

nunto THIRTY-FIVE

The whole truck ride, nine hours
this supposed vet's going on about his war and his syndrome
and his pension and his annoying fucking guilt
this Rear Echelon Mother Fucker
sickening me with his rhetoric
and finally I say

You want a fucking war story?

This time about five years ago
I was
working in Cambodia

got pulled over at a border by a fat, greasy looking police inspector
who obviously wanted a bribe, but I wasn't doing anything

wrong

so he shows me a grenade and says I can throw it for ten bucks
and me, who used to toss Molotov Cocktails off overpasses

can't refuse

so he drives me out to this field and
I'm a little afraid he'll just shoot me in the back and take the money
but he's honest, so he hands me the grenade, clips the price tag off
with a pair of field scissors and shows me how to pull the pin
and I pull that fucker and I throw it as hard as I can and
we watch it blow the hell out of the wall of an old barn

it's a satori-like moment

the smoke clears, and we see one forlorn looking
deserted cow inside
who wanders out to inspect the damage

Carpe Diem

the inspector smiles greasy sly grease at me
and digs out another grenade

thirty bucks, he says. American.

nods to the cow

now, there's no one else around but me and him and the cow
and fucked as it, rationalize it - when in Cambodia
but really, I was thinking

when am I ever going to have a chance to kill something this big
like this. with a fucking grenade. ever.

and.

when am I ever going to have a chance to kill
without consequence?

it's a telling question for all of us

but I answer quickly
give him thirty bucks. american.

pull the pin, which makes a funny click
the cow looks as I throw it, but doesn't move 'cause
it only lands close by - doesn't hit him precisely

and he's an inquisitive cow, so he sniffs it

and we watch in curious horror as the cow licks it
at the precise moment it explodes
vapourizes the front half of the cow in a haze of bright red
leaving two legs and a shrivelled udder
to topple gracelessly to the ground

we look around briefly for the tongue
but can't find it

the inspector drives me back to the checkpoint
and we only talk in glances

and later that day I am walking into Vietnam alone
my eyes hurting from the flash
head in a haze
blood still throbbing at the exhilaration
of seeing death at my hand

ears ringing from the sound of bovine murder
which sounds funny, but really

I'm thinking seriously
thank Christ it wasn't an abandoned child
'cause I don't like to think of my answer
to that question

sweet hymn of the killing fields

now that, my unknown soldier,
is a fucking war story