



Anders Carlson-Wee is the author of *The Low Passions* (W.W. Norton, 2019), a New York Public Library Book Group Selection. His work has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *BuzzFeed*, *Ploughshares*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *New England Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Oxford American*, *The Sun*, *Best New Poets*, *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*, and many other publications. The recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the McKnight Foundation, the Camargo Foundation, Poets & Writers, Bread Loaf, Sewanee, and the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, he is the winner of the 2017 Poetry International Prize. His work has been translated into Chinese. Anders holds an MFA from Vanderbilt University and lives in Minneapolis. (*Poems reproduced here with author's approval for classroom use*)

Link to “**Riding the Highline**,” a 16-min film by Kai and Anders Carlson-Wee on train hopping:
<http://www.ridingthehighline.com/>

Poems from *The Low Passions* (Norton, 2019):

Dynamite

My brother hits me hard with a stick
 So I whip a choke chain

across his face. We're playing
 a game called *Dynamite*

where everything you throw
 is a stick of dynamite,

unless it's pine. Pine sticks
 are rifles and pinecones are grenades,

but everything else is dynamite.
 I run down the driveway

and back behind the garage
 where we keep the leopard frogs

in buckets of water
 with logs and rock islands.

When he comes around the corner
 the blood is pouring

out of his nose and down his neck
 and he has a hammer in his hand.

I pick up his favorite frog
 And say If you come any closer

I'll squeeze. He tells me I won't.
 He starts coming closer.

I say a hammer isn't dynamite.
 He reminds me that everything is dynamite.

The Low Passions

The Lord came down because God wasn't enough.
 He lies on sodden cardboard behind bushes
 in the churchyard. Wrapped in faded red. A sleeping bag
 he found or traded for. Dark stains like clouds
 before a downpour. The stone wall beside him rising,
 always rising, the edges of stone going blunt
 where the choirboy climbs. He opens his mouth,
 but nothing goes in and nothing comes out.
 Like the sideshow man who long ago lost
 his right testicle to the crossbar of a Huffy.
 He peddles the leftover pain. The stitches clipped
 a week later by his father, the fiberglass bathtub
 running with color, the puffy new scar,
 the crooked look of the pitted half-sack.
 He tells me you only need one nut, and I want
 to believe him. I want to believe he can still
 get it up. I want to believe he has daughters, sons,
 a grandchild on the way, a wife at home
 in a blue apron baking. But why this day-old bread
 from the dumpster, this stash of hollow bottles
 in the buckthorn, this wrinkled can of Pabst?
 The Lord came down because God wasn't enough.
 Because the childless man draws the bathwater
 and dries. Because the choirboy never sings
 as he climbs. Because the bread has all molded
 and the mouths are all open. Open to the clotting air.
 Homeless, anything helps. Anything. Anything you can
 Spare. God bless you, God bless you, God bless. God,
 Lord God, God God, good God, good Lord very good God.

After Fighting

Sometimes my brother and I let go
Of rage and snuck in the garage to cut

fistfuls of beef from the chest freezer,
then lay side by side in the pines waiting

for animals to come. We didn't speak.
Hardly even breathed as we played

dead on the rust-colored needles,
the clods of meat cupped loosely

in our upturned palms. And if we waited
long enough, if we let the clods thaw

and seep their blood-deep sweetness,
sometimes a chipmunk slunk up

and nuzzled into our isthmus, crossing
timidly from his hand to mine,

mine to his, chewing. Its hunger
like an invisible line strung between us.

Cousin Josh on Family

Fargo, North Dakota

You ever had some loose screw try to tell you
Your friends is the family you choose?
Well I wouldn't bottle the breath of the minister
that delivered the message. The family you got
is the only family you're gonna get,
take it or leave it. Wanna know what I got?
I got myself sisters. Two of em. But that's all I got
to say about that. That's all I ever knew
to say about my sisters: There's two of em.
I bet I coulda stomached a brother better.
Even when I was a little grommet I wanted
a brother, so I practiced on this pet lizard I had.
He was one of them color-changers that could
change his skin to blend in with whatever's
below him. I named him Tony and took him
around with me. Showed him how to do
whatever I was doin. Talked to him and tried
to explain things. I remember wearin tie-dyed shirts
and putting Tony on my shoulder so I could
watch him change. One day I had him on the back
of my hand while I was hot-wheelin down the street
and he jumped off and I ran right over him.

What do you say about somethin like that?
Afterwards he was so flat he looked like one of them
Outlines of a lizard in a coloring book. No blood
Or nothing, like nothing was in him. I'll be damned
if I know what else to say about that.
I don't even know why I told you about it.
Would you believe me if I said I never got over it?
Never got over the fact that when he died
he was the color of my hand?

McDonald's

You walk all night and into the next day
To survive the sudden October snow.

You have no money or hope of money.
Your backpack is a cloth sack with duct-

tape straps and safety pins in place
of zippers. Your gloves have no thumbs,

just holes, just unraveling half fingers.
You've come inside for the heat,

for plastic spoons, mayo, salt and sugar
packets, hand napkins you'll ball later

for insulation beneath your clothes.
You've come for the bathroom – soap

to scrub your face, your neck, your pits,
toilet rolls for kindling flames as you camp

alone tonight in the woods or in a silo.
Mirror for popping your zits, hand dryer

for drying your hair, your musty coat.
You've come to run warm water

over hands you can no longer feel,
come to sit and rest and do nothing,

and think nothing, and be no one.
You ask the boy at the counter

if you can have some water. He nods,
tapping his foot to a bluegrass tune,

slides a paper cup toward you
with a smooth hand, asks

out of habit if that will be everything.