

## Those Places We Dwelled In

Kathleen Aponick

You could have been a young acquaintance,  
 I, city mouse to your sea-and-country mouse,  
 shy, insular in a world of relatives.  
 Was I angry like you? Warier, at first,  
 untrusting, clinging to Mum  
 in a house across the Charles,  
 you, in time, suspicious of all but your little ones,  
 perhaps a friend or two.

Three of your New England settings loom:  
 Your grandparents' salt-battered cottage at Winthrop's tip,  
 the house the Atlantic swallowed.  
 As a baby, didn't you crawl from their sandy yard,  
 rush headlong toward the sea as toward Pegasus's cave?  
 Lucky your mother caught you by the heels,  
 though there's a wailing call  
 we hear there now.

Nearby, at your house on Johnson Road,  
 your father reads, or is he writing,  
 forging order in the bee world?  
 He ignores his health, thinking he's doomed,  
 like you at thirty on London's Fitzroy Road,  
 having carved feverishly your last poems  
 while your little ones dreamed  
 a floor above, closer to the stars.

Go back again to Winthrop: you are eight,  
 Otto dies, the world's upended.  
 But as your mother Aurelia reads to you,  
 your ear's a tuning fork to words,  
 their sounds, impact; here's a power you'll master,  
 no one will kill it. It will not die.  
 Soon you pack—seashells and books,  
 lined journals, beginning missives to the Muse.

And where would I be at eight?  
 In my room in Cambridge,  
 hearing exhaust and engines,  
 my parents arguing over money,  
 his drinking. Like you I have diversions:  
 pencils, coloring books,



my dolls on the porch,  
a little library branch a street away.

With your mother and brother you headed inland  
to comfortable Wellesley,  
a small white-framed house  
with screened-in porch.  
Hadn't she wanted the best for you?  
It is here you structure, no, perfect  
into verse what absorbs you  
as your father had his findings, his hives.

And when, learned student,  
your belief in achievement's power  
waned, you're feeling trapped,  
down pills, crouch in a porch crawl space,  
lay down to die but are revived:  
called back by the Muse who insisted you stay,  
at least for a decade.

And I? In the land of our schoolyards,  
I'll study to teach,  
begin to write  
though I hadn't your drive at first,  
being insecure, a work shopper.  
There are no awards as yet.  
Just the making of poems  
to the end.

Four decades since your London exit  
there's news your son took his own life.  
Was it in the genes? The stars he gazed on  
from Fitzroy Road? Your girl lives on,  
beyond your age, carrying within her  
moments of your caring heart,  
there all along  
inside the poems, Sylvia, the poems.

