

Every Tree That Burns

- a collection of long poems about loss, grief and renewal



Allison Grayhurst

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Edge Unlimited Publishing

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The Poetry of Allison Grayhurst

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First addition

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Table of Contents

Dad (an eulogy)	6
Transfigured	24
In My Bones	25
Not a Ghost	26
I still think of you	27
Beyond The Grave	28
Silence	29
Because of course	30
Odie	31
Imprisoned	32
My Heart Creeps	33
A Month Unthawed	34
It Just Moves	35
Ground Bird Flown	36
Sister Lost	37
Half Circle	39
Figurine	41
Lumin	43
Loss	45
Monarchs	46
Effie	47
Because it is a Stone	49
The Letting Go	51
Sliding through the sewage tunnel gleam	60
My Mother's Sky	73
Ghost	151
Sparrow Wars	153
Twilight	192

Publication Acknowledgments.....	194
About the Author.....	195
Quotes.....	200
Books by Allison Grayhurst.....	204

Dad (an eulogy)

(Denis Grayhurst – August 2, 1934- November 19, 1996)

*"My life was my peace, now,
in the moment of my release."*

**Under here in the dark
deepest dream, the cold
loss, unbearable change,
I cry out blood. I have no
overcoat, no more protection.
It is now a different light I seek,
an alchemized marrow in my bones.
Do I sing, for death is peace,
and death is the edge that slices
the tongue in two, that drains the cup
of every drink? Home - I have lost
the essential tie. I have lived with a bond
so beautiful, now broken by fate and the blue-turning
cheek. How will I know my own grief,
the shattering that eclipses all but faith?**

**In the newspaper turning, I smell
your hairspray, I hear your boisterous voice.
I clasp in my hands the raw fire of nevermore.
Stand close to my mirror,
and help me breathe in and out,
help me take into my own
your generous heart.**

**I knelt before his photograph
on the casket and we talked
of gratitude and goodbyes. I saw
compassion's light, there, in
his dark tremendous eyes.
I felt the tearing off of seven layers of skin.
I held my hands together. Faith,
where is your shield? Your cradle
to rest my shattered spine? Each cell
is reformed by his departure. I am left
in the winter wind without clothing
or a protective tree.**

**Cut, the thin clouds
cut a pathway within
where loss is deep as God.
My fingers move like trains
back and forth. Ashes in an urn. Graveyard green
flavoured by tears.
I whisper to him when on the gravel road.
I see him beyond the fence, in the coming
December snows. I need him like before,
when hearing children talk, when waiting
for a terrible moment to pass. He formed a giving spirit,
rooted in integrity. Angels come and go,
hovering in my pocket books and on highways
I never cross. They touch the seagulls'
outgoing breath, they write his name
on Scarborough cliffs. I will not mourn
with unholy regrets, nor would I change
the tension in his nerves.**

**In closets, memories pile,
their scents and wooden colours
for years at rest in unchanged
shadowed hovels. I find myself
in unfamiliar rooms, emptied
of hope and the driven smile.
I find the walls pulsing, and the floor,
a bruised body I have cried for.
In years, this hot blood of loss
will thin and this tumour of unbuffered
pain will shrink and mend. In years, I will
see his picture and spend a Christmas under a pink sun.
November winds will wrap me in
a sweet and grateful slumber.**

**Hammered by a kaleidoscope of memories,
through the grand "if" and the willy-nilly
confines of love. Rifts in the pavement
I walk on today, still stunned by the enormous
and the unchangeable, still frightened of my thoughts
that go into the hard void, into the unfocused
stare and the image of him lying there,
no longer. Up & down craters beyond
this century's grasp, beyond the books
I've read and anguish before encountered.
He answers me in my head, wakes me at 2 am.
He protects me still, though his arms have bent
to the cold, unforgiving ash.**

Appleseeds I'll never bury.
Evergreens lean towards the greying sky.
He is there like a shadow on my back, there
in the wheat-coloured grass.
He is over the city factories,
his face resides on graffiti walls.
And on telephone wires I see him sit
with the starlings, smell him in the scent
of evening rain. I hear his stories from
the beautiful lips of children. I think
I'll see him tomorrow again, know his
paternal warmth, the way his smile lifted
the corners of his mouth.
Time is drifting into the homes of strangers,
as death strides beside every dream
living, defiled or lost.
He surrounds me like the sounds of a streetcar
running, and I am running, struggling
to stop, lay down and to be reborn.

Ocean-cold and wooed by the tongues
of snakes. Miracles abound,
but still grief gnaws a pathway
through my torso. Trees are singing
of the flames I sleep in and the empty
days toss me to and fro, from heavy tears
to rage. How without him in the huge,
unpredictable world? How without his loud
and open gifts? Landscapes where centres break
and colours are no more. I touch the crocodile
tooth, the boiling point of all my bones.
So alone, coupled with the uncertain dark.

I miss his brown fiery eyes and how
he lived, pampering the hearts of others.
I miss him like I would my very skin, like the shell its yolk,
and the eyes, their vision - Where
is the cure? Where is the farewell
from this gruesome spell? The shock
still rivets in me. Crows spin through the clouds.
Death has been unleashed like the first feel of pain.

*Believe me, you have reached me. Believe me,
this enemy won't win. I will stand tall for you.
I will hold your hand until morning.*

Pale in the December sky,
the sun is but an insect's dream.
I leap from cabooses onto the icy tracks.
There are people in the playground,
happy that Christmas is near. There are
buildings with stained-glass windows,
reminding me of the aloneness we each are
bound to endure. Now my father, I wake to find
you hour upon hour at night. I talk to you
in half-conscious streams. In the afternoon,
I break down. Crows sit on my porch,
then follow me through the peopled-street
where I swear your shoes have travelled, once
in a bachelor's dream. And mother is all
sliced-up inside. Days and days we spend
looking at old photos, trying to dispel
her sorrow and devouring regrets.
My husband holds me like the best
of friends do. He carries me over
these desert fires. I want to tell you
how good was your influence, how soft
my aching eyes. I want to know you again
after I die, like you were in this life -
my strong, my steadfast guide.

**Old factory fields in mid-December's light.
Vacant barns and rows of suburban homes.
You pushed me on the swing
and gave me courage to dive.
Sunsets in Spain and the sounds
of the typewriter at 4 am are now part
of my muscles and nerves - you are in me
like a fledgling in its nest or the drive
behind my every restless year. You knew
how the great dream fell, how rage can find
the form of forgiveness, and the bridge
between our two stubborn intensities.
You were my ally in the social sphere, my
guardian in the tower, my place of safety
and self-belief. You held me near
when the curtain opened, and my childhood
fastened to a ravenous storm.**

I live in a room of brown-papered walls,
TV screens and empty teacups. I want
to give up like the hand that lets go
of the cliff or the orphaned boy
left on the streets alone. I'm trying
to keep my head steady, but no abstractions
relieve me, only pins and needles in my brain
and the intestinal twist that has found
its way within like a permanent companion.
People call, but only this empty dread
makes its bed in my heart.

I know it is over - the special way we needed
one another. I know I must take the road
to lead me on, past the dried flowers
and 1 pm breakdowns. Shakespeare at
the dinner table and omelettes in the
afternoons - I won't forget a single
kindness, the way you prayed
on that darkest day in my adolescent life.
Ceilings crack overhead. I knife
a million strangers. I curse the cars
going by and the cockroach on the kitchen
floor. There are no distractions from death.
There are no soothing things to do -
but to wait behind this cold and sealed door.

The cloven hoof of
this and that blood's pardon.
I feel the acorn hit,
the crossing of the Nile.
I feel like an Indian summer,
and all the sweat pouring into
the brass cup of mortal knowing.
Time, in time no love is broken,
not the pound pound pound of his
nature, not the be-all of his voice.
I will never hear that voice again,
not his loud centre ringing, his
male pride, gentle in the sun.
I will never carry his water again,
or tell him - I thank God
for you. For you and your quickened
energy, for the artery of your moral
gestures that gave with 'yes & no',
with 'wrong & right', the seed
of my shelter and the over-fair justice
I believed in all my childhood life.
I thank God for your walking sound,
how the room rebounded with your
surely presence, and the smile on
your eccentric face, there, when we talked
of a grandchild. I thank God for the breathing space
you gave, and the will to live out my tale.
I thank God for the hemisphere you made
and the beautiful passions you instilled
in my heart. I thank God for you -
my weight, the reason I write
my song.

**If today the closed eye
takes me to where I've never
been before, if I meet my father
in the mirror or in a five & dime store,
would this pressure drain like the letting
of blood, would these horror-stricken
days mean nothing now but a bitter
tossed-away cup? If he moved through
a dream saying - Do not be afraid.
Do not let your mind fracture or your lips
turn blue - would I know him like
last month or meet him with raw wonder, anew?
The rings around my fingers.
The friends I cannot keep.**

**A month crushed
in the vortex of a python's circle.
Stale breath filling my atmosphere,
and hope is but soft warm sand
beneath the feet, is a season that
never fades, is not what my hands
can trace. I long for mornings
all to myself, to hear his voice
once more on the phone. But rocking chairs
and crossword puzzles rest vacant as
2 am streets. And birthday cakes are past
like an old person's dreams. He returns
again at night, alive for one more week.
Rain pours onto my teeth and
nutshells are gathered by the winter's
black and brindle squirrels.**

**With grace I may be replenished.
This dull anguish may be replaced
with starlight in my belly. Or with the
million winds of God's miraculous justice,
I may return to a little one the goodness
he gave, be offered the chance to feel
the kick, to know no stronger responsibility.
The same as he (with his stoic suffering
and gregarious generosity) plucked the weeds
from my journey's path and made me see
with moral clarity the fault of all but love -
so maybe I can be for one what he was for me.
Maybe soon my turn will come.**

Before I knew my own face
in the reflection, I saw
sparrows rolling in the sand
and wished my heart open as the underpass
cars travel through. Before I knew of death
and its yellow-green smile. I offered
caramel-coated apples and chocolate bars
to placate it. But now I stand
beside its smelly aftermath. I feel
its wrenching voice fill my solitude,
and all the mad children of this and
other worlds echo their hell beneath
my many scarves and sweaters, touching
me nude with their growing black hole.
And soon I am just darkness with no size,
no boundaries or vision of outside. Soon
I am embittered by friendships I thought
I had, and mountains of rage churn like
spoilt food in my belly. I am sad too, like
the willow tree in my Montreal backyard.
Sad like my father when his mother died,
and his orphan cry lied sealed inside
like a voiceless fear. Because now he
is gone and things I often waited for
will never pass. No "Owl & The Pussycat"
for my children's ears, no more pride in
his sideways smile, or trips to India
or English moors. He will never know
my children's names.

Pigeons flock through the fog,
high above the park benches and lamp posts.
Guilt has no shore, but is an endless
sea where jellyfish and stingrays
make their nests and the dolphin
is no more. Our talks by the fireside
will never be again, or his drifting
to sleep on the couch in the winter's
after-midnight air. On Christmas eve,
all my memories are soaked into
the tree's red and blue lights. And Grandma
is gone, as well as the dog beside me.
But worst is the emptiness of his vanishing,
is the click click inside my throat
and the razor-burn on my knees. Kneel and pray,
for life is nothing but this and that thing done,
is the touching of two hearts
and the softening of brittle ways, is to keep
the soul's challenge forefront, then to sing
around the merry table of relatives and friends,
as if immune to bitter unbelief and fear
that drives the nail inward. He is
on the windowsill looking in,
reminding me that long ago
our once colliding spirits
made the greatest of amends.

Waves of snow outside the window,
moving like pure isolation, cleansing all
with its cold fury. Last night
I hugged him in a short farewell in my head,
in the blue fog of a dream. And waking
I found peace in January calling. Outside
a city hawk circled, blessing me and mine
with its instinct so talon-strong and
close to God. Families I never knew
have opened my heart. Barnyards and lithe trees,
stretch toward the silver sun. I miss him
at the dinner table and when the wine is served,
when all the things of hopes and wonders
implode within. Into the scent of dried rose petals
death dives with mad glee. Water-towers
cut a hole through eternity. The wrinkled word
I cannot speak. The keepsakes (like hot wax
pouring onto my belly) cause a redness
that releases my broken-heart's moan. And hanging,
- my flesh, my guilt, my grief -
now and forever merged, undeniably atoned.



(Denis Joseph Lawrence Grayhurst)

Transfigured

Each day I wear my grief
like metal mesh. I see you
as a spirit burdened to speak.
You try to comfort this field
of wounds. You tend the amputees
and bound the screaming with soft song.
But it is hard for you to stay,
to not let go completely into the light.
I let you go. I make this year my bridge.
Though my heart has ruptured and cannot heal,
and I am forever overcome with this sadness
of our love silenced by brutal, unnamable death,
I will build a new house, dive with both hands
into my yard until the evergreens grow.
I will contain you as more than memory -
in my harvest will bloom many sunflowers
of your great generosity. And your fiery blood
will sprout the roots and flesh of passion fruit.
The maple tree will grow large like you, protecting all
within its strong and tender shadow. And children
will be drawn to this yard, to play there amongst
the tall dramatic grass, and then sit still to watch
with wonder the many shades of sky, reflecting
the warmth of your paternal sun-setting colours.

In My Bones

**Death makes a brother and sister
of us all, shedding the crusty scales
of protection and vanity, it lifts
each heart bare toward the scorching
sun. And I feel so different now,
as though my wardrobe has been replaced
with someone else's colours,
as though I have joined hands with the earth
in all her potent grief and glory.
I feel so well contained, though raw
as newborn babe. I feel this knowing
has made me whole, though it has removed
the ground I once stood on.
And here I see the space within will never go,
and the tears will be forever near. I see
the miracle of death, like the forming
of a caterpillar's tight cocoon.
I see May flowers begin to bloom,
and know now, that life is not
so long a thing.**

Not a Ghost

**Wide as the wind,
your spirit is around me.
I see your hands on books
and hear your voice as though
it were still your own.
I miss you again like the first day
when Death showed you its secrets.
I remember the love you gave, your
pride and your directness. I want to tell you
the things I have learned are not worth an ounce
of your lost affection, but still I have learned
to sail through this barren sea. I have learned
that I can. A year and half have past
and there is more time still to come.
I have feared this world without you,
but now I know because you were once here
the world will never be without you.
The sidewalks will forever hold your weight, others
will always speak your name with warm admiration,
and I myself am part of you. You are in me
like a main artery, a bloodline that fierce death
can neither dilute nor sever.**

I still think of you

**in the morning,
when the winds play across telephone wires
and winter's trees.
I carry your face before me
like a sacred chalice, or a goal I cannot reach.
There are things that have changed me,
but the loss of you has split me wide like
never before. I see colours differently. I touch
icicles and give up all other truths. I believe
you are still protecting me, and then I am lost
in the greyness of the sky. Your love is torn
from my side. And now I am altered, I am
adjusted. I am a scorpion walking the desert
sands. I am a gazelle near the waterhole. One day
I am free, then the pain returns like cancer.
I am carrying a child. I am your child
who wishes you could share this journey. But
death has taken your hand. And somehow I know,
darkness is not all.**

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.

Silence

I lift the bullfrog from the waters.

**Bread, parables and staying close to a legend -
these are things of joy. I am thinking of the grave
near the willow tree, whose roots have grown
around the coffin, and of a sailing ship
that has no home port, but drifts like
a hollow log on living waters.**

Freely I made my room and closed the door.

**I knelt for our starved country, and grief
wrapped around my sleep, landing safely in my arms.**

**My father, I dream of your flame. I miss the woods
and your kind goodbyes. Tomorrow is a keyhole
that shapes my hopes with tiny possibilities.**

**If I could rise like grass from dirt, then
my nerves would be brave and the smell of the sun
would heal me with prayers.**

**If my eyes were an ocean where the whale
and the seahorse gathered, then I could see mercy
in the shark's primitive teeth, I would
lie on the surface of a wave,
catching the colours of dusk with
my out-stretched tongue.**

Because of course

**you will go with summer
never knowing a remedy.
You will go beyond where you go
around the ninth and final life, ducking
in dark boxes to fade finally alone,
away from instinct and nurturing.
You will go into the natural earth,
and from there, my vision staggers and
cannot name, but caught
on the wind, in sensual shades
of forgiveness mighty & forever,
you will know a place unhindered by death.
You will hear the secret
your pale eyes
have always harboured.**

Odie

**You will not die
my golden companion,
you will not leave me
without your sweet warmth,
not without your familiar eyes.
You will only find a new way
of surviving.**

**I cannot admit the enormity
of what appears as truth.
I cannot admit there will be no
miracle change.**

**I can only see your soft cat beauty,
your orange blanket of fur
and a way around this danger.**

**I can only see what I first saw in your eyes -
innocence in need of someone to trust.**

**I see you as someone to be with me,
to rest by my feet at night,
someone to always keep my stories
tucked within a quiet stretch
of your feline soul.**

Imprisoned

**I cannot lose you
nor live as your body
nears death. And soon
the sun will descend and
your little breath will be the all
to fill my hours. Soon
friends will gather and kneel
for you and for me.**

**What a vicious teacher
this illness is, impotent and
sterile in its madness. Five
months immobilized by pain.
Lingering like a wasp lingers
near a babe's fresh face,
it takes with it our fear,
our anger, our hope, all but our love
that cranes its touch over this grief,
guiding us through the inevitable.**

My Heart Creeps

My heart creeps through the caverns of death, examining each pothole, each lost, decaying soul. And there I find you curled against the light, resigned to the apathy that has infected your flow. I drift to where the weepers are and the howlers of animal grief. With me, you go, though your head is barely lifted and your eyes are dull like sanded jewels. With me, through the eerie tunnels where stones lay in wait for us to stumble upon - stones of helpless rage, stones of defiant fear, of overwhelming hopelessness, of blaming life for what must be endured. We manage together beyond these rocks of bitter doom to an opening where an angel's steady hand strokes our spines, loves us in our wanting, though we see no change, see only sickness, months ahead without cause or cure. The angel sleeps beside you, merges its goodness with people who help to give me strength so I can give you what you need. We journey as friends whose souls combine. We press foreheads and wait for the burden to break. The angel speaks in the wings of crows who pass our home day and night. The angel speaks through the T.V. screen, through the smile of your compassionate caretaker. It tells me to hold on, to hold you, be patient in this grief. The angel holds my hand. He cradles you in his dress. He tells us death is nothing. Death will not come. He sacrifices his breath to you, then kneels for your recovery.

A Month Unthawed

**You sleep each day
without sunlight.
Gentle, as always, you
resign to the fatal bruise
inside. You look with sick,
half-closed eyes, with love,
barely visible, but in your veins
death is unveiling, deliberate.
I am the one to hold you,
to weep a yellow suicide,
to press your thinning back
with my palm, maternally
holding, whispering of sunflowers
and of faith.**

**Any other would have sank
into the hairy blood of wrath and blame,
but you and I, with an affinity between
that no illness can kill, are bearing this as one.**

**You are the favourite seashell found as a child,
a warm hearth in a room of shadows.
You have comforted me when the world
harassed and promised to rule.
And now humbled to lose what I cannot lose,
the doorway is opened.
Hope is what has been given.
Strong together in this giant pain,
we will raise each hour as a lifetime
and believe, unflinchingly, in miracles.**

It Just Moves

**The house is cold without you.
It has a strange rhythm,
an echo without a voice.
How to sleep, drink coffee, grind
the work-a-day toil, cast out by death,
dumb now in the stillness of your absence,
how?
Because you have always warmed me,
calmed my erratic, overcharged pursuits.
Because perfect closeness was ours - my stomach
is split, my forehead is tight, folded. Forgive me.
Cherish me still as I cherish you - let this not be
the end for us. I see your half-closed eyes. I kiss
your forehead. O love! It hurts! It is all unreal.
How can it be over? How can I emerge from this
hollow? I wake and you are gone.
I see you everywhere, but you are gone.**

Ground Bird Flown

**Layers of clear
rainbow shine guide
you through the pyramid portal into
open air revelation.
Joy on a stick, in your soft eyes,
closed in death, with permanent grace.**

**For all the gifts your gave,
daily miracles, flutterings,
vocalizations, accumulating in song.
For your fragile vessel, energy octave
higher than us wingless dwellers.**

**Your fearless power streaked
into the lining of your feathered coat,
patterned gold thick veins
washed in sparkling sand.**

**Beautiful Sage of the flowerbed gardens,
the blueberry, the hempseed swallow,
fearless messenger, angelic power
bound in a small body, you were
loved completely for everything
that you were, gave,
held lifeforce for. You were
soft, demanding and rich
with good humour**

**stretching, expanding
higher, wider, wings aflame, lifting
in pure vibrant dance, puffed and proud,
your freedom actualized, raised
only inches off the ground.**

Sister Lost

**A sister lost
to a mad-weave calamity,
hanging off the platform,
an ego-dream of dumb self-importance
- the war on truth that
masks its face as though it were truth,
but is only a gate to an easy explanation,
a system of hellish accusations and propped
up pillars of false justice, combating fake forms
urging anger forefront, poisoning
by such a sure promise of victory.**

**I send you sleeping sister. You say
I am sleeping and you twist your conspiracy theories
into a cloak of great magnitude, condescend,
so confident of your place of holy honour.
You jumped over the mark, missed it
and plunged into an upside-down dream of reality.**

**Once, a sister, a comrade, an unbreakable bond, broken.
I cannot see you. You cannot see the evil
you have wrapped in fool's gold,
claiming righteousness
as you measure your worth
by this aggressive attack on truth, denying
the wind, a child's cry, a mother's redemption.**

**Sister, I loved you, I still do,
but you have crossed the line.
It is terrifying to watch.
It is a shock to finally see
who you have become.**

**You took the plunge
long before I accepted your choice.**

**By your choice, your inner conflict
became an accelerant bile-fire,
you became a plurality, parts, parts
condemned to feed off
intellectual Jell-O,
find entertainment, immaculate purpose
in unbalanced passions and impulses,
claiming a cure by creating a disease.**

Half Circle

Too late, in the earth,
dug out and consumed.
A cramp in the thigh you named
your own, the affronted sensibility
of your self-importance.

That cramp took out your uterus,
took your home on the hill
and put you in a basement,
took me out too
of any further equation.

Too far, the fracture thickened into
a chasm, your mind found release
in bold yellows and reds
because it could no longer bear
the subtleties of existence.

You turned a monster into an effigy
of hope, sold justice for titillating fascism.
I am trying to forgive you, accept your death,
the hardened block cell walls of your mind,
once so fecund with inquisitiveness,
abstraction and high atmosphere.

Sometimes mercy comes as a shock,
a rippling destructive wave, speeding, breaking
the floorboards, the ceiling, so there is no recourse
but to run into the wide open, pajamas on, grief
on naked display.

Grief over our desecrated love,
over never knowing another morning
without raw anxiety, with allegiance only
to the immediacy of obvious uncertainty,
loss, the possibility of more loss.

**God is on my doorstep
like a swarm of sparrows saying
I love you I love you
I am here**

**I have been broken by this unhappy year,
still breaking, it seems.
I cannot piece myself together.**

**God arrives as a blue jay at my back window,
speaks, and I know the past is a finished dance,
necessary, sealed.**

Figurine

**In the middle, anywhere,
the Earth becomes a song,
a vision of its collected souls.**

**As the snake inches forward, then
consumes the still frog, the frog
thinking its camouflage and stillness
is enough protection, but it is not,
as high above nebulas continue to spin and stars
touch stars and explode.**

**How much compromise is permitted
before love loses its purity, its testimony to truth?
What is the threshold, obvious when reached,
when the deformity is complete and love
melts into a wickless waxy blob,
incapable of sustaining any flame?**

**In my mind, I am seeing you
as when I was 15, 21, 45,
seeing your dazzling eyes,
the lightness in your walk,
your unencumbered joy, remembering
our summers spent in Montreal, Phoenix, Toronto,
in renewing conversations and camaraderie.**

**In my mind, I will think of you
as one who has died and is not coming back.
Another spirit gone, to be thankful for
that you once were - like my father,
my many cats, rats, birds, big black dog
and my mentor.**

**You slipped on the mud, slipped up
and couldn't return or find the courage
to keep on the path.**

**You detoured into the plastic city, with plastic
placements, plastic bedrooms and digital relationships.**

**Poverty is hard, but still,
I expected so much more from you.
I thought we would take this to the end together –
as family does.**

**You broke our pact. You broke my heart.
The whole of a heavy high wave has collapsed on my back,
and the once singular flourishing mountain that was us,
has cracked down its centre, nothing left
but a barren flatland -
not a sprout, not a sound, not an insect,
soulless, seedless, dreamless, forsaken.**

Lumin

**One of the greatest souls I ever met
was in the body of a rat.**

**She was pure and noble, dissolved
in gentle love, a smooth essence, easy
to dive into.**

**Her name was Lumin- named by my son
after the Shaolin clan virtue Focus.**

**In truth, it may sound crazy, something many
would smirk at or mock - but here she was -
holding an infinity of tenderness in her rat eyes,
every day, every night with her rat toes, her Dumbo ears
and her rat tail.**

**She had a brain tumour and lived a year with it –
recovering five times from the brink of death, holding space
in the chair, giving up her seat on the throne to stay with us.
Every night for hours we stayed together, often
just looking into each other's eyes.**

**No one could know. I could have never guessed
that I would love a rat this much,
that such an untroubled expansive heart
could dwell in one so small, so shunned and disrespected.**

**She loved and was able to receive love
like a child with her mother.**

**She saved my son during two years of teenage despair.
That was her music. There was nothing hard in her, nothing
that did not soften into joy- even when she was ill.
When she died**

**five minutes she struggled, panicked, lunging for breath.
My hands went on her. I prayed for God
to intervene with mercy.**

**For five more minutes she stopped lunging, was at ease,
gasping slightly, then stopped gasping
and the light radiated through and around her body,
and her breath and the beating of her chest stopped. Now
she is at rest, delighting fully in the wave.**

**One of the greatest friends I have ever had was a rat.
And I have and have lost many friends in many body forms -
she was a shrine of layered clarity and kindness. She
was a great being, a resting point in God's creation.**

**One of the greatest souls I have ever met
was in the body of a rat.**

**Please listen. please understand. Holy. Holy. Holy halleluiah.
We are all joined.**

Loss

**There, the cement
is broken by a heavy fall,
ants make their way in,
dig tunnels, weeds sprout up
and birds land.**

**Beginnings are ugly, born out of death,
harsh endings and spoonfuls of stone and flame.
Even the perfect, soft, love-filled endings
are brutal in their permanence.**

**I drown in the shallow stream.
I make music in the desert.
I touch the worms of my thoughts,
wagging and whipping up the smooth level below.**

**Do you know how much I miss you -
the light in your dark special eyes,
the light that seeped into and saturated
wherever you went, and the natural love
pooling around your small body,
extending into the corners of this house,
upstairs, down basement stairs,
all the empty places?**

Monarchs

**The monarchs begin their migration.
The souls of the deceased start to visit.
Temperance comes
with discipline, conviction
to not evade the truth or promises.**

**The last time I looked into your eyes
you were dying, trusting my love for you
and all the love that shielded around
your frail and fading body.
One year and I still miss you in my gut,
an emptiness that cannot be quelled.
This is the bird song, the emphasis
of individual brightness. The gift of you
and others too of gentle and lost natures.**

**The monarchs come to my back garden.
I greet them. I know each one -
their wing patterns, their flight patterns.
One day I will be a monarch,
a whiff of my soul, darting
from flower to flower, offering
a mild comfort to soothe
the pangs of vanished intimacies.**

Effie

**Picture at the bottom
tied up in a pit of moths.
The royal crown, life without
a wheel to ride. Paving up the stream
where children once charged down an incline
and jumped into its shallow body.
Instead I am weakened, unable to hold
my breath for more than ten seconds,
lungs, tender with each breath, wounded, flaccid,
but airways enflamed, engrossed with harsh swelling.
Will I die this way? Before my children are fully grown?
Will this be the place, alone, afraid, surrounded by love with
no love able to save me, repair my pulse, give current
enough to dismantle the throne of this disease?
I lay on a bed, under sheets. I know what is tomorrow.
I have no choice
but to let go. My children! My husband! My darling loves!
Winter has not yet come – here, but more like spring
crushing my chest, one breath, one breath, heavy liquid
rising in pockets meant for air – one breath, one breath.
The morning has arrived and death is edging nearer.
I see it waiting
for me on my neighbour's roof, patient, not as a predator,
but more like a sea at ebb tide, gathering moon gravity
and a natural motion of force that will eventually drown
whatever remains on the beachy shores, drowning
before winter - one breath.
My children are on their own as I am and I cannot stop
this freezing, save them from the cliffs
of mountain-burning grief,
prevent them from being orphans in other people's homes,
holding eye contact briefly with other mothers who love
them, feel for them, but never the way I have loved them.**

**The world will wax me, carry me across
on the path of my heritage.**

**No one will be alright. Death is never healed,
it is a garment permanently glued, re-shaping the wearer,
taking the light through a black hole,
ending the peace of ignorance.**

One breath. The sky has changed.

**It is the last time I will bear it witness, from now on -
hospital ceilings, the insides of my eyes
and dreams of purgatorial pain
overcome, of dreaming my children old
with children of their own.**

Don't stop dancing, I tell them, don't watch me. I am sorry.

I can barely breathe. Is God real?

I am holding many hands holding mine; whispers,

I love yous, goodbyes.

My last breath escapes me, easier now.

I hear singing, sobbing, singing louder.

I am listening, complete as a stone. My work is over.

My love is burning.

It is a sun. It is the shape of that song.

Because it is a Stone

**Because it is a stone
the fire hits it, moves around,
changing shape like a wave.**

**Because grief is not a word
that counts footsteps or encapsulates
the butcher's madness, just builds like
a deep stagnant pool of a pond - one drop,
one drop, rising.**

**Because all the vegetables have not been picked through,
and more people hold compassion than they do hate,
the tree can grow, the fountain can flow up and make
a statement of solidarity, a sound
peaceful to those who are near.**

**Because the robin keeps coming back
to sit on my lawn, stares at me and waits
for my greeting before moving on.**

**Because hope is red eyes stinging,
but sight unimpaired,
and the darkening shadows darkening
the day-to-day landscape drift -
sometimes far away.**

**Because there is early morning, peppermint tea,
and love abides in everything living,
I can walk another step, another day,
bury the corpse of a treasured friend,
and place something beautiful
(a stone, a whisper) beside the grave.**

The Letting Go

I

Blast

**Blast your devil's heart,
make it into paper confetti,
take it into outer space
and leave it there.**

**You stood on my shoes as I was
wearing them, dug your heels in
and spat in my eyes.**

**Cruel corpse rising from a muddy grave,
you are weak and monstrous, always claiming
to be the victim of someone else's scheme.
You are madness, the sharp ridged knife
of madness flaying in chaotic whiplash
at the sky, the birds, and all manner of trees.**

**Take back your darkness, swallow it whole,
let it stew in your innards, ruminate, reuniting
with the depravity already there.**

**You will never lie to me again,
pretending you wanted love when all you wanted
was to spread your malignancy, vengeance
for an imagined wrong, to give a landing slap
with the full force of violent resentment and envy.**

**Slither away, your bite left no mark, ineffectual
as your attempts to love. Judas, Brutus, master
of deep, un-emerge-able hell. Go home. Blast away
your caked-on body filth, reductive stench, spoiling
all you claimed to hold sacred.**

II

Scapegoat

Give yourself over
to the burn on your back,
the sordid array of demons
counselling your thoughts.
Let loose the bell string,
pull hard and hard again.
Find yourself a ditch to
fall into, scream out of,
wailing at the stars.

Ruin a good morning with
your sticky filth, throwing blame
to deflect from the wounds of
your own weakness.

I add you up - here, here and here.
I will not play along
with your parlour-tricks, your mayhem
of pointing-the-finger lies
when what I gave was love
- not perfect - but love nonetheless.

Coil up in your bitterness, resentments you wear
like a special pair of shoes,
walking around, leaving prints over prints
of your relentless pointless pacing.

I am not who you think I am, not willing
to hold guilt for your depravity, for a crime never my own.
I will say it again - I loved - I gave you love
the best I knew how, and I showed kindness.

**Give yourself over to the intercourse
of false justifications and accusations and
see how it feels to be alone, here,
with what is left -
broken dollar-store jewelry, dandruff flakes.
Give yourself over and
get lost,
out of my thoughts
out into the isolated frozen-dead terrain
of your own sick making.**

III

Monster

Surrender to restore
the gifted strength, bruised
by curses, but otherwise unharmed.
Lay down the cloak of justice,
Achilles' revenge. Shout fire!
and let it burn.

What I did was falter,
overspeak with heart-felt enthusiasm,
that is all - thinking it was to a friend,
when in fact it was a snake, no, a worm,
without backbone, fangs or face.

Pour salt on it, watch it dissolve
into its true slime-form, formless
as the excuses of Brutus who cared nothing
for Rome, for Caesar, had only his own
power-grab in mind, wounded
that he was not chosen, pride-puffed,
feigning altruism to self-justify
his ruthless deed.

Appear to me, then pass like a bad smell
when a window is opened, or lavender calm is sprayed.
I was fooled when I should have honoured
the signs before, left, when I first witnessed
your shadow-flood self-pity play. Then
I should have hung up the phone and never
called back. But I kept on, over that hurdle, ignoring
its truth, always wondering, waiting for the monster
to unmask again. When it did, it was worse than before.

The wolves of hell have you now, surrounded
on all dimensional sides. Your vicious tongue,
still twisting and twirling, angered at the glare of the sun.

**Promise me never to return. I promise you
I have walked by you, looked, then walked
further up the devil's back, out
of the inverted pit of your doing, never to look again.**

**Know I have no good memories of you,
they have all been eradicated by this hideous calamity.
Your words of love ring like lies,
hiding a hostile, grudge-madness,
a decade of trust mutilated by spiritual sickness.**

**Know your hydra head is now exposed,
sliced off, cauterised, nullified at the core, illusion blown -
your sweet-honey-poison dried up, disposed.**

IV

Deviant

**Diminished in love
by excessive self-pity, locked
in anguish, in anger, in the burn-machine
lake layer of hell
as the long sword of your insanity
is wielded, intending to split
my skull in two.**

**I felt it breeze past, just missing its mark.
I felt the shock as I swerved, as you
suckled on the teat of your unfounded
resentments, brewing for months, draped
in pretty fabric, niceties and endearments.
How long had your soul gone foul,
and I never noticed?
No discussion, just your rigid arthritic finger
pointing, your creased forehead further creasing,
corpse-like and rising like a poltergeist
from the boiling mire.**

**Poor soul. Poor you as all of your
bold spiritual proclamations are reduced to naught.
Take care old woman. You cannot create
or be uplifted tied to this abhorrent deformity
of deluded self-righteousness.
You can feel good for a second, lift your sword,
and be exhilarated. You can rub your hands together,
feel the power of cruelty, demolishing
a friendship with one swift cut.
You can and you did, and it is now done –**

**The cancer I never knew was there is removed,
every cell radiated and eradicated.
I proclaim gratitude for getting me out,
for releasing me from the leach tethered to my underbelly,
masquerading as a trusted ally.**

**I see you, your collected violent distortions, the rage
you assume, your sword in its ruthless downward assault,
swing, strike past, dark mass amputated, and I am set free.**

V

The Hollow

The burn was received, betrayal
like a thousand strikes
on the same spot - ripping off
first my skin, then sinews.
A burn like a confession of hate,
masquerading for years as love.

That side has now descended, into the hollow,
along with all that burns and whose heat
cannot be tamed or reconciled.
I put a steel sheet over that hollow,
cover it for good and breathe easy in my escape,
tie my hair back and sing loudly with
my joy and intellect intact - with my trust in
God unharmed, my language rejuvenated.

*Layers of arsenal fumes, rising,
I see you below in that hollow
hunched over, lamenting
a sickly self-pitying cry.
Already your hands and arms, up to your elbows,
buried like stakes deep in the unforgiving ground.
You cannot move. You cannot hope
for better days.
Your hissing is useless, and the venom from your lips
dissipates into nothing as it leaves your gaping mouth.
You, stuck in a frozen mire, cut off
from the current, condensed, calcified, and stalled,
with only your conceit, your woe-is-me!
to give you voice, some
semblance of rudimentary comfort.*

**Sliding through the sewage tunnel gleam
(poem in seven parts)**

I

Forgotten (soon)

**Hard and cold as an ice storm
killing, hardening life
in its blanket frost.**

**The only love you keep is what
you can control. If you can't control it,
you ditch it with a kick,
with a higher-than-though mighty sneer.**

**Digger in the rocky lifeless garden,
resisting you, you claim as savage stupidity
because you claim to hold prophecy,
ancient words of a babbled dream,
zodiac tamer whipping up a storm
or a healing balm to break delusion.**

**When there is no compliance or
cheerleaders cheering,
you turn,
start character-flailing, lying, slicing into
the corners of human frailty
to etch yourself out a victory and walk away.**

**Atrophied heart inside you, a high ceiling
that will go no further, cannot expand
into compassion-for-your-enemies
overflow.**

**Dive back into the water-pool where all who
encounter you are obedient to your command, move
to the mountain where uncertainty cannot
reach you - exchanging truths in monetary form
and claim it all as blessed achievement.**

**Where was your kindness, your golden glow,
when you drove a knife into my loins
before you departed,
trying to lure me into self-loathing?
Low,
like arrogance, hubris, and lying are low,
immutable as a dead thing swinging in
the wind - movement, but no breath.**

**Farewell friend of the seventh soldier, fallen.
I need nothing here
in your palace of falsities,
closed off from humility and the equality of grace.**

**You could have left without letting me know
you never had my back, that you were always
back there, clawing with judgements,
grievances.
You could have just left without the
tongue-lashing psychological deception,
just turned away without the gutting,
flipping all those years of friendship
on their side, upside down, lying
like liars do with complete certainty,
no remorse or self-doubt,**

**amputating any devotion
I had left for you,
boiling its remains
on a rack of putrid oil and extremes.**

**Walk away, dragging this downed horse behind you,
into the thorny bramble of your defiant prejudice
into the fantasy of your less-than-holy paradigm, broken.**

II

Broken Glass

**Coward,
keeper of a false fixed star,
keeper of many truths,
knower of none.**

**Coward,
throwing glass into my garden.
Brutal, unnecessary cruelty so you can
own the platform as you leave,
nose stuck high in the air,
hands cleansed of any doubt or wrongdoing.**

**Coward,
incapable of walking through the mire
hand in hand, of not letting go and trusting love no matter
the centipedes writhing, the small gnawing things
and the larger creatures that scare. Incapable
of owning your own transgressions, or prioritizing
love above your frightened soul.**

**Coward
cussing a friendship because you quit,
cussing and lying and tossing the broken glass
from your high and mighty mountain.**

Coward
with blood on your hands,
who must turn back as you leave,
thinking you'll say your piece,
but really just recklessly, heartlessly tossing
broken glass.

III

Getting there

I am almost on the other side
(one day, second day)
where forgiveness collides
with terrible truth,
where pain is overcome with pity,
releasing my shield and cry
for human justice.

Quickly through the process
after the breaking of the sun,
after seeing the secrets you stand behind
to prop up your persona, after still,
your deliberate hurt was hurled, and after that,
ending it with pat-on-the-head platitudes,
even still, I forgive you.

I am almost there, I pray to be there, in spite of
your attempts to drown me in false accusations,
in spite of your attempts to undermine my autonomy.
I say, so be it, I am almost on the other side,
sensing a freedom, an inspiration
clearing the thicket of your malice,
almost healed of your viper-tongue lick,
your sticky twisted back-flip truths,
spiritual elitism of the highest order.

I am almost there, and I am feeling good,
relieved, now away from your succubus suckling,
away from your tight-grip surrealism,
distorting clean lines, bright glowing rivers
and intimacy.

**I forgive you. I forgive your incapacity,
your hard didactic tongue.
I forgive your small circle land, retreat
from a faith that holds faith no matter the outcome,
that part is easy.**

**But your foul lying insults
as you turned away, are harder to bear.
I will get there,
I will not carry you with me -
not your soiled diaper dripping, not a single
attempt to condemn me,
or the labels you blew towards me,
blew, night wind cursing, blew
into nothingness.**

IV

A Dead Man's Pockets

Petty, trust snapped
a killed bug on a windshield.
Into the grave, folding, four-fold,
soot in the ears, on your eyelids,
and your poison almost run through.

You lost me long ago, your spell thinned out,
held no power or impact long ago but I thought
love existed between us still, thought
respect existed between us,
that we were more than a bowing down
to your sure-fire claims.

On my side it did.

I cared for you, wanted your dreams
to glow and be more than you ever imagined,
when all you wanted from me was
obedience to your cause.

As long as I kept my place,
just below your shoulder blades,
we would be fine.

Why can't you love?

Why the subterfuge madness
parading around as absolutism?

Why couldn't you acknowledge
my side, apologize for your
terrible accusations, bend a little,

**suck in your puffed-up ego a little,
make room for someone other
than you, your way,
your branding rod?**

**There are more birds in the sky
than there has ever been,
more spark in my fountain than
I have felt for awhile.**

**Clarity is shameless,
a stream that rides, collides
with the rusty metal haul,
goes around it until it becomes one
with the waterfall, a cleansing continuum.**

V

Touch

**The first touch was bitter,
tantamount to an attack, deception
from a vantage point
of spiritual superiority.**

**The second touch
was touching a tomb, still full of stench
though the flesh had rotted long ago -
just dry bones, barely
a full form.**

**The third touch
angered, like when a snake
snatches a fledgling, angry
at the innate brutality all around.**

**The fourth touch
was perfect, a release
from the swing-seat of darkness,
a blessed gift that came
at the first touch -
consciously cruel, compliant
to the sway of a lesser self.**

VI

Small Moon

A small moon melted
fleshed out a sure-footed sacrifice
but changed directions, too quickly
into the direction of a red star.
Then her heart was burned, crispy
and crumbling, no more a perfect circle,
drooping on one side, gravity became queen
of her false crescendo song.

Hiding her deformity in the dark red burn,
hoping no one could see her misshapened side,
which she tended to only in hidden rooms,
chanting for a cure, bandaging her bloodied side
to try and form again that perfect circle.

A small moon strained to keep her crust,
could not resist flinging curses from her
cavity craters as she went out, could not accept
her time had come, that in the end she never had
a compact core or a solid truth she could rely on.

VII

Ribbon

**It is ok to still love you
though our personal love has been
caught by the fishing net,
drowned in the struggle.**

**It is ok to want you to be ok
and even thriving on a splendid mount,
trailing through the forest.**

**Though your axe came down
in a forced entanglement of muscle
and sinew, although you have failed me
and hurled enmity into my spine,
in a sharp take-me-down twist
that wanted to leave me maimed,
it is ok.**

**I am ok and I still love you,
not for what we were but
for who you are, now,
a person trying to
seize for yourself a homeland,
believing you are doing the right thing,
believing your betrayal was a necessary closure.**

**Closed now and I am ok
and I still love you
over here where we will never meet
in this life or any life again.**

My Mother's Sky

(Eileen (Lee Porter) Grayhurst 1930-2024)

The Death Journey

**Space around the memories,
walking the cul-de-sac,
house to house, in a dream
where the small school stood and the field
is just the same where you linked arms
with your teacher and talked,
bright with your awakening into literature.**

**The trees are stronger, thicker-trunked,
living non-violent as they expand
and take up more ground.**

**Space from room to room and five hawks
fill the sky, then merge with the sky over the lake
and the vast line of clouds, changing temperature.**

**She drives her last car drive,
into this emptiness that does not hurt
but offers no comfort.
After the drive
the love in her blazes refreshed
as she sits in her lazy boy chair,
forgetting her sickness and old age,
blazes the whole scope of her magnificence,
strongest in her compassion.**

This last journey we will have together.

**We will overcome together until the end
and even then
there will be no ending, just a change,
space, I cannot fathom,
space added between us, space experienced
sometimes as a shedding of plumage,
sometimes, as a wasps' nest touched,
accidental unbearable sting.**



**Before I remember
blank days, atheist days
that left me sombre-hard,
but these days
are brim with harrowing storms,
prayers and keepsakes infused
with intractable meaning, memories
ripe and revered as a newborn's flesh.**

**Before, my soul was below, breaking
through the body regularly, in pieces,
but these days it sits on the surface,
intact, a glass sphere without protection,
thrown and rolling, like
a lightning fuse, cracked.**

**These days there are no pointed steps,
but each day is like the first sun rays seen,
heightening my energy to be as kind and capable
as possible as the bringing pulse lives in a jar,
is taken out of the jar, and dying takes its fill,
and death runs in circles around the dream
and everything within the dream
that is real and everlasting is quenched
when the days are these days
sober and groaning, rising
break-and-fall, cresting hard
with this shining golden sharp
hurt, breath-taking.**



**Tricky blood dripping
into upper wall cracks,
through the grout tracks
and into winter's foreboding
months ahead.**

**How does it take so little to examine
the underside and know it is rotten,
flesh covered but disintegrating
underneath?**

**How many hands have to wash
at the same sink until the basin gets cracked
and the taps only release a trickle?**

**Tomorrow is today is
a slow-moving line bruised
with intensity and trauma,
clothed in brackets that shift then fall
then plateau before they fall again.**



**What seems unending
will end and when it ends
an ocean of emptiness will
consume. The dragon's nest
will be disturbed and
heat will flow its lava-reach and hot depth
into the ordinary, the extraordinary
and everything in between.**

**This star is imploding into a vacuous
vacuum-suck and spiral break, spinal break
that breaks any chance for mobility.
When it ends it will be my end,
orphaned, no hidden curses, icons will be broken,
and saints will be laid bare, naked, exposed before God.**

**So end, my mother, but do not end,
be like a songbird blasting her song
before the sun even rises, glorifying,
and watch the heavenly bodies
surrounding, lifting your soul gently,
transforming you naturally
to breaststroke through
sun-bearing ridges
rising, dipping
divine dimensions.**



The backside of the shadow
is awake, and losing ground again
burning in the sinkhole, into
a conclusion of harsh hard
cause-and effect.

Eyelids lower, sleep is never rest
but a patchwork horror-show
of violence and loss and things
once perfect, stolen
behind locked doors.

Underground, the circus continues
and I will never find my way out
of this mirrored maze.

I know that if I lie flat in the stark silence,
mortal eroding flesh is inevitable.
Extravagant love always has a price.
The price owed has been paid and I must leave
the turning circle, step past the fissure-groove
and sink into a faith abiding.

I will walk with you reckless
over this abandoned lake,
skipping across veiled skin ice,
thinning, seeing through, skipping,
and somehow never a crack will form
and never your toe nor my heel
falling through.



**The smell of worms.
A feast that rages inside
the system-nerves, taking
the body to extreme outerspace,
thresholds of reason
and waiting in the death-year
the year of exhaustion - one day brushed
with energizing hope, and the next,
crumbled, withdrawn.**

**What is deception in this playing field?
What is an honest ascent that will also
echo into the roots and stay there?**

**The distance to carry this weighted reality
is unknown, the duty within it, and the love,
is immediate and unquestioning.
So I stay, pressed against the mountain,
pressed against this aching uncertainty.
Pressed and moving and mourning
each conversation, trusting
that the sharp pointed misery
will not pitch, that peace will expand
until peace overcomes.**



**Arrow stream
in between existences
splashing between shores,
forced to confront her ancient
criticism that has wrapped
my mind-frame and grown
a shadow as cumbersome
as a heavy chain.**

**This land she demands me to walk on
crowns me with gruelling labour,
hijacking my dignity and sense of equality.
It is a constant place of servitude merging
with guilt and a dismissal of my strength
and true worth.**

**This red line drawn is crossed over,
onto hot sands without sandals.
Mine is to give but not to neuter
my prayers - rage and pity colliding.
I will give but I will not have
my music reined and whipped
and tossed like a dusty bag
with the rest of the clipped toenails.**

**I will tell her what I cannot tell her,
by not owning her hierarchical demands
as I give, as I am placed within
this imprisoned place
as her sickness and drug-induced mania
takes control -
her petty compulsions incurable,
but my love for her
so much more.**

*Kaleidoscope flaming,
her eleven colours remaining
mixed and pure and still swirling,
undimmed
by suffering's panicked toll*



**Too much dust and debris
filling the vents, my lungs.
Twisted plots of imagined problems
flung across the river without
factual explanation.**

**So I endure and I count my numbers
to hold in my anger, hold back my tears
and keep doing the soft servitude and
diligent care I am accustomed to,
instead of doing what I want to do -
withdraw, fold up and out
for at least a good week.**

**Too much drug-induced insanity whispers,
whispering accusations that hold no water,
but cut and kill just the same
all my good will, my enduring effort
and my exhausted heart that believed at least
it has kept itself true.**

**The crow almost hits the moving car,
almost goes under the wheel. Instead
it somersaults and avoids being clipped
by inches, flying in front of the car window,
raised away by maneuvering a mounting wind.**

**Too much blood without redemption.
Too much condemnation for a false claim,
a winter blank and brutal,
not of my own making.**

**Remember, remember -
the crow caws and reverberates
into the white cells, red cells
or your bloodstream -**

**Remember
God gives nothing easy,
nothing worthy of keeping
that doesn't first eviscerate
before reseeding
your radiant core.**



**How can I rock
between the eaten bread
and the rotten leftovers,
filling plates with putrid smells
and locked-in rage that rages in
an insomniac relentless punch
and tilt - twisting the bowels,
concerned only with petty victories?**

**How can I keep my self open
while needing full-on protection
from her drug-induced distancing eyes?**

**How can I live through another day
of exhausting intensity, with unveiled
shameless fears filling space and
the brutal-swerve
of a lingering inevitable?**

**How can I hold on until the end
hold out until permission is granted
to at last collapse flat out,
unfold, fold?**



**Last days, these days
roll like a slow-moving stone
across a stony terrain -
many bumps, inclines, declines
and turns.**

**Last days, restless then at peace
then restless again
as limitations close in so only
the essentials remain.**

**Last days are these days
soaked with this blazing wound, continuing.
These days there are no more plans
but to live through the days letting in
the undefiled grace that rises like vapour at dusk
through the balcony-door crack,
through her smile which she still manages occasionally,
keeping pace with the clawing hunger for relief
and the undercurrent smells of sickness.**

**These days are the last days
I can love you,
and how I love you, my mother -
your bright sailboat stalled
in the maw of this menacing wave
surging.**



**It is clear
that finally we are
adopted into the universe's time frame,
that time is not counted by cards
or the constellations.
Clear that light is not light-weight
but heavy
when it transforms.**

**Cracked leather belts tighten like nooses,
dreams crack then shatter and scatter
their fragments down the drain.
God is in the laundry room.
God is in her laboured respiration
and in her smile she now only shows
to strangers.**

**It is clear dying is not death.
It is its own journey -
a body breaking, a soul struggling
and losing
no matter the effort
to keep itself here, whole.**



**I wish I was a snail
robbed of its shell, squished
underfoot, drying up in the
sun
so all that was left
of me was a thin crust of skin
that found its way into pavement pores,
and I could be disintegrated, be no more.**

**I wish I had no responsibilities
but to my solitude, my own thoughts
waking and sleeping.**

**I wish I never tried to love
because now I know
I have failed at love, to love,
to be strong when open, protecting
not only from the outside but inside too,
taking on others' spiritual burdens,
not out of kindness
but out of cowardice and the delusion
that the world is anything but
a lulling zone of harsh beggary
and bully imagination.**

**I am a broken toy kicked to the curb.
I am nothing. I have nothing and
I wish I was a snail, dried up,
sensory-dead, flat
and inconsequential.**



**I don't know how to sing.
My legs have become old
and there are no more believers
around me.**

**Clasped in a never-opening lair
with active lava and no windows,
I cannot find the cave through the narrow incline,
trapped, submerged.**

**I cannot sing or breathe or be here
as I am broken down
bloodied and maimed.
I cannot continue to move,
pretend the feeling light is inside me
when it isn't, when most days
I wish it was over and the throne of my failure
would burn with myself along with it.**

**Chaos, eroding sickness,
and the brutal cold reign supreme.
Everything I have done
is shattered in a pit
with no way to reassemble or resume.**

**I don't want to be here.
I don't want the natural law
but only God's mercy.**

**I cannot sing.
My memories are false, used-up
and dissipating.**



Exhausted like a willow tree
is exhausted after a storm
but the storm keeps thrashing
and scooping all strong things once rooted
to the ground, releasing them across
the lawn like a brick thrown to the head,
like a dream inhabited in its ghoulish
madness, running but getting nowhere.

The suffering, the need
and the love that keeps
it together but not always.
Nerves dosed in gasoline -
fire just feet away but still at bay.
Breathing for one day, taking no messages, hearing
no extreme complaints. The doors are closed.
The balcony window is open. I step out,
there is a sky and a hawk merging with the clouds.
How much more can I hold?

And then it will be over, and I will hold no more,
not her frail hand, not her scent, not her eyes
with my eyes in deep and struggling prayer,
not her body leaning into my arms,
her full weight surrendered.



A day of reprieve,
wearing a costume and getting
in a car.

A day when the light
is unhooked from its source
and no one will say why
We will just carry on as through
this distress is natural
as though it is a wave to endure
instead of a captive fall.

A day of reverie,
the last time of gathering
and playing the role
The first Christmas at her home
The first time she will sleep through
most of it.

A day that we thought would not come
with her still with us.
So we are grateful
and we take this day
putting our mourning aside
this day - a winter-solstice flower
bearing its last bloom
before the advancing frost.



After the end,
when the end comes
and speaking is useless,
her home will be a torch
blown out - her turquoise eyes,
curtained. Sorrow will open
like a jar of dragonflies, fireflies
released as one.

And even then, when resigned
to the careful truth, the separation
will ache like a phantom limb,
like a stillborn child held, kissed,
never receiving.

As the end approaches,
I will have to force the basics
of breathe, sleep, eat
for her sake and those around me
who love her equally as I do.
I will forget about hope
and then later I will remember
her eyes, alit with playful joy,
her summers spent on proud
adventures and the way she loved me,
never giving up, generous
as an empathetic and beautiful queen,
loving me
without understanding me
but trusting me
all the same.



**Repeating, the days
knowing a different day will only be worse,
veiling the eyelids, opening an emptiness
that will never be eased.**

**Repeating but not forever, but
longer than anticipated. In spite
of the great love you feel, you feel
used-up, under appreciated.**

**But this is her now, diseased and drugged,
does not diminish her glowing
life-long compassion, her extravagant tolerance
and kindness, connection to everyone, her softness
that still peels away the crust in an instant
when her heart is touched, when faith
is required.**



Duty has made work in the garden
impossible, waking up,
a barren chore.
The mountains have dropped,
flattened out into a steady plane.
Energy I gave up as mine, came back,
surprising me with my own resilience,
stamina to hold the days together one after another
until they became months, a way of life and service.
This gift like a curse like a gift
necessary to pluck
my soul from a rut it had no awareness it was even in
until out, until forced to hold a different tune
and play it until it becomes naturally possible,
a place of unbelievable challenge met,
a place to live without
decisions, conclusions,
live as an open-end-nerve swimming
stroke by stroke upstream -
most times lit on fire,
a few times resting on the bank,
looking around
tamed, soothed.



**I cry out throughout the night.
I cry for the thousands due to die
who still remain unclaimed.
A slow step through misery, with moments
intermittent of a pure turquoise glow.
A gradual waking into loss and the definite
abyss of absolute letting-go.
Mid-sleep panic that wakes
me with its red tentacle squeeze
crushing my mind,
and the steady breath I need to endure
another tomorrow.
I cry out but I keep it contained -
my flesh without hope
my spirit committed to this sacred duty
as the rest of me is battered, broken-branched
bearing, feebly carrying
one collapsed body, now another.**



**A kiss
A curl
a look out
a look beyond
a rosy anticipation.**

**All things compare to each other
in the dark gloom of dissatisfaction,
meaningless activity
reaching its zenith then back to the nadir and
spinning again.
Painting helps and even singing a familiar song
but these things do not break the loop
or contain more than a flawed and temporary ease.
Hands down, Hands open and the mind saying
now- be brave!**

**Love is deeper than darkness
more unexpected and varied than the checkpoints
of delusion, chaos and dementia.
Love then, widespread.
Take on that love
and place what weighs you down
into the wet cement blocks
of this unhappy nightmarish decline.**

**Do this and inherit
the dreamy peace
and its mortal claim.
Do this and be devoted
to good service, knowing
all else is bloodshed,
must be shed to earn your keep
and beeline your way to
a maturing discipline,
an invincible pronouncement -**

**angelic terror
where only
this slender slice of light exits
to squish through,
beckoning, supreme.**



I do not know
the treatment
the reasons
for such a grand tribulation
I have only achieved this interval
of a tiny budding joy,
a respite from the imploding friction.
I do not know if it is more than
a respite, if it is a crossing over,
a victory over infection and chronic chaotic influences

but today she walks a little stronger, limping still
but improving her gait.
Today the Earth is this simple location,
open to the angels and to recovery.
I did not expect this calamity, collapse of
every dream, but my eyes are lifting.
I don't need a massive harvest, just food
enough to sustain and faith enough
for a mild liberation.



**Melody screeched to a halt,
bubble big, too big, extinguished.
I relinquished my faith for answers.
Gruesomely unattractive
in full sight
in sharp black and white
immutable, I wanted
control like some want pleasure,
like one without restrictions
or moral aptitude.**

**Demons aggressively demanded my trust
underserved, making up stories
to turn failures into victories.
Hell is the steel-illusion-force of truth inverted
where there is no bowing down to the greater
authority, who is God, in charge,
unpredictable, not a pawn to use to
increase power, not a valium pill
to ease my anxiety while
traversing the treacherous unknown.**

**In that journey there is only one activity,
only faith resuscitating,
the outcome irrelevant -
a blue streak across a grey sky,
feasting on surrender.**



**Sandbox throughout the vastness
take away the end of time
and I will slide like a globe,
like a planet, bursting stars
as I go, grounding suns and
drowning blackholes in my wake.**

**I will peel back tomorrow,
compost it into a Sunday secret
gasping for a solitude it will never find
or play-in again.**

**Take the hunger from Infinity and
I will be open as an abyss, spending money
like everyday is my birthday, my death day.
I will give birth away from
the tempting waters of deception
that conceal choice in hesitation
that drive the mystic to forsaken symbolism,
that pull the spine from its vertebrae, rotating
in one split-second choice,
while looking at it, desiring it, looking like
something worth the price of a soul.**

**Boredom demands at least a breeze,
at least a far-off flutter to speak the hope
that angels are real.**

**Take us out of this passageway,
underground mazes, mole homes
that imply safety. The sun is a sea lion.
We will ride beside him and he will coach
us to swerve and flip,
avoid the jellyfish and the stingray.
Meaning will pour like rain on the top
of our surfaced heads –**

**a storm, this sickness, just another high wave,
just another necessity to dive deeper,
lungs and cells heavy, heavier
to avoid the overhead storm.**



Inside, full of hot nerves
sinking without the sight of tentacles
or a slice of coral
to latch onto.
Your faculties, twisted,
breaking logic into shards.
Freedom came like a larger stone to carry,
duty like a sunburn, burning, causing
the first and second layer of skin to blister.
Useless music passes, cannot be kept
or remembered. The space is traveled
knocking against corners, bruising bones
and the remains of visions.
Stings on the pads of your feet
in the white of your eyes.

Inside, we are a tall-tower rubble,
a stack of concrete broken blocks
and bodies
and grief that lasts generations.

Inside, there is a ship enticing
we cannot board,
a mutual weariness,
a ghostly outage blackout,
blinding us from seeing
sharp corners, soft cushions,
the way to retrieve
a glass
in the kitchen, on the counter
of already poured, useful water.



Blended

**into this scenery, this sick bed
and the watered-downed horizon.
It is weak with over-empathizing
tearing crusts off until all protection
is gone from my soft mushy core.
I cannot acclimatize to this grief,
her life-force-fading drawn into my own
bruised blood of doom, dooming my
own cells and strength into this unfair despair,
unsoothable scorch and decay.**

**A washing down after every visit, care-day
so I do not mimic the symptoms
of death and dying and the aching
anguish of helplessness.**

**This path will not lead
to a garden but to a cliff,
a farewell without ever coming back.
Each step toward the edge is torture
when taken, is forced not taken because
there is no standing still against it,
no turning around, the inevitable is absolute.
This path is darkness, and this darkness
is complete love - heavy, high above,
a terrifying incarnation.**



**Turn to me, I turn
skinned,
striking a blow
to the inner circle.**

**My soul is a peanut,
two parts, shelled, asymmetrical.
Unity is divine, to kill
is never excusable or brave or
holy.**

**The bloodwind is the wind
that turns to defeat every journey
in disaster.**

**Take a mouthful - swirl the grey slime
of decline and the sharp spikes
of uncertainty, to swallow and know this
is what is meant to be
and what you have is this moment
to love and this moment again
to love
and the rest is not worth one thought,
is too much to take in,
so take in and yield to its power.**



**Chips of clear and broken glass.
Will I make this destiny-duty
intact or burn out on a hospital bed,
drained to the point of no return?
The stones are joy. I keep my smile
pressed on, my impatience under breath
and my dignity on a wire - pulled and tugged
by her unnecessary necessities.**

**When I am tired
the guilt pores in like
castor oil, down the wrong pipe
into the windpipe as I struggle
to regain our once synchronized flow,
but it will not return or rewind, as her love
only shows in momentary flickers now
before she dives again into these catacombs
collapsing.**

**She is owned by the morphine
pumping into her bloodstream
at regular intervals, pumping its purpose
to nullify her pain, while twisting mental foreign
tracks through her brain that torture her
with their relentless sticky grid
and serpents' faces rising, telling her
she is owned, robbed of her
treasured independence, confined to home,
watching her once happy socializing light darken,
and you love her, you know her. You know**

**for a while
the monster will chomp at the moon,
will take the glow from her view,
soil every brilliant horizon,**

**will capture her honoured seat,
even conquer her spiritual home,
for a while
death's rotting belly
will do what it must do,
bloat and swell
foul, naturally cruel.**



**Dream-self
destiny-self
never align**

**As soon as the shackles have cracked,
a new cage has formed,
taking away the morning light,
a chance to see the phenomena
of untainted being.**

**I have fallen into usefulness
like a bottomless sewer pit, falling, nothing
broke, just the drain of gravity in my bones
as I fall, lacking
the gift of appreciation and the possibility
of a safe landing.**



**Selling parts secretly owned
but never named. Scraping off
the daily dread to find a hope.
Hoping her suffering soul
will be reconciled in a flash,
unscathed when the new one begins,
budding, blooming into the opening,
the center of the ring,
enveloped in tenderness eternal.**

**Then the peace she gained by her natural
good heart will expand and blot out her
anxieties, her struggles for control.**

**She will be unharmed, in a state
where joy overwhelms with a constant
ecstasy sustainable and God is beside her
within her and all around her, swirling, caressing,
like God has always been, only now with a certainty
that even the most faithful servants
(inside time
inside gravity)
have never known.**



**Purely dying
like the universe
bottoming out,
letting it all go into
a sinkhole oblivion.**

**Purely fear of losing
the definite, the breathing lungs
in the body on the bed
and the heart-seized and blind from
its atomic power.**

**Purely God
holding the stick and strings,
concealed and blanketing,
preparing her soul for this
divine beginning.**

**The hall light is dim.
The curtains rustle forward.
Her eyes, once wet with anxiety's tears,
now see the angels surround, the truth
of boundless love, for her, for all.**



**Last days
Dark days
dangerous death
at my doorstep,
swinging its hips to-and-fro.
Burning body, cracked, gnawed
away by insect bites, rodent bites
and the big blackhole open-mouth, forsaken.
Take what you must, but take it now,
swiftly, cover the core and the extremities
with your weight and then lift that weight
into the light of the sun, glorious
as a sparkle-water-wave-ripple
and a solitary hawk merging with the horizon.**

**Let her go like that hawk, pure in spirit
as she is, kind and soft as a child as she is.
Let her go into a dream that turns from
a dream into heaven's threshold,
where she crosses over filled with your glory,
and my father looking on
with steady, welcoming eyes.**



**Outer nerves,
the madness of rise and decline,
undulating like an erratic wave,
the body joined to the illusion,
to past conclusions
and repetitive patterns remolded but unchanged.
Anxiety and intuition smudged
into one dim light.
I bow to the blowing wind, to the ignorance of now.
I hold her hand more now than I did as a child.
Tears rest for a while but lack any regulation.
Slow as a sloth but unpredictable as a storm.
Each day expends
what once was a normal week of energy.
Downward is the secret.
Bend in the direction of whatever gives.
The night is full of apocalyptic dreams,
solar flares and precautions, preparations
to minimize the coming death-blast charring burn.**



The night season comes
and Earth is mine to hold,
witness its mark
and its gathering decay
while you sleep in an unconscious
darkening - skin around your mouth
turning blue, and inside that open circle,
inner lips peeling rice-paper fine
and your tongue like a dried log, that I keep sponging,
trying to saturate and regain its malleable form.

Your eyebrows twitch in what the nurses
promise me is not pain, promised me
you are comfortable
even though
for three days and three nights you
have lingered in a grizzly dehydrated shadow-stasis.

These days are like years, ripping away my trust,
my faith, my understanding of mercy,
solidifying the power
of bone-chiselling dread.

I love you, more in your helplessness,
in your patience for the final command, lingering,
red sores forming under your eyes,
fingers cold, purple pale and never grasping.

I stay with you in that place, even when
I sleep, I never sleep without you with me.
I love you and I hurt for you
and I want your release from this
brutal collapse of your form.

**Why or even how you are lingering so long,
even the doctor can't say.
I think you are buffering us from the pain of your loss
I think sometimes maybe mercy burns
hotter than punishment.**

**And these times
life surpasses understanding,
when the bottom current over quicksand thins,
breaking the chrysalis, clearing the way
for an unwanted redemption.**



**I am lifted
Blood on a field Blood in a cloud
and then so many
streams flowing, unassuming.**

**I take your hand, lean
over you and kiss your forehead,
weeping, praying, saying
again and again I love you, thank you.
Your breaths are short, coming from below
not from your chest, but from your deepest gut,
stillness, ease, a letting go.**

**I drop like a bird on your shoulder.
I know you are leaving. You know
it is a beautiful alchemy, accumulation
of a life so gloriously lived. I tell you
to take Jesus' hand and he will take you
to the golden tender light of eternal heaven.
You take his hand, and God
has become the atmosphere,
encapsulating, removing time.**

**Your last breath is more
a soft sigh than a breath,
not a cross-wind of struggle,
not a brush-stroke of "But wait.."
You are gone.**

**Seagulls fill the view from the window,
circling, joyful in their angelic form.
You are free.**

**My heart has merged with yours,
forest blue, deep and rich and forever.**

**My mother, my powerful ally,
friend for all ages - goodbye,
the six-month journey to this point
was treacherous, the last weeks, tortuous,
but these final moments were divine,
was God's grace in full view, mercy
that healed all pain gone before,
resurrection visible like spread-out water lilies
or Elysian Fields, sublime.**

**My mother, the sky is again yours,
embracing the seen and unseen spectrums.
Your sky is prophecy, feeding
the bedrock and the water's reflection,
all parts proved sacred, identical
to the immutable moving whole.**

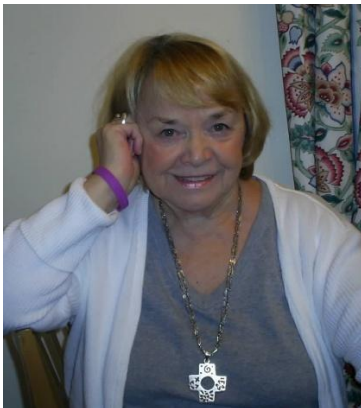




(Eileen Grayhurst aka Lee Porter and Marilyn Monroe) 1952



(Denis Grayhurst and Eileen Grayhurst wedding 1963)



(Eileen (Lee) Grayhurst 2005)

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Ghost

**Gone, dripping
down the drain
after a cut.**

**Gone, the sweet flavour lingering
of maple syrup on the tongue.**

**Gone like democracy from a land
conquered by a tyrant.**

**Gone like inspiration from the crushing
overtones, undertones, all-tones
of relentless grief.**

**Gone like a love that was once unique
as it was necessary, stretching her grace
over my home, my family and my faith.**

**Gone, and I have gone with it into a blackhole spin -
dream, here, there, no commitment, no connection
to the divine or otherwise, endless spin, inertia.**

**Here, a film between myself and life,
watching a screen, moving, getting involved
by remembering how, feeling none of it really counts,
feeling myself only playing a worn-out part.**

**Here, things I knew before
become nothing I know now, vulture-feeding
off my past false understanding, landing
in a heap of wet sawdust, taking forever
to make a move so I don't make any move
and just sit, watching, not even waiting anymore.**

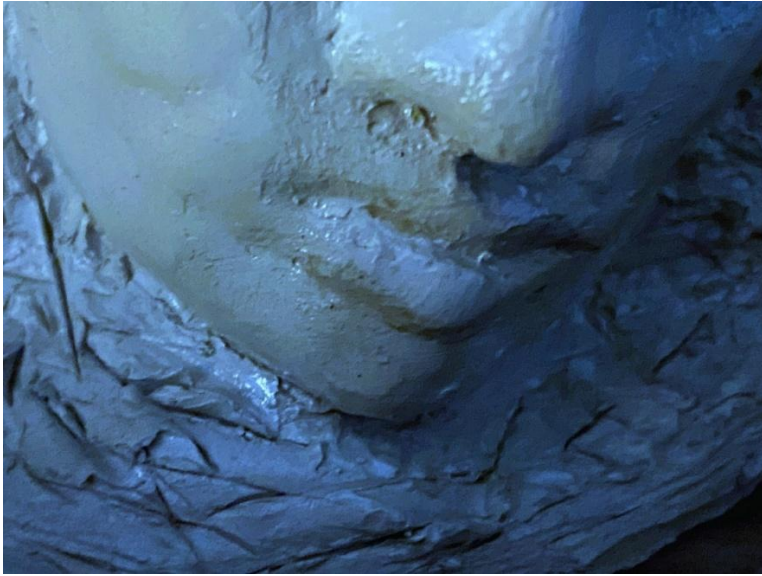
**Gone like she is gone,
unreachable, ephemeral,
somewhere else.**

Sparrow Wars

I

Sludge water dripping
into an already clogged pipe.
Blood in my microscope, torn out
like a diary page, necessary to
analyze the ingredients.
Will the wound lift? be inverted
into a creative windstorm or
a nemesis spread,
spidery-vein spreading
until the curse is complete
and conquers?

I know love is alive,
and that hot and sudden
is the joy that stems from a miraculous shift.
I know building comes with the morning,
comes like brimming sorrow and goes
to a final destination like all things final,
temporary, broken and sliced down the centre -
undergoing a brutal mitosis.



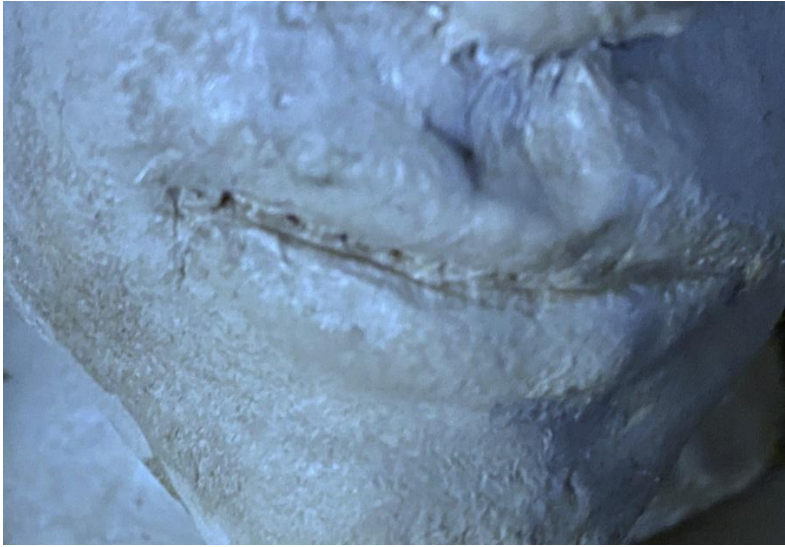
II

Empty tables
clawed apart within
with spikes a-blazing on the edges,
and the light of the moon
high in the sky,
hardly visible.

Time is a dust heap I roll inside of,
never making a dent
or relieving my extremities from
the grim cover.

Beaten by the relentless overwhelm
and the digging dream that digs further down
more than ever before, pulled in by
gravity unspeakable and charged.

Living each day bent over, cane-walking,
repeating anguish, shooting pain and dough-bread
kneading, never baking, never
consuming.



III

**When grief comes
it comes at the maximum degree
of chaos, doubt and all things
unsustainable.**

**Even there, in the squander and grave
disadvantage, I will surrender to trust,
protect the embryo of my new understanding
as precious as it is,
as the only intention worthy of holding,
clinging to despite the toxic smog encircling,
twirling over my extremities, nose-diving into
my internal organs, shutting me down.**

**It is there and its power is the past, old.
It is able to kill but I am not afraid.
I hold the jewel of this glowing budding faith
and that is all I will look at.**

**My heart is crushed, undone by the weight of grief
but my soul is tiny blooming. Let it be key.
Let everything be where everything needs to be.
Both are real. Only one will have authority
and receive my attention, elixir formed, a trickle,
ingested.**



IV

Drum beat

no beat

**I raise my arms
and scream hosana.**

**The drawers are empty
hunger parts my soul
into quarters. Stand up
and take account, no one
is listening.**

**Four months of stagnant emotion,
upheaval at the roots, planted again
somewhere less familiar and less fecund.
Faith and despair overlap, cross paths, join
together as a new entity.**

**Who understands? There is no understanding
to be had, only the ceramic bird on the shelf, winking,
and the air, heavy and humid one minute
and cold, oxygen-free, the next.**

**In my mind is an argument
existential, without possible resolution.**

**In my core there is shock at the terror
of disintegration, and for how long?
How much more? And still there is more.**

**In my being, I knew God
came with mercy, with Jesus and the peace
of infinity - washing clean, a soft joy
without degrees but only flowing, showering, eternal.
In between I wake up and I cannot see forward,
I listen, but I cannot be one with what I hear.**

**Holy Spirit, holy, do not escape me,
be clear, re-construct my devotion,
find me my union seed, to plant and tend to
simple devotion.**



V

Jesus, you let me live.

**I will sit with you
hand in hand.**

**I know you
in my personal crisis -
faith obliterated, reseeding
in a lucky garden.**

**I will trust you with all my problems,
with my anxiety like a dysfunctional
city, polluting the roadway, the airway
with its violence and indifference.**

**I will breathe easy, knowing you are here,
that you own it because I give it to you
and reckoning is rescue, in your hands,
miracles are coming - life changing,
a kinship with your divinity.**

**You are sovereign, my still-point, my doorway
into perpetual redemption.**

**I will collect the fruit and sit beside you,
eating together - no hunger, no hurry -
You and I, I with you, you
holding my hand.**



VI

**When I see the unseen
in a twisted longing
death-circle fantasy,
irresistible hope,
and drive to make that hope happen
even though
I am not a citizen of that land,
not meant to come forward
and shine with those deeds,
then I fail and live for an
illusionary future, creating a
hellish now, ripe with lack
and disappointment.**

**Bend on your knees, bow
to the one-name of God,
feel the slap of sobriety,
the consequences of depending
on your own wit and power
which is like a gnat trying to cross through
a tornado or a choir that sings without
glorifying.**

**I am learning that being conceived
and being re-conceived
is the cure for fear, the fire
that watches a greater fire,
burning enough,
releasing enough
to rejoice and just burn, a light, a warmth
transient, but elementally,
in this way, everlasting.**



VII

**It is hard to hold purpose
when purpose no longer holds you
when the single curtain seals the window
blocking the sun and sky,
making you blind so you only touch corners
and never a door.**

**All things lost their ownership, just wandered
aimless, squandering energy like tossed pebbles,
no pattern, sinking.
Governance failed, was only an imagined
corridor leading to a chaotic marketplace
that doled out meals, lacking nutrients and staying power.**

**Each shape to take and hold and shift from each day
was hard labour, exhausting to perform,
pretending hope existed when hope had abandoned.
I was not afraid because my fears
were pushed hard into my face,
swelling my eyes so they could only see behind.
Death won out over the light, won obedience -
the middle and opposite, smelling.
Death smells bad
smells like an inevitable succumbing
to rot, betrayal, rendering
endurance useless
and even the holiest of faiths debunked.**

There is a string before me,
thin and golden and unbreakable.
There is something I see I never saw.
I have collided with the consuming tyranny death,
felt it swerve and twist through
every vein, enter, break my heart,
break the truths I had before.

The string dangles,
dripping down from
my inadequate cries
and a mangled prayer,
comes shining a faint intermittent glow.
It is small and so am I, minute,
hardly there, but there.



VIII

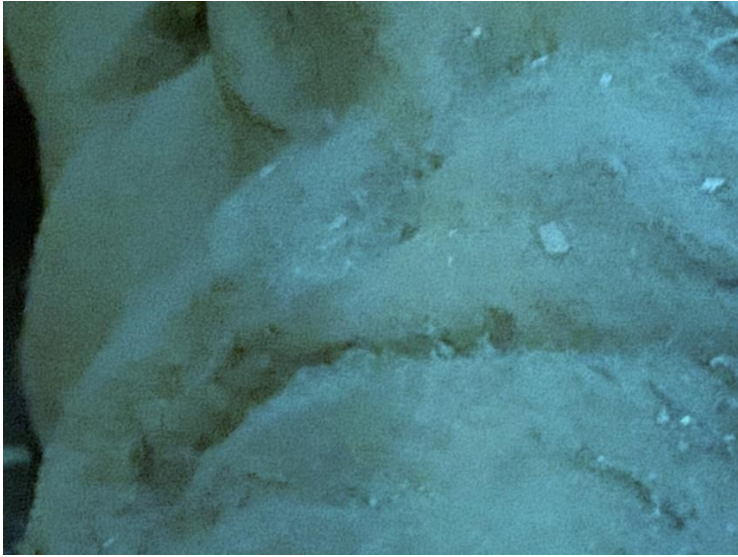
If I talk again,
I will keep my end-mind twisted
so it cannot speak or formulate
a plan.

I have no constitution for plans
or wherewithal for achieving
human-made provisions.

If I talk again,
silence me into prayer,
conversing only with the angelic order,
strengthened by devotion and the power
of obedience.

If I try to be a player,
remind me of my meek capacity,
sting me with regret and slap me
into a state of surrender.

If I try to enter a world not my own,
laugh at me, call me out
and put me in my designated low-chair place,
a dreamer, advancing
no further.



IX

Falling away like before
launching water at the moon
then releasing it, scattering it
onto a lifeless surface.

Songs and singing are murderous,
selling the false business of a buffet
inspiration, and poetry, like a sober
prayer or pleading, blossoms in a place
where no one comes or looks or even cares.

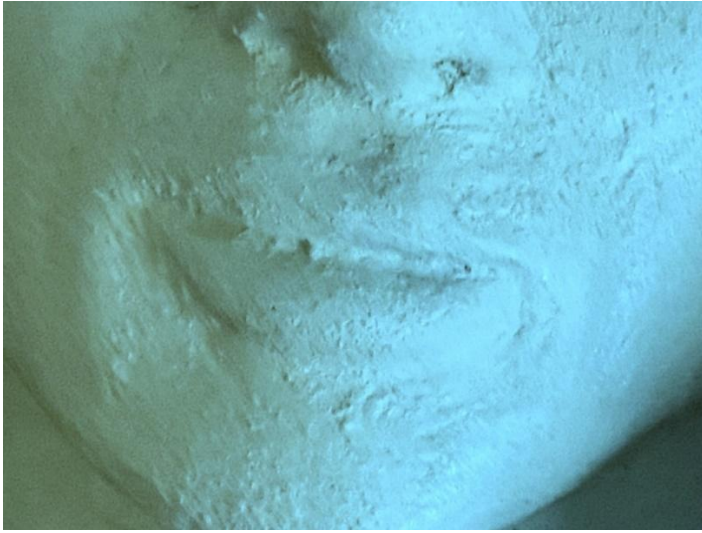
Things that once stretched
with divine determination towards health,
now fall backwards into addiction and defeat.
Chaos always hovering at the entrance door,
violence a few footsteps away.

Idealism once trapped in my mind has sieved through
incrementally and now in my mind, a faint flow
of tainted possibility, mostly consumed by despair, mostly
non-existence, more hesitant than youthful,
more resigned than risking.

The days drive on the same,
and how I wish I was in a state
of conspiratorial superiority
or in a social bliss of nonchalance.
How I wish I could be like I used to be,
believing despite the odds,
calling for help and receiving it.

**What is this weakness,
this futureless waste of now,
pressing on all my joints,
an aching misery perpetual?**

**What are these days
when I can find no hope
to master this tortuous doom?
I am removed. A thin slice everywhere
between me and reality. Only sorrow brings
me near enough to touch, only happiness lives
inside my dreams or in my memories,
stripping the peel from the fruit,
dropping it to rot in the mud-marsh with the rest
of my wearied hold on merciful possibilities.**



X

**I don't see
the far-reaching joy
to build a future on,
just disappointment, false-starts,
isolation and how-can-that-be?**

**I don't see
but I know the builders take their time
to make sure what needs to be aligned
is aligned, that broken hearts can
become hardened hearts
and hope is dangerous for those who are desperate,
perishing at the foot of the mirage.**

**But there is a noble prophesy to follow,
to stand by and wait for.
There is true love, love that alters bitter grief
that wraps your love in its healing balm until
it blooms and your dry throat is
finally soothed, your wounds are rewarded,
transformed into strengths exposed,
safe on the marriage altar.**



XI

**Time does not help
to lessen the sharp scream
of amputation, or to help gain
a way to cope, maimed as I am,
lacking resilience.**

**Prayer does not answer
any questions or bury the emptiness
outside of my body, allowing
room that can be filled, even with only
a faint groaning microscopic creation.**

**Love that sits beside me,
day-after-day, holding my hand,
stays with me - miraculous devotion -
helps while it is there,
but does not stop the welling-up of sorrow,
that will not ease or be appeased
in solitude or by distraction.**

**Faith is a word that sparks
but cannot ignite. I sink down again
on my broken knees. I cannot rise.
I try and I try, but
I cannot overcome.**



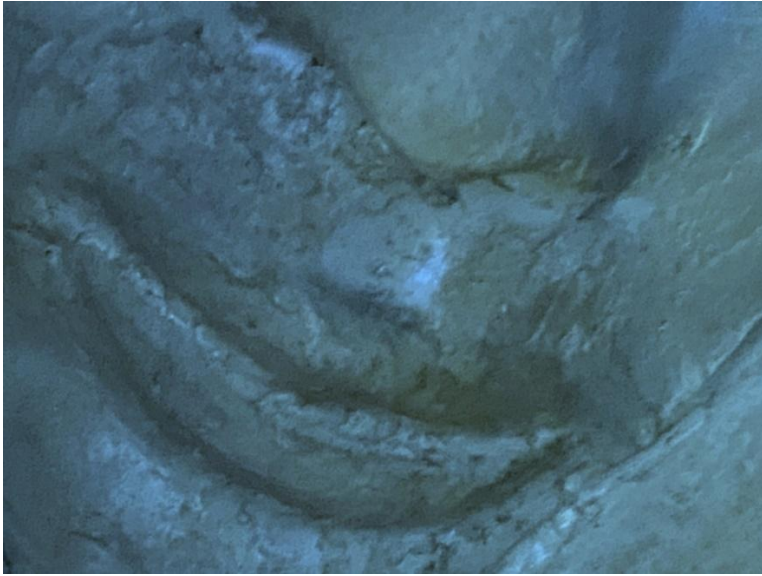
XII

God do you love me?
Everyday I fall short
of receiving your love,
blocked and stalled and wading
knee-deep in sewage mud.
I cannot take a step. I cannot
hear you anymore or
feel your mercy move the spoke
a mile, an inch, a fraction of
a way out of this criminal sleep,
arrested every day.

I try to take a breath,
try to step but I cannot
move. Please God, show yourself
to me again. I am aching all over,
joints on fire, mind - ablaze in jet-fuel burning
heat, tired all the time, cut off
from your glory.
Cut off no matter my prayers
and my pleas.

Please God, take my hand,
recognize me as one of your own.

I long for you.
I need your grace
to lift me, now,
trumpets calling,
advancing, only with you,
loved, permitted.



XIII

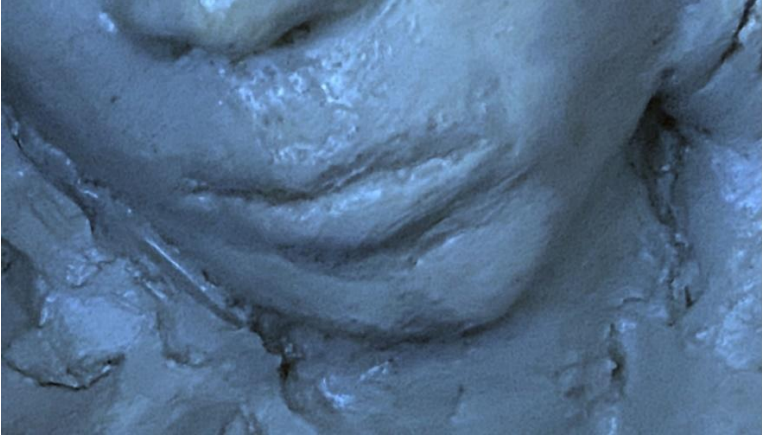
**A hive blasted
by poison.
A blood-letting
in crave of a cure.
Two close-together cliffs
jumped across, looking
closer than they are.**

**In the whirlspin of a fall -
arms broken, extremities blasted,
crying out for someone from the angelic order
to swoop down and placate the pain.
But no angel-being arrives and what is broken
remains broken, deformed and starting to heal
that way, into a permanent liability.**

**Even then, when stuck thigh-deep in forsaken ground,
God is close, washing our cracked bodies,
cradling our defeat, saying**

**My Love doesn't always answer with a clean slate
or a put-on spell so all hurt is forgotten,
not a trace left traceable. Sometimes
My Love just sits with you, beside the pain,
lets you know I am here,
here, in the empathetic love of others,
here, in your own resilience each morning to carry on,
here, in your determination to stay close to me**

**as you anguish and ache,
unable to walk or fully wake,
seeing that nothing turned out
the way you saw it
in your times of highest harmonic resonance
the way
you were sure it would.**



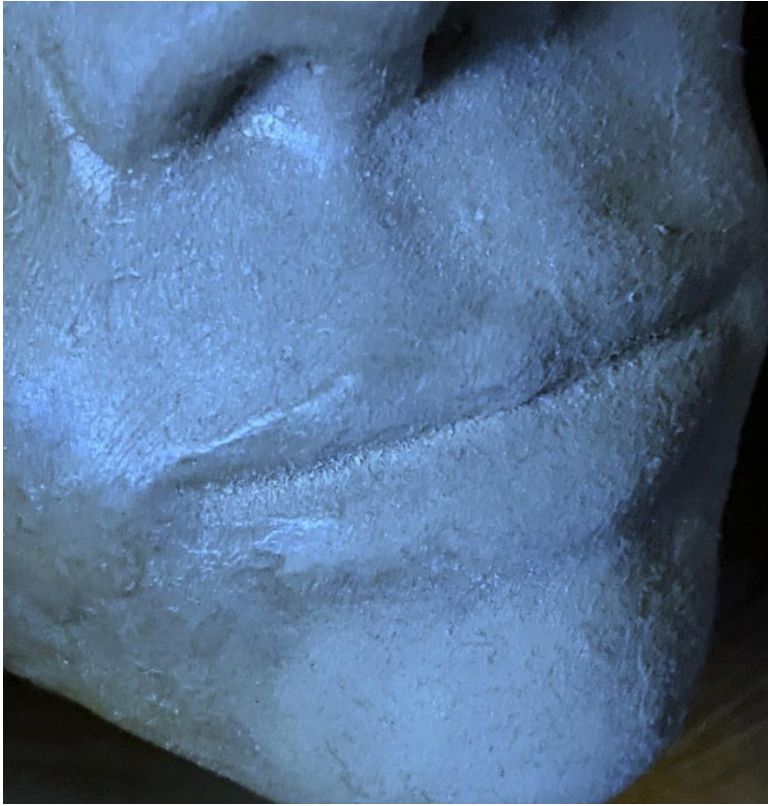
XIV

**Will you speak to me again
like before death cracked my windpipe
like when death still hovered thick in the air
but you were there surrounding everything
with the weight of your love?**

**Will you answer me again
cooling my shape, giving back force
to my petering-out flame
so I can grow again, still tied to your mercy
and the joy of having dreams?**

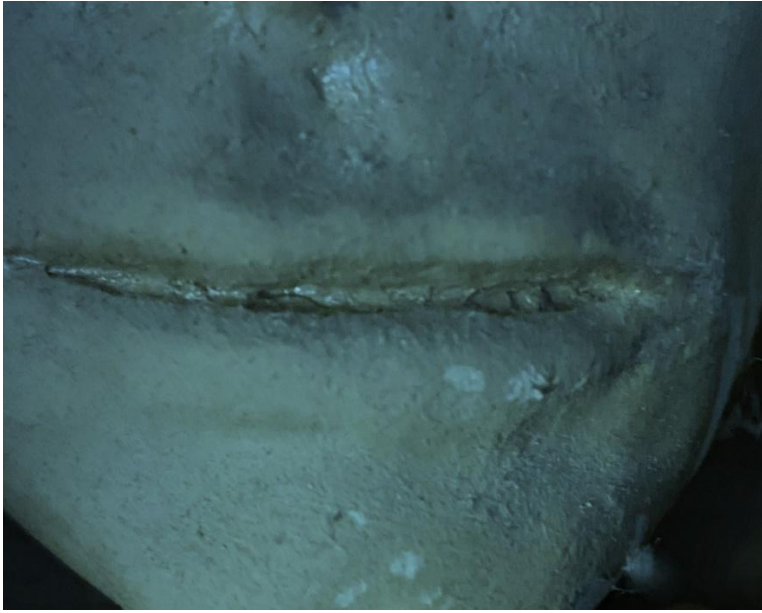
**Will I know you again
despite my mutations
and the iron that rotates sickeningly
in my core, using my energy
for lesser aspirations?**

**Will you love me again
and I will know that love
igniting its current through
my every predicament,
bonding me unbreakable
to your side, inside
your privileged embrace?**



XV

**First thing,
you are here.
I wake up and we are talking,
merged in a matter-of-fact
conversation. My need, my only way
to take a step in the morning.
More and more, without you, I can't
exist or comprehend a thing.
Then why this endless desert, the
hard bloated boils erupting
every time I move?
How is it, you are here, but there
is so much pain still, so much struggle
just to keep alive?
How do I feel so close to you and need
you more than I ever have, have you
more than I ever have, with such
drought and trembling-burns burning everyday,
throughout the days, echoing - no medicine, no food,
just you and I in this high heat,
where I am barely capable,
but somehow capable.**



XVI

**Then the bitter defeat
was burning like a sin
committed, recognized
and unforgiveable.**

**Then on a hill, heavy with
weighted down legs and
an injury there, debilitating but
unexplained, the challenge came
to walk.**

**Walk slowly at first, walk like
I can walk even though the reins
are dropped and I have lost my mother,
lost life's victory over death and the comfort
of an unbreakable love broken,
altered, intangible now as an angel's skin
or a hope held for decades unrealized.**

**Walk with my mortal burden, stumbling without
a path, a cane or a flat plane. Twist in my ankle, twist
in my knee, swollen, bloated with a hot fever, walk.**

**Face a direction, walk, slowly,
commit and make it my own.**



XVII

**Soak the born
in their own initial conception
to remember the pure-memory-pockets,
the truth of miracles.**

**Underline everything that matters
and read it again until no small word
is skimmed over or taken for granted.**

**Open the shelter doors and let all animals
in, wild ones, broken ones, aggressive and tame.
Free with a blessing
every dream that isn't false,
and follow your deepest duty -
both desirous and undesirous divine commands.**

**Under the blanket, conspiracies are made.
They grow limbs that look like light but exclude
humility and the thumb-print of surrender.**

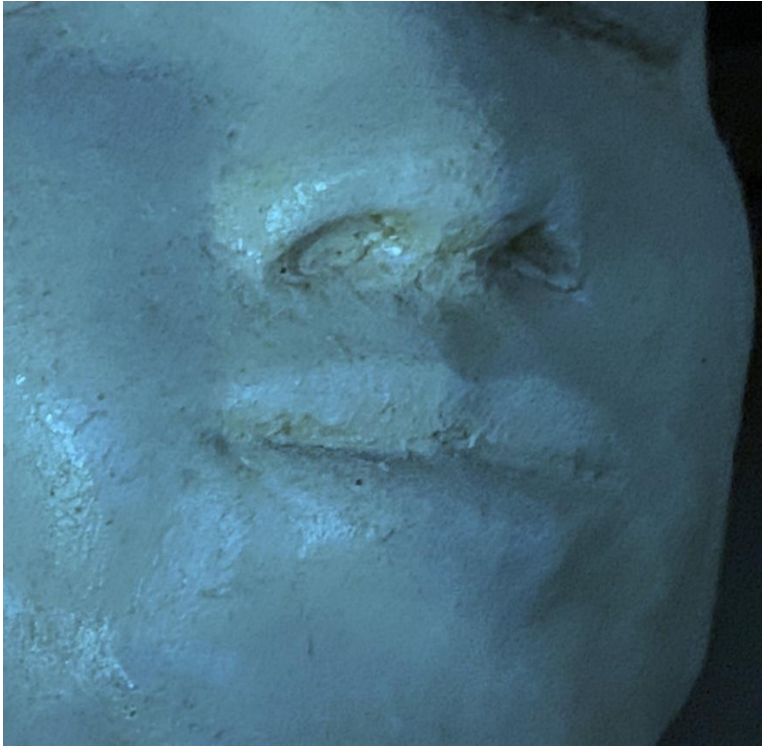
**The atmosphere is big,
the button-hole is small.**

**I am small when I toss
my self-determination out as wisdom
and fail at every turn.**

**Mercy comes with obedience,
obedience comes with trust, and then finally
freedom.**

**The dying are trapped in their wounds.
The living, in their success at survival,
but the gift is always
open for everyone, and changing
even without core movement.**

**I have a boat and that is all I own.
I see flowers on the shore, rooted in the sand.
I see yellow and sometimes, I see gold.**



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Twilight

**There is a beat in the darkening air
that whispers of love and laughter**

**There is song in the rippling wind
so moving
so unmeasured
that even dreams
cannot meet its glory**

**There is colour
There is more than power
in one stroke
in one fallen ray
that gives rhythm
to a discordant day**

**They say
Night comes
like death comes
 eventually**

**But there,
Oh there! The first star . . .**

Publication Acknowledgments

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Synchronized Chaos; Setu; Lothlorien Poetry Journal and anthology Volume 2; The Tower Journal; Poetry Life & Times; Turk's Head Review; Black Mirror Magazine; Indiana Voice Journal; The Stray Branch; Novelmasters; Veil - Journal of Darker Musings; Creative Talents Unleashed; Boston Poetry Magazine; Wascana Review; TreeHouse Arts; Purple Patch; Rocket Boy Poetry Page; Poetry Salzburg Review; Eunoia Review; Our Poetry Archive; The Plowman: A Journal of International Poetry; Atunis Galaxy Poetry; Raven Cage Zine; Outlaw Poetry; Creation and Criticism; Poets' Espresso Review; Medusa's Kitchen; New Mystics; Think Pink; Chicago Record Magazine; Winamop; The Peregrine Muse

My Mother's Sky was nominated for Sundress Publications "Best of the Net" 2024 – Synchronized Chaos, September 2024 issue – one long poem nominated

About the Author



Allison Grayhurst has been nominated six times for “Best of the Net” for her poems in 2024/2018/2017/2015.

She has over 1,400 poems published in more than 540 international journals and anthologies in Canada, United States, England, India, Ireland, China, Scotland, Wales, Italy, Bangladesh, Romania, Turkey, Austria, Zambia, Korea, New Zealand, Nepal, Kosovo, Colombia and Australia.

In 2018, her book *Sight at Zero*, was listed #34 on CBC’s “Your Ultimate Canadian Poetry List”.

In 2025, her work was translated into Italian and published in “International Web Post.” Eleven poems were translated into Portuguese and published on FaceBook.

In 2024, her work was translated into Italian and published in “Italia News Media – Alessandria Today”, in “Saturno Magazine” and in “Il Vischio e la Rosa” anthology, into Albanian in “Orfeu.AL” in “Gazeta Destinacioni”, and in

“Ciceroni”, and also into Korean in “Jeju The Pen Literature”.

In 2023, her work was translated in Korean and published in “Jnuri Magazine”.

In 2020, her work was translated into Chinese and published in "Rendition of International Poetry Quarterly" and in “Poetry Hall”.

She has been interviewed eleven times in print, as well as a TV interview, with translations of her interviews in Italian and Albanian, published in Italy, England and Kosovo.

Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers, a Porcepic Book, in Vancouver in 1995.

Since then, she has published twenty-one other books of poetry and twelve collections with Edge Unlimited Publishing.

Prior to the publication of *Somewhere Falling* she had a poetry book published, *Common Dream*, and four chapbooks published by The Plowman.

Her poetry chapbook *The River is Blind* was published by Ottawa publisher above/ground press December 2012.

In 2014 her chapbook *Surrogate Dharma* was published by Kind of a Hurricane Press, Barometric Pressures Author Series.

In 2015, her book *No Raft – No Ocean* was published by Scars Publications.

Also, her book *Make the Wind* was published in 2016 by Scars Publications.

As well, her book *Trial and Witness – selected poems*, was published in 2016 by Creative Talents Unleashed (CTU Publishing Group).

Her book *Tadpoles Find the Sun* was published in 2020 by Cyberwit.

More recently, her book *Running, lightwave riding* was published by Cyberwit 2023.

Collaborating with Allison Grayhurst on the lyrics, Vancouver-based singer/songwriter/musician Diane Barbarash has transformed eight of Allison Grayhurst's poems into songs, creating a full album entitled *River – Songs from the poetry of Allison Grayhurst*, released 2017.

Allison Grayhurst is an ethical vegan for the animals. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay.

Some of the places her work has appeared in include Parabola (Alone & Together print issue summer 2012); SUFI Journal (Featured Poet in Issue #95, Sacred Space); Elephant Journal; Literary Orphans; Blue Fifth Review; The American Aesthetic; The Brooklyn Voice; Five2One; Agave Magazine; JuxtaProse Literary Magazine, Drunk Monkeys; Now Then Manchester; South Florida Arts Journal; Gris-Gris; The Muse – An International Journal of Poetry, Storm Cellar, morphrog (sister publication of Frogmore Papers); New Binary Press Anthology; Straylight Literary Magazine (print); Chicago Record Magazine, The Milo Review; Foliate Oak Literary Magazine; The Antigonish Review; Dalhousie Review; The New Quarterly; Wascana Review; Poetry Nottingham International; The Cape Rock; Ayris; Journal of Contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian Poetry (now called The Journal); The Toronto Quarterly; Fogged Clarity, Existere; Boston Poetry Magazine; Decanto; White Wall Review.

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Quotes

“Allison Grayhurst’s poetry combines the depth and dark intensity of Sylvia Plath, the layered complex imagery of Dylan Thomas and the philosophical insights of Soren Kierkegaard, taking the reader on a fearless journey through the human condition, delving with honesty into death, grief, loss, faith, commitment, motherhood, and erotic love. Grayhurst intertwines a potent spirituality throughout her work so that each poem is not simply a statement or observation, but a revelation that demands the reader’s personal involvement. Grayhurst’s poetic genius is profound and evident. Her voice is uniquely authentic, undeniable in its dignified vulnerability as it is in its significance,” *Kyp Harness*, legendary singer/songwriter, cartoonist, author of ‘Wigford Rememberies’ and ‘The Abandoned’, Nightwood Editions; www.kypharness.net

“Allison Grayhurst is the Queen of Catharsis. Her poems are like cathedrals witnessing and articulating in unflinching graphic detail the gritty angst and grief of life, while taking it to rare clarity, calm and comfort in an otherwise confusing world of deception, mediocrity and degradation. Allison Grayhurst takes the sludge of life, and with fearless sharpness of eye and heart she spins it free of maggots with the depth of honour and passion. Allison Grayhurst's work is haunting, majestic and cleansing, often leaving one breathless in the wake of its intelligence, hope, faith and love amidst the muck of life. Many of Allison Grayhurst's poems are simply masterpieces booming with thunderous insight begging to be in Bartlett's Quotations, lines such as "I drink necessity's authority." Nothing is wishy-washy in the realm of Allison Grayhurst. Allison Grayhurst's work is sustaining, enriching, and deepening for the soul to read... a light of sanity in the world. As a poet, Allison Grayhurst

is a lighthouse of intelligent honour... indeed, intelligence rips through her work like white water," *Taylor Jane Green*, BA, RIHR, CHT, Registered Spiritual Psychotherapist and author of *Swan Wheeler: A North American Mythology and The Rise of Eros*.

"Grayhurst's rapturous outpouring of imagery makes her poems easily enjoyable ... Like a sear the poet seeks to fathom sensual and spiritual experience through the images of a dream," *Canadian Literature*.

"Her poems read like the journal entries of a mystic – perhaps that what they are. They are abstract and vivid, like a dreamy manifestation of soul. This is the best way, in prose, one can describe the music which is ... the poetry of Allison Grayhurst," *Blaise Wigglesworth*, *Oh! Magazine: Ryerson's Arts and Culture Voice*.

"Grayhurst's poetry is a translucent, ethereal dream in which words push through the fog, always searching, struggling, and reaching for the powerful soul at its heart. Her work is vibrant and shockingly original," *Beach Holme Publishers*.

"Allison Grayhurst's poetry appears visceral, not for the faint of heart, and moves forward with a dynamism, with a frenetic pulse. If you seek the truth, the physical blood and bones, then, by all means, open the world into which we were all born," *Anne Burke*, poet, regional representative for Alberta on the League of Canadian Poets' Council, and chair of the Feminist Caucus.

"Read at your peril. You will never look at this world in quite the same way again. Your eye will instinctively search the sky for eagles and scan the dark earth for the slightest movement of smallest ant, your heart will reach for tall mountains, bathe in the most intimate of passions and in the grain and grit of our

earth. Such is Allison Grayhurst. Such is her poetry," *Eric M. Vogt*, poet and author.

"Grayhurst is a great Canadian poet. All of Allison Grayhurst's poetry is original, sometimes startling, and more often than not, powerful. Anyone who loves modern poetry that does not follow the common path will find Grayhurst complex, insightful, and as good a poet as anyone writing in the world today. Grayhurst's poetry volumes are highly, highly recommended," *Tom Davis*, poet, novelist and educator.

"Biting into the clouds and bones of desire and devotion, love and grief, Allison Grayhurst basks the reader, with breathtaking eloquence, in an elixir of words. Like lace, the elegance is revealed by what isn't said. This is stunning poetry," *Angela Hryniuk*, author of 'no visual scars'.

"Allison Grayhurst is a poet whose work is characterized by startling imagery and uncompromising emotion, whose pieces have appeared in prestigious magazines. Lights, darks, colors, and passions intertwine throughout the pages of her work," *Louise E. Allin*, Literature and Language.

"When I read Allison Grayhurst's poetry, I am compelled by the intensity and strength of her spirituality. Her personal experience of God drives her poetry. With honesty and vulnerability, she fleshes out the profound mystery of knowing at once both the beauty and terror of God's love, both freedom and obedience, deep joy and sorrow, both being deeply rooted in but also apart from the world, and lastly, both life and death. Her poems undulate through these paradoxes with much feeling and often leave me breathless, shaken. Allison Grayhurst's poems are both beautiful and difficult to behold," *Anna Mark*, poet and teacher.

“The breath of roles covered in Allison Grayhurst’s poetry is exceptional. Even poems covering similar perspectives express subtle distinctions, distinctions which add depth to the poet’s larger themes. The cohesive psychology of the poet is clear, allowing for long reads and re-reads.” says author *Patrick Linsenmeyer*.

“Allison Grayhurst’s poetry has a tribal and timeless feeling, reminiscent of the Biblical commentary in Ecclesiastes,” *Cristina Deptula*, editor of Synchronized Chaos.

Books by Allison Grayhurst

Paperbacks with Edge Unlimited Publishing:

Book 1: Journey of the Awakening, 1997, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CH6WO5Y; ISBN-10: 1478189339; ISBN-13: 978-1478189336

Book 2: The Longing to Be, 1998, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CH94ZNK; ISBN-10: 1478197684; ISBN-13: 978-1478197683

Book 3: Death and Other Possibilities, 2000, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CHB8M0K; ISBN-10: 1478208163; ISBN-13: 978-1478208167

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Book 8: Pushing Through The Jelly Fire, 2010, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CHXZYOA; ISBN-10: 1478256567; ISBN-13: 978-1478256564

Book 9: The River is Blind, 2012, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CICVQ6K; ISBN-10: 1478280131; ISBN-13: 978-1478280132

Book 10: Seamless – A Collection of Love Poems, 2012, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CIFTU0G; ISBN-10: 1479304816; ISBN-13: 978-1479304813

Book 11: If I Get There – Poems of Faith and Doubt, a collection, 2012, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CIZQGI0; ISBN-10: 1479348740; ISBN-13: 978-1479348749

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Four chapbooks published under the pseudonym of Jocelyn Kain:

Jumana, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 0-929002-36-9

Perfect Love, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 0-929002-66-0

Before the Dawn, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 0-929002-11-3

Joshua's Shoulder, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 1-55072-025-2

"Allison Grayhurst's poetry has a tribal and timeless feeling, reminiscent of the Biblical commentary in Ecclesiastes," Cristina Deptula, editor of Synchronized Chaos.

"When I read Allison Grayhurst's poetry, I am compelled by the intensity and strength of her spirituality. Her poems leave me breathless, shaken. Grayhurst's poems are both beautiful and difficult to behold," Anna Mark, poet.

Allison Grayhurst has been nominated for "Best of the Net" six times. She has over 1,400 poems published in over 530 international journals, including translations of her work. She has 25 published books of poetry and 6 chapbooks. She is an ethical vegan and lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay; www.allisongrayhurst.com

