James B. Nicola

James B. Nicola’s poems have appeared in *Antioch Review, Southwest Review, Atlanta Review, Rattle, Tar River,* and *Poetry East.* His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. His two poetry collections from Word Poetry are *Manhattan Plaza* and *Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater.* A Yale University graduate, Nicola has been giving both theater and poetry workshops at libraries, literary festivals, schools, and community centers all over the country.

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WHAT SHE DID

She did his shirts. For years. He liked clean ones.

She heard his life for years. He liked to talk.

She was his wife for years. His very wife.

He took pride in his sensitivity
and acted like an eager listener, too.

She liked to cook for him and he came home
to dinner every night until the day
he didn’t. She cooked, he did not come home.

She stewed and served and sat. And seethed. And stewed.

On other nights his plans had changed, he’d called—
or asked his personal assistant to.
But one of them forgot, that night. He knew
she loved him, but they never had a child,
so often she’d imagine one, whose gruesome acts answered neglect. No one can tell
what happened. Neither one of them survived.
I heard the flames down the street, but arrived
too late to help. Stricken by the sight,
I told the officers later that night
I knew them. Somewhat. No one knew them well.