

Tom Wayman

Nineteen Ninety-nine

High winter in Paulson Pass:

spruce and fir on the slopes are tightly wrapped by snow
that shapes these conifers into white spires
rising from drifts.

The blue sky over the peaks, banked snow along the road,
and the snowy highway itself
pulse under a January sun's
crisp inundation of light.

Then a figure

stands in the white road: white trousers,
khaki sweater and balaclava
and the black stick of a slung rifle.

He lifts the palm of a glove toward my truck
as I approach. I observe a similar young man
on the highway beyond him
who faces the opposite direction. As I slow,
the opening of a forest road emerges,
choked now with a line of large, dark-green, heavy vehicles
pointed toward me, each bearing
a tiny representation of the flag of this country
above the grille. On the churned snow
around this stalled convoy
dozens of other men cluster, each with an FN
held in his hand
or suspended from a shoulder.

My engine slows to idle;
the soldier in front of me
shouts something I can't hear
at the troop on the side of the road.

A reply is aimed at him
and he impatiently waves me past.
Behind me the trucks of war
perhaps will enter the highway
or initiate a different aspect of their operational plans
this day in the bright alpine.
As a thousand years
of human blood staining snow
and pooling on soil, cloth, flesh
near an end, after forty more generations
of our killing our own species
have been endured,
the survivors are training hard.
Weapons, transport, tactics
tested and functional in any climate,
every terrain, we ready our children
to manufacture
the next century of death.