

After Two Months at Blackburn

On a certain Friday afternoon
Late in Indian summer, the boy
Left his last class and hurried
To the station downtown in Carlinville,
Familiar, yet unfamiliar.

Cautiously he boarded the electric Interurban,
Convincing himself it was not different,
Maybe even the same car he once rode
From his high school town into the
Countryside toward his family's farm.

Across the late afternoon he watched
The little towns of Illinois scoot by,
Frequently moving from his open window
To the back to stand against the
Curving iron rail on the outdoor platform,
The rails clacking away behind like
Polished bands being drawn
From beneath the car.

Some time after midnight his watchful stare
Caught the silhouette of Caldwell's grain elevator
Standing alone among the cornfields.
He rose quickly and jerked the slick cord
Above the windows.
A moment later he was off the steps
In the moonlight of the County Line crossing,
The little car gaining speed as it
Rattled off toward Champaign.
He set off at an easy trot
North along the silent dusty road.

More than two months away,
He was thinking as, nearly an hour later,
He trudged the corner by the silver maple
And clicked the front gate latch. Instantly
Surprised scufflings came from the porch,
Quick growls, two shapes hurtling toward him
Through the dark shadows of the trees. He froze,
Waiting, as the dogs rushed at him.
Near the moment of contact they changed,
Leaping, licking, murmuring frantically.

Staggering against their scrambling embraces
He moved toward the house,
Whispering reproachfully, shiny-eyed
And smiling in the moonlight.