

Jim's Book

New Poems



James Reidel



BLACK LAWRENCE PRESS

Contents

Coma Berenices	1
High Maintenance	2
Julia the Astonishing	3
For My Great Aunt, Anna Louise	5
Amish Children at Baseball	7
מִצְוָה	8
Jinn's Pajamas	9
The Help King ^{Comes}	10
Pill Bugs	11
Dina	12
The Home for Friendly Girls	13
Corn Pie, Ephrata, Penna.	14
Krewe of Orpheus	16
Lamb-Rats	17
My Grandfather's Jackplane	18
On Repairs Made to a Sister's Portrait	19
Postscript	20

For M. Lori Richard-Reidel

Coma Berenices

You're born,
The gray dye pack that gets so far from the hospital.
Then you open your medicine cabinet door and shut it once more
to be sure,
To get a good look at this dusting, this Jack Frost,
Just a pantry moth's worth and a couple of tired ones at that,
The kind you can pinch off the screens after a day listening to
them trying to escape,
The kind that leaves harmless powder burns between your
fingers—
A gray so faint to the eye,
You could still cut it all off for a sick child's wig.
No one would not the wiser,
Not even the sick child.

High Maintenance

On being told this

My yard ended in a birch thicket.
A farmer planted it long ago.
He kept cutting it back for tool handles, wicket gates, sheep pens,
Pain.
And so it served until no one else came
For its purpose,
Its control,
Its spread into a crown,
A rod garden from which I cut my walking-stick,
One varnished rosewood,
Upheld,
That is what *maintenance* means.
It's with me now in the woods,
Closed in my hand—I will say I didn't hear that.
Otherwise we take sides,
Otherwise you take yourself for the low,
Lowheld.

Julia the Astonishing

Lines on meeting Ms. Butterfly Hill

Were you not tempted to drift up into that truss-barn's loft
Where you spoke at Grailville,
Catch your balance among the white-washed joists,
Twist away from the last handhold,
Frighten them just a little
With a flash of hip half bark already,
A shoe slipping off to show your toes were a claw of roots?
To perch on one of those strong timbers,
To kick your feet off topic, over the beam,
The "divine mess" of those below,
Then leave and just leave the rich timbre of your voice,
An echo—I thought that for you—and be transported from
tree to tree.
This came when you said you were the most cynical of people.
I knew a challenge when I heard one,
How hard it was to say that, the people part.
And that's when I knew you really missed *it*,
The column, the light straight up smarting your eyes,
How to calm it raking its needles in your palms,
That you needed a consolation,
Something almost too green, perhaps,
For the way you force yourself down among us.
It was October and Ohio and I hurried from the barn to the
old windrows,
Where thornbrakes that fenced the pastures

Had gone to seed and become their groves,
To where I knew they grow (regarded as a “messy tree”
by arborists),
Almost banished
To find you a hedge apple,
To gift its vague orange smell,
What never looks ripe,
Like the inside of our heads too much—
To hand back *Adamo observa* a fruit that can’t be bitten,
What should have been planted in Paradise had the maker of
the mess
Not known already there would be here.

For My Great Aunt, Anna Louise

6 March 1892–17 November 1898

All that still stood beautiful
Were the thin soles of her button shoes,
The same cut and scuff brown of the beech leaves blowing across
the yard
As the world refilled the blast cone, the birdshot,
The spot where she stood.
Leaves filled the crooks of her arms and legs
Tossed like her chipped doll,
Some not knowing what to do and off again,
Some gathering to keep her warm as though a larger force
were at work
Than the God of Accidents
Counting Reidels on his fingers,
Skipping the eldest sister's bastard
Because he didn't make a real thirteen,
Landing on "Lulu,"
The last girl after a run of boys,
Like meat tossed in their games,
*Listen, listen, the cat's a pissin', run get the gun, before she's
gone and done ...*
How do I know it was like this?
I didn't get her brother's eyes.
He didn't have killer hair.
I'm the kind we always call "his mother's people."
The brow, maybe—

You'd get lost up there getting anything out of your head.
So how do I?
There must be a gene for it like the one for depression,
Something wrong you can't see,
Like the one for moonless nails.