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Exodus

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WELCOME TO CYPRUS

The airplane plip-popped down the runway to a halt before the big sign: WELCOME TO CYPRUS. Mark Parker looked out of the window and in the distance he could see the jagged wonder of the Peak of Five Fingers of the northern coastal range. In an hour or so he would be driving through the pass to Kyrenia. He stepped into the aisle, straightened out his necktie, rolled down his sleeves, and slipped into his jacket. “Welcome to Cyprus, welcome to Cyprus . . .” It ran through his head. It was from Othello, he thought, but the full quotation slipped his mind.

“Anything to declare?” the customs inspector said.

“Two pounds of uncut heroin and a manual of pornographic art,” Mark answered, looking about for Kitty.

All Americans are comedians, the inspector thought, as he passed Parker through. A government tourist hostess approached him. “Are you Mr. Mark Parker?”

“Guilty.”

“Mrs. Kitty Fremont phoned to say she is unable to meet you at the airport and for you to come straight to Kyrenia to the Dome Hotel. She has a room there for you.”

“Thanks, angel. Where can I get a taxi to Kyrenia?”

“I’ll arrange a car for you, sir. It will take a few moments.”

“Can I get a transfusion around here?”

“Yes, sir. The coffee counter is straight down the hall.”

Mark leaned against the counter and sipped a steaming cup of black coffee . . .

“Welcome to Cyprus . . . welcome to Cyprus” ... he couldn’t for the life of him remember.

“Say!” a voice boomed out. “I thought I recognized you on the plane. You’re

Mark Parker! I bet you don't remember me."

Fill in one of the following, Mark thought. It was: Rome, Paris, London, Madrid (and match carefully); Jose's Bar, James's Pub, Jacques's Hideaway, Joe's Joint. At the time I was covering: war, revolution, insurrection. That particular night I had a: blonde, brunette, redhead (or maybe that broad with two heads).

The man stood nose to nose with Mark, gushing on all eight cylinders now. "I was the guy who ordered a martini and

they didn't have orange bitters. Now do you remember me?" Mark sighed, sipped some coffee, and braced for another onslaught. "I know you hear this all the time but I really enjoy reading your columns. Say, what are you doing in Cyprus?" The man then winked and jabbed Mark in the ribs. "Something hush-hush, I bet. Why don't we get together for a drink? I'm staying at the Palace in Nicosia." A business card was slapped into Mark's hand. "Got a few connections here, too." The man winked again.

"Oh, Mr. Parker. Your car is ready."

Mark put the cup down on the counter. "Nice seeing you again," he said, and walked out quickly. As he departed he dropped the business card into a trash basket.

The taxi headed out from the airport. Mark rested back and closed his eyes for a moment. He was glad that Kitty couldn't get to the airport to meet him. So much time had passed and there was so much to say and so much to remember. He felt a surge of excitement pass through him at the thought of seeing her again. Kitty, beautiful, beautiful, Kitty. As the taxi passed through the outer gates Mark was already lost in thought.

. . . Katherine Fremont. She was one of those great American traditions like Mom's apple pie, hot dogs, and the Brooklyn Dodgers. For Kitty Fremont was the proverbial "girl next door." She was the cliché of pigtails, freckles, tomboys, and braces on the teeth; and true to the cliché the braces came off one day, the lipstick went on and the sweater popped out and the ugly duckling had turned into a graceful swan. Mark smiled to himself-she was so beautiful in those days, so fresh and clean.

. . . and Tom Fremont. He was another American tradition. Tom was the crew-cut kid with the boyish grin who could run the hundred in ten flat, sink a basket from thirty feet out, cut a rug, and put a Model A together blindfolded. Tom Fremont had been Mark's best pal as long as he could remember for as far back

Tom had been Mark's best pal as long as he could remember for as far back as he could remember. We must have been weaned together, Mark thought.

. . . Tom and Kitty . . . apple pie and ice cream . . . hot dogs and mustard. The all-American boy, the all-American girl, and the all-American Midwest of Indiana. Yes, Tom and Kitty fitted together like the rain and springtime.

Kitty had always been a quiet girl, very deep, very thoughtful. There was a tinge of sadness in her eyes. Perhaps it was only Mark who detected that sadness, for she was joy itself to everyone around her. Kitty had been one of those wonderful towers of strength. She always had both hands on the rudder, always had the right words to say, always decent and thoughtful. But that sadness was there. . . . Mark knew it if no one else did.

Mark often wondered what made her so desirable. Maybe it was because she seemed so unreachable to him. The iced champagne—the look and the word that could tear a man to pieces. Anyhow, Kitty had always been Tom's girl and the most he could do was envy Tom.

Tom and Mark were roommates at State University. That first year Tom was absolutely miserable being away from Kitty. Mark remembered the hours on end he would have to listen to Tom's mournful laments and console him. Summer came, Kitty went off to Wisconsin with her parents. She was still a high-school girl and her folks wanted to dampen the fervor of the affair with a separation. Tom and Mark hitchhiked to Oklahoma to work in the oil fields.

By the time school started again Tom had cooled down considerably. To remain in Mark's company one had to sample the field. The times between Tom and Kitty's letters lengthened and the times between Tom's dates on the campus shortened. It began to look like a strike-out for the college hero and the girl back home.

By their senior year Tom had all but forgotten Kitty. He had become the Beau Brummell of State, a role befitting the ace forward on the basketball team. As for Mark, he was content to bask in Tom's glory and generally make a name for himself as one of the worst journalism students in the university's history.

Kitty came to State as a freshman.

Lightning struck!

Mark could see Kitty a thousand times and it was always as exciting as the first. This time Tom saw her the same way. They eloped a month before Tom's graduation. Tom and Kitty, Mark and Ellen, a Model A Ford, and four dollars

and ten cents crossed the state line and sought out a justice of the peace. Their honeymoon was in the back seat of the Model A, bogged down in the mud of a back road and leaking like a sieve in a downpour. It was an auspicious beginning for the all-American couple.

Tom and Kitty kept their marriage a secret until a full year after his graduation. Kitty stayed on at State to finish her pre-nursing training. Nursing and Kitty seemed to go together, too, Mark always thought.

Tom worshiped Kitty. He had always been a bit wild and too independent, but he settled down to very much the devoted husband. He started out as a very little executive in a very big public relations firm. They moved to Chicago. Kitty nursed in Children's Hospital. They inched their way up, typical American style. First an apartment and then a small home. A new car, monthly bills, big hopes. Kitty became pregnant with Sandra.

Mark's thoughts snapped as the taxi slowed through the outskirts of Nicosia, the capital city that sat on the flat brown plain between the northern and southern mountain ranges. "Driver, speak English?" Mark asked.

"Yes, sir?"

"They've got a sign at the airport, Welcome to Cyprus. What is the full quotation?"

"As far as I know," the driver answered, "they're just trying to be polite to tourists."

They entered Nicosia proper. The flatness, the yellow stone houses with their red tiled roofs, the sea of date palms all reminded Mark of Damascus. The road ran alongside the ancient Venetian wall which was built in a perfect circle and surrounded the old city. Mark could see the twin minarets that spiraled over the skyline from the Turkish section of the old city. The minarets that belonged to St. Sophia's, that magnificent crusader cathedral turned into a Moslem mosque. As they drove along the wall they passed the enormous ramparts shaped like arrowheads. Mark remembered from his last visit to Cyprus that there was the odd number of eleven of these arrowheads jutting from the wall. He was about to ask the driver why eleven but decided not to.

In a matter of moments they were out of Nicosia and moving north on the plain. They passed one village after another, monotonously similar, made of gray mud-brick cottages. Each village had one water fountain which bore an inscription that it was built through the generosity of His Majesty, the King of England. In

the colorless fields the peasants labored with the potato crop, working behind those magnificent beasts, the Cyprus mules.

The taxi picked up speed again and Mark sank back to his reveries.

. . . Mark and Ellens had gotten married a little after Tom and Kitty. It was a mistake from the first day. Two nice people not made for each other. Kitty Fremont's quiet and gentle wisdom held Mark and Ellen together. They both could come to her and pour their hearts out. Kitty kept the marriage intact long after time had run out. Then it broke wide open and they were divorced. Mark was thankful there had been no children.

After the divorce Mark moved East and began banging around from job to job, having matriculated from the world's worst journalism student to the world's worst newspaperman. He became one of those drifters who inhabit the newspaper world. It was not stupidity nor lack of talent, but complete inability to find his niche in life. Mark was a creative man and the business of routine reporting cut that creativity. Yet he had no desire to attempt the life of a creative writer. He knew that his personality would not take the demands on a novelist. So Mark hung in limbo, being neither fish nor fowl.

Each week there was a letter from Tom, and it would be filled with enthusiasm and the vigor of his climb to the top. The letters were also filled with Tom's love for Kitty and their baby girl, Sandra.

Mark remembered Kitty's letters. A calm appraisal of Tom's effervescence. Kitty always kept Mark posted on Ellen's whereabouts until Ellen remarried.

In 1938 the world opened up for Mark Parker. There was a post to be filled in Berlin with American News Syndicate, and Mark was suddenly transformed from a "newspaper bum" into the respectability of a "foreign correspondent."

In this capacity Mark proved to be a talented journeyman. He was able to fill part of his desire for creativity by developing a style that labeled him as an individual-as Mark Parker and no one else. Mark was by no means a world-beater but he did have that one great instinct of a crack foreign correspondent: an ability to smell out a story in the making.

The world was a lark. He covered Europe, Asia, and Africa from one end to the other. He had a title, he was doing work he liked, his credit was good at Jose's Bar, James's Pub, Joe's and Jacques's Hideaway, and he had an inexhaustible list of candidates for his blonde-, brunette-, or redhead-of-the-month club.

When the war broke out Mark chased all over Europe. It was good to settle back

when the war broke out Mark chased all over Europe. It was good to settle back in London for a few days where a stack of mail from Tom and Kitty would be waiting.

Early in 1942 Tom Fremont enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was killed at Guadalcanal.

Two months after Tom's death, their baby, Sandra, died of polio.

Mark took emergency leave to return home, but by the time he arrived Kitty Fremont had disappeared. He searched for her without success until he had to return to Europe. To all intents she had disappeared from the face of the earth. It was strange to Mark, but that sadness that he always saw in Kitty's eyes seemed like a fulfilled prophecy.

The moment the war was over he returned to look for her again, but the trail had grown cold.

In November of 1945, American News Syndicate recalled him to Europe to cover the war-crimes trials in Nuremberg. By now Mark was an established craftsman and bore the title, "distinguished" foreign correspondent. He stayed on, turning

in a brilliant series, until the top Nazis were hanged, only a few months back.

ANS granted Mark a much-needed leave of absence before transferring him to Palestine, where it* appeared local war was brewing. To spend his leave in the accepted Mark Parker fashion, he chased down a passionate French UN, girl he had met earlier, who had been transferred to the United Nations Relief in Athens.

It all happened from a clear blue sky. He was sitting in the American Bar, passing the time of day with a group of fellow newsmen, when the conversation somehow drifted to a particular American nurse in Salonika doing fabulous work with Greek orphans. One of the correspondents had just returned from there with a story on her orphanage. The nurse was Kitty Fremont.

Mark inquired immediately and discovered that she was on vacation in Cyprus.

The taxi began to move upwards, out of the plain, on a twisting little road that led through the pass in the Pentadaktylos Mountains. It was turning dusk. They reached the peak and Mark ordered the car to pull over to the side.

He stepped out and looked down at the magnificent jewel-like little town of Kyrenia nestled against the sea at the foot of the mountain. To the left and above

him stood the ruins of St. Hilarion Castle, haunted with the memory of Richard the Lion-Hearted and his beautiful Berengaria. He made a mental note to come back again with Kitty.

It was nearing dark as they reached Kyrenia. The little town was all white plaster and red tiled roofs, with the castle above it and the sea beside it. Kyrenia was picturesque and remote and quaint to a point where it could not have been more picturesque or remote or quaint. They passed the miniature harbor, filled with fishing smacks and small yachts, set inside two arms of a sea wall. On one arm was the quay. On the other arm stood an ancient fortress rampart, the Virgin Castle.

Kyrenia had long been a retreat for artists and retired British Army officers. It was, indeed, one of the most peaceful places on earth.

A block away from the harbor stood the Dome Hotel. Physically the big building seemed oversized and out of place for the rest of the sleepy little town. The Dome, however, had become a crossroads of the British Empire. It was known in every corner of the world that flew a Union Jack as a place where Englishmen met. It was a maze of public rooms and terraces and verandas sitting over the sea. A long pier of a hundred yards or more connected the hotel to a tiny island offshore used by swimmers and sun bathers.

The taxi pulled to a stop. The bellboy gathered in Mark's luggage. Mark paid off his driver and looked about. It was November but it was warmish yet and it was serene. What a wonderful place for a reunion with Kitty Fremont!

The desk clerk handed Mark a message.

Mark darling:

I am stuck in Famagusta until nine o'clock. Will you ever forgive me??? Dying with anxiety. Love.

Kitty

"I want some flowers, a bottle of scotch, and a bucket of ice," Mark said.

"Mrs. Fremont has taken care of everything," the room clerk said, handing a key to the bellboy. "You have adjoining rooms overlooking the sea."

Mark detected a smirk on the clerk's face. It was the same kind of dirty look he had seen in a hundred hotels with a hundred women. He was about to set the record straight but decided to let the clerk think anything he damned well pleased.

He gathered in the view of the sea as it turned dark, then he unpacked and mixed himself a scotch and water and drank it while he soaked in a steaming tub.

Seven o'clock . . . still two hours to wait.

He opened the door of Kitty's room. It smelled good. Her bathing suit and some freshly washed hosiery hung over the bathtub. Her shoes were lined up beside the bed and her make-up on the vanity. Mark smiled. Even with Kitty gone the empty room was full of the character of an unusual person.

He went back and stretched out on his bed. What had the years done to her? What had the tragedy done? Kitty, beautiful Kitty . . . please be all right. It was now November of 1946, Mark figured; when was the last time he saw her? Nineteen thirty-eight . . . just before he went to Berlin for ANS. Eight years ago. Kitty would be twenty-eight years old now.

The excitement and tension caught up with Mark. He was tired and he began to doze.

The tinkle of ice cubes, a sweet sound to Mark Parker, brought him out of a deep sleep. He rubbed his eyes and groped around for a cigarette.

"You sleep as though you were drugged," a very British accent said. "I knocked for five minutes. The bellboy let me in. Hope you don't mind me helping myself to the whisky." The voice belonged to Major Fred Caldwell of the British Army. Mark yawned, stretched himself into wakefulness, and checked his watch. It was eight-fifteen. "What the hell are you doing on Cyprus?" Mark asked.

"I believe that is my question."

Mark lit a cigarette and looked at Caldwell. He didn't like the major nor did he hate him. "Despise" was the suitable word. They had met before twice. Caldwell had been the aide of Colonel, later Brigadier, Bruce Sutherland, quite a good field officer in the British Army. Their first meeting had been in the lowlands near Holland during the war. In one of his reports Mark had pointed out a British tactical blunder that had caused a regiment of men to get cut to pieces. The second meeting had been at the Nuremberg war crimes trials which Mark was covering for ANS.

Toward the end of the war Bruce Sutherland's troops were the first to enter the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. Both Sutherland and Caldwell had come to Nuremberg to give testimony.

Mark walked to the bathroom, washed his face with icy water, and fished around