IMAGINING BILLY

It is not hard to imagine Billy Collins stretched out on the bed beside me in the place now occupied by his new and selected poems. He is wearing striped pajamas, in a lightweight pale blue flannel with a darker blue piping, purposefully selected for their classic, formal lines and the way the colors enhance the lucidity of his eyes.

Unlike me, Billy has closed the book he was reading before bed and placed it on the nightstand alongside his water glass, watch and ring, admiring surely the peaceful arrangement of the objects and the way light from the hall glances off the watch and the ring and places a small square shimmer on the glass—a Vermeer-like touch he will save for future reference.

And unlike the volume of his poems, which lies where I left it, face-down and half-hidden in the covers, Billy is a picture of composure—hands clasped behind his head, his gaze sailing quizzically around the room. Perhaps he is interrogating the snow or coaxing bands of mice from the elegant labyrinth of his mind.
Perhaps he is devising a plan
to introduce the curtains
to the windowsill, the alarm clock
to the bedside lamp. It does not matter to him
that I lie here, ready to fool with
his buttons, or muss the remaining
hairs on his balding boyish head.
He has deeper mysteries to probe
than my unambiguous flesh beside him.