

Central Park  
by Billy Collins

It's hard to describe how that day in the park  
was altered when I stopped to read  
an official sign I came across near the great carousel,  
my lips moving silently like the lips of Saint Ambrose.

As the carousel turned in the background,  
all pinions and mirrors and the heads of horses  
rising to the steam-blown notes of a calliope,  
I was learning how the huge thing  
was first designed to be powered  
by a blind mule, as it turned out,  
strapped to the oar of a wheel in an earthen  
room directly below the merry turning of the carousel.

The sky did not darken with this news  
nor did a general silence fall on the strollers  
or the ball players on the green fields.  
No one even paused to look my way,  
though I must have looked terrible  
as I stood there filling with sympathy  
not so much for the harnessed beast  
tediously making its rounds,

but instead of the blind mule within me  
always circling in the dark —  
the mule who makes me turn when my name is called  
or causes me to nod with a wooden gaze  
or sit doing nothing on a bench in the shape of a swan.

Somewhere, there must still be a door  
to that underground room,  
the lock rusted shut, the iron key misplaced,  
last year's leaves piled up against the sill,  
and inside, a trance of straw on the floor,  
a whiff of manure, and maybe a forgotten bit  
or a bridle hanging from a hook in the dark.

Poor blind beast, I sang softly as I left the park,

poor blind me, poor blind earth turning blindly on its side.