

1973

# Father

Philip Levine

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## FATHER

The long lines of diesels  
groan toward evening  
carrying off the breath  
of the living.  
The face of your house  
is black,  
it is your face, black  
and fire bombed  
in the first street wars,  
a black tooth planted in the earth  
of Michigan  
and bearing nothing,  
and the earth is black  
sick on used oils.

Did you look for me in that house  
behind the sofa  
where I had to be?  
in the basement where the shirts  
yellowed on hangers?  
in the bedroom  
where a woman lay her face  
on a locked chest?  
I waited  
at windows the rain streaked  
and no one told me.

I found you later  
face torn  
from *The History of Siege*,  
eyes turned to a public wall  
and gone  
before I turned back, mouth  
in mine and gone.  
I found you whole  
toward the autumn of my 43rd year  
in this chair beside

a mason jar of dried zinnias  
and I turned away.

I find you  
in these tears, few,  
useless and here at last.

Don't come back.