



Home

Fall-Winter 2013-14

Summer-Fall 2013

Spring-Summer 2013

Winter-Spring 2013

Fall-Winter 2012-2013

Summer-Fall 2012

Spring-Summer 2012

Winter-Spring 2012

Autumn/Winter 2011-12

Summer 2011

Winter/Spring 2011

Autumn/Winter 2011

Summer 2010

Spring 2010

Winter 2010

Autumn 2009

Summer 2009

Spring 2009

Autumn 2008

Summer 2008

Spring/Summer 2008

Winter/Spring 2008

Editor's Note

Three Poems

by Kathryn Guelcher

Smoke without Fire

My reasons for avoiding tattoos and affairs overlap,
and though I know no such scientific correlation,
I suspect affairs occur slightly more amongst the tattooed.
It is not to say that both don't appeal to me
in some mod feminist rogue romantic way
--not that I face the dilemma often.

And I like Stephen Dunn's words
about the importance of a secret life.
It's not about maturity, though I'd like to think so.
Or integrity. Or that my body is a temple—
unless it is one erected to honor robust red wines.
There is a level of permanence, and they are
difficult to cover, I understand. After the first one,
another, presumably, isn't far off.

What then?

Of course, my wild love and devotion to my spouse
explains much of my restraint. I fall half in love
with half of everyone and all in love with any
who balance humor, intelligence, and sensitivity
with just enough confidence tempered by self-deprecation
combined with a tendency to hold strong opinions
with a willingness to tell me I am wrong
—well, sometimes. Yes, that makes me love you.
The arrangement of your features
-- your gender, age, body type—matter less.
I will wonder what sleeping with you would be like.
Maybe I've refrained
from fear of cliché. If it seems I might be an inked secret lover,
at least I am, for once, mysterious-- if just
in my seeming lack of class. *Gross*, my husband will say
of all this, withholding that he gets it. When our children's age
exposes me for my humanity, I'd prefer
to keep their evidence less concrete. But.
If they ask...

I suppose I will admit
that I certainly did consider
sleeping with you.

Bird Sanctuary

I'd like to think
that on my best days,
I am less
this common brown finch
and more
the Red-Winged Blackbird.

Guidelines

Contact

Certainly not the Cardinal
whose brilliance and meanness
are so well-documented.
Isn't that always the pairing?
But there, perched,
dressed mostly in black,
the sleek sophistication
goes largely unnoticed
among the woodpecker
varieties with their
downy speckles
and crimson bursts,
among the possum's
casual seed-eating--
her marsupial pocket
alone for continents.
A Cedar Waxwing
flutters in, alights.
No, it's not until the
blackbird leaves that
the flash of color
draws one to it
inspiring intrigue
about the mysterious
complexity of the
simple,
only in its absence.
How beautiful,
that kind of subdued cool.
How modest, too.

August 24th

Twenty years ago this day
the weather was beautiful.
I remember.
We went to the mall
for sunglasses.

I resisted sharing with the girl at the kiosk
who took no special note of us,
that our dad died today,
and didn't it seem strange to her
that everything almost seemed
normal?

I mean, miraculously, the mall still existed
and was open for us.
It felt like a secret I should not keep,
but did.
He was old to have teenagers,
but young to be dead, it seemed.

Nineteen months before,
the illness began.
Four years and eight months before,
he gave me a notebook
and suggested I write.

And the writing gives back more than I put in,
as it was with him and me.
In filled yellowing pages
and creamy blank ones, he continues
as ideas I can't craft or set sail
with memory alone.

In the past two years, **Kathryn Guelcher**'s work has appeared in *Memoir Journal*, *Orange Room Review*, *Yourdailyoem.com*, and *Fat City Review* among others. It has also been heard on George Bilgere's radio show, *Wordplay*. She teaches high school English in the suburbs of Chicago and laughs and lives with her three young children and her husband (who does not select the first poem here as his favorite).

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