

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.

So I have passed before your tunneled door  
Beneath the wall, unaccompanied  
In sun, ghosted with loss -- and gone on. More  
Belongs to neighborliness than need.

We have had war between our kinds  
Too long for either to make amends.  
Understand, I wish you no mishaps  
From poison, gun, the gardener's traps,  
Or the storm's ill. But I've responsibilities,  
A wife and dog your shape affrights --  
And pity's all I have left to ease  
Your snowy way these winter nights.

--Robert Wallace

### A Tough Go

I said no dice  
but the table hit back  
and caught me a wham  
in the wind.

I parried a jab  
from an arm chair  
and landed a  
straight to the ribs.

And so it went,  
day in, day out.  
The walls were a  
splatter of gore

and only when  
no one was looking  
I swung and  
the room came apart.

--Charles Shaw