

# Poems

*Elaine Bougie Gilligan*

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## Chant for Remembering

The sloping stretch of the swan's neck,  
the soft ringing shink of horseshoes hitting the stake,  
the stirring leaves of birch and beech  
the hushed air in the corner of the garden.

The dreams of all the unfettered pupils,  
child and adult, the dappling in the gardens,  
dancing light on the flanks of the small boats

The pitch towards sleepiness, idleness,  
mildness, the sweet sharpness  
of sun lotion.

Days made in the heavens and sifting,  
dusty to the ground, leaves curling up,  
the shout of the roses  
the purring of  
alyssum.

*.../continued*



Men cut away at city grasses and hedges,  
 women drive children to the country  
 to see horses, chickens, and uncut  
 grasses and hedges.

The gods of heat decree  
 sea gulls are to argue shrilly over shellfish,  
 children are to argue shrilly over practically  
 anything, and adults are to clinch, half-heartedly,  
 over whether it ever was this hot before  
 and if that means  
 something.

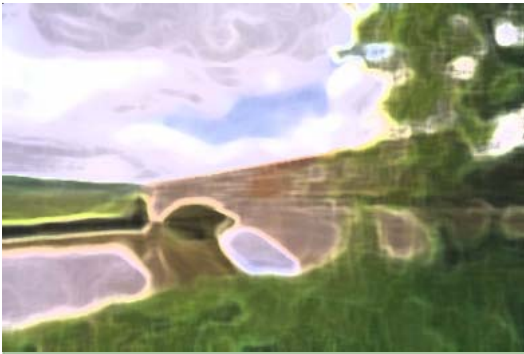
Light pushes into rooms,  
 Flesh warms or cools  
 around our bones, ripe as peaches  
 around their stones.



The total absence of tomorrow  
 and the presence of the moment, no matter  
 if the air browns a little, smells of tar.  
 It may rain, a while, and if it does,  
 summer dust raised by large, warm drops  
 is the headiest of perfumes.

Every patch of crab-grassed green  
 has its moment, its lolling lovers,  
 every window is a world,  
 every world is in reach,  
 large and small at once,  
 like the bodies of the floaters  
 and swimmers at the deep end  
 of the pool.

*.../continued*



The deep end of daylight,  
the shallow end of thinking,  
the junejulynarian augustness  
of living in a stretch of time.

The sloping stretch  
of summer's neck, under your hand  
you could lean down and kiss it,  
make a raspberry sound with your lips  
against its infant tenderness  
but you'd rather just leave your hand there,  
for all time, or at least until everything goes  
a little sticky, and you move  
away.

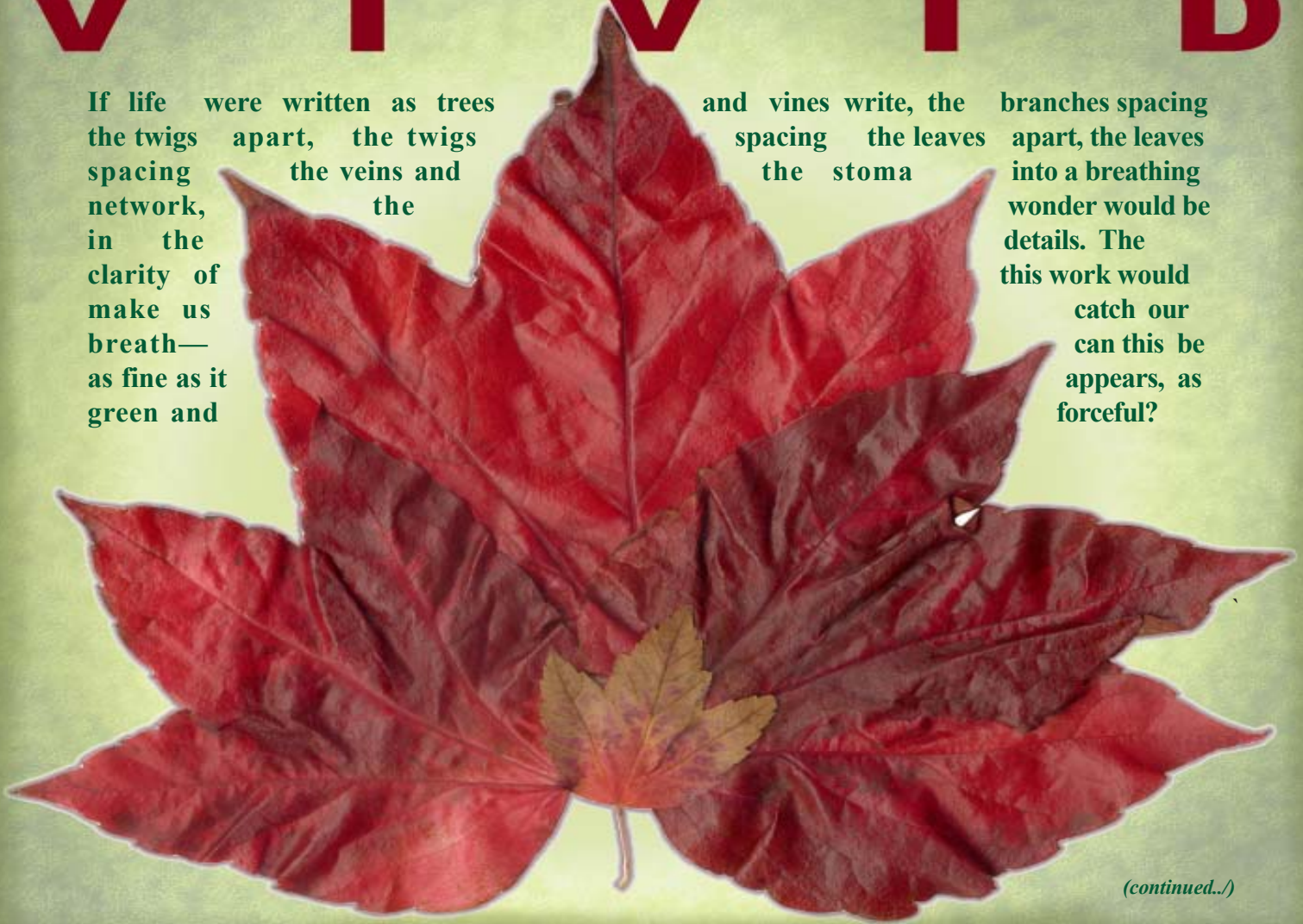
And you will move off,  
leaving summer behind  
where it always stays,  
no matter what other seasons  
catch you up, carry you off.

Summer lies quiet and waits  
until you come upon it again,  
fall into its breadth sighing and relieved,  
there you are, there you are,  
god I nearly  
forgot.

# V I V I D

If life were written as trees  
the twigs apart, the twigs  
spacing the veins and  
network, the  
in the  
clarity of  
make us  
breath—  
as fine as it  
green and

and vines write, the  
spacing the leaves  
the stoma  
branches spacing  
apart, the leaves  
into a breathing  
wonder would be  
details. The  
this work would  
catch our  
can this be  
appears, as  
forceful?



*(continued...)*

If lives were that way, printed leathery and open to the sun and rain alike, there would be no trouble reading the story of each life, its syllables, chapters, pauses and exclamations.

If time put itself on view, like a Boston Ivy piling its leaves by the rough cement wall of the Care Centre, the residents could stop on the curved walk beside the scalloped canopy, stir the fallen leafy pages with their canes or the rubber-tipped front feet of aluminium walkers, point with satisfaction to a day, a week formed on the wall only this year, evidence life is still happening here, even if the gaze of the drivers on 12th Avenue regularly shifts to the flashing green light ahead, to the bland walls of the hospital across the way, to anywhere not obviously marked out for age, the aged.

Aging is deemed to happen outside of regular time; you have a life and then, that part over, go off to the margins somewhere, till you go right over the edge and God knows where.

Older people, deemed brave for hanging on outside of time, beyond the obvious benefits of being younger. Their every word and gesture seen through a filter—how amazing—she still speaks, he still walks, they still are, as leaves are, bright and odd and brave, after falling.

Traffic goes by the rough-walled tower of the Care Centre and I pull out of the driveway to join it, and my mother stays, where the October days and leaves made vivid by their own dying pile up quietly.

# Chant for Birds

The heart of the bird  
beats fast.

The eye of the bird  
sees quick.

The bird is the hunter.  
The bird is the hunted.  
The dove is pitiless,  
the eagle doting.

The place of the bird  
is everywhere—  
sky, waters, earth,  
and the ice  
of Antarctica.

All of the air is a loom  
for bird flight,  
All of sound a chamber  
for birdsong.

Bird names beguile,  
bird names bespeak,  
shadowed flights of birds  
cross our brows  
with a blessing.



snowy owl, barred owl, saw-whet owl, burrowing owl.  
pelican, egret, cormorant, bittern.

black-crowned night-heron, great blue, green heron.  
wild turkey, ring-necked, ptarmigan, sharp-tailed.  
forster's tern, common tern, murrelet, puffin.

anna's hummingbird, rufous hummingbird,  
black-chinned, costa's hummingbird.  
olive sided, yellow-bellied, alder, willow, least flycatcher.

wood stork, jabiru, roseate spoonbill.  
sunbittern, oystercatcher, thickknee, avocet.  
sandpiper, yellowlegs, phalarope, dunlin.

shoveler, pochard, black scoter, goldeneye.  
rock pigeon, wood pigeon, turtle dove, stock pigeon,  
ring ouzel, fieldfare, scrub warbler, cisticola.  
tinker bird, barbet, wryneck, honeyguide.

flappet lark, crested lark, mosque swallow, fanti sawwing.  
plain-backed pipit, yellow wagtail, red-shouldered cuckoo shrike.  
christmas island frigatebird, storm-petrel, adjutant.

nightjar, needletail, house swift, treeswift.  
dollarbird, hornbill, minivet, bee-eater.  
dowitcher, godwit, turnstone, sandpiper,  
winter wren, cedar waxwing,  
catbird, brown thrasher.

# Transit

We're in transit station-to-station, we're standing at the stops, I've been left waiting at the stop, making me late. I often feel late even when I'm ahead of myself.

We've got transit, but it isn't rapid.

The buses are like cattle drives, these days on the Granville corridor. And it takes years, years, moving in the public arteries, from kindergarten

to the retirement party, where you can expect bad jokes, a few nostalgic tunes and wondering What if the money runs out? What if, and, but—I paid the fare, didn't I?

Sometimes when you're moving slow you look out the glass and say, am I actually moving or is the world leaving this crate behind?

And when the bus is really motoring you ponder, how's the driver

going to stop if that Toyota cuts us off, whatever happened to safety?

There aren't any seatbelts, on transit, there aren't any reservations.

There aren't any destinations, when you notice the bus always goes in a loop, and we're all getting off at separate stations.

I'm not complaining, mind you.

I buy the book of discount tickets. I wait at the stop, most of the time the streetcar comes on time.

Some of the time the driver even smiles at me.

Most of the time I smile back and really mean it, I think, what a fine driver, what a famous way to travel.





# Bird keeping

There must have been  
angels while we slept—feathers  
in every corner, downy, light or long and iridescent  
blue; how fortunate our home is deemed  
a park for airy creatures  
to wing through and leave  
these calling cards

Drowsy and stay-at-home, I could dream  
of angels. Angel song barely a whisper above bird song,  
chiming high and perfect. Diving blue birds of mine  
chortle that paradise is here—water, food, air to breathe  
and move through, what more do you want  
in a heaven?

Nothing, nothing,  
granted. What's here is here  
all light enough  
to waft away.

And it will.

# Opening

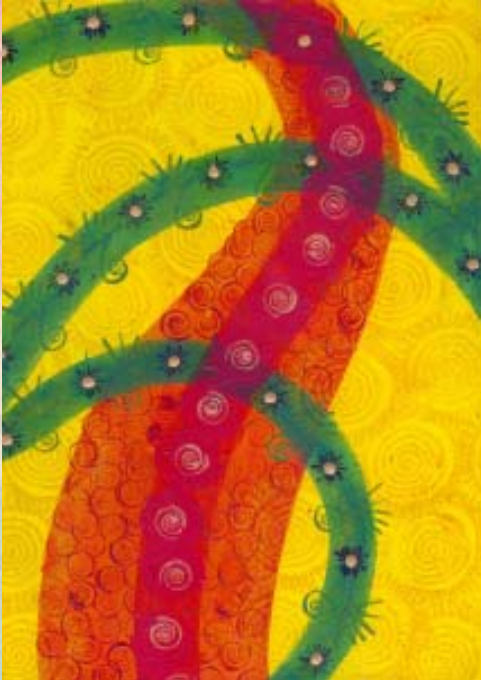
**It's snowing cherry blossoms  
at Kitsilano Beach.**

**The walkways, still wet  
with last night's rain,  
gather pastel stuff  
into clinging drifts.**

**A skirl of spring air  
rises from the door  
of the bus, as it opens,  
and lifts my hair.**

**My cheeks are as shy and  
wondering as a child's,  
at the unforeseen  
caress.**





# Forgotten/ Remembered

Forgotten poems  
1998 - 2002

## Forgotten and remembered

### Things I Forget:

how to breathe – as a cat does,  
as the sky does.

what my face looks like.

how to refuse.

when to go to bed.  
the erotic state of growing sleepy,  
between smooth sheets,  
while the wind stirs the trees.

that I am lucky. that I am loved.  
that I have a crinkly grey sweater,  
good for the coldest days.

the location of that café  
with a fireplace.  
what place carried  
the good ear-plugs.  
that I have a way with words  
and the right to protect it from rust,  
wedding showers, or  
financial progress.

what I did with my time last week.  
what I did last New Year's.

1964 through '71. odd evidence emerges  
from closets with old, mateless socks—a diary  
chronicling someone I do not know,  
sheaves of my own writing—  
scenarios and language of my own devising,  
as strange to me as meteorites  
at a bake sale.

I believe I have overlooked,  
for protection or intrigue,  
where and what I have been  
most of my time  
alive.

### Things I Remember:

voices.

the smell of the Fraser River  
at low tide. cracked shining boat-paint  
beaded with water.

*.../continued*

## Forgotten and remembered *(Continued)*

barefoot in the spinach field at five years,  
pattering summer rain raising the dust.  
being solid, valuable,  
and the soft sandy soil  
between my toes.

my brother's uncertainty.  
my teacher's enthusiasm.  
the day they read my story  
on the radio.

the skipping freedom  
of my green school tunic.  
how to be a good girl.  
being vexed with God  
for failing to show up.

how to worry when someone is angry,  
feel sorry for someone  
who beats you, mourn someone  
who taunted you.

how to shake off virginity,  
angrily, like your mother's curse.  
that love is blind, but the neighbours ain't.

and the nausea of the Pill,  
and being scared  
of others' words.

Laughing closeness of women.

The hidden sweet softness  
of a man.

I remember the shine in the eyes of my father,  
now closed. That light in the gaze of people and  
other creatures, all of the days.

Occasionally, I remember  
that I am lucky, loved,  
how to breathe – as a cat does,  
the sky does.

when to go to bed,  
the sensuous state of  
growing sleepy,  
between smooth sheets,  
and the wind stirs,  
stirs in the trees.

## True Crime

To see another's beauty, and not  
remind them of its existence.

To ride, when it was easier  
to walk.

To lose the strength of your feet,  
the roundness of your breath,  
your sense of proportion  
to the ball of mud  
you stand on,  
to the stars you never  
look up to.

Not noticing,  
as a way of being.

Refusing to cry, bite your arm,  
grieve, scream, admit it, admit it,  
have your fear.

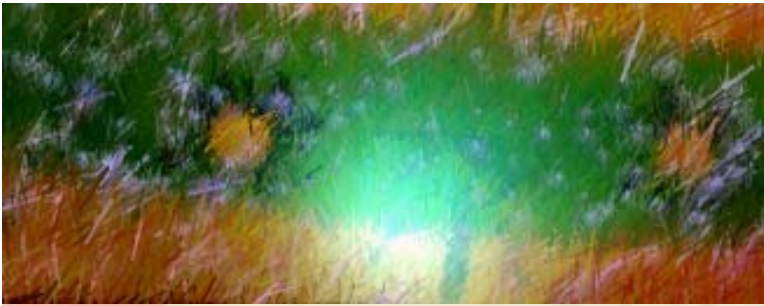
To elevate complaining  
to a volunteer occupation,  
to publish slogans celebrating  
defeat.

To refuse to meet  
the one in the mirror, that one  
whose eyes constantly seek yours.

To be overjoyed and hide it.  
To love to excess and hide it.

To know you are crude  
and flaunt it.

To know you have died and refuse  
the resurrection offered  
in every green place.



## Green Hour

The night is strong,  
the hour is green,  
Life whispers and runs in the corridors  
and if you have any inkling of its  
present location, you can have no idea  
of its speed.

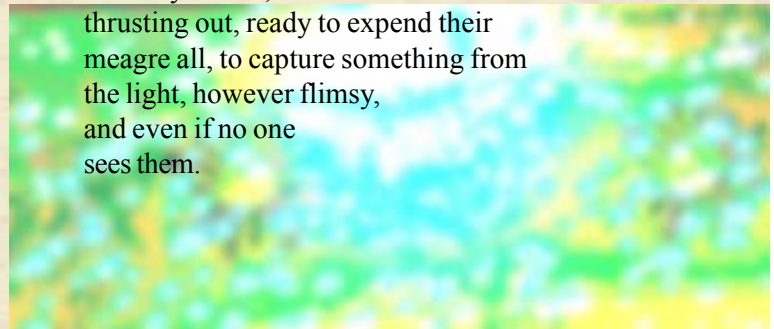
Wine won't do  
and food is a waste  
and coffee is a religion  
that loses its worshippers  
at night.

Waiting to catch  
the mercy wave,  
ready to be dropped  
wet, sea-soaked and shy  
into your own  
morning.

There, no cocks are crowing,

the sea-gulls are the only ones  
crying—but with great conviction,  
and you'd like to venture you know  
why, now. It's as clear  
as what's left when  
you're no longer  
immortal.

And the early hours  
may be green, too, though not that  
dissolving black-green of life eternal,  
heaving the gravestones. No,  
the yellow, nervous green of  
the early leaves, small fists  
thrusting out, ready to expend their  
meagre all, to capture something from  
the light, however flimsy,  
and even if no one  
sees them.



## The 100 year Chestnut

Under the 100 year chestnut,  
that great, green breathing tree,  
all is forgiven, even  
my life, its unkept  
promise.

The mall is forgiven  
for animated alligators,  
air foggy with fried everything,  
50 per cent off nothing you couldn't live  
without.

The century is forgiven its blind faith  
in rags to riches, the ragged riches  
in mountainous heaps, where the gulls scream

Pardoned for its made-to-measure wars,  
its sex, straight off-the-rack.

The chestnut leaves are shaped  
like hands with narrow palms and  
broad fingers. They wave slowly.

It might be a farewell.  
Could be a benediction.

The sky remains blue and ready  
for all those disposed to fall into it,  
wherever two or more gather to lie,  
backs to the ground,  
light-headed with the scent  
of our unimportance—it is not  
too late.

There is still  
time.

