



Image from Coracle Art

James B. Nicola

The Secret of May

The gardener's pulled up weeds and plants
turned brown or gray or gone astray,
culling and sacrificing for the row.
Like any choreographer or dance
master, his role's the martinet's,
his goal, perfection. And the show
goes on continuously, every day.
They bend and kick, not quite Rockettes
in perfect unison at Radio City,
but wink and wave at will with the wind,
as individuals, not disciplined,
just grounded. And you think, How Pretty,
delighting in the flourishes of May
uninterrupted by the thought
of who didn't make the latest cut,
or that May's secret lies in what
may not.

Ephemera

Why we are here? I hope to show you soon.
Have you known a sudden rain
on a sunny summer afternoon?
Not a downpour, but sufficient drops—
You have? then I need not explain
except to say what I have seen
but once. The sun sat low
and bright,
late afternoon,
just so,
some hours before twilight.

The folks who've lived here centuries
must see it several times a season:
a single drop on the silent lake
forming with its simple wake
concentric circles. A second, then some more, then many,
and the surface spread as a magic carpet
in the air. Like chain mail, worn by Peace, not War,
in every direction as far
as you can see, circles linked and growing,
the female of Klimt's *Kiss*, but flowing;

Nature trying on gold lamé
and yearning for a beau, and I,
being insufficient, held against the Sky,
have brought you here for seven days
to try
again.

If it happens, the shimmering will amaze
you something like a miracle.
We can take
a coracle
to the middle of the lake
or if you prefer watch here from the dock.

If none of seven evenings show,
at least we'll share the evenings' glow
and talk.

James B. Nicola's poems have 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*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a *Choice* award. He has received a Dana Literary Award, two *Willow Review* awards, and a

Storyteller's People's Choice award. He has also gotten a Best of Net, a Rhysling, and ten Pushcart Prize nominations.