the worst combination that vowels and consonants had ever been susceptible of.

One night during the Romantic Movement S.T.C. carried his howling baby son outside into the orchard to show him the full moon;

S.T.C. watched the baby's quiet face and the moon reflect each other like circular mirrors and he held up the weightless life of his son's blue, watery head and forgot about his awful name.

His son's name was Hartley, after a philosopher. His wife's name was Sara. His mistress's name was Sarah, too. His partner's name was William

which is also my name which I never much cared for. William: it sounds like the name of a king or an A student.

SILVER DOLLARS

My great grandfather was the man who held

queens over fours

in the hand that Wild Bill Hickock had the now dreaded aces and eights.

It turned out to be the second best hand (nobody else had shit)

so he took the pot, Wild Bill having been shot in the back by a runt. Everyone thought he should have kicked it in for the great man's funeral expenses

but he didn't and that's why my family today is so enormously wealthy.

> -- Billy Collins Scarsdale, NY

INITIAL MEETING

You were like a lost book
I hadn't finished reading: something
I thought I'd like. I was at once grateful
we didn't get to know each other
well enough to be harsh; and afraid,
in case we never met again. I heard last night Renoir
did not make drawings first, therefore his edges blent
like petals into evening, and I thought
I'd tell you that. I don't
especially care for Renoir,
but I like his method.

EMPLOYMENT ON THE COAST

Summer jobs were curious. Once I worked for a man who said we would sell jewelry, but what we did was pick ticks off his dog all day. I was well paid. Often, he'd smooth his hands down over my waist and say, "How do you like it -the way I've fixed up the shop?" We never were lovers, although the thought of him destroyed my love for another. We watched monster movies and the Watergate hearings while we groomed the dog, or put earrings on it. I thought it was a very good summer, though we never were lovers. He was blond as a ghost. I conceal his identity here: he didn't own the shop and it wasn't his dog. The rest is true, and the day we were meant to close the deal,