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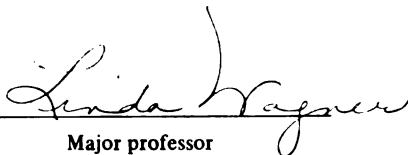
PROTOSUN

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Master of Arts degree in English


Major professor

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1978

PROTOSUN

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Something on the horizon
rising.

Another world building,
blowing up
in me like a bubble
ready to burst.

Red lava seas
melt the rocks,
 bubbling,
 breaking,
 dissolving.

My world is a great bloody bubble
rising in the middle of the molten sea

trying

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of poems was written over a period of eighteen months when I lived, at various times, in Detroit, East Lansing, London (England), and, finally, Calumet in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Although these poems were not written with a preconceived plan or theme in mind, I believe that, when structured together, these words give a feeling of physical movement and mental wandering.

Being of independent thought and action, this work has been mostly my own from first creation to final organization. I do, however, want to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Linda Wagner who revived my creative spirit when it lay near a permanently dormant state and for continuing to be a most helpful guide with her extremely tactful criticisms and beneficial suggestions.

I hope that this collection is a starting point from which I will further develop my ideas and my writing. But if events should occur that will cause this to be my only creative effort, then I present Protosun as a summary of my poetic endeavors.

For those who want, I give.

SJB

I

Singing How the Clouds Come Out

THE SUN LASTS

Daylight glows but I'm sure
you'll mention clouds.

I see warmth,
you see shadows,
long cold sadness across drying sidewalks.

I see clouds but I don't call them
by name.

I like to pet clouds gently,
listen to them purr
a low cheerful moan.

But I reserve my call for the sun.

POWER DRAIN

Tell me,
does this happen often
or am I just lucky to be here?
I'm staring at dead radiators,
a quiet stereo,
no lights
all the way to the Paradise Ballroom.
If I'm a moving target
why am I always being hit?
Julia would know what to do.
We'd sleep through the dark feeling out
the black.

Maybe this is death,
the pain of waiting.

NATURALLY UNTITLED

I don't know
I can't think.

The Grand Coulee closed
the floodgates.

The Point Reyes Peninsula
is taped to the wall but the waves
are motionless and across the way
the sun never rises
finally

over San Francisco.

JUST TAKE ME HOME

Taxi to Toledo,
tread across my vision,
rolling.

Morning dew
clings to barn roofs,
glistens in late morning
sun stabbing into
my scattered brain.

Unsatiated
hunger. No worldly satisfaction.
The Maumee becomes
River Styx.

VACATION PARADISE: MID WINTER

Somebody tell me.

I use old poems for grocery lists,
replay a song twenty times,
in town six months still feeling the first day.

Fan belt squeals break the sun rises.

If I spread my living on the floor
my dog wouldn't piss on it.

BRINK

I feel so helpless because I'm
being pulled toward
total order.

No guessing, hoping.

Flow along with a stagnant stream.
Drown in clinging mud.

DON'T TELL ME I'VE LOST AGAIN

Riding with waves,
a windblown meadow
splashes red wine
drowning in clouds.
I think I am
at the apogee of my intelligence
and I am
being thrown away
by the gravitational pull of my Sun.

TRANQUILITY REVISITED

It's almost funny.

A battle here?

Oceans of dandelions
bow to the breeze,
gold from the sun
contaminates the land.

A battle here?

A frightened brook swaths
through tranquil weed-fields.
Choking, strangling roots
clenched in combat,
the ruling sun
smiling.

"THIS WASN'T MY TIME"

All ended nowhere
to go.

Blinking black / white DETOUR signs everywhere
he looked
finding a life going

9 to 5 (a break for lunch)
curling with poetry collecting
dust in the attic.

His name never appeared anywhere
except on pay-checks,
but his calendar was full:

13th: Groceries
15th: Fill-up car
16th: Bank business
19th: Church
21st: Tell Miss Duffy her linens out
if it rains

Friends would come, the way friends go.
Nothing happens in-between.

One Bright May Morning, tulips waved to loving clouds,

his casket kissed the bottom
of the grave and settled

like his body
after the rope snapped.

A POEM FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

I have my fan humming to taut
nerves, strung like a kite
string in a room so small I don't
have a place to vomit.

I can only look up when I'm
on my back

because Richard
lives with Jeannie and Burton
just keeps beckoning from T.O.

because Kenda always looks
up from her typing and now
there's Lee and Karin and maybe
tomorrow there will be
more

because good smack is so hard
to find and a jet out
is so easy.

II

Shattered Glass

SPRING DREAM CHALLENGE

Clouds blown away, no
stars now but a cold night
coming.

Roving the open field with
my new National Geographic, so tired
I have to turn
to the sunset and see
the sky split.

Hear me, aliens!
Meet me,
entice me
Away
from Greenfield Village carriage rides and
Mackinac Island bicycling.

Incessant waves strike
Carolina sandbars.
Polished pebbles
will keep the time.

AFTER WALKING WITH WORDSWORTH

I should be ashamed,
an English major falling asleep
reading The Prelude. I can't
even get through one book.
No excuses. I dislike
It. I detest a lot
of creativity. I despise my poetry. I hate . . .
Wordsworth, hear me! I loathe you
and all the thoughts that
cross your mind.

I never could understand him or
any of his kind.
It wasn't any fault of his
yet I won't take the blame either.
He was just another man of history
like Jesus Christ
except I don't think
he was ever nailed to any cross.

MOMENTUM

"Do ya think the Yankees can do it?"

Grocery store echoes

a man near lettuce.

I squeezed (careful now)

cherries that once were pendulums

in Lake Michigan breezes. What's left

that isn't poison? or causes cancer?

I glanced at the time

accidentally.

Timex watch is *still* ticking,

a letter

bomb in a Belfast post office

but going slow.

DETROIT IS A POINT OF VIEW

The Ambassador Bridge stretches its graceful gray
span across the border
while the river is winning, finally,
its battle against ice clogging
its life.

And I'm standing
in the early April breeze of the lakes
in a line a few years long
coiled tight around the hall.

"This concert'd better be good for all this shit,"
screams some spaced girl with tangled
dirty hair, while nervous
pigs just smile inwardly hoping
'67 (the summer) doesn't make a repeat.

I can still dream of shattered glass
littering Woodward Avenue and we
chant through the skyscrapers' canyons
to the Grand Circus
Park chasing pigeons
from the statues before they die
from the droppings.

DECLARATION OF NON-PACIFICATION

"There's no replacement,"
screamed in my eyes
but I wiped the ache away.
"We'll see what develops," and I steadied,
sub-machine gun to my side
spraying images—
people in my past rising at me over the hill
deserved it.

All the universities, cities and garbage porn movie shops
melted with the hiss and stink of liquid plastic.

I smiled with blood running
from my ears
and kept firing

holed in Fort Knox.

TAE KWON DO IS CHEAPER THAN COCAINE

(But the Buzz isn't as Great)

Muscles snapped,
taut body tuned to perfect pitch. Breathe
in,

Breathe
out.

Banshee
cry to the roof.

Rigid tendons. Rushing blood
geyser erupting, forcing me to ride
the lifestream
into my ozone.

Eardrums beating in
unison to the hammer heart pounding
stronger until
the chest-wall gently tears away
releasing the gushing contents.

Wipe up my feelings all over
the floor.

SECOND ASTEROID BELT

North America flew by me.
Warm and cold
my saucer rocked gently,
isotopes humming lullabies. I thought
I could see pieces of Philadelphia.
L.A. flew to Mars.

Maybe this is a signal
for two-headed intellects living near Orion to change
their theories
before the galaxy burns like raisin bread

drawn to the sun.

III

To the Bearer of My Non-Existent Child

BUS STATION

1.

The bus driver turned the destination
sign above his head to
GRAND RAPIDS
and started that way
probably

leaving you in the station stranded
(in East Lansing, of all places)
on a late Friday night with no place
to go and everywhere
to be.

Winter's still
saying its last good-byes
and Michigan's no place for long
farewells
especially in old pinball galleries
(free game if the last two digits match)
next to boarded down ice cream
parlors.

Detroit is a thousand years away
when you're out in

the late midwest
winter for the night.

2.

It's not hard clinging
to a habit when the cold drizzle
begins to snow and
street-side lakes
ice over.

Misplaced yearnings can send you
to corners of the Earth
looking toward every sound
but hearing
the dull shudder of the distant
Chicago-bound freight.

A lonely wait with gentle tears
is always centuries
long.

TEXAS DREAM

(An Aborted Love Poem)

Christmas card snow,
gentle / thoughtful,
I don't even notice
I like the sun, the expanse
of warmth--I like her
accent (an affinity for
dialects) and I don't like poetry
when my mind pulls away.

ANOTHER TRY TOWARD A LOVE POEM

I feel like a placid pond,
silent
mirror of the mountains
and their dominance in a lazy
morning.

I need a pebble to break
my glass surface,
ripple through my body slowly,
soothingly,
changing
reflected peaks
to un-natural forms that are

BROKEN LINES

Blonde hair and a hot fudge sundae
confessing to me about her poems,
brittle, broken rhymes.

"But I don't want to be a poet,"
staring bleakly at her work.

"I want a career."

And the delicate blonde no-pref
goes on with her routine

leaving me sitting silent, cursing
an English major
and no words to command a general and his army,

the marching troops frightened
the poor peasant girl
away.

ENCORE

Massachusetts Turnpike winds slowly eastward
to big city noisy lights
and the hall with Julia strumming chords,
voice settling down like snow
singing of revolt cooing of love
watching for me
front row again.

Julia, another job is gone. It's hard to live
on folk music chords.

It's hard to survive on the tail of a comet.
My painted smile at autograph signings
doesn't show how I'm hating
being led by the nose,

a dog following the scent
of your "good luck" bouquet.

WARNING: DO NOT TOUCH FEELINGS UNDER PENALTY OF LOVE

Ever since I studied
white whales in high school lit
I was told, "Look beneath
the surface
to the depth."

But girl if you go under
with me I'll have to hold my breath too
long. Besides
the salt water hurts
my eyes especially
when they're tearing.

Deeper
the crushing pressure
pounds harder
at my temples,

the coral reefs don't
interest me, they cut,
scratch,
infect my thoughts

for you,
for living.

Let's stay ignorant
of the ocean's secret.
I hate everytime
you get serious.

DISCHORD

Are you sure
you want to hear more?

I'm the song in tune tonight
but tomorrow
harmonies will shatter
the delicate glass that props
Hollywood Bowl concerts and
Carnegie recitals.

I can't believe in melodies encircling my heart
like a cobra.
I can't be played,
I cry with the strain
of violins.

I'm a scream in the silent summer night.
It's lonely
never to be
in harmony.

CHECK

Telephone hung another weekend
flown
but not on my shoulders
anymore.
Now it's your turn:
do the guessing.

I'm tired of picking up
bad vibes everytime I make
connections.
I think it's time
to see your strategy.

So I've forced the move on you,
no way out
but to spell the situation
so I can finally read it.

LOST CONNECTIONS & SPRING RAINS

Down today.

Usual things. I don't like
the story I'm working on.

I'm growing older yet

I couldn't ask the E.R. nurse out
(even after she said she wanted
a hot fudge sundae but didn't want to
go alone).

If she said "no"

I'd be trying
at least.

Kenda talks to me
at parties.

She likes to
tell me about her years in France near Normandy.

She does this between petting
the small scruffy dog and cooing to it
in French. She says
she lived in Paris, too,
with some guy from some where and now
she hates to travel
crosstown.

Creative writing course was a waste.

Julia and another student

got in a fight

over a poem.

I went shopping. Bought a record album.

It rained this morning.

Tonight I see shooting stars out the window,

blue moonlight reflecting the open ice-coated country.

I make quick wishes,

none for a friend.

My breath freezes on the window.

Kenda smiles

but she's still in France.

SINCE NO ONE'S ASKING

I've burned
all my notes
and a worthless Michigan diploma.
While stocking pills in rural Canadian hospitals
I show more than anyone could give.
There'll be Valentine flowers, birthday music boxes,
anniversary plays,
no lonely afternoon and dying embers
and a horizon always beyond.

SHIFTING SANDS

Gray finite sky doesn't tell me,
only the greasy signboard:

PADDINGTON--ONE MILE.

London post office tower shrinks
back
chased by houses and trees
scurrying by my rainy window.

"I never rode trains much in Michigan,"
I whisper.
Julia smiles.
"It won't be far."

Regent's Park is down the road
but I can't see green open space.
"I hope I'll like your parents,"
I say.

I can see my mother in Julia's stare
on the porch in Detroit when I told her:

wild horses in clover fields,
a house on the heath,
a school near Wembley. I never knew America
could just fall through my outstretched palm.

My family cried at the airport as I walked away.

"I'll be back," I said with an emptiness that fooled no one.

Holding Julia tighter I turned
from memories of meaning

and a passing storm.

CHURCHYARD OF ST. JOHN

Formless
cloud beats the sun
I can never see
setting.

Night hesitates,
scared back
by city lights.

Small child cries.
Westminster tombstones stand guard.

THERE IS NO LIGHTHOUSE

Stumbling on pebbly shore,
staring at a distant broken ferris wheel,

the decaying coast of Brighton watches
as I sight the pier
dead
in the water.

I walk in a fish 'n' chip shop
humming an Al Stewart tune,
drowned
by the barking of the German shepherd on the unswept floor.
"What ya want, lad?" puffy lady in white
apron asks.
Cod sounds good.

I sit
and watch street life like rain
in constant damp salty spray
while the pier stands
dead
in the water.

I see too much
in the oncoming fog
to avoid. I can't speak
a word to stop it.

CROSSING THE CHANNEL AT MIDNIGHT

(Written on a ship slowly chopping
the water between France and England)

Moonlight

paves a white kaleidoscopic path toward me,
buoyed on waves, welcoming me
away
to stars.

I've never lived so close to the horizon.

LONELINESS TEN TIMES OVER

Placid puddles
reflect glowing dock lights,
a table-top waxed,
silver polished.

I see little
power in cold dampness
penetrating my mind,
wreathed around my bones.

I hear feeble
distant Anglesey trawlers,
dead men beckoning
from their graves.

STATE OF THE EMPIRE

Teasing "End is Near" man,
climbing trees near the Serpentine,
chasing Hamlet into Soho,
wave to prostitutes--
the one on the right doesn't have much
make up.

Tooting Bec beggar strums in the underground
under half-torn posters saluting
twenty-five years of the Queen.

And I have twenty-five p
enough for Green Park
one way.

Washed out star
strains to shine over Nelson's shoulder
reflecting markers for buildings gone.
They didn't have much
character.

ON NEARING KEATS' GROVE

I thought
I heard
nightingales in Hampstead.
I listened:

Leaves applauding the wind.

I tried to mimic but
the silent heath rejected
my echo.

I'm not sure
what I heard was a song.

EAST FROM CAMELOT

Enroute to Bristol
we watched the Taunton trains
struggling away, I wiped rain from my nose.
I think she had tears.
"It's only warm water," she said
struggling with psychology notes
and an Oxford exam.

"Good luck forever" is all I thought to say.
Silence was said.
"If I come back" I started.
"No. Don't," she whispered.
I heard the whistle.
I walked away.

STARVATION

Inter-City 125 lumbers
down glistening rails the sun melts
in the dust of a Glasgow evening.

I hear no singing. I see no choirs
except the thistles waving
silent in the fields.

Lonely tarnished sky follows.
No comfort.

The train rumbles. I want
to go farther than I'm going.
I want to sit on a deep green wool carpet
soaked in the scent of incense and pick
guitar chords during humid August nights
with Julia's sweaty body beckoning
along with crickets in Nebraska corn.

Scotland is no place to be if it doesn't reach
your eyes with its castles perched on hills like vultures
and a gray sky backdrop
unwelcoming,
coloring my journey with boredom.

WRONG SIDE OF THE WORLD

I sit
sweaty on a bed-edge in Britain.
My mind weaves like a looming machine
(over and under over and under)
combing for scarce gold thread.

Dickens,
 Wordsworth,
 Byron,
 Swift,
you took them all!

Or the thread's back home
in a Detroit alley
after stadium lights die,
confused crickets chirp with running feet rhythm,
fading police car wails
sing hymns for the dying
day
just like the rest.

PEOPLE WITH PARALYSIS SHOULD BE IN HOSPITALS

-to Diane (who is well but doesn't know it)

I had a friend. He was leaving, never coming
back.

I wouldn't say "See you later,"

"So long,"

"good bye."

I couldn't shake his hand.

I guess I shouldn't
have read her book. She wasn't satisfied
with hand-in-hand farewells. I remember
avoiding her like Black Plague on Easter Sunday.
Once she sat next to me
at a poetry reading about black camels
(or something equally complex).
I felt heat. I wouldn't take warmth.

I'd like to see her now,
tell her,

"At least he shook hands. That's more than I would do."
That's more than I can do.

I had a friend. He left.

STAGNANT GARDEN

Paralyzed with years of frost,
I can't grow flowers
even for high school girls
who bounce basketballs in time
to their gum chewing.

What happened
Julia? You're the expert
or was it I that drew the curtain in the middle
of your lines?

My scene has changed,
my acts have shifted
to abandoned copper mines
and Keweenaw ghost towns
where I'm digging
bare handed into the dirt,
starving,
not knowing what to eat.

ATLANTIC CROSS

Wake me but
how can I give you signals
sleeping?

Now
that we're divided by years
of ocean
what do you have
to say for yourself?
Will my name trip through
your wintertime images?
or my words echo between
empty minutes?
The Detroit drive takes a lifetime
and still I'm nowhere

near to you.
I'm tired of living.

TO THE BEARER OF MY NON-EXISTENT CHILD

Street light glimmers.
Venetian blinds break
the dampness of an April night
while all is still but
our breathing and
 I swear,
 our heart beats.

 And You
lying between my reason,
riding along
for the thrill of seeing
colliding comets, supernovas and alien battles,
tear
at my back for comfort
through worlds unexplored.

Then
 like a branding iron pressed against my brain,
burning
into my eyes, the million unborn
suns cry at me, tell me to pull away
before my seed sprouts
a monster so ugly

I will have no choice
but to face it and turn to stone.

In horror I rush back
to the brittle Michigan evening
where a silent rain wells up
in the clouds and in your eyes.

I'll weep tears
for the burning of a miracle
I could not conceive.

IV

Warm Nights and Old Worlds

TRAVELING THROUGH NIRVANA

(Michigan)

The rain wouldn't muster better
than drizzle. "Welcome"
sign hung by one rusted bolt.

Single railroad missed
the town: gas station (paint peeling),
renovated farmhouse, now
a bar.

I sighed as I floored the pedal.
Ludington has to be better.

SPORTING EVENT

Opening day
of August. The world champs were in town.

Upper deck right field.
I could see the batter perfectly
if I upset the old
lady in front.

Slow game. Pitchers' battle.
We watch the stadium guards
and pass B-grade Columbian.
A high flying spectator is out
after coming to Earth, rolling
down the aisle,
dazed at the bottom.
Chocolate mesc
probably.

Leftover July 4th firecrackers
planted under seats
of the old folks'
section bring the riot squad.
Rumble in the lower deck.

I think we lost.

AFTERNOON NAP

Curled
fetal position at the foot of my bed,
kitten hypnotized to the song
of summer fans stirring
life from dead heat
of a Midwest summer
I don't notice.

SUMMER ETHNIC FESTIVAL IN A SMALL MIDWEST TOWN

Not here!

Capital City, U.S.A.: home

of righteous government and decent living.

Now see what hot summers can do!

All the time I look into the weather:

sweat and dust,

a city like placid sewer puddles

but for one grassy corner where life is bubbling

out--air from a slow leak.

CRUISING THROUGH ROUGE PARK ON OUTER DRIVE

Even gray autumn days
when leaves turn colorless,
wilting in cold soil,
see me driving this road

because it curves
to and fro,
rocking lullaby,
a talent
all other roads have
for some reason
forgotten. (Straight
grid work
constricts me.
Lord knows, I don't
need constriction
when the cold autumn rains.)

Hypnotized I am
a pendulum swinging
as I cross the
Joy Street overpass.

SAME OLD WINTER SONG

Steamy, dripping windows protect
from the smothering
cold outside
by blocking the view out
to the street.
False warmth seems real.
I wrap myself in the cocoon,
soothe my aches,
calm my spasmodic body.

JANUARY 19

I wonder if it gets warm here,
if the heart of the great white blanket beats
or lies cold,
forgotten?

Revive stiffened air
with outsprouting life.

Break the cold,
melt it with vigor.

PASSING MIDWEST SCENE

"Thank you,"
said the graying farmer's
wife as she put picked tomatoes
on the backseat
when we were at
an Indiana vegetable stand
five summers ago.

Passing it yesterday with the snow
I saw it crouched in the drifts,
boarded by the roadside
waiting
for new tomatoes.

LISTEN TO WINTER

Search is over.
I've found bare trees
and they were right
out my window
but I thought
they were out of mind
while I walked through tourist towns
in January,
souvenir shop closed for the week
with summer T-shirts shouting
Mackinac Island ferry rides through the snow drifts.
Trees whistle and sing.
I've found their key.

ON COMING TO THE CLEAN SUN OF MORNING

¿Julia?

An apartment that echoes,
a place to breathe and lie spread-eagle,
sunken in a plushy carpet.

No windows
that I remember, but I don't remember
wanting to look out. No
lights either, just a glow,
an illumination.

And it was big enough for five.
Two guys. Two girls.
And me. Just going
our own way, not much
dialogue as I recall.
Just going.

One girl had been
a Real Life Attraction
now reduced
to the fake and finite of my sleep. Yet
in that world she'd wake
from the floor and

when I fell into her embrace

I was falling so softly I knew I'd never reach
bottom.

TOMATO PASTE AND SCRAP PAPER

Late afternoon

snow

waves outside the window.

"Can't you raise the temperature in this room?"

I've asked each day.

Students walk in and plop

in a chair with one armrest.

"How's my paper?" eyes ask.

"Readable," I say

it makes sense like my grocery list

and hoping for springtime

when Lake Superior water is deeper

blue.

UPON NOTICING HIS VOICE ABOVE A WHISPER

Ringling phone, Dad's sleepy murmurs,

it's harder to believe

I can remember

a neighbor rushed over,

my sister watching tail-lights fade

in fog from a February thaw.

Next day

Dad brought home his picture. He looked ugly

one hour old nothing

like me his only brother

now twice as far, twice as old,

telling students their participles dangle,

cursing

Copper Country snow,

a future summer as bleak.

But I'll never be double his age again.

When the river narrows it's easier to hear him

on the opposite bank.

NEURO-SURGERY

My cerebral mass has been

felt,

poked,

sliced.

I need a balm for my bleeding brain.

I feel

blood running behind my eyes,

dripping in my throat,

burning all the way down,

searing my intestines.

Nothing found.

Am I to blame?

What the hell are you looking for?

(It's like those B-grade sci-fi shows

where the spaceship can't detect the aliens--

being neither matter nor energy.)

Your instruments can't detect genius anymore

than I can detect creeping insanity.

RECOVERY

Wet ugly
snowstorm descends,
a vulture with its talons out.
I wonder how I got nestled
in east Idaho mountains with the caribou
and how Julia's doing in London.

Thinking east
I imagine another stormy fall
stirring Superior's waters
and see Calumet shivering in another early winter,

numbing cold, cutting feelings
I can only begin to touch
and know

even now.

V

Forever Summer Rainbows

(An Afterword)

CRAVINGS

Peanut buttered pickles
never thrilled me much but,
in the warm living room
colored with blue
off the TV screen, my young
lady sat staring over her swollen
belly.

The electric evening
transmitted the urges
from her womb
to the emptiness
in my stomach

And I've yearned
for candied apples in Idaho
county fairs,
for the rodeo with the midway
lights a distant memory,
for the mountains disappearing
from view,
for the sun preparing
to rise again.

ANTI-PRAYER

Nobody tell me
I am an atheist

because

I don't see inside stained-glass
looking out.

I see better
when I am
out.

I can never
get too much

Sun.

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