



# the poems

by Allison Grayhurst

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## river

I will run my breath across your eyelids,  
go to you, trace the edges of your hands,  
finding infinity inside your torment. I will  
drift into you like wind and you will not mind  
my lips like a concentrated shadow on your skin,  
darkening but leaving no weight. You will let me  
be inside your picture, a background to your lyrics,  
softly at first, I will heal the red in the whites of your eyes.  
I will release my wardrobe for you and you will be the mania  
that I climb through to reach tranquility. I will  
cup your flesh and stretch you through this intimacy because  
I own you as you own me and it is not a bad thing, not  
blasphemy or anything  
to fear. It is your hands, mine - these  
poignant burial grounds that have been excavated,  
these days of standing close, depending upon the ease  
of our mutual exposure. I will speak in your ear and you  
will step into my voice  
like stepping into a river.

It is this way, togetherness:

A covenant with tenderness and speaking thoughts  
only glimpsed.

The snow falls like rain as the afternoon moves  
without time, our hands pressed as one,  
lips and then, something better. Always  
miraculous, unexpected, awakening. Always  
us, vanishing and then re-emerging with these things  
of harmony and friction engulfing our scent and path. Soon,  
the tiger lilies will bloom and being just us will be made difficult  
with the children gathered in our arms. But this 'difficult' is  
whole and adds to our liberation - making coffee, laughing  
at things shared and only ours.

It is what was prayed for, what years and hardship has not  
diluted, but has fused into an unbreakable bond - us -  
the summoning of all our parts - ancient, immediate  
so that even when death comes or fate and terrible sobbing,  
neither of us will ever be again  
without the other  
alone.

**now i am two**

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## **animal sanctuary**

He turns his hawk head  
to view the shells of turtles streaking  
the still-shroud of water in tanks  
as blue as sky.

He lifts a leg and talons tensed,  
pivots to defend against an enclosing shadow.

With whitish eyes and an impossible urge  
to fly, he hops along his man-made perch toward  
the cages where squirrels leap  
from metal to wood, scattering like leaves  
in unpredictable flurry.

He listens to the ducks' lipless sounds.

Spring, he will never experience again, nor know  
the scent of a pent-up life released like  
sunflowers blooming, or the feel of the moon,  
colder but more comforting than being touched.

He is without time or tribe,  
and like fire, he haunts  
by just being.

First published in "UC Review" 1996

# beyond the grave

If all the seeds fell like blood  
or blood like seeds into  
the ravenous earth and time  
was a wagging tail in the dark  
then I would know that death would come  
by any reason and be a blessing  
all on its own. But as it is, death is  
the hollow spot of the living - some with  
grief and others with fear, and me myself,  
it is memory that unbuttons the flesh of my chest  
to leave me poked and burning.  
It is the hill I climb and stumble  
down its rocky incline whenever I return  
if only once a day  
to meet death's stalking eyes.  
It is not my heart that fails me,  
but the things outside  
like the shadow on the neighbours' window  
and the frightening madness of so many strangers.  
It is here and there like an insect  
on my wall, like the fatherly love  
I'll never find again in another's eyes,  
but is with me in the coming autumn air,  
and in the quietude of these joy-filled days.

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Under the willow tree a girl  
was standing, lonely with  
the worst of nights ahead.  
They said  
drink from the tar pit waters and swallow  
the oysters that lost their shells.  
She saw the drug the wind made  
though she did not let it shift her steadfast heart.  
Everywhere the notion stood  
that fighting back is better than  
the tender wave, better than  
empathy and believing in affection.  
The willow leaves have gone brown  
and the girl has moved  
beside a cliff. She dances as though she  
could not fall. And though they gasp to pity  
her poor body against rocks and ridges,  
she continues to move like a beautiful sound,  
sure of the hand that guides her.

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girl



Raincoats and rainy seasons  
are behind us now.  
I picked up a feather. You took it from me  
and now it is yours. And just like that,  
rich as the coral reef waters,  
we were initiated into a lower layer.

Intensity is a button. It is concentration  
- one part, one of your parts  
unrelentingly explored  
while ignoring other distracting  
sensations. It is the thick blood raking  
of thighs against our lesser faith.

Fears of the future put aside  
and left to their weeping.  
Shoulders become secrets receiving  
probing pressure-point intrusions.  
Like a primeval working of strings,  
through this communication, we see  
the courage of our history rise, become  
an advancing truth, and our pores  
grow and sparkle  
like thousands of tiny sun-drenched ants  
pooling together to parallel a single purpose.

We know 'just survival' is tyranny.  
What we seek is not movement  
purely for the sake of employment, but  
to create canvases  
of vigorous struggles - ones  
that can only be cemented  
in unison.

Our bodies have abandoned  
their blood-lines. We are touching  
every crease and tense design  
with undiluted intention - first  
blotting out words, then  
delectable conversations.  
We rejoice in the grand dramatics  
of our compatibility, equally committed  
to corporeal immersion.

The past culminates  
in this single outpouring. It is  
a privileged evolution. It is  
months of misfortune exterminated  
by the exertion of our mouths:

Strange rhythms are risked,  
foreheads pressed,  
giving way  
to beautiful unadulterated disclosure.

**seamless**

**you are**

You are simple  
like death is simple,  
like death is unmistakable,  
containing the most feverish and trying  
of mysteries within  
its boundless domain.  
You are beautiful  
like a cat is beautiful  
silently sitting,  
galactic in its sensual form,  
giving with its gaze  
substance to voice and blood.  
You are fire-driven  
like stars and like sex,  
in perpetual combustion,  
with an inner pulse of endless  
dance, dancing  
in savage, mystical tides.  
You are gentle  
like a raindrop caught  
in a lucky palm, gentle  
like the shelter of a best friend's arms.  
You are more than sun and bird and fox,  
more than soil to my groundless heart.  
All I bless and all I need,  
I hold because of you.  
No meaning nor madness  
could replace the milk and breath  
that you are.

# elegy of this day being

At the throat, brushed green like tile I shine.  
The devil says "hum-drum"  
as the eel struggles, futile like a wagging tail.  
So many broken, hating with the hardness of crocodiles  
and ants, pulling along their dead,  
to consume, knowing nothing of sorrow or forgiveness.  
All night I sit with my naked thighs  
on the carpet, red from the heat.  
What point could there possibly be  
to all this pain, the death  
of others, the sickness that swarms in mid-air?  
Hurricanes hit the graveyards.  
A gull tilts on a telephone wire. I wish to bid goodbye.  
I wish for ice-cream cones in my fridge,  
a handful of poppies to give some child,  
any child, I meet.  
I see dead eyes in my dream,  
glossed with mucous and unbearable vacancy.  
How do I serve when the world is so cold?  
The humpbacks know this, the midgets  
and also the centipedes.  
I want to hide in rooms where  
infants are sleeping or salamanders nurse their young.  
The darkness is in me. The ground deceives me,  
changes colours as I go.  
Let us go now, my nightmares  
and I, go under the light, go until  
our heart's blood is free-falling, exposed.

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**Allison Grayhurst** is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Four times nominated for "Best of the Net", 2015/2017, she has over 1125 poems published in over 450 international journals and anthologies. She has 21 published books of poetry, six collections and six chapbooks. *Sight at Zero* is her latest book, published Oct. 2017. Allison lives in Toronto with her family. She is a vegan. She also sculpts, working with clay. Allison's books are available worldwide on **Amazon**. [www.allisongrayhurst.com](http://www.allisongrayhurst.com)



## thank you

Thank you **Allison** for trusting and allowing me to change the form of your brilliant rhythms so that I could carry a musical spark forward. It's been such an honor to work with your compelling writings. The recording process this summer was also amazing and I am especially grateful to **Michael, Rob, and Brock** for helping me hold the sound strong and maintain the integrity of this body of work. I have, as local musicians in both Vancouver and my old home town of Toronto may know, recorded three previous albums of my own writing, however I feel most proud of this one.

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DIANE BARBARASH  
**river**

songs from the poetry of Allison Grayhurst

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Vocals and guitar by **Diane Barbarash**

Lyrics by **Allison Grayhurst**

Lyrical compositions with additions by **Diane Barbarash**

Musical composition and arrangement by **Diane Barbarash**

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Thank you **Nicole Alosinac** at Nicole Alosianc Luthieri

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River is available online at **Bandcamp** and **iTunes**