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The No

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The No · *Philip Dacey*

The condom salesman tries them on like shoes.
He'll find the size and style for you. He has
the practiced eye and hand, the sense of what

confines just so, that you can live in,
a way to breathe without the need to breathe.
He'll see it fits you like a pair of shoes

to go anywhere in, and touch nothing,
always a sole away, or skin, the fashion
nowadays for those who'd stay clean

cleaner, cleanest in the face of faces
close enough to catch. The condom salesman
looks you in the eye a thin film protects

and asks you how it feels, the size he found
to help you make your disappearance perfect
while seeming not to disappear at all.

But you've no feeling left to tell him,
or just enough to make a sign: you'll buy.
Today the going-out-of-business sale,

and he, the salesman of the means
of going out of business, smiles to turn
aside a question about price. Who can't

afford protection such as this? Sometimes,
as any schoolboy knows, you have to lose
your life to save it. And there's the beauty

of the thing itself, whatever the style,
the sleek and shining sleeve, a work of art,
finer than a shoe, and looking—this No

manufactured in accordance with
the highest standards—just like you.