

Billy Collins

Elusive

As I was wandering the city this morning
trying to imitate the voice of Michael Caine,
I began to think about her again —

which makes it sound as if she were far away
or lost in the past or possibly both.

But I was with her only an hour ago
and later I will sit in the kitchen
and watch her hair hiding her face

as she stirs some onions and butter in a skillet
and I pour us a glass of frosty white wine.

Still, she has been known to vanish
as if in a mist as we walk past
a row of store windows, or she will disappear

behind a hedge or into a side room at a party.
And often no aisle of the supermarket reveals her.

Like a fox, she is nowhere and everywhere,
a tail of fire out of the corner of my eye,
one of the corners she likes to turn

just as the streetlights are coming on
when I am searching for her in the evening crowd.

Would she and Michael Caine hit it off?
I wondered as I emerged from an alley
only to see her staring at me from a spot on a public bench.

Billy Collins

After the Funeral

When you told me you needed a *drink*-drink
and not just a drink like a drink of water,

I steered you by the elbow into a corner bar,
which turned out to be a real *bar*-bar,

dim and nearly empty with little tables in the back
where we drank and agreed that the funeral

was a real *funeral*-funeral complete with a Mass,
incense and tons of eulogies.

You know, I always considered Tom a real
friend-friend, you said, lifting your *drink*-drink

to your lips, and I agreed that Tom
was much more than just an ordinary friend.

We also concurred that Angela's black dress
was elegant but not like *elegant*-elegant,

just elegant enough. And a few hours later
when the bartender brought yet another round

of whiskies to our table in the corner
we recognized by his apron and his mighty girth

that he was more than just a bartender.
A true *bartender*-bartender was what he was

we decided, with a respectful *clink*-clink
of our *drink*-drinks, amber in a chink of afternoon light.