

The Poet Reassures The Unknown Young Lady Who, Buff
As Dawn, Found Herself In The Wrong Shower-Room

You're crying, girl? It's natural, of course,
But wrong -- though not to be would be still worse.
Some tearful penitence is not at fault,
For error's purest when preserved with salt.
But too much self-chastisement grows unkind;
Best put it out of thought. I know, to find
Five awkward husbands soaping all at once,
When you're not expecting even one, affronts --
Must seem to you in many ways alarming.
Let me at least assure you: you were charming.
Completely charming.

Graceful as a fawn,
Coming on hunters, stops with breath indrawn
And a wondering look in her glass-brown eyes;
Then, limbs slowed in turning by surprise,
Goes leaping off into the underbrush
Nearby, before a shot unseals the hush --
Thus, you came.

Tripping down steps, you stood
Within a clinical tile-and-lighted wood
Of steam, instead of leaves, as wholly bare
As young Nausicaa playing, unaware,
Among her maidens by the Phaeacian stream,
Whom bold Odysseus, waking, thought a dream
Before his eyes. So you appeared, through mist.
Head up, face gleaming. Breasts only air had kissed
(And the lucky water of the chlorined pool)
Sweetly tipped, like roses, with vermile.
Hair dripping. Eyes blue and lovely as Lucerne
Through which the noon-hour tourist may discern
The round, white stones upon its sandy floors,
Buttock-moons in moving glass -- smooth as yours
When, turning, like the startled fawn, and shy,
You fled at last up through our concrete sky
As you had come.

Say, then, what is its use,

If loveliness mayn't be its own excuse?
Never be embarrassed by it, or distressed;
Only envy keeps your fellows dressed.
And, more, I urge your blush in your defence.
Who would condemn unlucky innocence?
Disparage an honest error made in haste?
As your retreat was graceful, it was chaste.
O accidental nymph, you came upon
Our dim concerns like the rising sun at dawn,
Bursting the clouds! And vanished hence!
Cease weeping, now. As you showed grace, show sense.
You got some very pretty compliments.

--Robert Wallace

The Poet Warns The Rat Which Has Come, Three Snowy
Evenings In A Row, To Scratch Outside His Door

Hunger brings you? and the plunging cold?
Or some dim impulse, equally old,
For companionship on blizzard nights
As thoroughly wild as this? Our lights
Must seem a distant beacon through the snow,
So darkly, softly, swirlingly falling
To blot the earth, the paths we go,
And bring you now so lately calling.

Your scamper rides the metal stairs
Outside. The yellow porchlight flares.
A squirrel without the feather tail,
You clamber, mouse along the rail,
Explore a corner, climb the drainpipe's crook
With its old robins' nest's remains;
And, halfway up the door-frame, look
In through our half-steamed window-panes

At us. We look back. Your pink claws
Scrape lightly on the pane, and pause
Like tiny hands against the glass:
Whose mystery won't let you pass.