

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

James Crews: Four Poems

James Crews · Sunday, August 27th, 2023

Love What Comes

Add this to my list of small ecstasies:
the scent of pencils made from cedar,
wafting up as soon as I open the box
given to me by friends, the feel of real
graphite imprinting a notebook page.
And the crimson stubs of new peonies
I watered this morning, beginnings
of leaves and ruffled blooms all stored
inside a stem no larger than my thumb.
So much of what we imagine turns out
differently, swerves off-course. Why not
learn to love what comes as deeply as
the idea first held in our minds, like
a poem traced lightly in pencil, or a star-
shaped crocus pushing up through mulch,
both leaning toward a source of light
they can't quite see, but know is there.

*

Little Altars Everywhere

There are little altars everywhere
in the world, places where you can
lay down your suffering for a while.
Hollowed-out oak trunk by the forest trail
where you leave acorns and pine cones
and worries you've gathered on a cushion
of moss, whose patience softens everything.
Or the bench at the busy intersection
where streams of people crossing the street
parted around you, and you fell in love

with each of them—the men in suits, babies
strapped in strollers—and left your fear
crumpled there like a useless receipt.
Or the shelf where you keep the box
of your mother's ashes next to an electric
candle that flickers day and night, how you
give your grief to the yellow glow of that
false flame over and over, knowing
that even the plainest of light can be
enough sometimes to hold your pain.

*

A Better Place

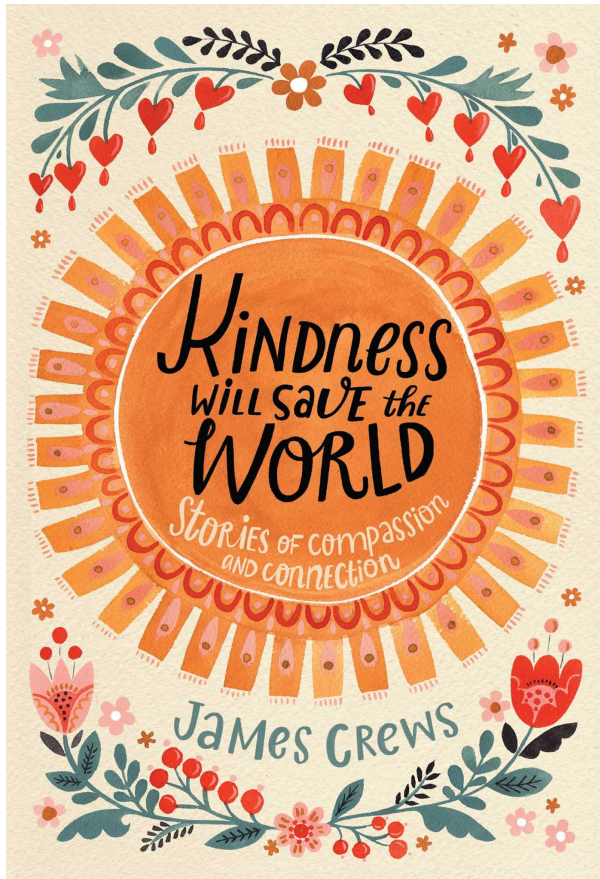
They are in a better place, we say,
but what if the dead still exist in a world
that is inside this one, living on as the tiny
glimmer I see in the air around me when I
think of my mother's smile, or the streetlight
blinking on, shuddering into brightness
as I pass beneath, remembering my father
coming home from work, his rusty truck
bumping along the driveway. What if they
live on in the small face of the wild violet
and the red breast of the robin lingering
outside my window, pecking at mulch,
pulling a shining worm from loose soil.
What if, as others promise me, my parents
still live in my heart, having taken over
those few rooms, both of them now seated
at a table in the center, laughing again,
their hands wrapped around cups of coffee
whose heat I can feel spreading in my chest
on those days I miss them the most.

*

Hermit Thrushes at Dusk

The long summer day's gone quiet at last
in the open-air cathedral of the woods,
yet still I hear the hermit thrushes unraveling
their complex calls, like someone running
a finger along the rim of a wineglass
over and over, out in the trees, their music
made more precious by the silence

surrounding it, more necessary by the worry
 that encircled me all day, keeping me
 from this world I love. I listen, freeing myself
 from the tangled roots of a pain
 that's not my own, and drink in those clear
 liquid notes like a medicine, a message
 I have craved my whole life without knowing:
 Let go of all that you no longer need.
 This is how you heal, using your body to sing.



Kindness Will Save the World by James Crews

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