**Introduction to Poetry**

**Billy Collins**

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

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| oem Number 45 | **Nights**  **Kevin Hart**  There’s nothing that I really want: The stars tonight are rich and cold Above my house that vaguely broods Upon a path soon lost in dark.  My dinner plate is chipped all round (It tells me that I’ve changed a lot); My glass is cracked all down one side (It shows there is a path for me).  My hands—I rest my head on them. My eyes—I rest my mind on them. There’s nothing that I really need Before I set out on that path. |

# Grammar

## Tony Hoagland

Maxine, back from a weekend with her boyfriend,  
smiles like a big cat and says  
that she's a conjugated verb.  
She's been doing the direct object  
with a second person pronoun named Phil,  
and when she walks into the room,  
everybody turns:

some kind of light is coming from her head.  
Even the geraniums look curious,  
and the bees, if they were here, would buzz  
suspiciously around her hair, looking  
for the door in her corona.  
We're all attracted to the perfume  
of fermenting joy,

we've all tried to start a fire,  
and one day maybe it will blaze up on its own.  
In the meantime, she is the one today among us  
most able to bear the idea of her own beauty,  
and when we see it, what we do is natural:  
we take our burned hands  
out of our pockets,  
and clap.

# Football

## Louis Jenkins

I take the snap from the center, fake to the right, fade back...  
I've got protection. I've got a receiver open downfield...  
What the hell is this? This isn't a football, it's a shoe, a man's  
brown leather oxford. A cousin to a football maybe, the same  
skin, but not the same, a thing made for the earth, not the air.  
I realize that this is a world where anything is possible and I  
understand, also, that one often has to make do with what one  
has. I have eaten pancakes, for instance, with that clear corn  
syrup on them because there was no maple syrup and they  
weren't very good. Well, anyway, this is different. (My man  
downfield is waving his arms.) One has certain responsibilities,  
one has to make choices. This isn't right and I'm not going  
to throw it.

# Reckless Poem

## Mary Oliver

Today again I am hardly myself.  
It happens over and over.  
It is heaven-sent.

It flows through me  
like the blue wave.  
Green leaves – you may believe this or not –   
have once or twice  
emerged from the tips of my fingers

somewhere  
deep in the woods,  
in the reckless seizure of spring.

Though, of course, I also know that other song,  
the sweet passion of one-ness.

Just yesterday I watched an ant crossing a path, through the  
          tumbled pine needles she toiled.  
And I thought: she will never live another life but this one.  
And I thought: if she lives her life with all her strength  
          is she not wonderful and wise?  
And I continued this up the miraculous pyramid of everything  
          until I came to myself.

And still, even in these northern woods, on these hills of sand,  
I have flown from the other window of myself  
to become white heron, blue whale,  
          red fox, hedgehog.  
Oh, sometimes already my body has felt like the body of a flower!  
Sometimes already my heart is a red parrot, perched  
among strange, dark trees, flapping and screaming.

# A New Poet

## Linda Pastan

Finding a new poet  
is like finding a new wildflower  
out in the woods. You don't see

its name in the flower books, and  
nobody you tell believes  
in its odd color or the way

its leaves grow in splayed rows  
down the whole length of the page. In fact  
the very page smells of spilled

red wine and the mustiness of the sea  
on a foggy day - the odor of truth  
and of lying.

And the words are so familiar,  
so strangely new, words  
you almost wrote yourself, if only

in your dreams there had been a pencil  
or a pen or even a paintbrush,  
if only there had been a flower.

# The Summer Day

## Mary Oliver

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?