

# 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

