

A monster boathouse lolling on the bank
Of the high river, backside in the water.
Inside, he greets the landlord's black-haired daughter,
Miss Jacobs, with a nod, and goes upstairs
To put his chamois-seated crew pants on.
Then, past the ranks of Compromises, he
Walks out to the land's end of the long float,
Selects his Single, and stands out to sea.

In and Out: A Home Away from Home, 1947

1. One O'Clock

With gin, *prosciutto*, and Drake's Devil Dogs
In a brown-paper bag, I climb the Hill
On Saturday, the thirty-first of May,
Struck by the sun approaching apogee,
Green comments issued by the Common trees,
Mauve decadence among magnolias,
The moving charcoal shadows on the brown
Stone of the moving brownstone where I live,
And a spring breath of Lux across the Charles.
My key mutters the password; I step in
To the dense essence of an entire past:
Rugs, chicken, toilets, Lysol, dust, cigars.
Through that invisible nerve gas (which leads
In time to total incapacity),
I climb the two flights to my little flat.

2. Two-Thirty

Done with the Devil Dogs, I take the brush
Out of the tooth glass and decant my first
Gin of the afternoon. In half an hour
She will be here. All is in readiness:
The bedspread taut, the ashtrays wiped, a glass

Swiped from the bathroom down the hall, a small
Plate of *prosciutto* canapés. Now Fu
Manchu reclines at ease in his hideaway,
While his nets, broadcast, sweep their victim in
To an innocuous address on Pinckney Street.
Now Lou the Loser uses all his ten
Thumbs to count up the minutes till she comes,
Or till (more likely, with his luck) she never shows.
The gin sets up a tickle in my toes.
I blow my nose. The room is hot. A fly
Does dead-stick landings on my neck. She's late.

3. Three-Ten, et seq.

The doorbell rings. I barrel down the stairs
To meet the coolest copy I have seen
Of Sally on the steps. Up in my room,
I fix her gin and secretly survey
This manifestation by which I have so
Astoundingly been visited: a girl.
She walks on her long legs, she talks out loud,
She moves her hand, she shakes her head and laughs.
Is this mechanical marvel to be mine?
Quite paralyzed, I nod and nod and nod
And smile and smile. The gin is getting low
In my tooth glass. The hour is getting on.
Gin and adrenalin finally rescue me
(With an assist from Sally) and I find
My lips saluting hers as if she were
My stern commanding officer. No fool,
She puts us on an equal footing. Soon
My strategies and tactics are as toys
Before the gallop of her cavalry
That tramples through my blood and captures me.

4. Five-Fifty

Later, as racy novels used to say,
Later, I turn to see the westering sun
Through the *ailanthus* stipple her tan side

Of Augustin the First, the ur, the great
Augustin Dunster Saylor, where too late
The sweet birds sang of Arthur in his hall,
God in his Heaven, Saylor in his chair
Of English Literature in Harvard Yard.

"My grandfather was great," his scion mutters.
I answer that he was indeed a bard.
(Unlike Professor S., industrious
And able critic of illustrious
American authors, save his forefathers.)
He jots an introduction on his card —
"Do show your work to dear Professor Dix" —
And bows me out to nineteen forty-six.

In and Out: Severance of Connections, 1946

1. *Civis*

Walking the town as if I owned it all —
Each lilac leafing out in Brattle Street,
Each green vane in the hollow square guarding
The gargoyles on Memorial Hall, each inch
Of rubber tubing in the Mallinckrodt
Chemical Laboratory, each
Particle who would learn and gladly teach,
Each English bicycle chained to its rack,
Each green bag humping on its scholar's back,
Each tally for a Cambridge traffic death,
Each boyish girl who makes you catch your breath,
Each Argyle sock, each Bursar's bill, each ounce
Of shag, each brick, each doctorate — as if
I owned the entire spring-wound town, I walk
Up the north path to University Hall.

2. *Magister*

The Master's teeth squeak as he sprinkles me
(Too hot to handle) with a mist of spit
That dries quite coolly. "Edwards, I've got some
Rough news for you." In his glazed, padded, blue
Old double-breasted serge suit and his bat-
Wing bow tie (navy, with pink polka dots),
He lets me have it right between the eyes,
His aces on the table, man to boy.
"Look, if there's one thing I can't tolerate
It's smart guys that won't work. The deans are soft
On geniuses. Not me. What we need more
Of is Midwestern athletes who get C's."
He stands up to reveal that his brown vest
Is perfectly misbuttoned. "Now, don't think
That I'm the least bit sorry about you.
I'm sorry for your mother and your dad.
You let them down. Now, you get out of here
And do something worthwhile. Work with your hands.
Stick with it two years. Maybe they'll take you back.
Okay, fella? That's it. Now let's shake."
We shake. I shake in secret with the shame of it.

3. *Exilium*

The ghost goes south, avoiding well-worn ways
Frequented by his friends. Instead, he slips
Into loose shadows on the sunless side
Of the least-travelled street. But even there,
One with a bony finger points him out
And pierces him with questions. Zigzagging,
He hedges hastily back to his route,
Which leads on past his windows, tendrilly
Embraced already by the outriders
Of summer's ivy, past his pipes and books
And dirty shirts and mother's picture, past
The dining hall where his name is still good
For a square meal, no questions asked, and past
The common room which is too good for him.
Across the Drive his beast heaves into view;

With yellow coin dots shaped to fit her skin.
This Sally now does like a garment wear
The beauty of the evening; silent, bare,
Hips, shoulders, arms, tresses, and temples lie.
I watch her as she sleeps, the tapering back
Rising and falling on the tide of breath;
The long eyelashes lying on her cheek;
The black brows and the light mouth both at rest;
A living woman not a foot away.

The west wind noses in at the window,
Sending a scent of soap, a hint of her
Perfume, and the first onions of the night
Up the airshaft to where I lie, not quite alone.

Midsummer Night, Charles Street

The one untuned clock bell, ten minutes slow,
Tolls curfew for all tenants. The black bars
Exhale us into the dark street. Below,
The gutters swallow water; above, the stars

Roll in their ball race, bearing the dead weight
Of stricken hours below. Cancer, the Crab,
Surveys his citizens, who, huddled, wait
For the last word, the last light from a cab

To form our faces, the last touch of hands
Laid on our sleeves, the *dernier cri* of night.
We must ascend alone into the lands
Upstairs we live in. The initial flight

Is granite, which our crampons lace with sparks
Like kitchen matches'. The next flight is brick,
Glacé like ornamental walks in parks,
Offering no purchase to our pitons. Kick

A foothold in the sheer face, belay up
Over the lip of the third stage, rigid wood.

Last up a scant lath chimney to the top,
Where, sweated, scared, made up with dust and blood,

We face at length again the nightly sky,
Where our sign reigns alone, picking us out
Of our crowd on the Hill, who singly lie
About us in a similar case, no doubt.

Two Encounters

I. AT THE INN, 1947

Your mink scarf smells as if it smoked cigars,
And soot clings in the corners of your eyes,
And cold has cancelled your pale cheeks in red,
And you stand faintly in a veil of Joy,
And your kid gauntlet grips a round red bag,
And your lips taste of roses and Nestlé's
Milk-chocolate bars, and your long arms entail
My foreign body in the turning world.
One washroom later, in the oaken Inn
Where things transcend the bogus and return
To old simplicities aimed at and missed,
At least today, at least with you beside
Myself with love on the ridiculous
Oak settle picked as earnest of the past,
I see your color come back in the murk,
Drawn by a dark and blood-suborning drink.
I can't describe your long-shanked leverage
To move the world at that tart, flowering age:
The brief and just trial balance of your power.
However, I recall that at that hour —
After one drink, before the Dartmouth game —
You looked at me forever with an eye
Of tourmaline without a fleck or flaw,
Set in a mount of bone as plain as steel
And flesh as scanty and as beautiful