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## 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 shrank 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?

Mother dimmed the lamp to an undisturbing glow and before leaving the room she touched my forehead and I felt the fleeting warmth of her. The warmth did not stay long and I was left alone and tired in the kitchen. I was beckoned for this child. For this child a pain spread in me. For this child and many others before him I had been called. I had my days of glory when the wounds were small and incisions short and clean. Then I had enjoyed the trust and love but now . . . did I have what was asked of me? The veins of my hands swollen like blue worms, the rusty nailheads upon the wall—in the dark I longed for warmth.

The morning sun peeled off layers of snow from the houses. They stood leperously grey, their snowy flesh dangling from the roofs. The rivers, the earth and the rains went about their work, but in this house was a child—my brother.

The lamp stoically glowed in the sunlight, the fireplace had long been cold. Mother brought her morning warmth with her. She always was warm and soft. That I knew and remembered, but to that I no longer could lean. She had not asked what I planned to do. She never had questions or answers but she was warm and soft when the storms came.

She placed a dark wooden bowl on the floor and stirred molasses into corn flour for the morning meal. It had been so long that I had forgotten how this mixture spread to the roof of my mouth. Mother spoke.

"It wasn't so bad in the beginning. People were kind to him from pity, but when he started . . ." She continued her slow moving circles in the wooden bowl but her words melted in the air.

The child stood in the doorway. He stood barefoot on the rough wooden floor. His brown shorts were tied with a string around his waist. His rough woolen coat hung limply about him. His head stuck forward a little bit, and his one eye stared unblinkingly from too small a socket. He had the motions of a very young bird, but the birds were all right.

"I am going for a walk," he said. Together yet untouching, we followed the crooked road of the village into the hills. Underfoot I heard the impatience of the wheat soon to grow and the drops that would spill onto the marble slabs of fountains, and for all those I had no fears, nor for the people whose skins would soon be filled with the restlessness of spring.

We stopped at the peak of a hill. The child sat on the ground absorbing the wet of the earth. He had a blade of grass between

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 now, 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?

Mother went about her work during the days to follow, leaving me alone with the child. The child tried to torment me with his different colored eyes, or please me, asking what color I liked so he could see the whole world with my favorite color. He did all this without asking answers for himself, and he cried and told me I did not care. I would not touch him because I feared that he would feel the tremble of my hand and the child would no longer hope and he would know that I too had my fears.

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.

The boy was restless. Strange that he did not cry in his dreams and call for me and defy me. He whittled green twigs into ungainly shapes. He no longer wore his false eyes to scare people or enjoy my agony. I saw him squinting at each many an hour in his room. He threw some away, but did not come for questions. I desired to touch the child, but knew not the strength, so I did not. He drank from the rivers and the rivers were cool but they did not satisfy his thirst. Did the child know what he asked of me, did the child know that answers are not what questions seek at times?

Towards the end of the summer I walked to the house of the wife who had died. There was nothing left in her room except the flattened spot on the rug where her body once lay. Yet new starched curtains ruffled at the windows. There was even tightly curled new fly-paper hanging from the ceiling. The baby of the dead wife stood barebellied and brown in the dust of summer, sucking his finger.

In the sun outside the door, sat the grandmother weaving fresh brooms for the new bride. She called, "Are you The One Who Came Back? So few come back nowadays. . . ."

For this I had wondered and hoped. . . . Oh for the days I wanted to know more of the herbs and ointments to answer the questions. Were questions asked?

I longed to touch my brother, the child for whom I had been called.

My brother was not at our house. I looked for him at the fields. I found him standing at the side of a hill that sloped into a jagged cliff. His own eye, clear and warm stood out in his face. His hands were empty and waiting. Love and tenderness spread from our fingertips when we touched.

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