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SECRETS OF WRITING REVEALED AT LAST

-- for billy collins

It was raining in Arcadia.

I sat in the car waiting for the free race,  
writing at a poem and reading Henry James.  
The heater whispered like the skirts  
of his heroines and those sentences  
were still measured by the furlong  
but I didn't mind, not like I used to.  
Did this mean I could handle my mid-life crisis  
in the library and skip therapy and motorcycles?

I worked on the poem some more (it turned out  
to be this one) but it wouldn't jell so I  
watched the stands exhale nine thousand fans  
each in his new, free, yellow hat: a host  
of golden daffodils. In the back seat  
Wordsworth introduced himself to Henry. Whew!  
But I played it cool, content to listen  
as they chatted about writing. Then one  
of them tapped me on the shoulder: "Look,  
Ronald, we know you need to finish this poem,  
and we can't leave until you do. It's one  
of the rules of inspiration. But we also  
want you to bet on Past Masters at 40-1.  
So why not just borrow some lines from one  
of your friends. We all did, you know."

I checked my program: 40-1. I checked  
my watch: almost post time. "Billy wouldn't  
mind," I said dashing for the windows.

And that is why my family  
today  
is so enormously wealthy.