

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/3

Dudley Stone

Count Your Children

"We waken and count out daughters" – Carolyn Kizer

First, count your children. Numbers are
elemental, like open wounds.

Nothing holds you to Earth like two
plus two equals four or comforts
you like I before E except
after C. Nothing lets you sleep
better than knowing Washington
could not tell a lie.

First, count your children, count the stamps
of rubber boots and slush puddles
in freshly mopped entryways, count
the dirty socks on the carpet,
the crayons scattered and hiding
under the sofa.

First, count your children. Count them when
they play outside, when they stay home
to sulk, when they tell you about
the neighbor's kid who stole their ball
and the man who stole it back but
isn't allowed on school property.

First, count your children. There's no need
to tag or tattoo them, to chip
them like rescued pets and chain them
to a tree in the yard. You can't
hold their hands forever, and you
can have truth in your house or peace,
but you can't have both.

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/3

Soon enough your children will tell
you that whole numbers are for kids,
that there are negative numbers,
rational and irrational
numbers, and Google says two plus
two doesn't even equal four
sometimes, that the word "atheist"
disobeys the I before E

rule, and Washington couldn't tell
a lie is, in fact, a lie, and
he owned slaves as well and, and —
and

Daddy's not ever coming home
and Mommy's new friend is moving
in, and Washington hatcheted
the cherry tree because he felt
like it, like the kid with the Glock,
dead inside a chalk line before
homeroom this morning.

So, count your children, even if
nothing happens, especially
if nothing happens, even if
you only count to one.

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/3

Is it the spare key that keeps falling from
its perch above the storm door? I
should tape it there while I'm thinking
about it (I don't).

Oh, yes, and there's a
pandemic spilling off the TV and the numbers
tsunami from orange to red, and I think nothing
can move me more today than

"The river
is famous
to the fish."

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/3

Grand Opening

A drum corps drums, a marching band marches, tall hats and straps, twirling batons, sponsored trombones. I'm the one holding the scissors, cartoonishly large. An enhanced blonde wears a tiara and next to nothing else.

The band is muted by the breeze, its song sailing downwind.

"I dedicate this bridge, named after me, proposed, prosecuted by me, a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant span over a dark and protesting river."

The words tumble from my mouth like drunken fireflies, flash once, and are gone. The blonde is Miss Grocery Chain, Miss Car Dealership, Miss Payday Lender, Miss Liquor Warehouse, Liquor Planet, Liquor World, Miss Liquor Galaxy. The Mayor cracks into a hot mic, "Lick her? I hardly know her." He has an orange jumpsuit in his future.

I cut the ribbon with the ridiculous scissors, and people start across, anxious to arrive anywhere but here. The queue waiting to cross the bridge is long. The line waiting to jump off is much, much longer.