

Carry On
(Elegies)

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Some poems in this collection appeared in some wonderful journals, sometimes in different versions:

“In Ithaca Once” —*Arsenic Lobster*

“Pre-War” & “The Center for Personal Growth is Next Door to Cremation Services” —*InDigest*

“Descriptor” — *Prick of the Spindle*

“Off Hours” —*Similar Peaks*

“Packing Heat”—Thrush Poetry Journal

“Migrations and Monuments” has an epigraph from a full work that can be found here:

<http://www.ngs.noaa.gov/INFO/fourcorners.shtml>

Additionally, thank you to those who have read these poems under various circumstances, especially Christine Bryant Cohen and Nate Pritts.

in Memory of DJ Robinson

The Roads Will Be Closed

If everyone keeps their brights on,
there: a beauty's stretched out
that we might just have to leave be.

A kid plays air drums
in first period algebra
with unsharpened pencils.
There is no incident
to report down to the office.
He harms nothing.
His lunch is in a sack
in his bag, with or without
a note from his mother.

I was schooled, too,
and my parents,
their sisters and brothers,
looking at the bomb shelter signs
beside the basement doors.
All of our eyes opened
in anticipation of the blast,
a pause,
the hot sweep, and aftermath.

Packing Heat

Lockheed rings, that vehicle inspector job
I'm looking good for. Human
resources has a bank of vital questions.

As a show of sturdy thew, I'm out of the bed.
Which caliber rounds could find their way
into a pocket's cough drop wrappers, crumpled
receipts, and coin? What's discovered contraband?

I'm comfortable with rotating shifts,
have no arrests, and can submit
to random testings, must wrestle down
a genuine objection to wearing a gun.

These answers are what they need, along
with my motivation: what do I want
from a company to give all I've got,
to draw when necessary in the clutch?

Shelter. Compassion. Semi-weekly
visits to a market for produce. Our fill.
I haven't worked in almost an entire
year, and can bear a uniform's weight.

I claim I am the man for this level
of clearance, wear no shoes on the porch,
hang up and stand through hours, unarmed.

What Cuts Through the Woods

Those orange signs show up on trees
and only make things worse.

Neighboring ranch hands and land
tenders, raw from a city council dispute,

dump a pack of wild turkeys
at the foot of my aunt's quarter mile

driveway. They bobble and charge
the abandoned railroad bed. She says

dogs and deer will take them down
through the next two or three nights.

And smoke on the wind comes
from a neighbor's place, is a local wood
holding oxygen in pockets that pop low.
We all drink from the same well.

The Droplight is a Sun

Long before you'll awaken to sip the nightstand
water, the engine practically removes itself
from gooied mounts, the proper lubricatives applied,
dabs of excess wiped into those worn jeans,
hung on garage hooks so they'll never be cleaned.

Remain tucked in behind the latched doors,
under the down and multiple threads.
Just as you'll allow it, someone will
certainly take care of maintaining you.

A deep rest repairs your body for daily wear,
so does the wall of every socket
press on the six sides of each bolt
that holds your vehicle together,
lock-washed tight by the hands of men
who live in the hours where we do not.

Hibernators

“He felt quite proud of himself. He had been
thoroughly practical.”

—Hemingway

It's another story of collapse:
just look to a flock of pigeons
in an acute dive toward
under the bench for bread,
sure as the path
is worn through woods
going thataway.

The ceiling is missing
a couple of tiles. We wait
for daylight to dig
through the universe above
the basement.
Patient, spread out
to the tune of deep
ignition in the belly
of a gas burner in the corner
with grasshoppers who've never
been outside the concrete,
sheet rock, and beams.

Call them frog bugs,
creeping, harmless.
They live here, too.

Migrations and Monuments

“Regardless of the technical nuances, we can confidently say that, considering the relatively primitive surveying technology of the day, the remote and difficult prevailing field conditions, and uncertainty in the survey's beginning coordinates for Ship Rock, Chandler Robbins' survey was a resounding success...Finally, we cannot overemphasize the fact that the aforementioned technical geodetic details are absolutely moot when considering any question of the correctness or validity...the location of the physical monument is the ultimate authority in delineating a boundary.”

— William Stone,
Where Exactly is Four Corners,
5/15/2009

Expecting mothers living near
a particle accelerator
have to tell the engineers
of the main facility.
Whatever happens beyond
that, far as we know, is mystery.

In accordance with the lease,
permission is mandatory to drill
and wedge a peep hole in our front door.

Your rucksack is washed. It hangs
in the shower—the small pocket
full of hotel shampoos

have leaked their goo.
They drown under the spigot,
spumed to excess, and all

the where-have-you-beens
are rinsed and drained.

If you are able to gather
enough of the skin
that cushions your spine,
you can make holes
large enough for rings
to become suspended
from the ceiling,
provided studs
are up there
and strong.

Kinda Like it's the Sabbath

When I rise anytime after six,
it's in panic. Entire moments
spun frantic, lost in the blazing sense
that I'm running late and will be behind
for the rest of my life, letting you down.

A clutch slave cylinder in my pocket, busted,
leaks viscous fluid in a hoodie's pouch.
There'll be no driving today, kinda like
it's the Sabbath. Twisted tears of newspaper
plug the holes and soak. I can walk
the weight of this bleeding part.

A woman, mom—not mine, but someone's,
maybe yours—walks a giant white Labrador
nosing at my lazy grip. I learn he's twelve
years old, just had a five pound tumor removed
from his shaved side, is acting spanking new:
a rubber ball hatched from a plastic egg,
tossed on the kitchen tile.

Devastation

The man on the door has lost two friends
in these last seven days. Suicide.

One: a girl tattooed, thorned roses,
with thin vines, spreading the pitch
of just one breast.

We've tried to explain: just because
there's a break in the road-side iron rails
doesn't mean a route's been cut to follow.

My dentist climbs the side of the chair
for the pull, fissures a deep line. In my jaw
under the gum, through bone,
I feel your weather an hour before
the squall hammers on your nest.

I hear thunder, and it breaks
my heart to kill, even the lights.

Great Aunt, Winter, & Sun

for Marilyn Adler

Each of us lifts a full shovel
and sends the earth down,
stabbing the tool
deep in a mound. The rite
is that we're to bury
our own dead and hear
the hollow low thud on the box
at the bottom. Mostly echo.
She was a small woman,
frail woven, sharp-angled.
Everyone drops their scoop—
cousin Frank forgets, is too moved,
must eliminate the void
until a sweat brings him back.
Still, the *we* never really fill
the hole. There are men
paid just for that, who pull
levers on a machine,
doze with louder cries
and bigger teeth
than any blood can harbor.

Strangers, Autumn, & Gray

for Ithaca's dead

A whole other mass, back in their ground,
slowly pushes, worms the pipes,
and gravels our foundations.

I ride a bus that weaves gradually up
the side of the hill, and hold back
somersaulting down in return home
through the bone yard. I'd surely blunt
on each of the stones, a flailing avalanche
on deep chiseled markers toward the top,
and come a cropper way down,
the monuments abraded,
generations' worth of runoff,
drizzle, and pour.

Pre-War

Bicycles stacked in this basement add
up to either eighty dollars in scrap
or a monkey bar obstacle course
to the damn water main, frozen again.

We thrash down lumber steps
for lessons on how to sweep, monkish
below clouds, shingle, gutter weaving
maple saplings, porous stone,
locust-shells-in-waiting dirt.

There is life within single panes, sitting up
in the front room colored like carnage in a barn.

And we *did* have some peace and lucky breaks,
in seeping wind through window seals
that kept our tiny world mostly dry.
Noise carries through dusted space
with simple grace of a plane holding on,
then letting go of Fat Man and Little Boy.

The Center for Personal Growth is Next Door to
Cremation Services

Tim brings his wife
to the courtyard
in a stainless steel egg,
reckoning she
could use the air.

I've got one—
a dash of friend
in a small vase,
and Murphy's got one too,
sets out a bronze cube
bearing a sunken cross.
He stores it away
near canned greens
in a desk fan box.
His old partner.
A business associate.
An old dog. A doc.

We're of a people
who keep absence
near. Handy
as duct tape.
The ground
is for a different kind,
with fierce ideas
on remaining whole.

Carry On

Can ashes be brought onboard,
or must we check them
with the larger cargo?
Could I set this miniature vessel
on the same surface where food
is served in the light's brilliant fade and lull?

Through the window is a canyon
he could have loved,
all that absence of rooves,
where one razors loose a dozen leashes
lashed around a self's own wrists.
There's a basset hound at each end
tugging away, or mauling the ground.
We are never alone in any event.
My brother who slipped

inks deep under young dermal layers,
sat in prisons nearby borders.
We were cornered by the window in a diner booth
out on the island, and became older men
sailing in a sedan with a pony in the back seat.
We're exiles of an old country's long gone century.

We're plowing through this life
in our longings so mighty, a bird swoops
up ahead and is creamed by the bumper.

Descriptor

for Xavier Robinson

These are fingers that cannot
feel ink on the book's page,
pressed, but they run the hills
and sloped lines in other skins.

Blood lifts these lines. A geyser-
like pressure presses hard
then calms under a fleshed ceiling:
swell from the whole night's rest.
So many visions are sewn in
to trundling beating beauty.

Your father's was not the art
of tragedy that comes from, say,
the fired gun. Nor were their scars
from glowing wire hangers.

These shapes were tucked under,
into us, with a machine. It made
compassionate ligatures from small pokes,
more curious sensations
than burning kinds of pain. Each one

a young child, exploding to share,
pulling at your cuff. Come here.
Come and take a look. Lookie
what I made. You've got to see this.

Our Advances are Not Unique

A sugar maple's arms built a chest
around our telephone wires, and roots
tore up a few slabs we shared in the walk.

We razed all the trees to chips over
that one winter, but left what they created—
a timber holding on to important calls
up there, where two birds, at least, dwell.

We stood below their home and rubbed
oils made from our palms on the toes
of our high-laced leather boots.

Poured fresh, a concrete path
between the street gutter, garden and yard,
the living pass under where others live.

Us This Day

Canners beat
the garbage trucks
to our curb.

Deer have nibbled
the neighbor peach tree,
while a man
keeps his vows
to never wear white
shoes again.
He wanders out
for a loaf of bread
he'll slice as he pleases.

This world won't flinch
at the groggy,
their stretching from dreams
and gatherings.

And a girl: she sees it all
and hears,
in every car tire's turn,
the name of a saint.

She recalls, from a collective
memory of ether,
great fastings commonly
mistaken as a sacrifice of sanity.

It is committed devotion,
a full majestic dish.
Our hunger is buried
in a shadeless field
where we muster,
just about daily,
spread on our backs.

Artisans

Waves distilled in a foam
applied to our wounds.

A machine we shall never think
of as a gun, intent
to ornament up these bodies
we carry some simple life
around in.

A new badge covers
over decades of sun
weathering and raunch.

Elsewhere, a woman
in dyed hair
wears baby brass knuckles
around her neck.
The stencils she's cut:
some are snipped in sheets
of tin or aluminum.
Others are sliced from
pizza box lids
so they'll be killed
after only a few sprays,
soaked and withered
under creation's gentle coat.

No Way To Live

This one show had everyone drunk
with hidden remorse on flashy scenes.
In another episode, everyone's
accused of murder, or else they're
getting killed, or beside a pool
cooking in the sun without waking.

This is reporting. A young man's throat
closed in the hospital's lobby. The nurse
said he was blue before his knees
came to rest on the tile. After, the ashes
arrived, sealed in a small jar and
just like that
there's too much stuff in my place
to consider moving. Facts.

Once upon a time, a salad plate
slid in front of me, and I'd talk
down to the cherry tomatoes,
taunt to them, like small people
at the prongs of the fork.

I hope they've forgiven me.
They've become a part of me,
a beast, teeth grinding down
on themselves, especially in nights
with drink, when nobody else
needs to get further hunted.

Pingueculum or Pterygium

Whatever.

They can fold a flap
on my eye's face
and hit it
with a laser.

It's safe.
They do it
all the time
to everyone.

Unless you're
some kind
of kung fu
fighter, it'll
hold.

Containable Noise

I've awoken in spinning cars
interested in specifically where
we were, but obligated to scream
at stretched ragtop skin rooves.

Only sometimes do those sounds
make sense. If these are my last
words, they're finally released.

Dryer

A bartender decides
a dollar no longer equals
4 quarters, gives 3 for the felt.

He's out of touch
with his craft.
Pours and pulls
But can't finesse
that soda gun
to only drizzle
the raw syrup.

The laundry mat
is 24 hours.
The night shift
is covered
by a machine gun turret.
Drop extra coin
for the 20 more
minutes those shirts
always need.

Pinch the jeans
in the rolled up
back window,
and floor it home
to give them air.

Golden Hill

Don't pay any attention
to how many bumpers
have kissed you.

The market's T is red neon
like it's trying to grow
into a mission's cross head.

Behind all those furious
sunned succulents
a retired ginger woman
fires up a wet saw
and slices at subway tile.

There are a few nights
the rain will never stop
pulling warmth through
all the walls.

I have to run to the store.
I have to pull the scarf tight.

Every beet I cut
looks like a heart
on fire in a Mexican
art piece.

Oh, Adam

If you were a real man
you'd cut your own hair
with a sharpened stick.

Out there is a flower dealer
watching a woodpecker
with priorities in order.

You've been constant
with grace and time.
Upkept and polished
to gaze upon day after year.

In Ithaca Once

I left her, barely alive
up in the rental, studying
our physics above the garage.
A BMW sidecar was flipped over
next to that loyal desk I stole
from a university department.

That landlord had his tea, found
a notebook in a top drawer,
called collect, mailed it
beyond confine: California.

All of those tight rope bridges
daring city planning officials
pulled across the gorges
had nothing to do with it.
We just froze like smelt.

And then, that one pizza place
with free delivery through midnight
locked up, the three ovens
all vanished in morning.

Returning

If I were to jump this fence, shoes leading a slide down a canyon's shoulder, those trees at the bottom would catch me, scrape me raw, and I'd deserve it.

I've wasted the last three years, ignoring useful parts of the carrots. Drawing shades in midday. How long do facts about video games take to erase from the human brain? Bees escape plants without flowers, right?

Vegetable stems become soil, if I can see through clouds built from fruit flies. Over a course of, say, seven thousand years, a stone can complete a simper.

An incredibly mysterious current event: a garage door is wide open, waiting for anything.