

*Nightclub*

You are so beautiful and I am a fool  
to be in love with you  
is a theme that keeps coming up  
in songs and poems.  
There seems to be no room for variation.  
I have never heard anyone sing  
I am so beautiful  
and you are a fool to be in love with me,  
even though this notion has surely  
crossed the minds of women and men alike.  
You are so beautiful, too bad you are a fool  
is another one you don't hear.  
Or, you are a fool to consider me beautiful.  
That one you will never hear, guaranteed.

For no particular reason this afternoon  
I am listening to Johnny Hartman  
whose dark voice can curl around  
the concepts of love, beauty, and foolishness  
like no one else's can.  
It feels like smoke curling up from a cigarette  
someone left burning on a baby grand piano  
around three o'clock in the morning;  
smoke that billows up into the bright lights  
while out there in the darkness  
some of the beautiful fools have gathered  
around little tables to listen,  
some with their eyes closed,  
others leaning forward into the music  
as if it were holding them up,  
or twirling the loose ice in a glass,

slipping by degrees into a rhythmic dream.  
Yes, there is all this foolish beauty,  
borne beyond midnight,  
that has no desire to go home,  
especially now when everyone in the room  
is watching the large man with the tenor sax  
that hangs from his neck like a golden fish.  
He moves forward to the edge of the stage  
and hands the instrument down to me  
and nods that I should play.  
So I put the mouthpiece to my lips  
and blow into it with all my living breath.  
We are all so foolish,  
my long bebop solo begins by saying,  
so damn foolish  
we have become beautiful without even knowing it.

Collins, Billy. Sailing Alone Around The Room. New York:  
Random House, 2001.