

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/4

*Dudley Stone*

### **Over the Hills to Grandmother's House**

Over the hills to Grandmother's house  
bundled in the backseat, bored  
and dreaming of a girl with blond bangs,

I seem to seep through the frosted window  
to a stand of pines off the highway  
and down the ravine, where she holds

my hand and we melt together, flying  
from nightmares like parents fighting  
and second grade and growing up

(and I remember to bring some cookies  
and chips and maybe a blanket because  
I'm slow but I'm not stupid).

Years later I drive the same highway,  
six lanes instead of two, over the hills  
to Grandmother's grave. The pines

are gone and my parents as well  
replaced by a truck stop, a Red Roof Inn  
wilted flowers and handmade crosses.

And where did she go, my blond-banged girl  
and second grade? If I lie and tell you I remember  
it only means I'm still angry about that.

**The Church of November 22**

Knowing what you know now  
it's easy to claim you see something  
in his face, some dissonance —  
laugh lines flanking unfunny eyes,  
creases in his forehead too deep  
to be made by mere life. After the fact  
we all predicted it.

This is the mask tragedy wears. No one  
ever mistook Ike for Agamemnon.

The Church of November 22  
has its chorus —  
Badge man  
Umbrella man  
Babushka lady  
Three hobos in a railyard  
The Accused Mother —  
whose only purpose is to serve up  
their individual slivers of gospel.

The Church of November 22  
has its Golgotha, its passion, apocrypha,  
its holy relics — magic bullet, pink pillbox hat —

it has its ruby slippers, roadside souvenir stands,  
its parade of huckster apostles, none of whom ever  
arrive at the same event.

Its bible is a Rorschach blot. What you say it means  
says more about you than about it.

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Everybody knows the good bits, of course, the Garden,  
the Apple, Moses, the Mob, Fidel, Khrushchev,  
John Birch, Oliver Stone. Every liquor store, dollar store,  
payday lender, porn emporium has a secret door  
and a dark hallway leading to a byzantine temple  
with a sign reading "No Admittance" — unless you believe  
in five or more shots, twelve assassins, or ballistics  
that conclusively prove

the Secret Service was in on it  
and Bobby and Jackie and Hoover and LBJ  
and Hoover, and Hoover

the Ford Motor Company was in on it  
the CIA, IBM, all the acronyms  
US Steel, J.P. Morgan  
Mexico, Russia, China

and if there's a man in the Moon  
(and there is because we put him there)  
he was in on it too —

Crucifixions spawn religions, but before they ripen  
here come a hundred Martin Luthers to hammer down  
the orthodox door, every splinter a collector's item,  
an autographed and numbered piece of the One True Cross.

In a Midwest suburban split-level home  
with streets named for exotic foreign cities  
you'll never visit, at the bottom of the stairs  
is a familiar figure watching a second- or third-  
generation copy of a super-eight film  
clacking its way across the sprockets.

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You feel like you're looking through a keyhole  
at someone looking through a keyhole. You hold  
your breath tight like shame, even if all you see  
is the vivid green of a park surrounded by sun-polished  
concrete.

Something pink and vile erupts at the bottom edge  
of Frame 313. You flinch in time with the man  
filming and the one beside you watching —  
he might be your father or mine —  
and cover your eyes and peek through your fingers  
in horror and awe.

**Stockholm Syndrome**

To dredge up an old cliché, let us raise  
this ship, repair the wound in her salt-scraped  
side, and christen her the Catatonic.  
Let us sail her in circles until the ice  
comes back.

Ask not what your country can do for you,  
ask what you can do for the country  
that richly maintains you in poverty,  
releases your shackles in name if not deed,  
lovingly holds you hostage, and lures you

into the shell game with free parking, half-priced cocktails,  
and bells and flashing lights that make you forget  
the house always wins.

New year, new normal.  
If this is the a new paradigm  
it ain't worth a plug nickel.