

I blame Billy Collins,
 who does not wear a dark fedora
 but slightly faded blue jeans
 and an ironically rumpled
 white dress shirt,
 who is not unfond of the double negative
 and writes self-reflexive sonnets
 light and liquid as spilled milk,
 even writing of subjects as solemn
 as Emily Dickinson or death
 manages to undo
 Emily's buttons,
 have his father tip his hat and crack
 a joke from the cold grave.
 Billy, who will tell
 how the world aches and treads?
 I am split, swept along in the tide
 of laughter and admiration
 while some side of me sits
 in judgment, irked and muttering,
 "What's so damn funny?"

O Billy, is this the ugly bile of envy
 I feel creeping up my throat?
 How can the poems of a man my father's age
 make me feel nostalgic and passé?
 Better not to admit it,
 hunker quietly, hiding
 my criticism and unfashionable longings
 under my dark overcoat.
 Or perhaps I should thank you
 for dropping in, dressed as the muse.
 Call this an ode—
 or a gauntlet.

Blame It On Billy Collins

O where are the morose poets,
 the broken-hearted, given to drink
 and penniless cold-water walk-ups?
 I long for the lugubrious
 poets of darkness.
 Now everyone's writing
 witty little poems
 giving serious subjects
 wry wings.

I blame it on Billy Collins,
 that former poet laureate
 who rolls poems off his fingertips
 like a magician pulling coins
 from the audience's ears,
 or Lucille Ball rolling out chocolates
 on the assembly line, except
 nothing ever goes haywire here.
 I miss those sad poets
 writing with ink in dark bars
 and coughing tubercularly,
 dressed in clothes that hang
 a bit baggy because
 they forget to eat.

Poetry for Breakfast
 Reading poetry, I blacken
 my organic popart in the toaster,
 maple-syrup-sweetened frosting caramelizing, cracking.
 Coming up, emerging from the river
 climbing out the page
 to stand on the bank,
 words course off my body,
 puddle at my feet. Outliers
 dapple dry ground with Dalmatian spots.
 I shake like a wet dog, hair disarrayed
 from sleek to wild waves
 and bite into the blackened-sugar edge,
 warm cherries on my tongue,
 blistered frosting flaking in my mouth
 sweet and hot and dark as the poems
 I swallow.

Writing

I am mad with words, sick
 as Blake's rose
 tunneled through by poems
 like worms, each word eating
 another red petal.
 What kind of mother
 feeds her children poems
 instead of bread?
 What kind of wife
 wishes her husband out the door
 so she can rush back to her black ink,
 mark the white paper?
 What family wants a poet
 among them, scratching secrets
 until they bleed?
 I am obsessed as coyote
 with full moon,
 running, nose to trail,
 poem's tail wishing into a bush
 just out of sight.
 I catch its scent on night wind,
 howl.

BLAME IT ON BILLY



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