

2 - Labeling Keys - Taylor Mali [Keys - YouTube](#) [live version - YouTube](#)

Filmed at the Bowery Poetry Club on 11/12/2005 as part of a reading with Billy Collins called Page Meets Stage. [TAYLOR MALI - YouTube](#)

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Though not a secretive man,
my father understood combination locks and keys.
oh yeah, he was a "Yale Man".
and he had a love affair with brass,
and he had a key rack
as organized as the writing on the label of each key, was neat.
it's the same angel that made him label and date
butcher-paper-wrapped-leftovers in the refrigerator
with christmas present creases and hospital corners
and little 2 by 2 post-it-notes with possible suggestions for the leftovers' use.
"Turkey Scraps November 23 - yummy treat for the D-O-G".
secured with (count them) one, two rubber bands.
one for snugness, the other just for, you know, symmetry.
But there's an art to labeling keys.
The one you keep to your neighbor's house cannot say on it:
"Neighbor's House across the street (in Maine for all of May)".
Similarly, "gun rack", "burglar alarm", "spare set of keys to Saab in garage" ...
These are labels you will not see at our house.
Instead, my father wrote in his own argot,
in a cryptographic language of oblique reference.
The key to the burglar alarm he called, "the Siren's song"
The gun rack, "that infernal racket"
The neighbor's house across the street was called "The Farm in Kansas".
"Victor" was the Volvo, "Henry" was the Honda, "Gabriella", the Sabatini.
A security of the mind no doubt, and not so much precluding burglary
as offering a challenge to the industrious burglar,
as well as evincing from my brother and me
much in the way of loving parody,
such as the key to the side door,
which we labeled "NOT the key to the side door"
"Destitute Neighbor's Hovel (far far away from here, nothing to steal)"
"Boat House in Djibouti".

But among the neatly labeled keys, some to cars we no longer possessed, such as, "Potemkin" and "Gerald the Ford",
there was a brass ring called "keys to unknown places"
Little metal orphans, they **had** all **lost** their locks
or rather their locks had all lost them,
misplaced them all on the same ring,
which is a sadness that no **bolt cutter** can cure.
Even the key that says simply: "Hartford".
"Hartford"...somewhere there's a door, a box, a closet full of secrets locked
and the only thing I know about it (knowing my father),
is that it's probably not in Hartford.
But I keep them all **jingling** and **jangling**, turning the **tumblers** of the past;
who knows when i **may** not be in Hartford again
and have such a need for such a key?
And who here knows nothing of the magic that escapes
everytime a key that **should** unlock a door, does?