

The Carrying: Poems

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WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD
ALA NOTABLE BOOK OF 2018
FINALIST FOR THE PEN/ JEAN STEIN BOOK AWARD

From National Book Critics Circle Award winner and National Book Award finalist Ada Limón comes *The Carrying*-her most powerful collection yet.

Vulnerable, tender, acute, these are serious poems, brave poems, exploring with honesty the ambiguous moment between the rapture of youth and the grace of acceptance. A daughter tends to aging parents. A woman struggles with infertility-"What if, instead of carrying / a child, I am supposed to carry grief?"-and a body seized by pain and vertigo as well as ecstasy. A nation convulses: "Every song of this country / has an unsung third stanza, something brutal." And still Limón shows us, as ever, the persistence of hunger, love, and joy, the dizzying fullness of our too-short lives. "Fine then, / I'll take it," she writes. "I'll take it all."

In *Bright Dead Things*, Limón showed us a heart "giant with power, heavy with blood"-the huge beating genius machine / that thinks, no, it knows, / it's going to come in first." In her follow-up collection, that heart is on full display-even as *The Carrying* continues further and deeper into the bloodstream, following the hard-won truth of what it means to live in an imperfect world.

Ada Limón is the author of five books of poetry, including *The Carrying*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was named a finalist for the PEN/ Jean Stein Book Award, and *Bright Dead Things*, which was named a finalist for the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Kingsley Tufts Award. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and *American Poetry Review*, among others. She lives in both Kentucky and California. Trying

I'd forgotten how much
I like to grow things, I shout
to him as he passes me to paint
the basement. I'm trellising
the tomatoes in what's called
a Florida weave. Later, we try
to knock me up again. We do it
in the guest room because that's
the extent of our adventurism
in a week of violence in Florida
and France. Afterwards,
the sun still strong though lowering
inevitably to the horizon, I check
on the plants in the back, my
fingers smelling of sex and tomato
vines. Even now, I don't know much
about happiness. I still worry
and want an endless stream of more.

but some days I can see the point
in growing something, even if
it's just to say I cared enough.

The Raincoat

When the doctor suggested surgery
and a brace for all my youngest years,
my parents scrambled to take me
to massage therapy, deep tissue work,
osteopathy, and soon my crooked spine
unspooled a bit, I could breathe again,
and move more in a body unclouded
by pain. My mom would tell me to sing
songs to her the whole forty-five-minute
drive to Middle Two Rock Road and forty-
five minutes back from physical therapy.
She'd say, even my voice sounded unfettered
by my spine afterwards. So I sang and sang,
because I thought she liked it. I never
asked her what she gave up to drive me,
or how her day was before this chore. Today,
at her age, I was driving myself home from yet
another spine appointment, singing along
to some maudlin, but solid song on the radio,
and I saw a mom take her raincoat off
and give it to her young daughter when
the storm took over the afternoon. My god,
I thought, my whole life I've been under her
raincoat thinking it was somehow a marvel
that I never got wet.

Dead Stars

Out here, there's a bowing even the trees are doing.
Winter's icy hand at the back of all of us.
Black bark, slick yellow leaves, a kind of stillness that feels
so mute it's almost in another year.

I am a hearth of spiders these days: a nest of trying.

We point out the stars that make Orion as we take out

the trash, the rolling containers a song of suburban thunder.

It's almost romantic as we adjust the waxy blue recycling bin until you say, Man, we should really learn some new constellations.

And it's true. We keep forgetting about Antila, Centarus, Draco, Lacerta, Hydra, Lyra, Lynx.

But mostly we're forgetting we're dead stars too, my mouth is full of dust and I wish to reclaim the rising-

to lean in the spotlight of streetlight with you, toward what's larger within us, toward how we were born.

Look, we are not unspectacular things. We've come this far, survived this much. What

would happen if we decided to survive more? To love harder?

What if we stood up with our synapses and flesh and said, No. No, to the rising tides.

Stood for the many mute mouths of the sea, of the land?

What would happen if we used our bodies to bargain

for the safety of others, for earth, if we declared a clean night, if we stopped being terrified,

if we launched our demands into the sky, made ourselves so big people could point to us with the arrows they make in their minds,

rolling their trash bins out, after all of this is over?

Wonder Woman

Standing at the swell of the muddy Mississippi after the Urgent Care doctor had just said, Well, sometimes shit happens, I fell fast and hard for New Orleans all over again. Pain pills swirled in the purse along with a spell for later. It's taken a while for me to admit, I am in a raging battle with my body, a spinal column thirty-five degrees

bent, vertigo that comes and goes like a DC Comics villain nobody can kill. Invisible pain is both a blessing and a curse. You always look so happy, said a stranger once as I shifted to my good side grinning. But that day, alone on the riverbank, brass blaring from the Steamboat Natchez, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a girl, maybe half my age, dressed, for no apparent reason, as Wonder Woman. She strutted by in all her strength and glory, invincible, eternal, and when I stood to clap (because who wouldn't have), she bowed and posed like she knew I needed a myth, -a woman, by a river, indestructible.

The Year of the Goldfinches

There were two that hung and hovered by the mud puddle and the musk thistle. Flitting from one splintered fence post to another, bathing in the rainwater's glint like it was a mirror to some other universe where things were more acceptable, easier than the place I lived. I'd watch for them: the bright peacocking male, the low-watt female on each morning walk, days spent digging for some sort of elusive answer to the question my curving figure made. Later, I learned that they were a symbol of resurrection. Of course they were, my two yellow-winged twins feasting on thorns and liking it.

Other Books

Poems to Carry with You on Life's Journey, POEMS TO CARRY WITH YOU ON LIFE'S JOURNEY is a collection of poems written by Bruce B. Wilmer for graduates of life at every stage. It is a handbook for dealing with change, embracing new beginnings and following dreams. It is a poetic blueprint for believing in oneself and confronting every challenge with spirit and determination. The poems are meant to offer "a gentle nudge in a positive direction." With this at its heart, the book forms a gift of inspiration and encouragement that will keep on giving each time it is picked up. It provides an insightful and compassionate compass for the future. Since 1976, Bruce B. Wilmer has touched millions worldwide with his original poetry products and books. His heartfelt and accessible poetry speaks to young and old alike with its uplifting themes and melodic style. The poems in this book mirror his own experiences and his empathy and understanding for the challenges we all face and the dreams we all carry. This book is a spiritual bonus to carry with you on life's journey.

