

\*

you do not move by me nor through me so much as past me bolted into your greatness the geometries your car takes on under an amazed & howling sun that scrapes the fenders what is it you hope to clutch what engines would you engage do you actually care about the strange motion that takes you into sickness into flight the slash of light that drives you crazy i mean this is allergy just look at you my god ripped on sun where's the glory in that there at the side of the road stalled stuck broken down out of gas a flat & you got no jack frankly I'm revolted im sick & tired of this i got a bone to pick with you mister

this is all truck & train philip don't be a jerk this is mere allegory more piddling with cars mere fiddling is what it is there's no glory in it the jalopy you peddle & jockey your dinky-toy jellybean jealousy you want all the gory detail don't you well all right I'll tell you hell you're just diddling get serious philip not even a horse for starters & you a lover what will it take philip when will you learn you got to unclench yourself unbridle me ske-daddle past a horizon saddled with eternity all those mothy and mouth-filled months riddled with paternity a red bandanna whooping at your throat boy that would be fun wouldn't it

what's needed my man is a decentering an indecency the two of us without a cent without a stitch cantering into the country moon an almond popped out of its skin it's so taken aback it's a cinch we don't make a break for it learn to find one another in a clinch we can't elope sun a heavy cantaloupe bouncing on our shoulders till they are bruised sun running down wires like oil on water on our arms & hands we pass round burning ourselves & sometimes plucking music from when we least expect it your car tired its tires blown radiator shot me a dazzled bride across the saddle a modern-day lady Godiva practically god I've a yen for that your lap the blocks of muscle on four feet under us leaping blind & dazed into the sunset no more scolding philip no more scalding sun we could be dynamite baby you know we could day & night would be a slow fuse how could you refuse we could fizzle we could blow open every safe in the country & Mrs. Wenderby hot on our scent her fire-proof heart she would be sent from heaven haven't you heard heavens we could be a purple yodel galloping into ourselves philip loping if by then or now by yes im not eloping into now past her baying beyond earshot of her her hot ears braying windpipe we could id opine sprain the whole world open you & me riding on our spavined bodies i mean we could really whoop it up we could have some fun after church out behind the outhouse out behind

the barn among the shit & thistles there where Paul's epistles fall in  
snowflakes fall like cornflakes around us there among the piss & pizzles  
we could sneak out from behind the breathy windows we could jump out  
from behind ourselves there by the eaves-dropping & scandalized willows  
if you would get off your high horse for once we could kiss & kiss we  
could sizzle in lakes of kisses Smack Smack Smooch Smooch louder than  
cherry soda pop sloppier than Mr. Crowe's pooch when he slobbers all  
over the back porch

\*

the green blood  
believe me

that guy when he fell  
his legs were open blades  
cutting the blue fabric  
it was one long electric scream

you are amazed how  
beautiful it is how  
skilled he is, yelling

light drizzling from his shoulders  
wailing, confused

\*

you are holding on for something good  
you are holding on to yourself me too  
you want good in a world that is always  
slithering off the road getting mired  
the world isn't good good enough you say  
what about keeping your word  
what about oaths what about fidelity  
what about the pillar of dust by day  
the pillar of fire by night the dry heat  
what about your powdery alkaline breath  
what about our warty souls hopping in dust  
hoping to savour rain the ditches full  
what about giving me the green  
light out for the territories & no one to holler stop

I know this Philip oh how I know this  
rust that eats our flesh as if it were fire  
how we are cast into fire as fuel of fire  
I have seen how fire goeth before you  
your dragon breath how you are death  
on us as stubble our flesh burns & burns

when is enough enough these are  
the Dirty Thirties we are virtuous  
as only deserts can be  
thirsty we are thirty going  
on seventy for heaven's sake & yes  
it rains fire from heaven is this our lot  
you have your pillars of pain

take your bowl of dust  
everywhere with you  
which we take drink do this  
to ourselves our bodies until the last  
days we all will be hens  
sing of grit & buttons & ragweed

hence everywhere you look  
it is dust to dust  
hardly any room inbetween  
for pillows & creeks elbows & cheeks

haven't you heard p. in your fervour  
the scabby bushes all the bushes  
brown & burning we all are  
consumed in this fire the fire  
rings along the ground the barren fruit  
trees swallowed by fire scream  
& scream their consummation

it's a perfect time i say  
how about talking dirty  
it's high time we were  
playing dirty

\*

why then knowing his word  
is as a fire in my bones  
you have both set me  
on fire, in it, yes & in  
my lips a burning my flesh  
is in fever you know though  
disguise of flesh you call it  
would you begrudge me philip  
my wetting of lips once in awhile  
now & then a little mud on my skirt

you have already shaved & burnt  
my hair maybe you could do me  
a favour why don't you  
allow me this mist on the face  
just once there in the willows  
a green fire

perhaps if you were to  
    spare me give  
up with holding you could be  
holding on to me holding  
me in march snow  
flavour clear & cool  
spearmint in your mouth

\*

hay butter fingers he calls  
you looking up into sun  
thick as pudding the windows  
thudding the darkness his body locks  
he at home smiling

look up from  
the churn your heart wheeling  
culverts of your affections  
discs inside their heaviness  
gather speed the way they do  
rising to the top  
something sweet & yellow  
running from you  
sudden fear your heart  
he almost feels  
and you stand there  
smacking your glove  
you say  
hello  
you squint & pretend  
it is the sun

under the stitching in your jeans  
out from under the bottom  
drawers that slide in  
and out of your heart

these days a joy a banjo  
you so  
tightly strung every  
time you play it breaks

\*

she having freedom to burn  
spurns you gives you  
freezer burn do not think  
this is spurious when she pulls

the lake up over her  
face you are afraid  
she will snuff all the hearts  
put them out for the night  
never a thought for skunks or weasels  
would yank them off one by one *could have been*  
with a quick twist & *& was*  
toss them outside *when you reach*  
yardful of hearts aimless *across &*  
as a headless hen *ript*

thinking she might be snow *there was a blue*  
white though she squeezes *ripping sound*  
oil from summer rain *sky a piece of cotton*  
cultivates briars *torn (a*  
/ just for the blossoms she says and she sneezes *part the bed i lie*  
though i think she is specious  
so cloistered and thorny *all night in*  
she secures a fence against all waking *every morning*  
walks slowness through all her days *sheets pulled loose*  
*thoughts ript open*

spacious with protest

\*

Philip at supper, you can see he is on edge of saying, tilts his face toward the plate, his hands stuck on the cup.

How are the Angers?

Hmm? Oh, all right.

The cup tightens.

Mrs. Anger?

She's ok.

Did you remember the pie?

Darned rhubarb is about all that will grow.

Mmm.

Mmm yes? or Mmm no?

Yes.

And?

Sends her thanks.

Philip wanting to say something, readies. Bolsters himself, jams a cross-pole into the corner. Looks solemn as a coroner at a drowning. He is a man trying to get a pry under a rock, wants to wedge himself out. And then he is. Out. On top, exposed.

And I wait.

It's the kids. Charles 's finally worked up his nerve to apply. They've been hit so bad they're living on potatoes, what potatoes they can get. Ate the seed grain from the government. Bank says they've got till harvest to catch up. Don't and they're out.

Out?

Yes, out, that's it.

What are they going to do Philip?

Silence. Philip regathers himself.

I don't know. The kids are already out of shoes. Little fella's in these make-shift things his dad's made from old tires and binder twine. Maybe ok for summer, but come winter . . .

Oh Philip I am so sorry.

Philip, who says almost nothing. It comes out of him now, no stopping.

Charlie takes me out for a walk, maybe we were just walking,  
what else is there? We walk into the field, what is supposed to  
be wheat, and the dust rises like cement powder. Grasshoppers  
so thick we squash them under foot.

I am just listening now, he's inside, looking. Listening to something.  
Charlie doesn't say a word, just bends over. Crop's yea  
high—no more than 10, 11 inches—plucks a few heads and  
rubs them.

Philip shows, with his hands.

Opens the hands—nothing. Not a speck of grain, the chaff  
blows away before you know it. Just like that it's gone.

What will they do Philip? What will happen to them?

Philip tells about Charles. Charles just stands there, huge  
hands, so strong he could lift the backend of a car, two  
people in it, not a word of a lie. His hands that can bend  
a tire iron are bewildered, they don't know where to go.  
He just stands there, doesn't say a thing, looks out, face  
so far and so empty you don't know what he sees.

Philip shakes his head and makes a choked sound, tongue off the roof  
of his mouth. He is looking somewhere I can't see.

Yes, it's bad all right. One farmer says the grasshoppers got so  
bad on the Lang quarter they ate the harness off the horses,  
cleaned it right off, nothing left but bits & buckles.

And then they have Philip for supper.

Squirrels, Katie says, lucky the boys got some squirrels. Got an eye  
those little beggars the way they can pick off those darn things, but  
she is sorry she shouldn't talk this way this is a mother's vanity.

The way they look at each other.

They are eating gophers. And Philip eats them too.

Shamed that he knows, that they know he knows.

Philip I say. Philip.

Inside. Philip has fallen back. Into the ground. Back inside.

\*

think of you there \the echoes  
/theatre of their emptiness

slats i sit inside  
alone among the flats  
afraid to stand up  
knowing when i do

the seat will make  
a terrible racket

there ill be there  
youll be  
shuffle-footed under a red-faced moon  
where it has clambered to the top  
and now it's stuck  
it can't get off  
the posters they have pasted on every corner  
talk about glamour

wonder if you will find me  
fitting for the role if you will  
give me half  
a chance if i can  
win the part i most want  
when you say my god you are  
one good looker and i say  
well that's what you do  
isn't it you poets you are always  
into everyone's pockets & you say  
as a matter of fact no you say

every night the stars switch on  
& there is a loud clamour  
that's when the moon goes  
ballistic i mean let's get real  
is tick is all that's when  
the show gets on the road  
that's when things start  
to happen that's when  
the fun begins

hours you say shall be

a night in shining amour

well you say  
do you want it  
or not

\*

said

said:  
if god is in the sun  
if the sun is god if god is  
good then we all can we all are  
cain we all are  
in trouble, straw blown on a hot hot wind  
for crying out loud

hot cinders we sing  
until we singe one another  
fickle as wind  
chained to a changing  
and sickle moon

said:  
our howls inside  
the fire we open small bowls  
bottles we are  
breathed open thinking  
to have something of ourselves  
something to drink, wet  
our lips inside our own  
dust we have  
been sinners and sometimes cinders  
thrown into

said:  
all our talk meant  
to keep the day off

said:  
every night under  
our touching there are 6000 years  
starlight sprawled at our feet

said:  
wouldn't you know it  
"Eden" in Sumerian means flatland

that's us all right right here in Saskatchewan  
Adam and Eve all over again  
height of summer the same old teaching  
how sumerian can you get

said:

[to herself]  
why do I feel this way  
as though I were a witch  
good god  
the looks they throw  
in my face, burning  
my bowels burning the bowls  
I lift to my mouth  
hot coals in my mouth

as id

imagined it wld be  
when you sum it all up  
grateful  
& irretrievably ashamed

\*

we hold one another  
over the stove until  
we are scalded  
the days we scold  
one another there  
is never enough

all the men and women p.  
sealed in the earth for  
ever these thousands  
& thousands of years  
every one of them  
are they turning  
to rock

their lips sealed  
their eyes scaled over  
mineral and unblinking

when earth presses against them  
they sigh for centuries & centuries  
their silent and joyless embrace

not even warm p.  
not even close



\*

& when at last we are we are  
at last together night forms  
a kind of memory  
elastic with stays  
& with what goes  
round us out of rain  
you run out of the static  
lightning firing away

just for one minute we are  
suspended in shiver we find  
hanging somewhere between us  
could be laundry on the line  
turn it over & over in our hands

it's good to see you yes &  
my god your hands are cold your hair  
the wet & cold until we no longer care  
there are faces on the other side  
we do not care they are looking through  
the faces blurred lanterns in rain  
all we care is night shudders  
we stutter in the dark our skin  
ecstatic to have lost  
its smooth  
nipples tongue mouth hair  
cold & warm & cold & warm together

\*

frightened by ourselves so pleased  
we are alarmed our clothes  
have shivered off  
our fears for a second too

how soon we are delivered back  
the blankets we had begun to warm  
pulled back to another cold a cold  
we brought with us we are  
brought back to  
shocked and blinking  
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give me half  
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ever these thousands  
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bouncing somewhere between us  
turn it over & over in our hands  
it's good to see you yes &  
my god your hands  
are cold your hair  
the wet & cold until we no longer care  
there are faces on the other side  
no we don't yes it is yes we say yes  
we do not care they are looking through  
faces blurred lanterns in rain  
all we care is night shudders  
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frightened by ourselves so pleased  
we are alarmed that our clothes  
have shivered off our fears for a second too

how soon we are delivered  
the blankets we had begun to warm  
pulled back to another cold a cold  
we brought with us we are brought back to  
shocked and blinking  
dark water in the eyes

\*

Philip fancies himself  
a cowboy does so : :

hens dosey-do in in their  
henna hair-dos Gab Gab  
they do say smart as smart can be  
grab for the wind in their hats  
red and common as floozies  
sun hat-pins them there  
it's all heel & toe with the chickens

rooster dawdles out easy does it  
one hum-dinger of a travelling salesman  
all his jokes filled with buttons  
bitten off every collar in town  
he'll tell them what to do  
you don't know where  
to get off him  
& that there stetson

meanwhile pigs talk, theirs a pep talk  
they don't keep anything to themselves  
their songs of chop & snakes  
ruminations on flies & dung  
they can't wait to tell  
the pigs rave say rains wash over  
& the sun hits  
sweeter than liquor  
they say  
& lots hotter

there is a hard brightness  
no not in the pig's eyes  
the pigs are too smart for that  
it is what the flies have found in themselves  
put a hard lacquer over everything  
fast for all that, their flashy  
glisten & then  
they're gone

& back

shocked out of the tarpaper shack  
they jamboree in  
city-slick flies, their haze & hustle  
& the pigs guzzle them down wheezing  
could be old geezers on the front porch

\*

listen listen to this philip  
the man is saying  
listen I'm all ears he says  
it's the end of an ear  
practically, plain & simple  
no two ways about it  
leans over & talks with the pigs  
flies hang on his every word  
he's got them buffaloed, put near, the flies

Philip kicks the rails  
uh-huh uh-huh uh-huh  
oh yeah  
don' say

midst of all that  
my long slow stroke  
the paper I keep by my  
self the paper I keep me in

what you say broken underfoot  
crunch of seashells we walk on  
the hens gather in excited talk  
the nightyard broken open till  
you feel like Venus herself  
you now can see  
they go in hard  
clicks & pops  
could be in  
highheels  
clickety  
past  
clickety fast  
clickety  
clack  
clamorous  
as a train  
keening into a glamorous sunset

*listen to that  
would you just listen to that*

\*

this is what they do  
in my diary they are  
more lovely than  
the way you twitter  
love this dairy & clippety-clop

w<sup>w</sup>hhy<sup>A</sup> you shout h'yaa  
yuh little critters

why didn't you tell me  
this before you had an eye  
for the heifers plain & simple  
pressing the flesh  
p. you & your big hairy mitts  
big silly grin  
hung like a lantern from your face

\*

Philip singing GIMME  
LAND LOTS OF LAND

and that's not all

meanwhile the pigs bunch up their eyes  
glint (roundly) like quarters  
snuffling down flies where they buzz bluely blithely

grant them no quarter you cry  
a baby pig the flies crowd  
in their eyes saying he's gone  
off the deep end  
this time he's gone  
hey he's gone he's gone  
& done it

you can depend on that  
you can count on that  
till the cows come home

\*

this is what they say the men  
whose lives choke them  
throats in collars  
religion a harness on these honest folk  
what they say a mustard plaster on their breathing  
men so burnt they have turned to charcoal  
have turned blunt as an anvil angels beat on  
frogs flattened on the road  
if you can find any  
frogs that is

say we got what we deserved this is what we get  
for sin will go on & on & on upon the face of the earth  
there's no stopping sin once she gets a head up  
cold hail heat wind lightning grasshoppers  
it's all too good for us they say  
-and that's not counting husbands

say we wait for a garden one that is  
wet with noses lit with lilies  
so lush we will walk naked again  
(only they do not say this  
I have read this in philip's book  
and there were pictures)

fair enough heavens I can hardly  
wait let's get on with it why don't we  
I could go for the lilies and roses  
I could go for that part  
they say it is the Dirty Thirties  
what about ours, I could try that, I'm thirty-some,  
enough of the thrifty enough of the collar  
let's snap to it let's find a horse of a different colour  
how about sucking on something sweeter, huh  
how about it huh aincha interested  
playing dirty i mean  
aawww c'mon  
/jist a little bit  
thirty or no thirty I'm terribly thirsty  
could use a snort

just wait'll the ladies get wind of this  
why not thistles  
is all we have to clutch  
P's epistles to the heat  
all the hearts infested with prickles  
preserved like pickles in brine

\*

not much I know but the Wheelers  
burnt out fourth year running  
they take the brunt of this, the farmers

in the meantime we've got to make the best  
of it and so I think a horse why a horse  
Paul why not a camel say  
we could highstep the sand in camel bells and caravans  
sounds of lambs in our ears and goats, the bells  
sharp smell of goats, sweeter than iambs even  
their cheese we're not ill fated man snap out of it  
do I have to draw a picture don't you know  
the way we could sidestep the Mucklers step  
out as if we were born to it, the alacrity of wrens  
hands full of caramel sunlight the sweet electricity

there would be  
the yellow slant of September fragrance of camomile  
wed be wed wed be Anthony & Cleopatra  
all over again

we could you know, practically  
horny as thorns that brush against nights somewhere it would be  
a night in shining amour we'd be  
in clover all over again you know we would  
everything sleek as silk comely as camisole stockings

think of it there you'd be the sheik of estevan  
a bedouin even & me id say  
whose bed you in huh you could be  
this handsome and chique stranger  
young girls would shriek and giggle  
you could be a gigolo but I wouldn't  
let you I wouldn't let you  
out of my sight, ever  
id go for shacking up  
no slacking whatever gig  
you played

just think, no more thin things  
it would be dates & figs nothing but  
figs & dates forever everything

coming up the rest of our lives  
up one sand dune and down the other  
saying one good sand dune deserves another  
kiss what have we done to deserve this  
forget the faces full of vinegar we can have a little fun

\*

there we would be in the midst  
salt & sand banked up past our ankles  
sundials for sure & sandals  
we'd wear sandals all over the place  
we would stir up quite the scandal  
we would you know when it came  
right down to then it tygritty  
and everything in between be King  
of the desert

Queen

salt and sand galore  
ourselves burning  
ourselves would  
get our just  
deserts for there  
inside the tent we'd find  
lemons & thy me & roast lamb  
our mouths full  
from nut sandhoney  
Mrs. Finlay sullen as old mutt on wit hen  
the sweet we'll within  
that ent we would dip in  
olive trees dripping around and birds  
singing a soft herewe  
no tomorrow copera tourankles  
& in our yes jingling & wouldn't you  
now it the rewould be no more  
sorrow in this  
green & pleasant and

\*

*o westryn wynde*

rain when it comes :  
when wilt thou blow

if it were to  
arrive i imagine would be

*some ocean blue in places and fish as if kids have finger-painted them and they wedge  
into night onto ledges pose as parrots turn yellow and orange as cararrots and they rub  
against white and it would be so green it would shine like a basin like soda straight  
from the bottle the sky radiant with pomade & oysters in the shell*

and when it does  
rain that is

*the small rain down doth rain*

it will be cold

needles of a sewing  
machine and it will raise  
braille on the fields  
remove the stem to our brains  
the soft beating of 8 billion legs  
grasshoppers drowning in deluge

just now this doesn't  
happen this is not  
going to happen

*christ if my love were in my arms*

when i look into the sky at night  
all the bits of light enamelled there  
hard shiny insects  
strewn in periods & commas  
dull clinks when they pop against the sky

i can see the whole creation  
know that all day sky will get skinny & warp the sun  
squirt oil into our eyes  
that always it will knock out our sight  
wrap us in a plastic that is close and sticky

the days sting us to a brown forgetting

*and i in my bed again*

\*

time through our bodies the  
time burns away weeks  
week after week of it  
year in year out

our bodies are wired with time  
burn from the current  
it clicks round & round  
we are meters it whirls  
our bodies balance a moment  
on wires no words can keep  
or worry turn round

we glow & twang  
wind & unwind our lives

together in time they are  
pulled through the wall  
all the glum and weary bodies  
our frail & final bodies  
torn on the wires fall off time  
lose power & go out

filaments that burn & go  
out our broken & wary bodies  
turn into burnt-out insects

\*

that day at Paul's  
home & school they call it  
mothers at the back watching  
small children, and big, their noise

chalk dust and wax  
paper apple cores wet mittens  
we're kids all over again  
we lean into Paul's stories  
little cries the desks let out  
when they move

and then the kids clicking  
sticks together they do it  
like this do they  
like this

they insert twigs  
stick insects in the wind  
their thoraxes bright in afternoon  
click against sun

stick to my thoughts till i am  
sick with them and the  
endless ticking of wings  
smell of their hot bodies, squashed

wonder if I scratched  
them on sun  
would they burst  
into fire I could hold  
a sliver to you burning  
wanna light big fella

at night there would be  
birds pecking at the stars  
thick as thistles, as pretty

oh send me letters Paul  
send me

Paul's epistles to the heathens  
I'd call them  
and you, you could call me  
anytime

\*

Yeah, it's hard for them.  
Grown men tears in their eyes going in  
for welfare. Signing away their  
manhood, that's what they think.  
These big proud men never asked a  
thing in their lives, never expected it  
neither. You look after yourself.

One man tells me the guy who signed  
them up watched for him. "Watch out,  
John, you gotta watch yourself."  
"Whadaya mean"? "Just don't get  
caught where you shouldn't be, that's  
all, they're watching."

Some folks turn mean, bad times like  
this. "They'll squeal on yuh sure as I'm  
sittin' here and wham just like that yr  
off welfare." They do it too—kids and  
wife, whole kit and kaboodle, no  
questions asked, and nowhere to go.  
One bad word and that's it, bam.  
you're gone. Seen whole families  
booted into the street, little kids, and  
not a drop of milk.

Guy's not bad himself, years he's been  
holding up his end, he pops in for a  
minute. This man's lost his job, his  
house, what he thinks he is,  
everything. Four kids and they give him  
10 bucks for a month. 10 measly  
bucks, six of them. Relief they call it.  
Some relief. The man, he's ruined  
practically, and they go and pull a  
stunt like that. Hell you couldn't eat  
Russian thistles for that. No tobacco,  
no beer. No fancy clothes, neither,  
that's what they say, which means no  
clothes at all, put near. Hell you got  
kids going to schools feet wrapped in

gunny sacks, or they don't go at all  
they have no shoes, or too much pride  
as they say. They can go in rags, the  
wife and kids. To hell with them, the  
banks want their money, the old lady  
she can wear flour sacks.

How clear in his head, what this man  
tells me. Reverend he says, and I don't  
feel very reverend. This man with the  
forms sits there he's got this navy blue  
pen he's tapping and tapping, they  
have to talk to him.