

The Winner

by Alex M. Pruteanu

we didn't have much where i come from
but we had some good goddamned country music smuggled in
on plastic fingerprint-smudged audio cassettes
which we played on an old German Grundig player/transistor
sometime in the summer of '77
we piled into the small Dacia
took the cat with us
and set out across the country to visit Ottoman Empire history
we spent nights with strangers who'd take us in for a bit of cash
they were all peasants and cooked for us
and in return we left behind pieces of Almond Joy
or Milky Way or Three Musketeers on the pillows of their beds
(for their kids)
some nights we were put up by priests or nuns in monasteries
one time I sleepwalked down a spiral staircase
and ended up on a chair in the church kitchen next to the pantry
across the way from a nun who was up and massaging the dough
for that day's bread
but what kept me going through those long hot hours
of being crammed in the back seat with a car-sick howling Siamese
was Kris Kristofferson bellowing from the small transistor tape
player
he's a walking contradiction
partly truth and partly fiction
i loved those lines from The Pilgrim-still do
(years later in another country this reference would pop up in one of
my all time favourite movies: Taxi Driver)
toward the end of the summer
we were queued at a railroad crossing
waiting behind the ding-ing barrier
waiting to drive back to the city
to start school to start life again

my mum announced that Elvis had just died on his toilet in America
i never much liked Elvis
never did then never do now
he was no Kris Kristofferson
he was no winner nursing his three broken bones
not to me

