

# 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.

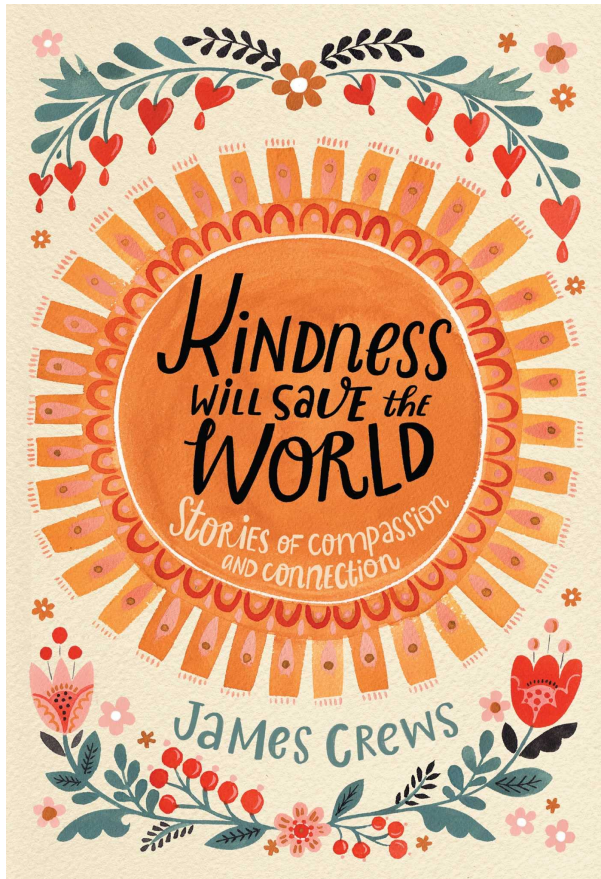
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## Hermit Thrushes at Dusk

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.

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*Kindness Will Save the World* by James Crews

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