

Excerpted from *Jimmy's Blues & Other Poems* by James Baldwin. Copyright 2014. Excerpted with permission by Beacon Press.

Conundrum (on my birthday) (for Rico)

Between holding on,
and letting go,
I wonder
how you know
the difference.

It must be something like
the difference
between heaven and hell
but how, in advance,
can you tell?

If letting go
is saying no,
then what is holding on
saying?

 Come.

 Can anyone be held?

 Can I—?

The impossible conundrum,
the closed circle,
why
does lightning strike this house

and not another?
Or, is it true
that love is blind
until challenged by the drawbridge
of the mind?

But, saying that,
one's forced to see one's definitions
as unreal.
We do not know enough about the mind,
or how the conundrum of the imagination
dictates, discovers,
or can dismember what we feel,
or what we find.

Perhaps
one must learn to trust
one's terror:
the holding on
the letting go
is error:
the lightning has no choice,
the whirlwind has one voice.

**Excerpted from *Jimmy's Blues & Other Poems* by James Baldwin. Copyright
2014. Excerpted with permission by Beacon Press.**