

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

*Cleo Griffith*

**Daddy was a ladies' man**

Of course I didn't know that  
when he'd come in from the orchard  
tired, ask me to pull off his boots,  
or when he drove me to school  
after I purposely missed the bus.  
He looked like a famous movie-star,  
looked great on a horse.

I didn't even miss him after the divorce.  
Only in the age of my own reckoning  
do I miss what might have been.  
Why, Daddy?  
Where did our strengths disappear?  
Would it have helped us each  
had we been together through your life?  
I miss you more now than ever,  
you-- the fictional hero--  
like a hope, a dream, the movie-star.

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### Grandmother Celia, Circa 1914

She was a tiny woman  
which worked to her advantage when  
working in the rough camps  
of the Cascade and Columbia River Railroad.  
She easily won over the Boss  
whose protection was absolute.  
She cooked for dozens of  
hard-worked men, fed herself  
and her three children after them.

The oldest girl helped clean  
the pots and plates, rough forks and knives,  
the kids all knew not to wander far  
from the site, but took pleasure  
in the outdoors, learning from the men  
the names of trees, of machines,  
of how loneliness binds people  
and hard work wears their spirits.

She read to the children in the evening  
after the cooking fire was out,  
dishes ready for the next day,  
sometimes the oldest girl, my mother,  
would read and they would all listen  
to the story and the sounds of the men  
and the sounds of the wilderness.  
They slept comfortably in their wagon,  
the tiny woman had done well.  
She smiled as she slept.

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### I Found You, Frank B.

I looked you up, Frank B.,  
found someone, might have been you,  
three generations ago.  
A rather common name, still — there you were,  
correct geographical place, you from whom  
my son and I may have inherited  
too much of the joy of one's own image,  
and maybe I received  
that absurd drama of desertion—how was it  
for you who left my grandmother  
when she became pregnant with my mother?  
Who knows where you went,  
with whom if anyone, and by whom were your  
two acknowledged children born...?  
You may have become more caring by then,  
lost the lazy wander-lust, maybe you even became  
the kind of husband who helped with the two boys,  
washed dishes, shoveled snow  
from the Minnesota driveway.  
In the only photo we have of you,  
given to my grandmother before you were married,  
you are posed stiff but with unmistakable delight  
in yourself, in a (then) new car in a studio setting...  
on the back of the photo you wrote:  
Come away with me.  
She did — left her parents' comfortable home,  
married and went away with you. With you, Frank, then  
you went away. Except some of your life carried on  
to a third generation, the look in your eyes  
in my son's eyes. The inviting smile...his smile.  
But, sorry, Frank, there is enough blood-and-guts  
from other sources — you have not completely taken over.

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I wonder if you ever felt guilt? Were you  
just another good person  
who did a bad deed?

I looked you up, Frank B.

I found you.