

## Wilderness House Literary Review 17/3

*Susan Phillips*  
**Old Artie**

**I**F YOU LIVE LONG ENOUGH in the same place—as I have, down here in Jonesport, Maine, for my 86 years—you’ll meet all kinds of folks. Nice folks, smart folks, hardworking folks and also a bunch of damn fools. At least, that’s been my experience.

I used to be a lobsterman and I caught the best, sweetest lobsters in all of Maine. If you don’t believe me, ask Maggie. She owns Maggie’s Place, a small restaurant just outside of town. Her lobster rolls should earn her a special star in food magazines and tourist brochures. They’re generously sized and delicious. The lobster salad spills out of every roll she makes. But even Maggie has to admit that they aren’t as good as when she used to buy from my catch. She’s a sweet gal, is Maggie. If I was 30 years younger I’d court her, but who wants an old geezer like me? And Maggie does alright for herself, especially since she kicked that no good husband of hers out.

Winters are tough here—tough and long. I keep myself occupied, though. Every day I read from my Bible and old books and magazines that Cecelia finds for me. Her antique shop does a fair amount of business during tourist season. Sometimes she travels around, going to auctions or house sales and finds all kinds of treasures. She saves me the books that no one would want to buy. I always thank her kindly and offer to pay, but she just waves my dollar bills away. “Don’t be silly, Artie,” she’ll say. “I thought of you when I found these. They’ll never sell and, besides, Maggie would never forgive me if I took money from you.” Well, I reckon that’s true enough.

In the nicer weather I like to go down to Maggie’s for an hour or three. It’s a smallish place, but there’s always a space for me to sit and drink coffee, maybe have something to eat if Maggie has cooked too much chowder. I like sitting there and sharing my views of the world with Maggie and the tourists who come by for a meal or snack. They respect me and what I have to say. I tell them there’s no place prettier in Maine than Jonesport, unless it’s Beals Island. I let them know they shouldn’t expect meals in Bar Harbor or Eastport or Portland to be better than what they’ll eat at Maggie’s. They’ll be disappointed if they think that. If they’re on their way to Milbridge and want to see the movie there, I let them know how I feel about whatever’s playing. “I don’t care for Whoopi Goldberg,” I’ll say, or “any movie with John Wayne or Clint Eastwood is bound to be good.” I know they’ll take my recommendations seriously. I’ve lived long enough to know what’s good and what’s bad.

A few years ago, one fellow came to Maggie’s and sneered at everything I had to say. Damned fool. Luckily there was a young couple having lunch at the same time. They listened to every word I spoke and I could tell they agreed with everything I said.

Lately what bothers me most is this damned war on Christmas. All those ads talking about Xmas—just taking Christ right out of Christmas. Who do those fools think we’re celebrating, anyway? And then I read about Christmas Tree Shops open all year. There ought to be a law about

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that. They should just be open during the Christmas season—Thanksgiving through Christmas Day. Or I guess the day after Thanksgiving and until 3 PM on Christmas Eve. Give people time to celebrate the holidays. And If I wish you a Merry Christmas, you should say it right back to me. Maggie and Cecelia agree with me. “You’re right, Artie,” they say. “You’re right about so many things.”

Well, of course I am.