

James B. Nicola

Other People

We are the Other People
and are here
where we have been
and yet shall be
Passed by in our small rooms and scattered graves for centuries.

We teach and are forgotten.
We sit with niece and nephew for their parents' dates;
sit at their nuptials too behind front rows.
We're the ones who need most to get drunk and we abstain,
to drive the others home.
We bring desserts and salads, never main courses, of fruit and
egg, a fortifying joke.
We are pall bearers too,
as alternate choices.

We've made fortunes in the New World, venturing forth
with herds of wagging men and wagoned women
suffering camps and boarding houses and dryasdust careers
at home or abroad as tutor, governess, librarian,
peddler, priest.
We tell a truth with humor, tempt with heart,
or torment with another way to see,
another way to be. At times we are
the Wicked City's ornery avatar;
at other times, the honest anodyne.

Journals we keep as well, and poems at times
are found upon our whispered deaths, to be
unearthed again perchance by one of note
who'll set one of the things into an aria,
the unmelodious rebirthed as lyric.
A solo hour, so sung, at last congeals
some decade or safe century beyond
into a brief, conspicuous community.

But most of the time we eat, sleep, work, breathe, stay
or amble, dissolving without issue:
More like the universe over-spiced than blades of grass,
which sow another season.

I come from a long line of Other People
Though didn't know how I was to become one of them:
The mantle should not be inherited.
Now as my former friends and loves pass by with
carriages and lives
And as I call and find they've moved to larger digs,
or cannot come
For diapers, soccer, graduations — such good
friends we once were, too —
I fall into the Other People
Who dote on those we've known and lost
And you whom we shall never get to know.

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Forgiving

You know what Hindus say: that we return to make up for this life's ills and abuses; the Western model, that we either burn, or wait to move. So if the State of Grace is the Kingdom of God toward which we strive, it's coming, but seems never to arrive.

But other realms are worth the founding: To Forgive, for one. Yourself as well as others. Then, not need to, because the person you become sees neighbors as sisters and brothers — and, when the realm's frontiers swell to the seas, not only neighbors but your enemies.

For that family comprises givers, takers, bullies, victims, heroes who are hitters, good-deed-doers who are really fakers, the shat upon (forgive me) and the shitters; those who are miserable — for no real reason, their earthly circumstances being blessed with riches —, neither moved by nor impressed, if they even note, the changing of a season.

You've known —? Well I have been all the above, forgave myself, then you, then learned to love in such a way I don't need to forgive so much now. It's as hard to understand as to explain — like living in a land remote from everything that I once was, that coexists in the same continuum of time and space, accessible because you can leave the world of Was and Will — for Am, the Kingdom that comes even while we live.