



The Petting Zoo: A Novel

By Jim Carroll

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A moving, vividly rendered novel from the late author of *The Basketball Diaries*.

When poet, musician, and diarist Jim Carroll died in September 2009, he was putting the finishing touches on a potent work of fiction. *The Petting Zoo* tells the story of Billy Wolfram, an enigmatic thirty- eight-year-old artist who has become a hot star in the late-1980s New York art scene. As the novel opens, Billy, after viewing a show of Velázquez paintings, is so humbled and awed by their spiritual power that he suffers an emotional breakdown and withdraws to his Chelsea loft. In seclusion, Billy searches for the divine spark in his own work and life. Carroll's novel moves back and forth in time to present emblematic moments from Billy's life (his Irish Catholic upbringing, his teenage escapades, his evolution as an artist and meteoric rise to fame) and sharply etched portraits of the characters who mattered most to him, including his childhood friend Denny MacAbee, now a famous rock musician; his mentor, the unforgettable art dealer Max Bernbaum; and one extraordinary black bird. Marked by Carroll's sharp wit, hallucinatory imagery, and street-smart style, *The Petting Zoo* is a frank, haunting examination of one artist's personal and professional struggles.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Basketball Diaries author Carroll's slightly rough posthumous novel about a famous painter's breakdown begins as painter Billy Wolfram has a psychotic episode, wanders about the Central Park petting zoo, threatens strangers, and is picked up and committed to a mental hospital for observation. Upon his release, Billy returns home and goes into "reclusion," brooding on events in his past (such as his mother's death), watching old TV shows, and receiving visits from a Central Park zoo raven who talks to Billy about the flood (the raven was on Noah's ark), art, and the emptiness in Billy's life. Other than his assistant, Marta, Billy's only real visitor is his childhood friend, rock star Denny, leaving him plenty of time for introspection that leads back to Kennedy's assassination, which coincided with Billy's mother catching him masturbating. Since then, Billy has frozen out his sexual feelings, and, as it turns out, Marta would love to thaw them. Although Carroll's prose is uneven--clever and profound sentences jostle awkwardly with lumbering, bathos-soaked platitudes--and the narrative tension is rather slack, this is a heartfelt portrait of a New York original by a New York original. (Nov.) (c)

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From [Booklist](#)

Carroll's first novel is, unfortunately, his last. A poet, memoirist, and punk rocker, Carroll died in 2009. His poetry was published in the *Paris Review*, and his journal entries, collected in *The Basketball Diaries* (1978) and *Forced Entries* (1987), chronicled his experiences as basketball player, addict, and street hustler, along with his encounters with Andy Warhol, Bob Dylan, and William S. Burroughs. An incendiary single, *People Who Died*, established his bona fides in the rock world with a gut-wrenching account of friends who were casualties of the street culture. Billy Wolfram, the young, famous, and talented artist of *The Petting Zoo*, draws heavily on Carroll's own experiences. While attending a reception for a Velázquez exhibition at the Met, Billy undergoes an anxiety attack that calls into question his own artistic abilities, his identity, and his sanity. As Billy's crisis begins to threaten the completion of new works for a forthcoming show, he's visited by a talking raven who claims to have been on Noah's ark. Introspective, observant, and, at times, quite hilarious, this is a fitting culmination of Carroll's life's work. --Ben Segedin

Review

"A heartfelt portrait of a New York original by a New York original." ---Publishers Weekly

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bert Ferguson:

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