

NEAL BOWERS

SLEEPING LATE

Done right it takes the wit and courage
of Houdini under ice, breathing in the thin space
just beneath the surface glazed with light,
looking for a hole back into the waiting world
and the exact moment to emerge.

My neighbor, who rises every day at seven,
and the garbage man, who slams the can
against the house for spite, know nothing
of the skill involved as I float quilts deep
in a drowse of underwater sounds,
one hand still cuffed.

Getting out of the trunk with its chains
and double locks may seem the hardest part,
but anyone can move a sliding panel.
The real trick is to hold the dangerous poise
between water and ice, as the river lulls
the inner ear and the slow heart starts to crystallize.

I sometimes drift along this way for hours
through the blurred landscape, a dark shape despised
by milkmen and farmers and workers on the early shift,
even by the boy who brings the morning paper.
If I let myself imagine it, their picks
against the ice sound something like applause.