

# CARRIE NEWCOMER

*before & after*



## Before and After

*There are experiences by which we mark our lives. Some of these experiences are large events - the birth of a child, the loss of a parent, a wedding or divorce. Some of these experiences are small moments that we did not realize at the time would effect us so profoundly. There is always another a before and after and because of that, our lives grow deeper.*

The dust settles after a hit and run  
Bewildered by the damage done  
I don't know why we chose the roads we travel  
Or how a life could get so unraveled.

**Chorus:** We live our lives from then until now,  
By the mercy received and the marks on our brow  
To my heart I'll collect what the four winds will scatter  
And frame my life into before and after.

Once a trick of light made me believe,  
A red fire was blazing from every tree.  
We held hands as the evening gathered.  
I forgave myself for what I didn't ask her.

I once saw the sky filled with falling stars  
Bumped my head in the dark and it left a scar  
Held on too tight before I let it go,  
Then forgave myself for what I didn't know.

**Chorus:** We live our lives from then until now,  
By the mercy received and the marks on our brow  
To my heart I'll collect what the four winds will scatter  
And frame my life into before and after.

I've stretched my soul over fifty states,  
I have lived on fumes and religious cornflakes,  
And once I dreamt my shoe had grown thin and battered,  
And forgave myself for what didn't matter.

God said Cain where is your brother,

And who will tell his grieving mother?  
Jacob dreamt an angel called his name  
And he never was the same

**Chorus:** We live our lives from then until now,  
By the mercy received and the marks on our brow  
To my heart I'll collect what the four winds will scatter  
And frame my life into before and after.

## Ghost Trains

*I came upon an essay about mysterious natural phenomena and the stories people have told over the years to explain them. I've always been fascinated by light, mystery and a good story.*

There's a light in the darkness just barely out of view  
From the corner of your vision it beckons to you.  
After the crops have all come in amid the stubble and the chaff  
Keep on walking when it whispers and don't look back.

Some say it's the Ghost Train's headlight or poor Wayland Smiths' pyre  
Some say it's the Will o the Wisp or St. Emo's fire,  
Or the ghost of wandering spirits that got lost between the worlds.  
Keep on walking when they whisper or if the lines begin to blur.

**Chorus** When it's done it's said and done.  
What it's gone it's good and gone.  
Sometimes there's nothing left to do,  
But pack it up and move along.

I'm not saying don't remember or that all things can be repaired  
But after the truth's been told where do we go from there?  
Sorrow is a constant companion we learn to walk beside.  
Keep walking when it whispers and don't listen when it lies.

**Chorus** When it's done it's said and done.  
What it's gone it's good and gone.  
Sometimes there's nothing left to do,  
But pack it up and move along.

There are stories that we were told just to keep us in our place.  
There are stories that we made up ourselves to save a little face.  
There are the ones that made us crazy and the ones that kept us sane,  
Keep on walking if the stories all start to sound the same.

**Chorus** When it's done it's said and done.

What it's gone it's good and gone.  
Sometimes there's nothing left to do,  
But pack it up and move along.  
Sometimes there's nothing left to do,  
But pack it up and move along.  
Sometimes there's nothing left to do,  
But pack it up and move along.

### **I Do Not Know its Name**

*The opening lines of the Tao Te Ching are translated as "The Tao that can be expressed is not the Everlasting Tao. The Name that can be named is not the Everlasting Name." This song is a little hymn to mystery and the mysterious.*

He leaned and whispered as he turned the page,  
And he said "Make yourself into a flame"  
A crazy old lion with his hair all backlit,  
Grinnin' like a little boy who has a secret.

**Chorus:** I do not know its name  
"Though it's ever intertwining,  
And I believe it must look like an old man shining

We were eating summer peaches by a roadside stand,  
Juice running down like laughter on our chin and on our hands  
When we were done we looked around and smiled at each other,  
And you said, "Come on Carrie, let's have another."

**Chorus:** I do not know its name  
No matter how I try  
But I think it must taste like peaches eaten by the roadside

He drove a rental car shuttle to the airport on Sundays  
We chatted that grey morning 'bout the choir he sang with Wednesdays.  
He sang a haunting gospel hymn shameless and clear,  
With only me a wandering stranger sitting there to hear.

**Chorus:** I do not know its name  
Elusive and subtle,  
But I believe it must sound like that man singing in the shuttle.

Standing in the river barefoot in the current,  
I hear a birdcall and try to learn it.  
The water is a wonder, it's cold and fast and deep,  
I saw fish go swimming out too far for me to reach.

**Chorus:** I do not know its name,  
Swimmer or watcher.

But I believe that there is always something,  
Moving beneath the water.

If holy is a sphere that cannot be rendered,  
There is no middle place because all of it is center

I do not know its name  
I do not know its name  
I do not know its name

## **Stones in the River**

*This song was inspired by a conversation I had with Parker J. Palmer about how small our actions are in the large and rushing river of time. And yet, each stone cast into a river may be the final collective bit e that changes the course of the water. And so we all search for our spirit's true north, we offer our best intentions to the world, and we cast our stones into the water.*

There's a crack in the glass where the water gets out.  
There's a dusty wind when the heart's in drought.  
And the map of the world looks as if true north,  
Disappeared entirely.

I can live divided or bent  
Conspire in my own diminishment  
Or believe in the better world I've dreamt  
That grows from inside out

**Chorus:** So today I'll drop stones into the river.  
And the current takes them out into forever.  
And the truth is most of us will never know,  
Where our best intentions go.  
And still I'll drop another stone.

So we trust in a dim flashlight,  
And always walk into available light.  
I'm not a woman inclined to bet,  
But it's never failed me yet.

**Chorus:** So today I'll drop stones into the river.  
And the current takes them out into forever.  
And the truth is most of us will never know,  
Where our best intentions go.  
And still I'll drop another stone.

**Chorus:** So today we'll drop stones into the river.  
And the current takes them out into forever.  
And the truth is most of us will never know,  
Where our best intentions go.

And still we'll drop another stone.

The empty self still hears the call,  
To live in the center of the ache and awe.  
It's there the hope of the whole world shines.  
And yes, there still is time.

**Chorus:** So today I'll drop stones into the river.  
And the current takes them out into forever.  
And the truth is most of us will never know,  
Where our best intentions go.  
And still I'll drop another stone.

## **If Not Now**

**Chorus:** If not now, tell me when  
If not now, tell me when.  
We may never see this moment  
Or place in time again  
If not now, if not now, tell me when.

I see sorrow and trouble in this land  
I see sorrow and trouble in this land  
Although there will be struggle we'll make the change we can.  
If not now, tell me when.

### **Chorus**

I may never see the Promised Land.  
I may never see the Promised Land.  
And yet we'll take the journey  
And walk it hand in hand  
If not now, tell me when.

### **Chorus**

**Bridge:** So we'll work it 'til it's done  
Every daughter every son,  
Every soul that ever longed for something better,  
Something brighter.

It will take a change of heart for this to mend.  
It will take a change of heart for this to mend.  
But miracles do happen every shining now and then  
If not now, tell me when?

### **Chorus**

If Not Now, Tell me when.

But miracles do happen every shining now and then.  
If not now tell me when.  
If not now tell me when. If not now tell me when.

## **A Small Flashlight**

*There have been times when I felt like I was moving forward with only a small flashlight to guide me. The good news is that even a small flashlight is enough to illuminate the next step.*

The way is dark up ahead of me.  
The way is dark and I cannot see.  
What I love the most is a flashlight beam,  
Lighting up the way when I cannot see.

The way unfolds like an open hand.  
The way unfolds like I didn't plan.  
And only in looking back do we understand,  
That the way was true as an open hand.

Over trials and trouble I've already come.  
And the net appeared when I needed one.  
Yes the road is dark and the ground is rough,  
Most the time a flashlight has to be enough.

We move forward one step at a time,  
Wide-eyed and hopeful, lost and half blind,  
Mistake by mistake, we all learn to be kind.

There is so much to see and to realize,  
If I could close my mouth and open up my eyes  
And the world will tell us more than enough lies.  
But we'll find our way with a small flashlight.

## **A Simple Change of Heart**

*When we are in times of crisis or change there is an opportunity. When we are in change there is an opening to reassess what has worked and what really has not. I used to think the glass was either half empty or half full. Now I know that it's just a really big glass.*

There has never been a day  
When the world wasn't new,  
When the sun didn't rise,  
Or the light breaks on through.  
Things might get a little worse,  
Before they get a little better.  
But there are always clearer skies,  
Stretching out beyond bad weather and  
The world holds its breath  
To see where we'll incline this time.

I feel something has shifted,  
I know the story's changed.  
In the window of a crisis,  
We can build a better frame.  
Come on and look inside you  
That's the best place to start.  
The greatest revolution  
Is a simple change of heart.  
I can't put the sacred in such a little box  
Because it's not.

There's no shame in learning something  
When there's something that must be learned.  
But there's danger when we will not see.  
What our actions earn.

Courage doesn't always shout  
But whispers and reminds,  
When we get up one more morning  
And try one more time.  
We tried yelling at each other,  
It hasn't worked so well.

Throwing gas on fire,  
Never helped as far as I can tell  
Throwing stones cut deep,  
A little kindness goes deeper still.



## **Hush**

*A Love Song.*

You can rest your head upon my heart,  
And we'll curl into a question mark,  
And I'll hold you in the arms of Hush,  
And love will have to be enough.

There's a time laugh and a time to grieve  
A time to speak and a time to breathe.  
Let the silence be the place we meet  
In the space between heart beats>

**Chorus:** Hey la hey la hey li  
Hush my darling hush a bye.  
Sparrows fall and sparrow fly,  
And we may not ever know why.

Some things we can forgive one time,  
Then it's out of sight and it's out of mind.  
Some things we have to forgive twice,  
And every day for all our lives.

## **Chorus**

The known world is an open letter,  
The unknown world we'll brave together.  
I'll knit you a redemption sweater,  
To wrap your troubles in.

You can rest your head upon my heart,  
And we'll curl into a question mark,  
And I'll hold you in the arms of hush.  
And love will have to be enough.

**Chorus:**

**Coy dogs**

*A coy dog is a cross breed between coyote and dog. Because they are half domesticated and half wild creatures, they are destined to walk the sharp edge of their conflicted nature.*

There have been too many leavings to list in one place.  
Too many arrivals to ever retrace  
And all who have wandered have not fallen from grace,  
Just done a few things they'd like to erase,  
And met with their shadows face to face.

Up on the ridge top a coy dog cries,  
It's the mother a coyote with bright yellow eyes.  
A coy dog's half friendly the other half wild,  
Half is homebody and half is streetwise,  
It can't help it's nature and but God know it tries.

**Chorus** Star light star bright,  
All the dogs are restless tonight.  
Leave on the porch light,  
I'll be home after midnight.

It's all blessed and restless and up for debate,  
A season and chance to alter a fate,  
But a moment can pass just because it can't wait  
And time hits you hard with terrible weight,  
Like a rock to the forehead stamped with "Too Late."

**Chorus**

**Bridge** Our vision is often faulty.  
We see but through the glass darkly.  
And yet, we know deep down,  
When we hear the sound,  
When it speaks our name.

The moon eats its center until it dissolves,  
Then conquers the shadow with single resolve.  
Here's to hoping for wholeness no matter how small,

Asking the questions that cannot be solved.  
And following the ache of unnamable call.

**Chorus**

### **I meant to do my work today**

*This the prayer my friend Richard taught me to pray at the end of the day.*

*"What has been done has been done, what has not been done has not been done.*

*Let it be."*

I meant to do my work today,  
So many plans I had made.  
I'd check the mail, I'd make the calls  
Save the world and sweep the hall,  
Finally get my accounting done,  
Sort the beans one by one,  
But I got waylaid by the morning sun.  
And I got absolutely nothing done.

I thought I'd live a louder life.  
I'd learn a lot and get it right.  
I'd rent a loft I'd drink all night,  
I'd be a living archetype,  
And in a blinding flash of light,  
I'd see that one great insight,  
But silence called me deeper still.  
Like nothing else ever will.

I woke to hear an owl nearby,  
Hunting something large enough to cry.  
Nature's always beautiful,  
The change of season always right,  
The moon shines cold and true and bright,  
And sets at dawn without a fight,  
And yet I could not find a way,  
To get myself back to sleep last night.

I never knew just what it meant  
The way you smiled while you dreamt.  
And why my heart can overflow,  
And why mistakes can haunt me so,  
Why nothing ever stops or stays,  
Dust shimmers in the morning rays,  
I didn't do the work that I'd had said.

I just wandered through these thoughts instead.

## **Do No Harm**

*This song was inspired by a short story by Scott Russell Sanders called “  
It is a hymn for those who believe in the possibility of the peaceable kingdom here on  
earth, here and now.*

John Roth had a heart like flame, he believed all souls were loved the  
same.  
He packed up his hopes and his family and moved to Ohio.  
There in the deep dark wilderness, with a newborn son he soon was  
blessed.  
Raised him up in the ways of the old prophets, and named him Isaiah  
Roth.

**Chorus:** Do no harm shed no blood, the only law here is love.  
We can call the kingdom down here on earth.  
Beat your swords into plows, don't be afraid I'll show how.  
Lift your eyes to the skies. All is holy here

The forest people soon came near. His message to the red children  
clear.  
We can build the peaceable kingdom here in shadows of these trees.  
They planted oats and beans and maize. They planted their hearts in the  
dirt of that place.  
And they learned to speak of hope and grace in language of John Roth.

## **Chorus “**

When Isaiah Roth had just turned ten, he was working in the loft again.  
He looked out and saw eight white men come riding up that day.  
The men shouted out from the deepening glade saying, “Ya'll come on  
out an we can trade”  
The forest people walked out unafraid with smiles and open hands.

The white traders brought up their guns,  
And them shot down each and every one.  
And the Eden that John Roth begun,  
Lay bleeding on the ground.

## **Chorus**

The world has aged by 50 years. The Quakers came and settled near.  
Old Isaiah Roth still preaches here, that the greatest law is love.  
Some people say it's all a scam, just the ravings of some old man.  
But Isaiah Roth says he still can, see Eden on the hill.

Do no harm,  
Shed no blood,  
The only law here is love.

## **I Wish I May, I Wish I Might**

*This song was inspired by a lovely essay called "Carnival" by Philip Gulley in his book*

*I Love You Miss Huddleston and Other Inappropriate Longings.*

*And yes, most of the fairs listed in this song are real Indiana county fairs.*

Sweet Corn Days in Oakland City,  
The Apple Fest in Nappanee,  
The Blueberry Cavalcade,  
The Sacred Heart Polish Days,  
Oktoberfest in Rensselaer,  
Marshmallow Days in Ligonier,  
The Feast of the Hunter's Moon,  
The Pork and Pumpkin Rendezvous.

**Chorus:** At this year's county fair  
All our friends will be there.  
Gather kin and cousins near,  
And everything we love is here.

Soybean Fest in Rising Sun  
Scarecrow Days in Wanatah  
The Bean Blossom Jamboree,  
Maple Syrup Fest in Wawasee,  
Popcorn Fair in Versailles,  
The Mennonite Relief Quilt Sale,  
A fish fry, gala, holiday,  
Covered Bridge and Dogwood Days.

**Chorus:** There'll be fireworks and lemonade  
A tractor pull and fine parade.  
There'll a gospel jubilee,  
Right before they crown the sausage queen.

Bingo games and, polka bands,  
Arts and crafts made by hand,  
Pierogies, sweet corn on a stick,  
Carnival rides think of it,  
Now I am grown and miles away,

From apple nights and limestone days,  
I wish I may I wish I might,  
Be at the county fair tonight,

## A Crash of Rhinoceros

*Yep, they're all real animal grouping names!*

When Adam when out to name the animals  
He sat on a rock and he figured,  
Horse and cow and goat and sheep,  
Were the best names that he could deliver.  
But Eve looked around at all of that glory,  
Said Hon I think we should consider,  
Something a bit more unique and refined,  
For each and every critter.

**Chorus:** It's a Crash of rhinoceros a pomp of pekinese,  
It's a gaggle of geese and a swarm of bees  
A parliament of owl and gam of whale  
A pandemonium of parrot and a watch of nightingale  
A Huddle of Walrus, company of Moles,  
Exultation of lark and a murder of crow,  
A simple flock sheep and a herd of deer,  
Its a bask of crocodiles and a sleuth of bear.

Adam looked shocked and scratched his head,  
Eve stood there happy and beaming.  
The animals gathered in close to their feet,  
With roars of delight, barks and singing.  
She's on a roll and just getting started  
The birds and beasts held their breath.  
What fine appellation would they receive,  
And which of them would be the next?

**Chorus:** It's a team of oxen and a mob of kangaroo,  
It's a charm of flinch if there are more than two.  
A troubling of goldfish, a cluster of cats,  
A bloat of hippopotami a cloud of bats,  
Ostentation of peacock, a barren of mules,  
An army of ant, nursery of raccoon,  
A parcel of penguins a dray of squirrels,  
A bed of oyster with or without the pearls.

All that naming lasted far into the night,  
Until even the insects had groupings.  
Eve was still bright eyed and willing to finish,  
Though her shoulders and fig leaves were drooping.  
Adam said, "Darling I'm proud and amazed  
You're really one heck of a woman.  
So lets go to sleep and tomorrow we'll rise,  
And we'll start naming the rocks plants and woodlands."

**Chorus** It's a tittering of magpie, company of mole (knob of toads or a rake of colts)  
Its a pride of lions a tribe of goats,  
A plague of locust and a pack of dogs,  
A leap of leopard an array of hedgehog  
It's a caravan of camels, a drift of swan,  
A sulk of foxes and the list goes on,  
It's a an prickle of porcupine, a battery of hens,  
A cohort of zebra and now once again,  
It's a colony of rabbits, and a sounder of boar  
IAn ambush of tigers, now just a little more  
It's a business of ferrets, a swarm of eels  
A covey of quail and a pod of seals  
It's a parade of elephant ,a dole of dove  
A bale of turtles and them all I love  
And she kissed the horde of hamsters  
On their furry little heads, sighed with satisfaction  
And she went to bed