

*

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
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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
dark water in the eyes

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could be laundry on the one
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
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we are alarmed that our clothes
have shivered off our fears for a second too

how soon we are delivered
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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^whhy^A 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 sifter here
no tomorrow copera tourankles
& in our yes jingling & wouldn't you
now it the reward 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.