

**The Policeman in the Lime-Green *Moskvich***

Here in Suzdal the Entry into Jerusalem Church is fastened to a street that runs for seven centuries. Three grandmothers are sweeping history to the curb. You stand alone looking down that street and the bite of a mad month breaks into your clothes. A dozen boys play *gorodki*, the sticks cracking like pistols in a courtyard. Men with child-faces loom through the fumeshrouds of a police car idling. Bundled in greatcoats and arrogant as three-bird colonels, they trade slow drags on a Gauloise, watching you. An old woman approaches, the village explainer whose great bombé brow furrows under the weight of her years. What she has to say is so shy of warmth or tact that she could be a man mumbling a curse or a Tartar threat to an outlander like you. She disappears into a boarded yard, a shack of royal blue. What she is saying in that house, what look might now arouse her undazzled face is less important than the spectacle spilling over the street. The leafless trees have trellised their branches like runes on Oriental scripts. A brunette sky hurries off to Asia. And the crows! the crows! gather above Suzdal like a rabble. In trenchcoat and camera, you are the butt of their raucous jokes. Lit with a fired expectancy, you could go up like straw before these massive black sentries who have been here longer than women.

*J. Patrick Lewis*