

Keith Tornheim – Three Poems

Battered Sleep

2 a.m. I was awakened
by a rhythmic whir,
the repeated woosh of wings
above me, from one side
of the room to the other,
then back again.

At last I realized
it must be a bat,
somehow entered
and now trapped
within the bedroom,
cruising well above me,
crossing and recrossing,
looking for an exit.
I crawled out of bed,
crept along the floor,
over to the window,
opened it and raised the screen,
then quickly left the room.
I huddled by the door,
ear to the briefly opened crack
to check at intervals for sound.
At last there was silence.
I entered and listened intently
in each direction,
turned on the light
to look around
for oddly hanging shapes.
Saw nothing.
Heard nothing.
He was gone.

But the good dreams had fled
through the open window with him,
leaving only the dark ones,
and even these fluttered
for an hour at the ceiling,
out of reach above my head.

Picture Album

I still see you, black hair one day,
white the next, then black again,
though it's nearly twelve years,
mother, since you died.

The images are old ones
I flip through in my mind,
not on a smart phone,
so perhaps they've been
retouched a bit by time.

There's your smile at the airport
when I would pick you up,
despite your fatigue from the transatlantic flight,
your bags so heavy we joked
you must have brought rocks from the Holy Land.

Flipping further back, you visiting me
at the college in Ohio where you once went.
You were in that bright yellow dress
and matching bow, like a tiara,
youthful face and stride—
they thought you were my sister,
maybe an older one.

And even further back in time,
the serious yet caring face and voice
(yes, there is audio sometimes, too),
in the bathroom of our house
just north of Berkeley, California,
you telling me, the sometimes rambunctious preteen boy,
that you would always love me, but
that I must tell the truth—I don't remember now,
was it a broken cup or lamp
or spill of milk that I denied?
Whatever it was, you set my moral compass
and anchored my self worth that distant day.

Of course, the album is my life, too,
now proceeding without any new images of you,
just these, just the memories.

One Voice

for Christopher Reilley

There was this older boy—
well, older than me—
who really wanted a dummy,
you know, a ventriloquist's dummy,
like Charlie McCarthy or Mortimer Snerd,
and that Christmas, he got one.
From then on, they were inseparable,
and one spoke for the two of them.
In my childhood eyes
I can't remember which one it was.

Keith Tornheim, a biochemistry professor at Boston University School of Medicine, has five recent books, *I Am Lilith*, *Dancer on the Wind*; *Spirit Boat: Poems of Crossing Over*; *Can You Say Kaddish for the Living?*; *Fireflies: Poems of Love and Family*; and *Spoiled Fruit: Adam and Eve in Eden and Beyond*. His poems have appeared in *Ibbetson Street*, *The Somerville Times*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Muddy River Poetry Review* and *Poetica*