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

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It is this way, togetherness:  
A covenant with tenderness and speaking thoughts  
only glimpsed.  
The snow falls like rain as the afternoon moves  
without time, our hands pressed as one,  
lips and then, something better. Always  
miraculous, unexpected, awakening. Always  
us, vanishing and then re-emerging with these things  
of harmony and friction engulfing our scent and path. Soon,  
the tiger lilies will bloom and being just us will be made difficult  
with the children gathered in our arms. But this ‘difficult’ is  
whole and adds to our liberation - making coffee, laughing  
at things shared and only ours.  
It is what was prayed for, what years and hardship has not  
diluted, but has fused into an unbreakable bond - us -  
the summoning of all our parts - ancient, immediate  
so that even when death comes or fate and terrible sobbing,  
neither of us will ever be again  
without the other alone.

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

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

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

He listens to the ducks’ lipless sounds.  

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The past culminates in this single outpouring. It is a privileged evolution. It is months of misfortune exterminated by the exertion of our mouths. Strange rhythms are risked, foreheads pressed, giving way to beautiful unadulterated disclosure.

You are simple like death is simple, like death is unmistakable, containing the most feverish and trying of mysteries within its boundless domain. You are beautiful like a cat is beautiful silently sitting, galactic in its sensual form, giving with its gaze substance to voice and blood. You are fire-driven like stars and like sex, in perpetual combustion, with an inner pulse of endless dance, dancing in savage, mystical tides.

You are gentle like a raindrop caught in a lucky palm, gentle like the shelter of a best friend's arms. You are more than sun and bird and fox, more than soil to my groundless heart. All I bless and all I need, I hold because of you. No meaning nor madness could replace the milk and breath that you are.

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

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

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

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DIANE BARBARASH
river
songs from the poetry of Allison Grayhurst

Produced by Diane Barbarash
Vocals and guitar by Diane Barbarash
Lyrics by Allison Grayhurst
Lyrical compositions with additions by Diane Barbarash
Musical composition and arrangement by Diane Barbarash
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Starlings Murmurings photo by Andrew Forsyth at thewildlifephotographer.com
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Diane plays an American Fender Strat and a Martin HD28V
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River is available online at Bandcamp and iTunes