TRUE NORTH FOR THE TYRO

Tighten your seat belt, we're goin' up fast.

We got us a williwaw, a sudden weird wind
off the Aleutians. Full o' silt and seal hair
and moose musk. One thing 'bout a williwaw,
you can take off downwind with just enough power
to rise vertical like them fancy VTOL aircraft.
A smidgen o' runway is plenty--which is good, seein'
it's turned to slop we need to get shed of in a hurry.
Your innards'll catch up with you in a minute.
Uh-- might be a bag in the door pocket.

Never had a designer crate, never will. Adam Adcock
used to call his old bush plane a bunch o' spare parts
flyin' in formation. Mine's old too, but dependable.
First time out? Relax, you'll get there just fine.

Yep. Adam's the one used to intercept my radio calls
for a pick-up. He'd beat me there then tell my customer
I smeared up at Nulato. One far back night he even moved
the flare pots so's I'd land on the worst o' the muskeg,
maybe turn turtle, and lose me the mail contract.
I disappointed him, but when I hit them hare holes
it dang near did bust the seat of my pants.
Could've been bad, that's what I flew by. Still do.

Oh, I've got some real smart gadgets now, even LORAN.
But up here where you can't believe magnetic north, here
where you may get six hours o' light and sixty-below-zero,
your gut is still your best instrument.

Bush pilots ain't bad folk, just hungry. Always lackin'
fifteen cents o' havin' a dime. Weren't enough runs
for all of us so we used to compete on the dirty side.
Things're more polite now. Got my own little company.
Jets ain't worth a damn for pipeline inspections,
gettin' equipment to a leak, airliftin' an injury
off a Bering Sea pressure ridge. Hell, we even ferry
Dove Bars to one-lung villages or cognac to Denali climbers.
--You okay? Hey, I'll shut up if you wanta hear a cassette.

Did I ever forgive Adam? Yeah. The night he searched
and landed on the Chena River when I was down in a whiteout,
stuck in the cockpit, feet almost frozen.
Naw, I didn't crash--just ran outa gas lookin' for a break.