

Rain

By Billy Collins

Some time after the books had been forbidden—
The one about the woman and her daughter,
The one about the boy who spoke poorly—
And after the smoke from the incinerators had cleared,

It was suggested that censorship be extended
To the plover, the wild turkey, and the common moorhen.
But these birds have done nothing, a few protested.
That is precisely the problem, the loudspeakers answered.

It rained that month day and night.
Men with nets fanned out into the fields
And shouted to each other along the shorelines.
Teachers disappeared on the way to their cars.

Then the committee came after the morning glory
For its suggestive furling and unfurling
And the ligustrum and the alstroemeria
Because they were difficult to pronounce and spell.

Then the pine tree for its tricky needles and cones
And parsley and red and yellow peppers for no reason at all.
You would think the lock and the gate
Would be safe, but that was well before whispering,

Shaking hand on the street,
And hooking an arm around someone's waist
Became the subjects of discussion
Across long granite tables behind dark glass doors.

And the rain was constant and cold—fine days
To curl up with a good book, someone joked—
But there were no more books,
Just the curling up of people quietly in corners and doorways,

Bits of straw floating down the streets
Along the curbs into the turbulent rivers and out to sea.