**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.**