

James B. Nicola

The avenues that one has

The avenues that one has never known
ask but one question of a life of ease:
Are you to be the hero of your own

life? Will you have turned over every stone,
or will the stuffing of complacencies
mean avenues that you have never known

remain so? Well I know the Comfort Zone:
it's one of the craven anomalies
of not being the hero of one's own

life. For what soul has ever really grown
except in leaving it? They may not please,
those avenues that you have never known;

and for a long while you may feel alone;
but then: two roads in frost-rimed yellow trees
appear. And you, as hero of your own

life, in response to me, as crossroads crone,
impatient for the possibilities
of the avenue about to be known,
tell me I need a hero of my own.



The Gift

It was the worst thing I have ever done.
It was the best thing I have ever done.
It was the first thing that I did as me.
Was it a cursed thing? Hm. Fortunately,
he'd never know: two weeks later, he died.
Was that convenient? Would he have cried,
or railed and cussed and called me wicked slurs
in slurred speech? Sudden death, of course, defers
knowledge, so I won't know until I die
how he would have reacted had he found
out. Nor would I have had to explain why
I changed my name, his mind being unsound.
His timing was a sort of blessing, then—
a gift, I tell myself, time and again.



Dawn and Dusk

When a young person passes by an old
and looks, the instant funhouse mirror works
in both directions (the distortion: time),
though they have never said so, nor do they
admit it to themselves. The way they know
lies in their instinct, bones and blood, and eyes.
It's something sunrise minds don't realize.

When a young person passes by an old
and does not look, the mirror only works
in one direction. Once upon a time
they didn't look, either. And what are they
now but the unseen sunset souls who know
about sore bones, thin blood, cataract eyes,
and final things they finally realize.



Why You Haven't Seen Me Lately

You have a type of personality
that has initials. Namely, OCD.
If it is a mild case, you wash your hands
till super clean. Everyone understands.
But if your case is chronic and severe,
your fingerprints will all but disappear.
You also binge. Some things are not unwise
to binge on: healthy diet, exercise,
and so forth. Chatting on the internet
is safer if you set a time limit
and honor it. Too long and you get tired.
Then, should some avatar get you all riled
up inadvertently and you fire back,
you're down the rabbit hole, if not a black
hole. So I do not chat. I watch old flicks.
One night I stayed up all night and watched six!
But then I had to sleep. And wake. And eat
and bathe and work—then, true to type, repeat.

