

*Katrina Hays*

Bend, OR

**DEAR MR. BILLY COLLINS,**

Several years ago you sent me  
a small signed broadside with a note  
congratulating my recent acquisition of an MFA in poetry  
and warning:

*Don't bother looking in the want ads under 'poet'.*

My mother was born in an age  
when schoolchildren memorized poetry.  
For her a fine poem will always be just as lovely as a tree;  
good verse her heart with pleasure fills,  
and something-something daffodils.

I heeded your poetic advice, sir:  
took a job with Big Blue editing prose  
that trumpets technology. Please refer  
to the white paper on reopening old mines to probe  
more deeply into the flanks of our tender blue dot in space, and

how we can build artificial intelligences  
to kick our human heinies at Go.  
My mother says (this is probably an irrelevance)  
my poetry is nice, but really  
she prefers my prose.

Fra Pandolf's hands could freeze me  
no more thoroughly in time  
than this oft-repeated phrase  
that tends to stop my smiles altogether.  
But no whining!

My mother loves your verse.  
It would mean so much to her  
to have an inscription on your latest from her most  
favorite poet.  
(America's favorite, too, says the blurb.)

"Dear Alice,"  
you might begin,  
"A little birdie told this author  
of your fondness for my poems.  
You must be so proud to have a daughter,

dear lady,  
who is a poet,  
who cares for you enough to write  
on your behalf. I know it  
must bring you deep delight."

Or something like that.

As I say, my widowed mother would love a note from you,  
Billy Collins.  
She keeps the volume of your verse  
I gave her on the nightstand,  
and when she cannot sleep

she slips out of her kyphotic body  
and sails alone around the room,  
her nightgown floating gossamer  
in the moonlight  
of your mutual minds.