# **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 starshaped crocus pushing up through mulch, both leaning toward a source of light they can't quite see, but know is there.

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# **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.

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#### **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.

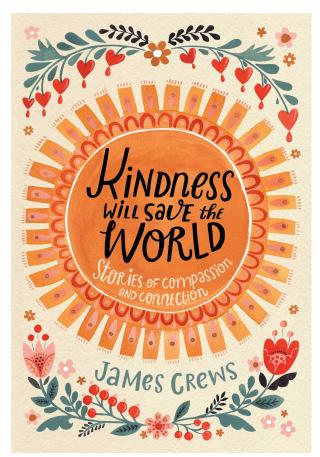
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## **Hermit Thrushes at Dusk**

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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