

## Wilderness House Literary Review 20/4

*Nathan Coates*

### **Memory**

It moves like a minnow's shadow  
on a creek shelf,  
untethered and unpredictable,  
flash and absence—  
a promise of presence in the cloud  
that blooms from a lifted rock.

It sits leafed like black birds that  
crown the old oak's canopy  
shrouded by fall's brilliance before  
coyote yips send them  
scattering into night air, the leaves  
buzzing with the bustle of departure.

It settles like morning dew,  
appearing sometime in the night,  
unexpected but unsurprising,  
collecting each cool step  
and footprint of morning,  
this daily manna whose  
reappearance is always a miracle,  
lest we forget.

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### Mary Oliver

So, a poem can be a prayer,  
can offer up silent hopes  
and questions, like the spider  
green as a September pawpaw leaf  
who reached the dune grass tip  
and hung on  
as the blade bent  
at a right angle—the web  
a perfect hypotenuse  
facing the lake sunset—  
a window of light  
on this shifting sand  
that rivals any stone chapel's  
stained glass views.  
What is prayer if not  
a thread sent out  
to catch an anchor  
and cover the chasm  
of absence  
in evening's warm light,  
waves quieting like  
my heartbeat, one barge  
on the horizon at the flaming  
edge of the aisle of light  
bearing down on the web.  
What words are sturdy  
enough to hold light? Are  
any constructed, engineered  
that can contain August,  
red sky, or even a single wave  
dissolving in sand?  
Maybe the gossamer reflection  
is generous enough,

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this spill of light that, like the loaves  
and fishes, only grows  
as given and only nourishes  
when received. A gift, then,  
these poems, these prayers  
offered like the blade end  
of dune grass  
bent low, waiting.

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### Waiting

They waited for their son to come home,  
not from war but from college,  
coasting on the certainty of youth  
in a car full of fishing gear and gas station snacks.

But he was late, so they worried  
and waited, learning how his independence  
lessened theirs. Then the news came—  
he had to catch the sunset with a girl  
and hadn't even left yet.

Well, if you're gonna be late  
a girl is a good reason.

She reset his clock and made  
late early, the dusky halflight a rising sun,  
the moment deeper and richer  
than the pitch of the road that  
will keep—it isn't going anywhere—  
they aren't going anywhere—these  
two who wait,  
eyes on the horizon  
already home.