

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Tommy Dean
Going There Alone

THE PLACE LOOKED LIKE A MUSEUM, but it felt colder and he listened for the drip of the leaky pipe in the basement. The room itself gave off little sound, her laughter no longer echoing off the walls. At the hospital, the doctors were keeping her alive just long to allow Patrick the time to come back to the house and gather up a few things. Some clothes as though the blush of color might change the grayness of her skin, a comb and a barrette to hide the stitches the funeral director would have to take out, and finally the penguin. "Don't forget," Lori had said while gripping his wrists, the nails settling into his skin. He had come straight to her room planning on gathering the items as quickly as possible, but he was having trouble crossing the threshold of the doorframe.

The penguin sat on top of the comforter, facing the far wall, it's extremities worn and smudged with the dirt that followed kids around as they ran from room to room accumulating stains—grass and ink, juice, candy, ketchup, and chocolate until age forced them to shed that awkward skin and they became more graceful, adults even. Emily was stuck, her life stopped in the wake of the sparkling of pink and purple ponies, cups with handles and lids, Velcro shoes, and stuffed animals that you dragged everywhere, because being separated from the cloying touch of it's soft fabric meant that you would have to face the unknown alone, that you might not have someone to hug when you got upset, and that place might be darker, colder, and scarier than any place you'd ever been before. She'd be there soon and he'd be damned if he'd let her go there alone.

