

Narcissism of Consciousness: 1944, 1996, 2018

In a field in dry summer
in grainy black and white
is a man clutching
a five-year-old to his chest.

To his back stands a soldier,
profile of aim and stature,
who we know, because this
is a reproduction come across in

a book, will fire his Mauser,
detonating the Milky Way of
a brain. But in the moment
of the snapshot he lives,

cleaved to his daughter
for the last time. Imagine
that terrible knowledge,
and this innocence pleading

for *papa*. This time
he cannot kiss the hurt
or soothe her with a mime.
The soldier cocks

his rifle and steadies his finger.
You hold her closer,
your eyes search hers.
The shutter clicks.

Hugging the Sheets

Back before I knew the little I know about love, I was learning more about fucking when one night in The Cove my girlfriend, Jack Daniels drunk as she often was come evening—86 proof absolution, and when that didn't work, a man whom she would toss like an empty when done—slapped me so hard, talk stopped and heads pivoted, her face rached with a rage I could not fathom.

All I had done was toast the round with a John Lennon refrain, *Whatever gets you through the night, is alright, is alright*. What happened next I don't remember but last night a friend whose lover left asked after a night of a movie and dinner if I would stay over because the night is long and she just wanted ... *what*. I wanted to say *yes* yet recoiled. It's hard to manufacture desire.

But of course I stayed, a straight guy scoring—you know how it goes. The touching, of course, was awkward, when she asked if I would go down on her. Again I wanted to leave. I just wasn't *into it*. Afterwards we curled together. She told me the story how in a field in Block Island, geese rose like epiphany.

I told her of Octobers, a new school, each year, the son of an army man before a class of eyes locked in on me, both saying little about the loneliness in bed with us. On the way home, during the morning rush hour, the A train was packed with commuters and silence, eyes careful not to meet.

With each glance, I saw something I wanted to reach out and smooth.

Identification Cuts Many Ways

Every morning, regardless the rain and ice, the summer heat, between
Seven and nine on the corner of Merchant Concourse and Stewart Avenue

The protesters gather, a steady ten to fifteen strong. Two, the more
Virile and young, pace, hoisting posters proclaiming in bold

Black capitals, "THEY KILL BABIES," and the more succinct "BABY KILLERS."
The others, older, kneel single file on the strip lawn and bow their heads.

Their devotion is singular and concentrated. Most bring pads to soften
The grind, but one, an elderly woman, her face deepened with wrinkles,

Endures the vigil on bald knees, her lips pursed, her eyes squinched shut.
She is so intent that I wonder why

Abortion. We know the story: In Hempstead, children go hungry, in
The Bronx, unattended. Worse is the newborn found yesterday in a dumpster

Off Jerome, dead-stiff. Then the hundreds of thousands hacked, bludgeoned,
Garroted, stabbed, stomped and beaten, children, babies and pregnant mothers too.

Is it because they never had a chance? Is it for them, without voice,
Without say, she pains? For them, she gives over?

Forgive me my selfish and silent way,
But oh how I wish she would, just once, pray for the living.

Pardon Me

I woke late and stood on the porch.

Mrs Fudjinski, bent over in her garden, snipped
Sprigs of thyme and basil. Behind her

A cardinal lit on a maple, a shudder
Among the green, through which, out in the bay,

White sails floated against a patch of blue.
Then a breeze stirred the hedgerow,

And turning, I noticed a hummingbird
And yellow jackets flecked thick with

Pollen. I wanted to share this moment
But what the moment was I could not say.

And then it slipped away.

The Exaltation

In dry season in equatorial Chad, the Sahel is so hot the soil
Chars to red dust, the grass to a blonde bristle, heat bearing down like affliction

And because the land blisters and coastal Africa is forested, humid and cool, air
Is sucked easterly, darkening the horizon with fury into which a man, tending

The village flock stares into, a wave so sudden and massive the Dogon has little time
To corral the sheep before the air erupts with stinging needles. The storm

Sweeps across the continent until in the Atlantic thunderheads and wind
Marry the doldrums, and a hurricane is born. Its updraft plunges the ocean, and swells

Spiral westward across the open sea to loom large on beaches lining the American
Eastern seaboard as in Montauk Long Island where surfers

Scan the near horizon for the darkened lines their kind read. It's what they have prepared for
The summer afternoons and cool September dawns before work, that one stirring

Pitched perfect just where a surfer waits, and he paddles to catch the lip, a chthonic uprising
Heaving him high to which he surrenders, riding the rolling level underneath into rapture that I

As a ten year old in the thick of the Ozarks heard in the tree tops swaying back and forth,
A thousand miles away. Everything is connected to everything. The shepherd

Stokes the charcoal embers with dry twigs, the surfer packs his board, and the hurricane
Makes landfall near Kill Devil Hills, devastating summer homes. I have wasted my life.