**THE NAMES  
 by Billy Collins**

**Yesterday, I lay awake in the palm of the night.   
 A soft rain stole in, unhelped by any breeze,   
 And when I saw the silver glaze on the windows,   
 I started with A, with Ackerman, as it happened,   
5 Then Baxter and Calabro,   
 Davis and Eberling, names falling into place   
 As droplets fell through the dark.**

**Names printed on the ceiling of the night.   
 Names slipping around a watery bend.   
10 Twenty-six willows on the banks of a stream.**

**In the morning, I walked out barefoot   
 Among thousands of flowers   
 Heavy with dew like the eyes of tears,   
 And each had a name --   
15 Fiori inscribed on a yellow petal   
 Then Gonzalez and Han, Ishikawa and Jenkins.**

**Names written in the air   
 And stitched into the cloth of the day.   
 A name under a photograph taped to a mailbox.   
20 Monogram on a torn shirt,   
 I see you spelled out on storefront windows   
 And on the bright unfurled awnings of this city.   
 I say the syllables as I turn a corner --   
 Kelly and Lee,   
25 Medina, Nardella, and O'Connor.**

**When I peer into the woods,   
 I see a thick tangle where letters are hidden   
 As in a puzzle concocted for children.   
 Parker and Quigley in the twigs of an ash,   
30 Rizzo, Schubert, Torres, and Upton,   
 Secrets in the boughs of an ancient maple.**

**Names written in the pale sky.   
 Names rising in the updraft amid buildings.   
 Names silent in stone   
35 Or cried out behind a door.   
 Names blown over the earth and out to sea.**

**In the evening -- weakening light, the last swallows.   
 A boy on a lake lifts his oars.   
 A woman by a window puts a match to a candle,   
40 And the names are outlined on the rose clouds --   
 Vanacore and Wallace,   
 (let X stand, if it can, for the ones unfound)   
 Then Young and Ziminsky, the final jolt of Z.   
 Names etched on the head of a pin.   
45 One name spanning a bridge, another undergoing a tunnel.   
 A blue name needled into the skin.**

**Names of citizens, workers, mothers and fathers,   
 The bright-eyed daughter, the quick son.   
 Alphabet of names in a green field.   
50 Names in the small tracks of birds.   
 Names lifted from a hat   
 Or balanced on the tip of the tongue.   
 Names wheeled into the dim warehouse of memory.   
 So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart.**