



Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems, 1968-1998

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This volume brings together new work along with poems gathered from nine previous collections. When Linda Pastan's first book was published in 1971, the Jerusalem Post wrote, she "in large measure fulfilled Emerson's dream -- the revelation of 'the miraculous in the common.'" Since then, Pastan has continued to explore the complexities, passion, and dangers under the surfaces of ordinary life. She speaks in the voices of Penelope and Eve; of daughter, mother, and wife. The new book follows work that over thirty years both darkens and deepens with time.

Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems, 1968-1998 Details

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Author : Linda Pastan

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Kc says

My favorite book by my favorite poet. Her poetry has both passion and domesticity, which is relatable to me! Her words are simple and surprising. I can't say how much I adore her and this book. In a fire, I would have to grab this one!

Jason says

Oh, how I love the poetry of Linda Pastan. Her first poem that I ever read was "Marks" in my college poetry textbook, and this poem reappears in this collection. What amazes me about these poems are their simplicity and elegance. I like how Pastan reuses words and images throughout all her poems (snow, Eden, alphabets, curving roads). Her poems never get old or seem repetitive, though. This is my favorite poetry book I've read all summer in 2009.

Jimmy says

Some great poems in this book. Here are a few examples:

The Happiest Day
by Linda Pastan

It was early May, I think
a moment of lilac or dogwood
when so many promises are made
it hardly matters if a few are broken.
My mother and father still hovered
in the background, part of the scenery
like the houses I had grown up in,
and if they would be torn down later
that was something I knew
but didn't believe. Our children were asleep
or playing, the youngest as new
as the new smell of the lilacs,
and how could I have guessed
their roots were shallow
and would be easily transplanted.
I didn't even guess that I was happy.
The small irritations that are like salt
on melon were what I dwelt on,
though in truth they simply
made the fruit taste sweeter.

So we sat on the porch
in the cool morning, sipping
hot coffee. Behind the news of the day—
strikes and small wars, a fire somewhere—
I could see the top of your dark head
and thought not of public conflagrations
but of how it would feel on my bare shoulder.
If someone could stop the camera then...
if someone could only stop the camera
and ask me: are you happy?
perhaps I would have noticed
how the morning shone in the reflected
color of lilac. Yes, I might have said
and offered a steaming cup of coffee.

Ethics
by Linda Pastan

In ethics class so many years ago
our teacher asked this question every fall:
If there were a fire in a museum,
which would you save, a Rembrandt painting
or an old woman who hadn't many
years left anyhow? Restless on hard chairs
caring little for pictures or old age
we'd opt one year for life, the next for art
and always half-heartedly. Sometimes
the woman borrowed my grandmother's face
leaving her usual kitchen to wander
some drafty, half-imagined museum.
One year, feeling clever, I replied
why not let the woman decide herself?
Linda, the teacher would report, eschews
the burdens of responsibility.
This fall in a real museum I stand
before a real Rembrandt, old woman,
or nearly so, myself. The colors
within this frame are darker than autumn,
darker even than winter — the browns of earth,
though earth's most radiant elements burn
through the canvas. I know now that woman
and painting and season are almost one
and all beyond the saving of children.

The Almanac of Last Things
by Linda Pastan

From the almanac of last things
I choose the spider lily

for the grace of its brief
blossom, though I myself
fear brevity,

but I choose The Song of Songs
because the flesh
of those pomegranates
has survived
all the frost of dogma.

I choose January with its chill
lessons of patience and despair--and
August, too sun-struck for lessons.
I choose a thimbleful of red wine
to make my heart race,

then another to help me
sleep. From the almanac
of last things I choose you,
as I have done before.
And I choose evening

because the light clinging
to the window
is at its most reflective
just as it is ready
to go out.

Marks
by Linda Pastan

My husband gives me an A
for last night's supper,
an incomplete for my ironing,
a B plus in bed.
My son says I am average,
an average mother, but if
I put my mind to it
I could improve.
My daughter believes
in Pass/Fail and tells me
I pass. Wait 'til they learn
I'm dropping out.

Abby says

Linda Pastan is my favorite poet. I had never heard of her when I ended up with a free copy of this book over

a decade ago. I immediately loved it, and I've read it over and over again. I love how this collection takes you through the different periods of her life - having children, middle age, grieving her parents, etc. I read an interview with her where she said that she edits each poem over 100 times. Amazing.

Dan Simmons says

Loved this collection. Here are a few of my favorites...

The Obligation to Be Happy

It is more onerous
than the rites of beauty
or housework, harder than love.
But you expect it of me casually,
the way you expect the sun
to come up, not in spite of rain
or clouds but because of them.

And so I smile, as if my own fidelity
to sadness were a hidden vice –
that downward tug on my mouth,
my old suspicion that health
and love are brief irrelevancies,
no more than laughter in the warm dark
strangled at dawn.

Happiness. I try to hoist it
on my narrow shoulders again –
a knapsack heavy with gold coins.
I stumble around the house,
bump into things.
Only Midas himself
would understand.

The Safecracker

On nights when the moon seems impenetrable –
a locked porthole to space;
when the householder bars his windows
and doors, and his dog lies until dawn,
one jeweled eye open; when the maiden sleeps
with her rosy knees sealed tightly together,
on such nights the safecracker sets to work.
Axe...Chisel...Nitroglycerin...
Within the vault lie forty thousand

tons of gold; the heaped up spoils
of Ali Baba's cave; the secrets of the molecule.
He sands his fingertips
to feel the subtle vibrations
of wheel lining up, just so, with wheel.
His toolmarks are his fingerprints.
And now a crack appears on the side
of the egg, a single fault line,
and within: the golden yolk just waiting.
A kind of wind...a door flies open...a glitter
of forsythia forced out of the branch.
With smoothest fingertips you touch
the locked cage of my ribs...just so.
My knees fall open. And Cleopatra smiles,
whose own Egyptians first invented the lock.

To a Daughter Leaving Home

When I taught you
at eight to ride
a bicycle, loping along
beside you
as you wobbled away
on two round wheels,
my own mouth rounding
in surprise when you pulled
ahead down the curved
path of the park,
I kept waiting
for the thud
of your crash as I
sprinted to catch up,
while you grew
smaller, more breakable
with distance,
pumping, pumping
for your life, screaming
with laughter,
the hair flapping
behind you like a
handkerchief waving
goodbye.

The Happiest Day

It was early May, I think
a moment of lilac or dogwood
when so many promises are made
it hardly matters if a few are broken.
My mother and father still hovered
in the background, part of the scenery
like the houses I had grown up in,
and if they would be torn down later
that was something I knew
but didn't believe. Our children were asleep
or playing, the youngest as new
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how the morning shone in the reflected
color of lilac. Yes, I might have said
and offered a steaming cup of coffee.

Teri says

Pastan is like a feminine version of William Stafford.

Kelsey says

This was the collection of poetry that I grew up to...the collection where I learned to love poetry and to love through poetry. It was the book that I wrote college essays about... the book that taught me that words can do

something emotive like nothing else can.

Joe says

Thirty years of poems. This was almost like reading an unintentional novel, following the arc of Linda Pastan's life not as a sequence of actual events but as a sequence of growth, of changing moods, of love and lust and motherhood and hospice. Her words are simple; her thoughts are deep. Her clarity is stunning. As a man, I appreciated the female point of view that drew me in rather than pushing me away.

Jsavett1 says

Linda Pastan is a really good poet. Most of the pieces here have little moments of beauty and simplicity which stay. I'm really happy I read this though I'm not sure I'll return to it often-

UPDATE---Boy, was I wrong. Just a few years later and upon returning to this book, I find it full of jewels. How I mistook them for mere stones I have no idea, but Pastan is a treasure. She is the Poet Laureate of Maryland, but she is the poet laureate of nature and family, loss and silence.

Joan Colby says

The recent poems that begin this collection, with the exception of the title poem, written for a painting, illustrate what every poet or writer dreads: the falling off from earlier excellence, as a factor of age. One wishes Pastan had confined this volume to selections from her previous works and eliminated the inferior later poems. Carnival Evening could have simply set the stage.

Arlene says

Short, well crafted, usually free-verse poems. I think a slimmer selection would have had more impact, as the subjects and metaphors began to become familiar and expected.

HBalikov says

This combination of new (1998) poems as well as selected ones going back as far as 1968 was a National Book Award finalist.

I do not recall having read any particular poem of Pastan's before. As with other great poets, I am impressed at how her words surround me and challenge me to peel them back, layer by layer, until I can appreciate their whole meaning. It is worth the effort.

Here are some poems or fragments that I suggest are characteristic of her work:

From The Imperfect Paradise
If God had stopped work after the fifth day
With Eden full of vegetables and fruits,
If oak and lilac held exclusive sway
Over a kingdom made of stems and roots,
If landscape were the genius of creation
And neither man nor serpent played a role
And God must look to wind for lamentation
And not to picture postcards of the soul,
Would he have rested on his bank of cloud
With nothing in the universe to lose,
Or would he hunger for a human crowd?
Which would a wise and just creator choose:
The green hosannas of a budding leaf
Or the strict contract between love and grief?

There Are Poems
There are poems
that are never written,
that simply move across
the mind
like skywriting
on a still day:
slowly the first word
drifts west,
the last letter dissolve
on the tongue,
and what is left
is the pure blue
of insight, without cloud
or comfort.

Wildflowers
You gave me dandelions
They took our lawn
By squatter's rights ---
round suns rising
in April, soft moons
blowing away in June.
You gave me lady slippers,
bloodroot, milkweed,
trillium whose secret number
the children you gave me
tell. In the hierarchy
of flowers, the wild
rise on their stems
for naming.
Call them weeds.
I pick them as I

picked you,
for their fierce,
unruly joy.

Stephen Glynn says

My favorites included "RSVP Regrets Only"...an Oh Wow! poem and "Courbet's Still Life with Apples and Pomegranate" and several others. I'm still trying to decide if I will add it to my "permanent" collection.

Nikki says

Love this collection and will definitely return to it when I'm in the mood for more poetry. Read about 170 pages so far.

Bevlaudie says

Reason why I love poetry - the ability to find the perfect metaphor to explain seemingly unexplainable feelings.
