



Image from The Fun Times Guide

James Nicola

### The Value of Poetry

The idea, the glimmer of that penny  
found in the garden soil when you were three.  
You make it shine before you think to spend it  
(although you know that it cannot buy more)  
with spit and alcohol and cogitation.  
Then when the luster of its face begins  
to dazzle even you, you do not spend  
but cogitate even yet to get the grime  
out of the wheat-wreathed tails.  
Its value soon becomes more than a cent  
but all the sweat and care you poured on it  
like a cherished pet you don't feed but perfect:  
plus the passion pounding, when you do discharge it,

not to buy a sweet, but as a gift to  
the object of your first and greatest crush:  
who might be a redhead you met in kindergarten  
who enjoyed tumbling over you at the gym mats  
with a bolt-of-lightning love-ensmiling laugh; or  
the blonde-brunette-brown-male-female-young-old  
and all the in-betweens and never dreamed:  
the soul of man, boon mate and lifelong love.

### What Did I Do While Waiting for You?

What did I do while waiting for you? I  
brushed my teeth. Then flossed. Twice. Then noticed a  
smudge on the bathroom mirror, wiped it. The  
doorbell did not ring, and I did not die  
a time or two. I didn't think of you  
too inappropriately. Of course I lie.  
I checked the clock, and then I wondered why  
I cared about the clock, you'll get here when  
you get here. I decided not to try  
so hard, then changed my mind, and once again  
I checked the clock and it was fast. Phew! Then  
the bell, I did not swoon, but might have swirled  
when you walked in, no not just you, the world.

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James Nicola's poems have also appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Rattle*, and *Barrow Street*. His seven full-length collections (2014-22) are *Manhattan Plaza*, *Stage to Page*, *Wind in the Cave*, *Out of Nothing*, *Quickening*, *Fires of Heaven*, and *Turns & Twists* (just out). His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a *Choice* award. His poetry has received a Dana Literary Award; two *Willow Review* awards; *Storyteller's People's Choice* award; plus one Best of Net, one Rhysling, and eight Pushcart Prize nominations. ("What Did I Do While Waiting for You?" was previously published in *Samjoko*, a publication in South Korea.)