

Cultural Daily

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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.

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).

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.

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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