
Surrogate Dharma



Allison Grayhurst

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Long ways and no ways

Out of phase with the frame others are drawn to. At last,
illuminated, released from artificial expectations.
You will not correspond or accelerate into my atmosphere.
My magic is inward, and the gravel you picked up and misplaced,
rolling it over your lips to find a perfect indentation,
I have held it too - for moments at a time, swinging in the wind,
fruitful. But I know that is not my natural practice or
a possible habitation for me. I must stand behind boards with
the spiders, while you are sunning -
an artery of pearl-like significance,
attentive, lubricating glory, improving
your already abundant harvest.
I will not make you flash-cards to categorize my plight,
or give you the pulley cord of my broken development to pull
and make use of. I am not a substitute
for a makeshift wedding ring.
My only protection is to give up. So I give
you up. Your glorious atlas open, appealing to the otherwise
immobile crowd, but not to me. I've left the track, left this road
I picked - for one year I have been walking and have met
so few believers. It has been inadequate. You
have been fraudulent and have unknowingly plagued
the thrusts of my yearning. Energy matters: what doesn't fit
doesn't graduate into a tangible weight, will never be
sun or iceberg.
Long ways I have loved. For hours, I have kissed
the bridge of your nose,
conscious of my fixation. In my bed, I offered you supremacy.
Now summer draws me away, tells me this work is done,
asks me to go forward, to map and mend
a child's ragdoll that fell overboard
where the ocean stretches on and keeps
no hidden crevices for toys or wounds.

Waiting

is secondary, serves
to sustain the illusion. Better
to bathe in the molten heat, dig out weeds and pay the bills.
Better than pretending the chalk drawing won't fade,
that the overalls fit and the twirling webs glittering
in the sun do so solely for beauty's sake, not as nature's balance
to its otherwise invisibility.

Formations, adrenaline - geese call
as they split the undertones of sky. It is better
to have no fences, no boundaries actualized
by the mind's pride, no tangible hopes
of personal importance. The sidewalks are torn up
and there is nowhere to put my feet. I don't believe
in waiting, being patient while aroused.

Once upon a time a child's voice
was all I needed to save me - once there were scooters,
pigtails and baseball caps. Damn my world
for changing, for making me ready, but falling behind,
insufficient to nourish this latest being that has arisen.

I will not wait, not be killed daily
without knowing climax or the aftermath when nerves stop
scurrying and there is quiet enough to collect good memories.
Better to partake in war or to crush anthills.
Better to be left in my monastery where the brick walls
have a shadowy sustaining glow and my lover's heart
is walnut strong, drained of expectations,
giving, yes, but rudimentary, self-contained.

It starts

like precipitation, infusing
iron seeds that rest atop the ozone-dome
and flourish. Somehow I am coming to terms with
churches I will never go back to, and last-year's friends
who own creative nobility but fail to nourish.

It is starting, culminating like a blood clot,
anchoring me to my drive, wringing out my squishy insides
until they are parched, until the robin's song registers austere.

Escape happens in the morning,
wading through yesterday's debris,
fascinated by scars and euphoria that comes opening airways.

Can I conceive of a crime that will not haunt?
There are rules to follow, bones that fit into sockets,
sacred formations that must not be tampered with,
and speeches spoken, brave enough to own on paper.

Biting is war; be it biting on silver,
gently marking areolas, or lacerating wet teabags.
I forfeited what I thought was a shield, sure it was
more than only emptiness swelling. It was
a birthmark, nihilism reclining over my pre-destined zenith.

There are things that start then overtake.
They emerge pure as children,
touch ground and vaporize. August is hard.
In that critical heat, everything that wavers between worlds
gets erased - splits up into two categories
of corpses and lifeforms that take celestial flight - ends up
where water sinks or where water concentrates,
either way, falls
but does not flow.

Plastic

Plastered with glue,
sticking like betrayal like a spider's eggsack
to a branch. I watch your gorgeous
pontificating, watch you mourn just a little. The injury
rips only part of your body, fragments you.
Grief becomes a tremor,
an uncontrolled twitch under your left eye.

Everyday, I journey to the drug mart, handle
bread and vitamins in the same hour, thinking of your music,
showered by these harmonic intonations
of your irate loneliness.
I will never get clean. I knock down garbage bags,
pocket unsharpened pencils,
buy myself some tea, thinking today I will let go,
rid myself of your domination,
purchase a splendid fantasy to replace
your magnetism - saw at roots, trust
the broken staircase and climb.

You have been kind, when your thumb strokes
the back of my neck or when you let laughter escape
from your stoic eyes. Money
has never been my brimstone or firewood - there or not there,
but always with the fragrance of just-skinned leather. So
you see, that
is not what I want you for.

But I do want, and not just a portion of your stamina,
not just a gasp of deep disturbance, but to be at the vortex
of your desire, the one you rely on to rebuild your toy train set.

It is too much, picking up shampoo bottles, looking at lipstick.
I know it is too much - these yearnings that beat
and these necessities I need are the same, but you

are still in my mind
pushing, ploughing through and through,
saving me a plot beside your plot
beside the potpourri covering a stranger's grave.

this prevails

Footprints you appear in. Fences you break down.
Your back has become my meadow, laced with dandelion seed.
Your muscles twitch to the feel
of grasshoppers' brandishing wings.
Your shoulder blades combine under beetles' scurrying strides -
flesh becomes grass and grass becomes flesh becomes weeds,
connecting their incompatible sinews, intimately.

I plant myself on one side of you, searching for a conclusion.
Permanence is a chain. I take photos while you are sleeping.
I brush across the stubble in the cleft of your chin
with my cheek.

Holding is indefinite. Years counted
are like ivory appropriated, but at what cost?
We lift up our shirts, place ears over navels,
dwarfing any future with instinctual immediacy.

With each lip-graze our fears are gradually disempowered.
They shrink, and then we shrink-wrap them before they fully decay,
offering them an honoured yet secondary place.

Events are karma. Our karma is caged, dies
from the surgical stitch formed between us -
what was deemed inevitable is void of vibration,
outcast from its orbit.

You are a wall made of sponge, absorbing.
I will saturate. For you, I will not be hard or polished, but
exile my conscious desires, give crown
to a steady delirium. You will be central.
And this will happen without conditions.

The afternoon rises and what stands on either side
- be it memory or our impending dreams -
falls subject, subdued by our abiding bond.

Our Light Cannot Always Burn Whole

Nests that stay through winter
are similar to us at times - left abandoned
on high barren branches,
valueless until spring - if ever, even then, reclaimed.

We jog through bitter uneatable harvests, absorbing
disappointments as our only viable feast,
not heeding our self-honouring needs,
too proud to address imagined or deliberate injuries.

Jackets buttoned to the neck, we move in these sewer shafts,
trying to shake the foaming stench off
of each other's tailored attire.

On our bed, we are broken, letting our arms rest
like a Spanish squid's tentacles would rest,
pulled from pulsing waters. Our mouths primed for confession,
our eyes scanning features - short hair, skin under the eyes,
familiar necklines.

We tell each other these things are worth
the horror of abominations
accepted as societal norms, atrocities justified
as a soldier's directed bullet.

Here in a shut-in space, we can lock,
shed faculties of crusted reason,
create a colourful spread of sensuality, messaging
our blood vessels with deep oxygen, curing, learning
to make saliva and swallow.

We tell ourselves sometimes we wish
we could be like those who live
never knowing an intimate tender beauty,
like those who get shipwrecked,
daily hunted by a cancerous loneliness.

At times we wish this love didn't exist, then we could give in
to what lies beyond the cliff, defend our exit, salt the Earth
with a dramatic departure.

Those times, we hear a desolate chorus rising
and we vanish completely into its volcanic siren wind.

Other times, we talk. We watch squirrels dance across
our backyard trees, make tea, passing domestic glances,
gladly sharing the last spoonful
of bottled honey.

Something found

Babyskin and bare,
these roots protrude from
the steady earth, assaulted
by squirrels digging and the sleet
of nocturnal phantoms.
Breath, I need to breathe like being
touched and not so alone, received
in male waters and a female sky, accompanied
by tirades of kisses, kissing jellyfish and crows.
I need to move my eyes slowly across piano notes,
type each sad circumstance, shine my injury like
a just-bronzed statue and wait to be collected.
But the salt is fresh like thunder, entering my mouth,
making its way dryly down my throat and I am tired
of bitter happenstance that is boundless with surprises, never
worthy of a relieving smile. I am centred in this silence,
anticipating a hunt or legs I can conjoin
with my own. Flowers are small. I can hear trains in the morning
when windows are stubbornly closed,
when I am walking and it is dark,
and the space around fills me with the ache
of unintended solitude.

Changing skins

Months behind my eyes, splicing nerves, bonds,
virtues that have kept me solid.
As I look, my desires are dilating,
taking more in, red with surrender
and wanting to germinate but not here,
not beneath this sheet, but in the breeze,
to grow special, purer than a weed, expand,
not interacting with the elements but part of
them, geometrical, saving space, knowing passion like
a labour - confined to a pattern, somehow
boundless. Joy. I stand a virgin in your honeymoon.
I am made up of sunsets and dreamy afterglows. I am
putting this on, demanding as intoxication, kneeling in this
costume, assuming I am dependable, but
I am not. I should close these shutters, marry a
soft genuine smile. I should care more. So much
that is done is done, fatal, heavy as a hanging. If I could
dig behind my sockets and make a window, I would. I would
walk away, but lust is water, and more than lust
is worth every star.

Quagmire

Coming down, knowing now
that everything known is blindness,
deciphered speculation - constellations out there
that spin, conjoin, burst and create
are mesmerizing but lifeless - into the future,
out from the past - the power is menacing, somewhat,
and somewhat stale, stagnant, just 'happening' like storms happen
and the rising of the moon.

Rain on a leaf or an orange tabby chasing a shadow is
accessible, pleasantly startling, metaphysically invasive.

Many serious intellects are left crawling from the lack of sleep,
from acquiring too many codes and smug victories.

We are small, inside this body of God - a city, drooling with
arrogance and inquisitiveness. That is us in motion, devouring
the zenith and charting out mysteries.

But things get caught on other things. Dead butterflies
can still glow - behind clean glass, inside Berber-carpeted buildings,
all fluorescent lights and classifications.

We can point and name and even think
that energy starts and ends, forget that everything is circulation
and that life here is simple.

It would rather copulate, raise offspring, than count stars.

Inside this body of God, we are cupped in fluid boundaries,
by instinct, by undeniable emotion, stronger, yet part of, cerebral musings.
We feed from the Earth and we get hungry.

We have these telescopes, our catacombs of understanding,
but we also have pilgrimage, crust, heartbeat, dying,
soccer fields and song.

Do not define me

Do not define me
as a woman, or a wheel
of rolling curves, with lipstick
in my pocket and perfect polish on my shoes. I am
not interested in shoes.

I carry this body with two breasts and I have born and raised
children like a sacred treaty between the unmarked countries
of time and infinity. I have loved with two arms,
lived with thoughts of Schopenhauer in my sleep and nurtured
the orphan pup. Do not define me -
my sexuality is not confined to the tender receiving sigh,
not to the congregation of gossip and giggles
and the making of apple strudel. I do not knit,
though I bow to the knitters
more than I do to the intellectuals, and gossip bores me.
Talking bores me unless it is about God or the many ways
we are given to love - children, animals, art.
(Lover's love I only speak about in poetry, because that is
private). Do not define me. I would love to be
straight lines, proudly hanging, perfectly clear.
I would like to be brutal. Women can be brutal,
can be like a smile -
gloriously giving, razor sharp, androgynously
beautiful.

Ceramic-tile stuck

I cannot say the rim
is soft enough or that there is any place
I can be strong, afford myself aggression, brick-throwing,
penetrate for the sake of alteration,
for the possibility of scattering pieces of my tongue
on the train-tracks of thoughts of giving
“just enough to get a person through.”
Sober after the feast, air-raids and pumpkin smashing,
navigating the basement where floods happen and things
must be cleaned or thrown out.
In the bed, in the well-wishers award book, carving, craving
to be told that everything I wished for is owned,
not on loan - assimilated into the higher oblivious machine.
It is impossible to be noble without newness,
to taste liberty, remembering
this cold world is the necessary formula
to make remarkable heroes.
I can go to work collecting and stacking beach stones,
each atop of each, just such and such, let them sing
to someone’s eye. I can make water from the sun,
sipping the moon’s weeping.
I can run down the street with a white shirt on.
If I had a white shirt, I could wear it, rolled-up sleeves,
and run.

Complete, but

to no avail. Sitting as a new house sits
on its lot, needing occupants.
Sewer sludge, soiled napkins, anthills
too late underfoot. Held up by restlessness in the many gardens
of Mount Sisyphus, heave-hoe to the point
of rudimentary madness. Windows I look through, birch trees
I stop at to collect nuances, rest like the sparrow in hopeful camouflage,
wearing myself down with unrealizable dreams.
If I had claimed myself a calling
as a chaplain - ritualized pacing in university halls, my arm
around youth, accompanying my affection
with a spiritual smile, then I would have
the certainty of some kind of career, not be a carved body
on fire, totem of tripwires and earthquakes.
If I was a young starling neck deep in uncut grass,
pecking at exposed roots, I would be
sky, downspout, bush, tip of a cross on a steeple,
cured of isolation, taking flight and landing when I choose and
I would choose a fenced-in backyard
where a boy's imagination owns the splintered bench, weeds
and a dug-up secret hole. I would watch that boy plot his course
and leap, knowing no separation,
I would spread, sing
and fold.

Saltwater Sprint

A returning dream ruffled in my shell,
opening intermittent passages of discovering.
Crossbreezes and singular infinity,
by death and dying you buy me whole.
The slug's flesh merges miraculously with
the curve of a leaf - white pink on green, more potent
than a drop-cliff, than rebellion.
Stroking the skin of tree, I end up here, in the morning,
with the nesting squirrels collecting torn newspapers, swaying
with the telephone wires. Brilliance plays like chords
on the brink of chaos, almost fracturing sanity.
Suspended firm like a branch over traffic,
I hear riffs like cars arrive then leave.
Sleep, little lilac near the fence, I have learned
determination can solve most problems. Tomorrow I will make
the final break, orbit beyond the periphery of natural selection.
God, scoop me up in your cone, don't
let me doubt your goodness. If you are here,
I am living, I can let slip what I am capable of,
create origami with infants and animals.
I can climb the steps of any probability
just to feel you press up against my rigidity,
purify with kneading pressure
a hard illumination.

Endure

the brilliant fractures,
repetitions of wars and slaughterhouse squeals.
Once more, brought to the tower, looking
over - so easy to sway and not think of the
consequences. So easy to crash the wine bottle
over the piano-stand and stop the bad music playing, forgetting
there are so many things better left unexplored,
like feelings that extinguish boundaries,
that are soft as loneliness or under-appreciation.
Sunglasses always worn. Endure, wait for fullness or for medication,
wait for that one hour to be adorned by another's desire,
embroidered into another clothes - when wounds and failures,
(for that hour) are reduced, overpowered.
Moon mountains and muscles, patterns build life. God,
there is creation without you - there is everything -
grandfathers, butterflies and sand dunes.
Unpredictability is glorified. Minds rejoice,
gaining rules, workable explanations. Endure,
why must I? Why, when denied
a boat, a bed, a simple wild hand roaming? Love is absurd.
Love is you God, and you are outside of all this,
waiting for an invitation,
tender as a new mother's nipple, flowing.

Muse,

like a seahorse floating forward
you are brittle and small. When you move
you barely touch the sandy ground.
My eye to your reflection,
forging for fundamental truths.
Your skin to my aura, skimming the anointed flame.
I wear you as a wig to fight off
prejudice. You lay over me like a shroud
made of woven sunlight and shade, made
to supply me with defining features
and leave an impression.
You are like the freeway I fell onto
when I was barely grown, rolling over
to the side, watching the car I rode in
shrink into oblivion.
I am a reptile in a drying-up waterhole,
cocooned in sludge, where you sniff me out,
expose my underbelly and devour.
Pocket knives and crushed branches,
I owe my secrets to only you.
Lap me into your watery mouth,
tongue-swirl me across your taste buds
unless I die, evolve, unrecognizable, and you
fairy-tale pretty, ride away on a mild tide, saying
it is over.

Circle

Breathing into a brown paper bag, responsibilities
weighing me down, spreading out, hiding
in my speech, making up lies to
lie across me bare-chest and crushing.
I've slept in a pantry with roaches and a window
with a full view of an unkempt backyard,
but never did I suspect that my love would wane,
polarizing my impulses and my apathy.
There was only one choice, a card turned and midnight
streaming into my veins like celestial pull and light
into the astrologer.
Fighting is a fiddler playing - tension to maximize
the resulted genesis, or a room where rhymes
are written across the door frame. In that room I clip
my fingernails, waiting for admittance to foreplay,
something to electrify my sinews and sing.
Intimacy is a garden to plant or to let flourish
on its own accord, with eatable weeds
and dung beetles foraging.
Summer is slipping fast - with worry-wrought eyes,
under satisfied.
Summer beats its sloppy heat on my shoulders,
on eyelashes, volunteering
its blaze and affirming breath.

I remember how it happened, listening
to lost friends voices on an answering machine. Some I wish
I never lost, most just conjure memory without emotion,
sure of why the break occurred, and glad
it did.
Drip, drip dreams betrayed,
looking over old books in an old bookshop, where
I used to treasure the smell and the surprise.
Ghosts enter me, collect and layer,
amplifying their mass, personal
tangibility.
Age does not slow or still desires.
Age does not make both arms free. I am the same,

as when my phantom wings expanded,
extended,

past hydro wires and mating cardinals, touching
the misty tip of a cumulus cloud

Balanced Repertoire

Petals and fizzling small craters, inches
from the side of the road.
I dive
into the net and let
the struggle ensue.
I lived in corners
with the dead-mature, in flaps
like wishy-washy by-standers. But here, entering

the small soft mounds of pleasurable
taboos and smiling up in the treetops, I am sitting
on the weakest branch just to get the best overview.

My tongue
is painted many colours.
I lost you in the nuclear glow. It happened
gradually, like a cliff descending,
finally,
meeting ground.

I used to float -
a silhouette of fine cuts
and obvious edges. But I lost you and
it is good to lose extensions,
flavours of redundant delight.

Enthralled by sensual geometry,
by mountain ridges reflected in heartbeats,
wrinkles, rough spots, perfect
intricacy
equilibrium
subconscious sway, and you.

You never loved me, never knew
I was a neophyte, taker of whatever
I could get, keeper of
an ethereal garden. I

will accept my joy
regardless of lack, discover joy
in what droops to provide me canopy, also
in what arches upward, proclaiming its praise.

Creativity

Peeled of my own death,
entering a corridor of dawn,
heat without fire,
a staircase into the void,
buried in the gas furnace, this
guest that never comes, eats bread
or slips into the cradle of a comfortable
home. Pen and beauty, an inevitable
loneliness that victory cannot solve,
a transitory opera, bird songs, fragile,
almost breaking, vibrating at a desperate
but soft speed.

A woodland to walk through that inherits
a shadow canopy darkness. Walk through
regardless of doubts full-blown,
regardless of scrapes across your tender surface.
Love is just an image
as you walk,
sounds are menacing but
never reach crescendo,
never sustain the heavier beat that leads
to ecstasy's blackout.

Leaves become teeth.
Impressions are unkind.
Your husk is broken
and your blood is a heap of
dead violets crushed
in a celebrated summer.

Surrogate Dharma

I didn't think I would get lost
or be chained to a contractual victory.
I thought a grain would grow,
become a solid garden. Fires would come, then
firefighters. I would be testifying about
the worth of what survived.

That is not what happened. I fell prey
to the propaganda of affirmations,
to the volume of control I could contain.
My dream dropped out of me
like a miscarriage. I hoped I could forget:
Tie my shoes, zip up a coat
and kiss the shelter I have. Bridges here and there -
they are not mine to travel.
Vinegar keeps getting injected into my bones,
replacing the marrow with
its potent clarity. Do you see? I am getting older.
It will be over
and I have to be able to say I served well.
My mouth opens and folds like a fledgling wing.
People pass - each one a violin note, a digit, a reluctant
panting pitch. Conversations are ash.
I don't like living in these elements, my neck
stretched up into the dense middle
of a monsoon. Let me climb,
dragging this dead beast behind me.
Let me live where my father went to school,
on a Himalayan peak.

I am not a petal. My courage is fickle, it fortifies or fades,
dependent each day on mutual obligatory infatuation.

I can't keep pretending:

The sun is strong. The night is strong. I am not stronger.

I am in this hovel with my lamp, tasting metal
of varying textures -
rusted, gold, and other star-erupted symbols -
greeting obscurity, broken toenails
I can't be bothered to trim. How many rooms, my God?
How much waiting and walking, and the fish? I could be a fish. Make me
one of those - sliding about, weaving with one full-body stroke
through a lush intricate terrain, mastering
a juicy undergrowth.

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The Weary Blues – “Quagmire”

Blue Lake Review – “Do Not Define Me”

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The Continuist – “Creativity”

About the Author

Allison Grayhurst is a full member of the League of Canadian Poets. She has over 400 poems published in more than 210 international journals and anthologies. Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers in 1995. Since then she has published ten other books of poetry and four 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. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay; www.allisongrayhurst.com