

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Cynthia Atkins: "In Plain Sight" & Two More Poems

Cynthia Atkins · Thursday, February 28th, 2013

Cynthia Atkins is the author of *Psyche's Weathers* and the forthcoming collection, *In The Event of Full Disclosure* (Wordtech, 2013). Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including Alaska Quarterly Review, American Letters & Commentary, and BOMB.

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### In Plain Sight

*Incomprehensibility has an enormous power over us in illness....*

—Virginia Woolf [On Being Ill]

I am certain of only one thing—  
 I am a team a team of (n)one.  
 In the lineage, all things pass  
 through the kitchen, the mouth, origin  
 to the tribe. Smudged surfaces claim every trace  
 in the family cell— I moistened my tooth-brush,  
 it came back with germs of madness—  
 Verdant and wet, just this side of the doormat,  
 pale footsteps left at the ajar  
 of an argument. One June afternoon, a feud  
 erupted (in the frozen food section).  
 It was hot as a dog's nap, when a baby cried out  
 like a road side bomb.  
 I kept smiling at the cashier, thumbing bruise-less  
 fruits, counting the dated canned goods.  
 It took hostages, sealed windows,  
 taped my mouth shut  
 with sugar and pleasantries. I kid you not,  
 it pawned off my jewelry, blood diamonds  
 of /t/rust. I screamed out loud,  
 but nobody answered.  
 I need to mind what matters most—  
 My sister needing a phone call,  
 my husband an apology, the time to watch  
 my son fumble a soccer ball down a muddy field.

I am so clumsy  
 to the people I love. I've slid my tongue  
 on the sharp end of the conversation.  
 I am the form built to last, but made with  
 cheap labor and parts.  
 (Do you *wanna trade your troubles for mine?*—  
 yours are manageable, and state-of-the-art.)  
 The dog watches my son when I'm not home—  
 (I mean, *home*, but not).  
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## Letter to Metaphor

*Soundless as a disc on a dot of snow*  
 —Emily Dickinson

It goes without saying, there's something  
 for everyone. Remember the slut  
 of the multi-purpose room,  
 legs spread and bearing  
 the burden for everyone—?  
 Lipstick put on  
 for all the wrong reasons,  
 and all dolled-up for what  
 the bed of roses stole.  
 A note was penned  
 by simile's hand—your first cousin  
 allergic at the ersatz country house,  
 flirting with images and glyphs.  
 Ask for subtlety, you'll get  
 a mixed strip-tease every time.  
 No consequence, no punishment,  
 like when you helped write  
 cheat notes on the inside  
 of my hand—the same naked hand  
 that braided hair, slipped off a coat—  
 traded in sex for a prayer.  
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## Without A Visible Sign

*(after music by Jan Garbarek)*

Seed me the need to pair down, threaten  
 six birds with one  
 stone. Indecipherable lists, breeding  
 more lists—Remember when  
 the chalkboard scratched its weary head  
 in delirium, desperate for the proof,

an empirical evidence  
 that *we were here!* Translucent shoal  
 of fish swimming a blue streak  
 in the river that holds  
 my religion—and my house beside it,  
 as if the domestic institution  
 of the soul.  
 The river is my lung, or the long green  
 dress, I never got to wear to the prom.  
 The crisp gown, stilled tagged  
 and left on the bed by my mother's indecisions  
 like hush money clad in chiffon.  
 Is there ever simplicity?  
 The wrinkled symphony—the river's violin,  
 the bullfrog floating with eyes closed  
 like padlocks and waiting to awaken  
 to the night's uncertainty. The riderless  
 canoe spreads the inchoate word  
 of mankind. My foot soldier  
 (prom-date) weary and hocking for war or fertility—  
 it's always one or the other. *Don't ask, don't tell.*  
 Water and oil will be the elements  
 that make us kill. I'll spend the rest of my days  
 telling my story, someone else will tell theirs.  
 The prints will be left—  
 You have to forget everything  
 You know to write poetry.

*'In Plain Sight' was first published in In Quire. 'Letter to Metaphor' was first published in The Broome Review. 'Without a Visible Sign' was first published in Inertia.*

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