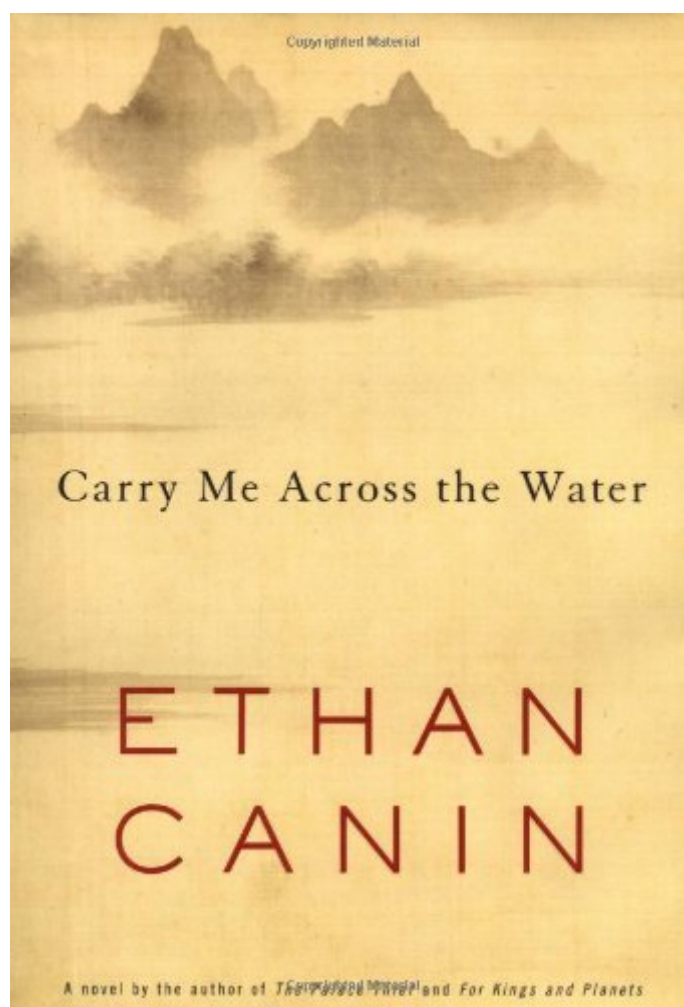


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# Carry Me Across The Water: A Novel



## Synopsis

“Take the advice of no one,” August Kleinman’s mother says to him while August is still a young boy in Germany, and with these words to guide him, he escapes Nazi Germany and goes on to build a fortune, a family, and life on his own terms in America. At the defining moments that reveal character and shape fate — a shocking encounter with a Japanese soldier in a cave during World War II, the audacious decision to start a brewery in Pittsburgh and a violent reaction against threats to its independent success, a vacation in Barbados, during which his beloved wife mysteriously wanders off, the birth of his grandson — August’s instincts are determinative in a way that illuminates how lives unfold at the deepest levels. This is a brilliant, suspenseful, surprising novel by one of America’s finest writers. Publisher’s Weekly called Ethan Canin’s *For Kings and Planets* “Masterful” | a classic parable of the human condition, and the same can be said about *Carry Me Across the Water*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I loved this book. It’s a riveting story of an old man’s struggle to come to terms with a lifetime of

decisions and their consequences. As Kleinman mounts a series of small, surprising initiatives to fight the boredom and loneliness of retirement and widowhood and to build a relationship with a grown son who distrusts and misunderstands him, he reflects with conflicting emotion on the experiences that have shaped his life. Canin covers an astonishing range of material here -- recognizing fear on his infant son's face in rough play, feeling peace as he and his mother fled Germany for America without his father-- these are moments so disparate in substance and scale and chronology that in most writers' hands the full story would take 600 pages to tell. Not in Canin's. He moves through them so seamlessly that despite my plans to get a good night's sleep I stayed up to finish the book in one sitting. And the compassion and emotional insight for which the author has earned a much-deserved reputation graces every scene. The CPR class Kleinman takes with his wife is alone worth the price of the book. This scene is less than a page (less than a page!), and reading it brought two friends who had not yet even read the rest of the book to tears. For those of you who haven't read Canin's other work, I envy you. Read "The Palace Thief" after this one. I challenge you not to read it more than once.

After the major disappointment of *For Gods and Planets*, Canin again displays a mastery of his craft in *Carry Me Across the Water*. What a pleasure to find a novel that can be comfortably read in a couple of days yet leaves a deep emotional impression. I disagree with the reviewer who complained about the form, which uses flashbacks and cuts between various scenes in the protagonist's life; there's nothing confusing about it, and it works beautifully. I do agree that Canin has brought to bear his skill as a short story writer in conveying the essence of a good novel without the tedium of endless descriptions and meandering plot lines. For those looking for a complex interweaving of many well-developed characters, look elsewhere; this is the story of one man's life, in which all other characters are supporting, existing only through the lens of his aging eyes in order to help us understand how he feels as he approaches the end of his life, and why. Those reviewers who found the man unsympathetic perhaps are just not as familiar with their own irritable side as they hopefully will be eventually. I found the portrait very true to my experience. Canin seems to do much better with older characters; his young people tend to be two-dimensional, but he has a wonderful grasp of the subtleties of the minds of people much older than he is himself. After *For Gods and Planets* I wondered whether Canin was capable of writing a good novel. As I finished the last page of this one, I said out loud to myself, "A good book."

This book was recommended to me by a good friend whose taste I trust, but I'm afraid I was

disappointed. The writing is, of course, very fine, but I found the story splintered unnecessarily. I have read books where this technique works well, but here I found myself getting impatient. I wish the author had skipped most of the part with August's son and included more of the Japanese story. And I felt manipulated by the ending.

This is a wonderful story of a 78-year-old man looking back on his life while he deals with the changes of the present. August Kleinman made some tough decisions in his life, and he did what had to be done to protect his family and amass a fortune, but now that he's older, he's got time to reflect. And one decision in particular must be resolved before his health fails him. Like many of his generation, August is a tough, plain-spoken man whose exterior belies his big heart. All his life he's been called arrogant, and even now, he's too independent for his own good, according to his son, who nags him to sell the house and move closer. But August has one more task to carry out, and he's going to do it, because he has an iron sense of duty and obligation. *Carry Me* is a multifaceted story that captivated me from the start. It's beautifully written. Here's an example of August reflecting on his life: "His life had shown him the fruit and dirt of the world; he had killed one man and possibly a second, told Lyndon Johnson he was a coward after paying two thousand dollars to meet him, grown rich in a business that was abidingly anti-Semitic, beaten all the odds, and then lost the great love of his life before returning, if not to his former self, then at least to a man who could pass as that..." This novel is extremely moving. The characters are three-dimensional, the story has a nice pace and dramatic tension, and it illuminates the second half of life. It's one of the better books I've ever read, and I recommend it wholeheartedly.

August Kleinman, immigrant and self-made millionaire, has grown old. Nearing what he knows to be the end of his life, he now believes that everything he has worked for and achieved -- the money, the business -- are worthless when compared to what he has lost -- his late wife and the time he could have spent with her and their children. The thread that makes this more than just another "old-man-looks-back" story involves some papers August had removed from a Japanese soldier he had killed during World War II. Keeping the documents which included a love letter, August had them translated and framed after the war. Almost 50 years later, in what may be one of the final achievements in his life, he traveled to Japan and returned the letter to the Japanese soldier's son. The trip, from the memory of the hunting and the killing of the soldier to the son's reading of the letter containing secrets he had not been told, allowed August to make amends, freeing him from the emotional and psychological baggage he had carried for so long. This was a quick read for me

(just a few hours), but this isn't a light read. Canin succeeded in making August a multi-faceted character, both aggravating and endearing. The decisions made by the characters, including August's mother's decision to flee Nazi Germany and August's struggle with Judaism, help to round out the story. Very enjoyable.

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