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The cover for Exile, designed by Jane Erb, was chosen by the Cleveland Art Directors from a number of contest entries submitted by Denison students. It will be permanent, with each issue varying in color.

Summer of the Anatolian Cyclops

BY NIL MULDUR

Snow flaked off the skies heavily. In the small eastern Anatolian village the fields stretched silent and sterile. Footprints did not remain long in the heaping snow. The houses fattened in the white of winter, the garden fountains mute, the cypress trees starkly leafless. Before walking up the steps of the house of my birth, I stopped and wondered—how long had it been . . . this place, these people . . .

The grey walls housed wheat-smelling women who washed the floors in the morning and went to their husbands’ callings at nights. They still had their scarves around their heads and they still smelled of wheat, and to one of these mothers I had been born.

This place, these people. My people, people who loved me well.

Standing in front of the door I blew warm breath into my cupped hands. The door was like other doors, a wooden slab hinged with two wide shanks of leather. Ice insulated the cracks. Before I could knock, the door opened, bits of ice falling at the edges.

Mother stood at the door. The full round face and still the unquestioning eyes. “We hoped you’d come,” she said. The house was warm inside, warm from the bluish-orange fire of the white-washed fireplace. She led me to the room where the child lay sleeping in the night.

“We need you,” Mother said. I knew so little of her, Mother with her cracked lips and unquestioning eyes. She was one of the many who did their job without asking, yet this time she had asked for me and I had come to her bidding. Her hand that held the kerosene lamp was strong and suntanned. The lamp unpetaled the
darkness above the small heap that curled warmly in bed. The boy was asleep. My brother, for whom I had been sought, breathed softly under the covers.

Mother called, “He is here!”

The boy was not different from many who lay sleeping in other houses. Too little skin for the bones, elongated torso and pink-soled feet. One of his eyes opened more slowly than the other; when they were both open I shrank within and wondered how this had happened, and I had not cared.

One eye flickered and the pupil shrunk in response to the light above, but the other shamelessly stared, unwavering and cold.

“We really did our best with what we had,” Mother said, uncomplaining, unapologetic.

With one eye, the warm one, the boy had stared and drunk the feeling of me. “You are here, you are here! I did not think you would come.” The boy blushed, putting the blame of many unanswered calls upon himself. “Of course I should not have doubted. Mother told me you would come.”

His hands were bony, yet warm; and looking at him I wondered. I wondered if I had been gone too long to come back with the completeness that was expected of me. I had not seen this boy before and yet was bound to him by his trust and blood. I wondered if I had what he so unknowingly demanded of me.

The trees outside twirled in the dark and the rivers crept underground. The trees and the rivers were all good and well, but this child . . .

He was sitting in the middle of the bed. “Listen,” he said, “Do you want to see something, do you want to?”

“No,” Mother said, “He is here; you just lie soft now. Everything is going to be all right.” I felt the pain of trust.

We left the child in his room. Back in the kitchen I sat on the low stool near the fire. I had nothing to say to Mother. She never asked.

I was tired, so tired. I had worked hard at my task, for that I had no regrets. The wounds that oozed, the rapid answer of the flesh to the knife, the smell and the slippery newness of the babies—all these and long sleepless nights of greedy seeking. The momentary pang of wondering, wondering if this greed was the only reason I had stayed so long away from my people . . . or had I fears about returning to my land?
his thumbs, he tried to whistle but the blade was too fresh and it split. I too had learned how to whistle with a blade of grass between my thumbs. I remembered the urgent shrillness of a grass whistle.

"Look," the boy, my brother, spoke, "Look what I have." In his palm were a handful of false eyes. "Pink, green, yellow and even a grey one!" Just the cold, unblinking stare of them made me shudder. The boy fondly gazed at them, a spreading smile upon his lips. "I can see all sorts of colors, all sorts of colors. I can see the whole world with one color." He was talking excitedly, shaking the many hued bits of glass in his hand. "I can see with them; I am not blind, I really am not in that eye. Look," he took the purple eye and quickly put it in the shrunken socket and said, "Give me your hand—no don't. Just put it in front of my eye and show me, show me your fingers and I'll tell you how many. Come on, show me how many fingers." He squeezed his own eye tight and I stared at the unflickering purple eye.

I lifted my fingers, three of them.

"Three!" he said. He couldn't have seen, not with the purple eye. "Mm, maybe you didn't have three fingers up, maybe you didn't have any fingers up at all." The child was silent for a moment and put his handful of glass eyes in his pocket.

"Other boys do not believe me, they don't believe me, they don't believe me that I can see, I can see all brown, all green. They don't, they don't. One day, a big boy, a really big boy broke one of the eyes and it bled my toe—do you want to see where it cut my toe, do you? You don't even care, do you? Answer me!" The boy was in convulsions, crying. I stepped back and did not touch him.

Now was the wrong time to stroke his blue veined forehead swelling with defiance. In his right fist he clenched the purple eye and pounded the earth with it.

I had no answers to give. Admission of this left me hollow. Why did they ask so much of me? Had I what they sought?

Spring came; snow relaxed on the fields so that the wheat could squeeze through. The child did not feel the spring but for the coolness of his false eye in the socket. He stamped his feet and no longer slipped his hand into mine. I shivered while the buds and the leaves and the rivers swelled with expectation. They did not have what this child had, and yet the leaves and the buds were all right.

Sometime in August, after spring had folded away, the hot sky cracked, the heat crept up from the earth and poured from the heavens. I had heard of a wife, ill, and had kept the thought behind me hoping the illness would not advance; hoping someone, some of the menfolk would intervene before it was too late. Wishing, hoping too much from the many to whom I had thought I had given enough.

A late August night, mother took her scarf off the nail on the wall. "The wife is dying," she said. Her scarf was sunbeiged where it covered the top of her head. Outside the trees' silhouettes lengthened, solidifying with the shadows of others at the points where they touched. The child, my brother, was in the room cracking walnuts with the heel of his wooden clogs. We three left the house to see the wife who was about to die.

The child followed Mother's naked feet slapping against her slippers. The wooden hedges of the house framed us like an embossed picture abstractly hanging in the night. Each smooth, rounded stone bubbled in the dusty road. Mother's figure looked shriveled and the child sidled into her shadow wishing to be swallowed by it. The child no longer put his hand into mine and I could not touch him since he suspected.

The wooden hedges like rows and rows of skeletons veered about us, towered over us. Now and then someone came and nailed a fresh plank; the hedges did not care, their time was past. At the apex of the triangle that we three and our road formed, stood the house where the wife lay dying.

The moon-scarred night spread itself against the sky. The stars hung crookedly, and when the wind moved their strings, they twirled crazily in the night. When we reached the house, the rows and rows of hedges were rocking with laughter—all this for a woman dying in a grey house. . . .

The fireflies swarmed in batches. The boy sucked the August air and felt the thin coat of dust in him. He spat.
The house of the sick woman was very old. It smelled of refuse and sour milk. Mother and the child took off their shoes and put them neatly alongside the others lined at the door. The room of the wife was full. The kerosene lamps smoked the corners in pine tree patterns. The room was filled with women and children. Women, all, looked strangely like Mother. Girls sat on the floor, their tulip-stemmed heads bowed. Boys, their reed whistles clammy and wilted in their hands, crouched close to the floor. I stood at the door and stared. All this was like a nightmare I had pushed back hoping it would not happen.

Somewhere in the corner a hand, as if carved from vermiculated-wood, rocked the baby. I did not know that the sick wife had a child. The flypaper hung in broken spirals from the ceiling, covered with flies.

The wife was dying a strange death. The first death of this kind people of the village ever knew. The paisley cover heaved rapidly. Her mouth foamed with every bellowing breath. Froth spread and covered her face. Her life was slowly ebbing through the wooden boards of the floor.

The child, my brother, stood erect and tense in a corner, his stomach flat against his ribs, his face grey and dusty like his insides. I sensed his insides tremble.

Outside the menfolk stood tense in a semicircle, with their bare heads moon-shellacked in the night. They knew and sensed that the woman was dying but they spoke of the crops and the fields and the cows instead. Avoiding knowing that they, too, had neglected.

All of a sudden from hungerlike emptiness of silence, rose a voice, a thousand voices, a million voices. The pain and anguish in each and all curled and steamed and tore the shrouds of night.

The wife was dead and foam stood out fuzzy and white over her face.

The menfolk outside jerked up their heads—silent and shamed. The womenfolk had trusted them. Trusted that they could do something, and now they stood bareheaded under the glittering moon and the skeleton hedges held their sides with laughter. The menfolk could only offer to help with the burial now. I did not look at their eyes. We all knew and understood so we need not have looked to have felt the blush of shame. I left the house alone and walked my hills that night.