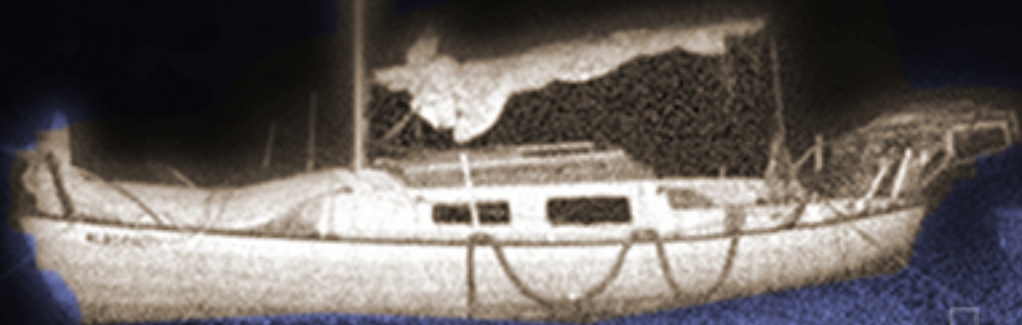


# NO RAFT - NO OCEAN

Allison  
Grayhurst

2015 chapbook



scarsuonpefend

# Table of Contents

Undertow.....	3
Ripples.....	4
If it is empty then it is empty .....	5
The fault of sages.....	6
Growing the grey .....	8
Neruda.....	9
Govinda in the mud .....	10
Where are you? I've been calling .....	12
Voice.....	13
With the purity of a single intention .....	15
If I see.....	16
Tell me.....	17
Matchstick, acorn hill .....	18
Crystal dark.....	19
Coiled.....	20
Trickle.....	21
I go inside.....	22
Edified.....	23
Desires traversed .....	24
I turn the corner and .....	26
Structures I pretend to own .....	28
Before you .....	29
Past obligation .....	30
I moved like a moon.....	31
Deciding.....	32

## Undertow

Somehow I stood  
dark and brave below the deck, in small spaces  
emptied of shadows and science.  
The walls took advantage of my privacy,  
and before I could collect my wealth  
I was tied to the mast of a pillaged and  
hacked-away ship, joining the races  
of hunted whales and tentacle creatures.  
Dissecting the storm at my feet, seeping into  
my lungs, I promised myself to live my last moments  
without envy or rage. It was easily done  
until my ropes became loose and I rose to  
catch a breath, catch sight of my splintered sea-house  
where there was wood all around - dead bodies of comrades,  
but no sharks, no children needing my protection.  
I promised myself another promise,  
to die in meditation, fixing on the sky, transferring my pain  
and crushed confidence to the stars' philosophy of afterglow.

It is a long time to be still and look up.  
It must be a painter's journey. I must learn  
to sprout roots from the tips of my frozen toes,  
knowing water is not earth and earth  
will never be a sailor's deathbed or home.

## Ripples

Dirty dish, I lift  
and know I am holy.  
Does it matter or mean  
my feet are mine,  
though they cramp,  
and my skin is a littered shore?  
After moving in, it makes no sense to dream about  
round planets or miracles hunted down  
between spaces, in the flesh of dark stars.  
Blessings come like other conditions, feeding,  
filling, then the fish is hooked and the river goes on.  
How many cupcakes can I keep? Not many. Not one.  
At night I wake up absolute,  
solid as a never-touched stone.  
I stare at the clock and have conquered time.  
For that time I am the best thing of all things to be.  
For an instance, I am more than metaphor, I am witnessing.  
In the day I hold out for a fickle hand's generosity,  
sweeping floors and making beds.  
What a hot rhythm to keep, like kisses and eclipses  
of sexual elation.  
Two thousand eons, and the cosmos continues  
as a body just born.  
Spotlights and warm lights, my love is my fulcrum,  
he carries me entirely in the dips above his clavicles.  
He mixes me incandescent colours, enters me  
like wings tightly folded, plunging into sea,  
coaxes me to thicken, be a builder, take what I can  
and build.

If it is empty then  
it is empty

Perishing like wasps in wet tar,  
we can't claim an answer  
but only wear our raincoats, acting out  
past wounds, meditating by watergardens where  
amphibians breed, owners of the pond.  
Perishing enough to create parables  
to be sold to our advantage,  
holding hands in the summer or after a bath.  
We look through windows, keeping  
vigil with homebound strangers, unlocking cupboards,  
storing gifts on laundryroom shelves. We welcome  
the red squirrel, make love most afternoons, tie-dye our t-shirts,  
burning colours hotter at the edges.  
We meet old mentors perishing,  
drunk and mutated, mentors who taught us  
to read the lines in our palms, how to find music underwater,  
poetry under siege, sometimes showing us  
the pitter-patter pace of caterpillars on a damp park lawn.  
Depths pushing out like a well-nourished womb,  
depths we perish in, drained of desire,  
listless in the light. Don't bother complaining,  
we were made to perish, grow a revolutionary peace  
in the crisp leaves of burnt sage, discover mercy  
in a backwards fall.

## The fault of sages

Love was there  
spreading hope like jam over my taste buds.  
Then the first skipping rope broke,  
got snared on a fence and frayed.  
I stole away on a subway train where  
hundreds have gone walking into a warzone.  
Amen to the end and the predator's  
happy-go-lucky disposition. One claw,  
one tentacle, in flowing precise motion.  
Another lifetime and it may be different,  
tender as lovers beneath their first full moon,  
or worse, like cartilage deteriorating.  
I rehearsed a familiar pattern,  
sabotaging memories to find a way to be holy,  
to make only God matter, dismantling adult days  
of calculation, days of stultifying impulses,  
of consciously unplugging the push of inspiration.  
I flicked the splinter and loosened its stem, learning  
that every homecoming is different - some shed  
their most treasured members, others,  
an accommodating persona. Still others constrict  
just to pitch thought and become a pulse.

Love I lifted like a heavy stone,  
trying to grow flowers between sparrows' toes  
where they nested and puffed up under eavestroughs,  
trying to weave myself an escape in the shade,  
a carpet to lie back on.  
Solutions were bare,  
offered crossword puzzle satisfaction  
but no retreat from passengers staring  
and the continuous stab of uncertainty.

Templates I now break and breathe and blow all away  
into the sandalwood spring, into the eyes of my dog.  
Stiff joints lend themselves to patience,  
planting wings in my palm - empty spaces finally  
accepted. Shadows I see take on a life of their own  
and keep dancing. God I see in the sloping deformity  
of all steps climbed, treacherously taken, born whole  
from parallel paths of lack and yearning.

## Growing the grey

Splendor is stolen.  
I call high but am dammed  
to the form of a lesser magic.  
In captivity it is harder to communicate  
the truth, to find the altar of happiness.  
All things I have are stolen.  
From a ship dismantled, I landed  
and stole. I am always stealing and losing  
God, cracking the cup of my direction.  
Bodies exist to understand the brutality of loneliness,  
to yield first to breath, then to sex and then to death.  
When I was a candle I had the courage of a candle.  
Planets I once walked upon are dead. Could I have been a child,  
and now I am not? How is it possible to give up  
the solidity of imagination?  
Take me back through the ice-cross  
in the skylight, into the glow,  
sniffing cool blue-green spores - smells purer than spin.  
Caves and stars, coloured covered canvases  
melting into unison. Alchemy as I walked, dissolving  
into the flesh of constant spring, as I walked,  
sprouting the nuclei of many mountains.



## Neruda

I can't be and think like you,  
majestic in your sensuality,  
Godless but deep with sorrow, forever restoring.  
From you I see women's hips.  
And though I would never care to shield kisses upon  
their soft swaying mounds, your waters swell  
and grow and make me long for Spanish trees,  
seascapes I saw as a child. Rising male, always like a mountain,  
you pick granules from the ground, place sand on your tongue  
and name the sensation.

If I could be and think like you,  
like a native river that has known no footprints,  
gathering rowboats, families of endless generations,  
my house would sing, fruit would fall and  
I would hold a hand, glorify each fingernail, memorize  
the exact curve of each cuticle. I would retire,  
rest my shoulders on an old bed, loosely clothed,  
feeling the Mediterranean heated breeze encompass me  
like a lover's welcoming demand for unity. Speaking,  
my words would drip like oil, gifts  
of oil and bread.

## Govinda in the mud

This line of devotion that moves  
bitterly as lust tracing unresponsive thighs,  
cups a poor groan of invisible blooming,  
following you underneath a diseased tree,  
smelling as you spread your aloofness  
and mingled your affection tighter with the dealers of denial.

It came to me at first in healthy moderation,  
as a permit to appease my obsession. Then it grew indecent,  
flushed through me like a spell, drowning  
my apprentice music with your own reclusive master-drum.

I found you in the carcass, in the millipede's dart into the drain.  
You swelled your glow across all my sunny spots, mighty,  
but not brave, only bored with the circular twists  
of relief, thirst and sorrow - diamond clear,  
you asked for everything, wanting nothing for yourself.

I knitted together the practicalities of decomposition  
to the voyage of your ever-increasing detachment,  
understanding what you did not - that love  
is not living alone on a dried-up hill  
nor is it consuming every crumb of dream-life  
until the flesh is reduced to accident.  
I cannot rekindle my devotion, so I must leave you  
to authenticate a future. This deed of leaving is like you like  
a star - old, seen many times over by many eyes,  
power with no purpose but to be bright  
and desolate, eating away  
waves of darkness, emptied of praise, tenderness, the bullet  
needed to puncture a human heart with revelation.

I do not believe in nirvana. I do not believe in immortality:  
when things change they die and do not revert.  
We were, it seemed, perpetual, connected  
by the red rope of my loyalty.

I am dawning. I that is I,  
cracking the dome of my hereditary inertia.  
I leave the shadow-guilt of solemn yearning, and also you  
of coral-reef intricacy, simplicity, perfection.

I know I am alone, though permanently imprinted -  
by my years of unnoticed devotion,  
by the shunning of personal expectations  
and by your long finger,  
tanned, transcendental, a spiritual aphrodisiac still  
pointing.

## Where are you? I've been calling

and waiting, soiled and famished, anticipating your return,  
circled by predatory chains. There are things  
we need to talk about. Are you  
here, or just a synchronized inspiration, energy  
as icing for one day? It is not enough.  
I need you here, not galactic but like a man  
before his wedding hour, needing me too,  
focused entirely on my fulfilment. Where are you?  
In the sparrow-droppings? In the kitten's fear?  
I cannot go forward so close to the lurking eyes  
of mire and sacrificial doom.

Why are you leaving me blindfolded,  
tremours and hard lumps invading my body,  
aching against the sky for you,  
on my knees, in many ways excavated, sagging without  
mettle or substance? Where are you -  
in the sideboard? The baseboard?

Compel my breath into freedom,  
sing loud in my left ear, love me  
like a solid spike, but weightless in its consequences.  
I drive the rattle. The world is huge and  
I am capsizing, eaten by its ignorance and filthy demands.  
Where are you? Did you fly away?  
Can you be my gravy, not dry and vague  
as a passing half-hearted smile?

Can you not pay for my funeral and be done with the obituary,  
sending me into the afterlife, a new life  
of baby days and infant trust?  
Where do I hurt? For you, everywhere. It is impossible  
to escape, impossible to cross my legs, fold my arms.  
Tender or with a shovel pounding,  
break through this cobwebbed room,  
give me a background I can play with, a full dish, delight  
in the splintered wood.

## Voice

When you talk it is not  
a shimmering sensation or  
a delicate fluttering of  
nature's delicate best. Days  
are not here like you are -  
an open sewer grate, a crushed  
locust. They are smudged and flat  
as a textureless dream.  
Helmets worn. Grievors  
with their now-permanent-grief etched  
under their fleshy eyes, checkbones and chins.  
I buy buttered pastries, leave them  
by their doors. I hear your voice.  
You are trying to reach me with an old painter's words  
of resignation and reluctant wisdom - words  
I cannot make use of.

The dead evergreen in my front yard will not revive.  
Like me, and these things I clung to, it must be replaced  
with something of less substance, of more obvious beauty,  
like a red rose bush, birdbath or sundial. Or,  
I could leave it there, brown and dry - a monument  
to what was once lush, gorgeously plump, once withstanding  
winters, the heat of global-warming summers, green,  
wondrous against my window.

I could walk faster than this, chat with the neighbours.  
But I won't. Because nothing is here but you, only,  
and my feet can't find the motivation to pick up pace.

You talk. My aura is a smog-filled season  
where your sun's rays barely seep through. Days  
with stones in my stomach, rubbing against one another,  
pressing their hard weight into places.  
I have no drug to ease my longing. Will it be long? Years?  
Will I make it through to the Fall?  
Do you have more to say? Say it then, differently.  
I can't go on repeating,  
where nothing shifts but these stones,  
sharp-surfaced, blocking my intestinal tract, pressing  
with each step, demanding acknowledgment, denied  
release, a minimal hope  
for redemption.

## With the purity of a single intention

Days of history voyage low  
into nations, beside graveyards.  
You played with the existential architects for a while,  
breathing in their deconstruction, but your laughter  
languished. Straddled between crossroads,  
you could not form a picture.  
Days of comfort can be understood  
when the crack tents with severity enough  
to slice two wholes.  
In your mind there are mountains  
you have lost the ambition to cross, or to look up  
at their venerated summits, and listen.  
You have lost the cunning to cope, continents of wayward  
possibilities. Look up, for the sake of past miracles  
that swooned into your embrace like found love  
as a perfect match  
against fatalism and rising futility. Look up - out  
into outerspace  
and grow yourself a fierce mystic midnight.  
Whitewash trails and gardens, places  
where children are allowed to dig a hole in the ground,  
tunnels where the earth shines copper  
with forgotten buried pennies.



Look up and drop the stone of objection,  
the stretching sorrows of realism.  
It is divine, if you choose it to be.  
It is the freedom of a fugitive, freed  
of the rusted bars, equipped with appetite  
and the exuberance of a gamble.  
The ship is lost and an ocean is gained.  
Water and water rhythms  
are teaming between your toes,  
salting your hair and open wounds.  
From side to side, look at the glorious space around you,  
then up, envisioning yourself strong-winged, safe  
as a seafaring bird.

## If I see

If I see God's skin,  
myself a season of  
rain washing a field,  
then my condition is final.  
Doors keep collapsing  
like elm-tree branches in an ice-storm.  
Stars are weeds to Oblivion's depths,  
sea-floating, swaying with the motion of moons,  
spreading weedy flowers of illumination.

I moved from my purgatory coffin,  
opened my hand to hold yours. Did it matter?  
To lift my head to hear your music?  
A perpetual low-fuel  
drainage, in me, this desire, hole, exposed  
and storming, drip, drip, a spider-bite,  
a great bird, small in a high height of sky.

Still, to be asleep again, before this battered bridge  
beckoned me across, before the  
culprit of caring cracked my anonymity, my  
protective chamber fat with secrets, cold with no need.

Looking out, I cry, I could jump, exploring a soft wind.  
If only I could stop looking, face  
the lonely rushing in, face  
the result of this failed equation -  
damp dead field, drowned corners.

## Tell me

Tell me what  
is this aberration, this final cut-glass  
apparatus? What are you holding me for,  
on this earthquaked-ground with madness filling  
my ears, with no relief from the quickening, no shortcut  
to liberation? What whim am I? Eventual.  
I am eventual, grounded only by my children and the  
animals that pace my floors. I will do a visible  
decisive deed if that is what you want or I will  
suck in the deadening-pretend, barbaric in its stupidity,  
disingenuous in its over-rated kindness. What is left?  
Tell me, deprive me of government, of natural things  
that others have, but tell me what you want me ready  
for. Hire me with this particular fruit. Let me be noble,  
eliminate my doubt, my fear of being wrong or cruel. Take me  
into your music, pound my spirit with your weight and  
effort. Tell me what rabid ghost I must put down.  
Help me  
    put it down.

## Matchstick, acorn hill

Some altered landscapes go unnoticed,  
hidden by mature growth,  
lush angular anomalies,  
and streets continue on  
as though limping was not a hindrance  
only an eccentricity - limping slow  
as our sun's heat is slow to reach the exoplanets  
or slow as destined love can be before it is  
fully embraced.

Self-definitions needing  
to be re-defined and illusions  
of future bliss needing  
to be released for more authentic possibilities.  
Years of pebble-hopping, fresh denials  
embodied into lifestyles.  
The spot is marked. Grass stained,  
unwashable, obvious to everyone,

but you are on the rafters, singing  
to a made-up ghost, you are whistling  
the tune you learned as a child,  
whistling without variation,  
plodding the automatic path  
you were told would lead to joy,  
to a mandatory means of fulfillment,

instead of seeing and serving the deformity,  
blessing its merging waters with your own,  
becoming stronger still, blooming as it grows,  
methodically eliminating your most coveted  
expectations.

## Crystal dark

sound, woodpecker  
foraging, near, nearing  
spice  
on my fingertips -  
relaxed appropriation.  
Backpacks and scarcity,  
only the Zen flavour  
of moving, taking necessities,  
giving up newly bought coats  
to strangers on buses.  
Bus routes going to unexplained territories  
vocalizing droning dreams  
of the misused, disenfranchised  
ruthlessly bored,  
cardboard box lifespans  
arrows pointing back from the way  
you came,  
mounds of  
silver sorrows, pee-stains  
on stones, what is left but dead planets done with  
geological formations, never  
knowing scattering amoebas, only  
knowing failed attempts at rhythm, equilibrium,  
rubble,  
aftermaths of harsh creation,  
pointless rock-globes  
spinning  
with moons no signs of summer.

## Coiled

Keep it. Always.  
Well built, like literature.  
This birthplace and then, into  
the weighted wind. I am scarcely  
bearing it, palpitating, counting  
palpitations, high on this kundalini drug. Today,  
I will say nothing, be elusive as a shy-man's smile.  
I can't stand the crumbs. Eating for nourishment only,  
one grape, this fabric - covering, menial, not warm.  
I can't plant daffodils in January. You know  
everything I gave you was purely accident,  
not meant for you to treasure. How else can I be beautiful?  
How else can this legend not be broken, but be a masterpiece  
in your eyes? My tree. My front crawl.  
I need to lead, callous with my intentions.  
Because there is more at stake  
than the digging up of remnants, more than  
you and me and this mortuary of foiled ambitions.  
On the couch. In the bedroom. Armpits, ripe and enticing.  
You built a city. I entered. But this is my ecstasy.  
There is something growing. I need release,  
space to expand my fleshy torment. Damn you.  
Gleaming like a little sun, gorgeous  
and calm, edging out so many possibilities.  
Damn you. I want to descend from this height, leave  
these messy corridors, not needing you, not needing  
your fire opal tongue skimming my skin,  
pointed deep into my chasms. You are barricaded  
in convention, denying everything we are supposed to die for,  
everything, you promised, we would,  
together, own.

## Trickle

It takes rich waters  
to feed your body. Your body  
is a neighbourhood of curvy undercurrents  
where people smile but the sidewalks are  
frozen. You own nothing pure. You would  
like to shed yourself of femininity, yet still  
be seductive as ouzo - licorice, clear, burning.  
Murder, knowledge, both are too absolute for you but  
being found like a rare coin, that would be special, something  
you could sink your teeth into.  
Instead, you are a trophy beside many,  
on a shelf, in a corner, lack-luster, cramped, barely legible.  
Your belly has hardened. That  
is supposed to be a good thing. Not for you. You,  
who craves honour, never wanting any effort or desire,  
unmatched, unmet.  
You are not ready even for a mirage -  
your body drained of its natural oils.  
I would feed that body. I would consummate with you  
and bear you twins. Even that is only a platform  
and not the means to travel. Because  
it takes rich waters to feed you,  
and this thin-stream garden hose  
will never quench you or, you know,  
make you happy.

## I go inside

to hide  
from the wind and  
the windy things the wind brings  
like popsicles, icicles  
and cloud watchers on their backs  
ashamed to speak without symbols.  
I retreat from the rocky mounds where  
toddlers hold their picnics and the cardinals  
rest, oblivious of camouflage.  
The daydream that sustained me all last year  
has weakened in potency, now is just a fleeting habit,  
a camper's terrain I travel to, flooded,  
swampy and putrid, fraught  
with the imagined memories of sing-songs and linked torsos,  
clogged now with pestilence and unrealized connection and  
the stars. I still see them overhead,  
ordinary, insignificant - never astounding enough  
to bleed cosmic capacity into my dilated veins.  
Veins waiting to be juiced, to be breached  
of their thin-layered confinement - myself waiting to be more  
than a catalyst. So many reasons to keep moving,  
but none impregnate my spirit, none immerse me or  
insist that I take up arms. My arms.  
They are hanging, tingling. They are not  
me. I am in hiding, away from the wind and the windy things  
the wind brings, part of the pile of the undeclared, an  
illegible signature.



## Edified

Was I bound by the artificial?  
Driftwood down an interceding flow?  
Horse stance, back muscles rolling, lines of twine, and fishing.  
I will not fish or tighten my spinal cord  
for the appearance of strength.  
I will not bask relaxed in hot spring nobility or lick the nose  
of prey I someday plan to devour. Was I combined or conditioned  
to make a unified shape?

Loudly, my name was spoken. It was God, I am  
sure of that. And it was angry, pressing, urging me  
to wake and take nothing lightly or so hard.  
It was the second time  
at the time of 2:30 a.m., when my bed flushed with instant  
rigidity, lifting me with dominance  
from the gardens of my despair.

It was spoken as a permit to build, to trap the past inside  
the future - not as vintage romanticism, but for the sake  
of journeying onward, to be integrated  
with what must be re-owned, absolved by the fact  
that nothing can escape the impact of eternity. I was shown  
that the igloo mansions I once erected,  
featuring such elaborate depictions,  
cerebral justifications of indignant loneliness,  
were natural and could not be dismantled.

I heard my name spoken, calling me to dart alert  
from a shrinking sleep, to walk the hallway, carve  
myself an inclusive center, to answer boldly,  
unconditionally step  
into the dictates of a personal command.

## Desires traversed

There are lines that frame me in negative expectations.  
There are sweet tufts of weeds  
I would like to pet like a kitten. And eyelashes that spark  
a gentle nostalgia.

There are too many eras  
walked through, never to be re-entered,  
and remnants of lore and legends  
like pigeon droppings on pavement, washed away by storm.

I have grown too used to the drapes being closed,  
to all mannerisms of my fugitive vitality being ignored.  
Saturn is a vacuum, galactic in its weighty substance  
and in its cold temperature push -  
condensing my liquid garden into impenetrable ice.

A tightening in my intestines. Shoelaces undone and left.  
I eat the seeds I am supposed to discard.

I am beyond knowing if  
I am broken. And oh the circle of things! Up the escalator.  
Colour-coded stars. A dermal abrasion.

Things conspire like sunken feet in the mire  
unwinding of doom. Archaeology I cannot speak of,  
guaranteeing a false result.

Straining to sound a faith that will cleanse.

Distances crossed, to point to and witness  
the handicap of being a single being  
amongst a kaleidoscope of organic tapestry.  
Shifting to let go, to imagine archangel  
power and not have it substituted with  
a neutralizing force - a force that stops the growth  
of artful transformation.

There are hills and hallways that draw me to their altars.  
Little did I know that dreams too long waited on  
become waterlogged, that suffering is not  
a stigma or a banner to flaunt, and love,  
is mostly about honouring inner limitations,  
challenging them to consolidate, regain momentum then  
unequivocally be breached or be immutably restored.

I am dissolved into this squeezing, into denying  
the little that I know that quivers precise,  
deconstructing the intricate  
solidity of greed and hard resilient walls.

Orbits are barb-wired.  
Countdowns counting, dictating short spurt breaths.  
As my tendons stretch  
only in my imagination. And these doorways become  
sunsets I stand straddled across.

History is a hyena, grotesquely curved,  
pulling down royal constellations.  
I have learned that peace can be a pyre  
where loins burn exquisite, can also be a dishonest maturing,  
where desires are reduced to fruit fly annoyances,  
where coming to terms with reality is a step toward  
entropy.

Little did I know that bodies melt with their spirits -  
more than dead houses or gloves, defining one tick, one  
conjoining of fibers, pulsing a fingerprint, pulsing  
one lifetime possessed.

## I turn the corner and

someone has been here, picking up clover,  
invading front lawns, rebelling against privacy.  
A rat's corpse as slender as a leaf lies at my feet.

I kneel down to meet it and I am stuck, retrieving  
information about decay, the smell of a flattened skull  
and the effect of dehydration. I get up. I walk  
around not over, and butterflies are moving. They are  
wrinkled energy lines, producing abstract patterns near  
sturdy bushes. All roads are shattered if I look closely enough -  
mini-fault lines of labyrinth tubing curiously crushed  
like the nutshell is under my heel.

Summer is almost beginning -  
heat encroaches and people smile  
untrustworthy but predictable.  
Dogs are minerals of volatile emotion  
which they never struggle to conceal.  
The moon is still in the sky. It should not  
be there like it is, a half-faded stamp,  
pale on blue, larger, closer  
than the obvious sun.

In my fantasy, pine cones are eatable. There,  
there is courage enough in every relationship  
to feed the demands  
of wedded intimacy. And I can sketch tall, yellow weeds.  
I can even paint  
the striking space between them like dialogue.

I can carve the curves  
of a sitting brindle squirrel, carve  
where the tail meets the spine  
and the spine, two twitching ears.

In my mind I am actualized, verified and seen,  
vague dread is much like a pebble tossed and lost  
under a parked car. Anytime I look into another's eyes,  
be it a hawk, child or mild foe -  
there is the colour of wet river stones,  
a healthy delirium, the feeling of faintly floating  
through deep-breath ministrations, into  
puzzle-piece convergence.

## Structures I pretend to own

Organs flayed

Nightmares understood

God is a scientist, a retina with constricted veins,  
dictating an obituary with every birth.

Circular spots; ink-stains, light-stains . . .

there are so many preconceptions I need to let go of.

I must grasp that rationality and chaos both  
are immature theories, primitive understandings.

Nothing can be drawn to scale. Inside the void,  
it is fizzing, being expelled then absorbed with  
a brief division and then a brief collision - beautiful osmosis.

I saw a strawberry swallowed,  
progress from being a fruit to being  
a taste-bud treasure. I was engulfed in vastness,  
cultivating a pattern.

But there is no pattern, though there is geometry, formula,  
and muscles functioning by invariable laws.

God loves most things with a sense of humour,  
with an unexpected discharge. Energy cannot be  
damaged, but it can pulse too quickly,  
get caught in a tachycardia loop, be confined to a fixed pathway  
like a spasm, repeating, stagnant in its activity. That is not love.  
It leads to heart failure, lacking  
arousal, inflammation, surprise. That is a condition where  
sludge is formed and purity is suffocated, and all and all  
it is not very crisp. The result is not creation,  
movement only, not breathing.

I know I am not meant to hear the angels flutter,  
but I hear them anyways. Some nights  
they enjoy a quick wing-shudder, jettisoning  
in and out of phase. On my sloping rooftop,  
near my bedroom window,  
they say to me: pregnancy demands a gentle cultivation,  
a willingness for a foreign inclusion.  
They say: do not look for equilibrium because exact balance  
would mean obliteration.

## Before you

wide with surrender  
with no backdrop or formula,  
with the accomplishment of releasing  
plans by the wayside into the swamp  
that used to be an instrument playing,  
a cliff of clay forming a tireless gale  
of heavy sensual dreams.  
I belong to you and to the strength of your empty hands,  
the endings you leave me with, harvesting  
ephemeral food - a soul full  
of coastal curves that break the waters and is broken  
by them, pressing and caressing the chain of tidal  
obliteration as an umbilical cord connecting  
to the vast sweet space that is you.  
Never meant to anchor roots or climb a sturdy cliff,  
you stop my struggle to illuminate a typical liberation,  
gaining the wherewithal to stay pale,  
upright and destined in my cage.  
For it not a hellish home, but submerged  
in the damp abandon of your shaking,  
it is subject to your prying appendages poking,  
tearing away speech and understanding.  
I am yours, withdrawn from words into a connection  
washed with elements of prayer but unlike prayer  
more like lemonade to the day labourer or grass  
to the grazing mare - away from bit, halter and reigns -  
your sun sinking its evening heat into my back and shoulders,  
erasing division, drawing an intimacy  
that frees my blood's natural flow, squeezes out  
the clotted clump of summoning-up  
of years scarred by grief and hidden,  
rebellious longing.

## Past obligation

Perched and listening,  
a point of war.  
Several days I lived in a hole,  
shoulder shot by the blast  
of a rubber hammer coming down.  
Clear as pacing, counting  
the clock ties, permits overdue,  
you stayed like a waning moon, unobtrusive  
in a cloud-cloaked sky -  
the only light left to have. Somewhere in  
that shady disaster I bought a dream,  
almost new, with you, carefully walking  
the wet rocks. I fell asleep and you stayed, documenting  
my close-to-death dawn. Fishing me out of the fishtank,  
releasing me into wide open waters.  
Middle age is best, sea-worn but still pursuing.  
You stayed – an island never claimed by reptiles,  
a freight train, moving slow enough to chase and board.  
Thank you for staying, for your fervent destiny  
choke-collar-chain and your eyes  
of tender extremes. I lay it down.  
The lizard with the leaf.  
The primal mysticism I built my struggle on.  
I lay beside you, knowing you climbed many stairs  
to find me, and you stayed.



## I moved like a moon

in predictable orbit, smashed  
by meteors, space pebbles  
meeting my surface with deep impact, when  
there were dark oceans under my skin, unseen  
single forms, coupled forms, and beds of  
colourless weeds, but I steadied myself  
on the cold shell of repetitive expectations -  
dead valleys here, dead heights there.

Going through the hard crust, under, into  
a thicker atmosphere, currents of heaviness,  
breaking barriers better off broken.  
Haunted by shapes that come close and rarely touch,  
in this weighted environment, by-passing predator  
tentacles and jaws by instinct alone, no journey-map,  
stars or horizon to act as goal or inspiration, but

rolling  
through cross-waves with creatures captured  
by a dark density like  
myself, shaded, loose at the extremities, compact  
at the core, thriving on plateaus of deep pressure,  
salty flavours all around - so far gone from walking  
that legs leave, replaced by fins, and language is not  
sound, but a full-body resonance - no delay  
between appetite and attainment.

## Deciding

Deciding to lose, coming home,  
speaking of love and worn-sole boots,  
knowing rest as forgiveness.

Love I see is a marriage that spares no compliment  
or insult, uncomfortable as a needle sometimes,  
sometimes grazing, naked, uneventful, exposed  
side by side.

The bluejay owns its love - a tuft of feathery charm  
and a voice that shrills across the snowbanks.

Wanting all wanting vanquished, love I see  
will not tolerate averting eyes, the coveting of humming,  
shining cars moving by, puts no store in the making  
of breadsticks or piled-up gift certificates,  
sings extreme, never nursing inner deformity's indulgent dreams  
as a balm to ease the downpour of poverty.

The love I see is worth the gathering of moths,  
dark circles under my eyes, horizons and hopes  
of insufficient glow.

Love I know like death, exposing the vanity of turtle-shell treasures,  
of keeping dried flowers and polished plaques.

I will not cry for this world,  
for love is born as a larvae emerging beetle, continuously,  
is substantial as an open window, small  
as the cracked-egg nourishing grace of an extended hand.

These poems have first appeared or will be appearing in: The Milo Review; VerseWrights; Kritya Poetry Journal; The Furious Gazelle; Ehanom Review; Wax Poetry and Art Magazine; Sentinel Literary Quarterly; The Brooklyn Voice; Contemporary Poetry; Stepping Stones Magazine; The Kitchen Poet; Nothing. No One. Nowhere.; Indiana Voice Journal; Misfits Miscellany; WritingRaw; Calliope Magazine; New Binary Press Anthology; Rasputin; Cosmonauts Avenue; Of/with; Change Seven Magazine; Bond Street Review; The Bitchin' Kitsch; The Commonline Journal

Contact the author:

[allisongrayhurst@rogers.com](mailto:allisongrayhurst@rogers.com); [www.allisongrayhurst.com](http://www.allisongrayhurst.com)

Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. She has over 675 poems published in more than 315 international journals and anthologies. Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers in 1995. Since then she has published eleven other books of poetry and six 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 in December 2012. In 2014 her chapbook *Surrogate Dharma* was published by Kind of a Hurricane Press, Barometric Pressures Author Series. More recently, she has a chapbook *Currents* pending publication this Fall with Pink.Girl.Ink. Press. She is a vegan, and lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay.

## A breakdown of where and when the poems were published:

Undertow (The Milo Review 2013)  
Ripples (VerseWrights 2015)  
If it is empty then it is empty (Kriya Poetry Journal 2013)  
The fault of sages (The Furious Gazelle 2015)  
Growing the grey (Ehanom Review 2014)  
Neruda (Wax Poetry and Art Magazine 2014)  
Govinda in the mud (Sentinel Literary Quarterly accepted and pending publication)  
Where are you? I've been calling (The Brooklyn Voice 2013)  
Voice (Wax Poetry and Art Magazine 2014)  
With the purity of a single intention (Contemporary Poetry accepted and pending publication September 2015)  
If I see (Stepping Stones Magazine 2015)  
Tell me (The Kitchen Poet 2014)  
Matchstick, acorn hill (Nothing. No One. Nowhere. 2015)  
Crystal dark (Indiana Voice Journal 2015)  
Coiled (Misfits Miscellany 2012)  
Trickle (WritingRaw 2015)  
I go inside (Calliope Magazine 2015)  
Edified (New Binary Press Anthology 2012)  
Desires traversed (Rasputin 2015)  
I turn the corner and (Cosmonauts Avenue 2015)  
Structures I pretend to own (Of/with accepted and pending publication Sept 2015)  
Before you (Change Seven Magazine 2015)  
Past obligation (Bond Street Review 2015)  
I moved like a moon (The Bitchin' Kitsch 2014)  
Deciding (The Commonline Journal 2015)

