

Keith Tornheim – Three Poems

Chicken Man

Recovering from surgery for skin cancer,
I bought a Balinese wood statue
of a seated man holding a chicken.
This was to look at his oh-so-calm face
to remind me to try to remain calm myself—
like him, calm when anything might happen,
like when you're holding a chicken.

Digger

There's a large Volvo digger
working down the street,
a good-sized little steam shovel
cutting a trench in the pavement
for new utility pipes.
I sympathize with the street,
for a surgeon's going to excavate
to remove more melanoma,
cutting a trench in my scalp.
I know that his scalpel is tiny,
but it is like what I heard about injections:
the needle is only half an inch long—
the other 24 inches is just your imagination.

Two Strikes

The Angel of Death
struck me twice on the head
with the claw of the crab—
or was it the sun?—
carcinoma and melanoma.
But the good surgeons
carved them out of my scalp,
and Death walked away,
to come some other day.

Keith Tornheim, a biochemistry professor at Boston University School of Medicine, has five 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*.