



In the Salt Marsh

Nancy Willard

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In this strong, appealing collection, Nancy Willard shares her passion for observing the mysteries of the natural world, particularly the flora and fauna of Cape Cod and the Hudson Valley, where many of these poems are set. We see, through her eyes, the coming of darkness to an empty orchard, the retreat of deer at dusk, and the breakup of a river with the onset of spring. Willard is also deeply engaged with the living creatures that populate her world. Her poems record her encounter with a moon snail and her celebration of the ladybugs she sends into the garden and the butterflies that alight on her shoulders like ghostly kisses.

Amid poems about the intimate presence of nature are expressions of absences deeply felt. Willard is drawn not just to the inhabited world but also to the empty spaces with which our passage through life is strewn. In “The Absence at the Swing,” a rabbit watches a swing’s back-and-forth motion just after the children have left the playground; in “Niche Without Statue,” she takes us to “an alcove scoured / to stucco light” and tells us, “Somebody lived here. Stepped away. No tracks.” We learn, too, of the presences she misses most deeply, as in “Phone Poem,” in which she imagines receiving a telephone call from her father after his death.

Whether she is cultivating a sense of the life that is all around her or attending to the losses felt within, Nancy Willard never ceases to enchant us with the sense of dedication and awe that graces her verse.

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