

Angelika Quirk – Three Poems

Nametags

Next time I'll stick to the narrative of my journey,
but my nametag, peeling off from sweater and naked breath,

is sidetracked by vaulted ceilings, the hum
of doldrums and static on a TV set.

My surname changed from palms that touched
the shrouded house of birth and blood

to the one-syllable search for meaning.
I'll call on the neighborhood of dreams to settle

on my forehead, but my password, my code
cannot be replicated. I tried to grow roots

in so many places, but no clods will stick
to me long enough. Now I search for the blink

of my mother's eye, the lip of the moon
slowly sinking, and a keynote speaker

to echo my pleas for the hearsay generations
where the only way in is out.

An exercise of feeble ends. Yet a thousandfold
Tomorrows to cheer us on.

Lips without Words

I watch your grey silence creep
backwards curling up:
your lips without words,
your tongue listless.

When I stroll down 4th Street
I see you leaving our house,
your silhouette against the fence.

I wear a sign of chastity now,
and in the local market
I peel back the stares of strangers.

I no longer approve
of your roving eyes,
lust for raw silk,
your appetite for half-witted lies.

Now I trample down the path we trod
and live with thin hope
among misleading
faces and facades.

What I long for now is howling
winds from the north drowning
your voice
raspy, querulous.

My Gig

Here I am reciting True Love, Crazy Love,
for the third time to a man in black across from me
gulping down a Miller Light, blasting
to a smoke-filled ceiling Take Five.

Metal knobs on his trumpet
push out angular moans,
like heroin up his veins.

Some concerts last days or even decades
in a bar under a neon-lit sign
or at home in a shower shattering
the echoes of night terrors.

In the back room a wheel of fortune spins,
dice roll, or is it in my mind
where my lucky number ricochets
against my forehead?
A man hollers, Give me a three.
A tattoo writhes across his neck, fiery red.
A woman in tears shares photos of her ex.

Mack the Knife takes the stage
Oh, the shark, Babe, has such teeth,
grinding, biting afterthoughts.
Then bongo drums and applause.

My doppelganger staggers on, upstaging
my claim, my last poem, lulling
lip-syncing, To You, not Listening,
addresses the crowd downing
whiskeys and worries.

Then the chorus, It's been a good ride.
Taking over. Its registry in perfect pitch.
My voice cracks. I exit stage left.

The bartender saunters off. Calls a cab
for me and the man in black.
We buckle up. Ride into the dark intimacy
of a stranger's hand on my lap.
I blow against an icy window pane,
the last line of my poem:
breathe, breathe, breathe...

Angelika Quirk was born and raised in Hamburg, Germany. Her poetry is influenced by German culture and experiences. She immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 18 and received a degree in German literature from UC Berkeley. Her poems have appeared in various literary magazines and anthologies. Her first book, *After Sirens*, (Conflux Press, 2011) deals with her family's and her life in Germany during and after WWII. Her new book, *Of Ruins and Rumors*, (Tamalpais Press, 2015) ranges far and wide both in style and subject matter. She was a board member of the Marin Poetry Center for 6 years.