



# Things Invisible To See

*Nancy Willard*

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## Things Invisible To See Nancy Willard

In a small Michigan town on the eve of World War II, a young man and woman share a love that is shadowed by tragedy, yet lighted by powers beyond the everyday. To preserve their future, the young man makes a wager with Death, pitting a local sandlot team against the greatest players who ever lived. Things Invisible to See is a story of the power of love and faith to overcome pain and loss. It is a miraculous novel of enduring power.

## Things Invisible To See Details

Date : Published January 1st 1955 by Cowley Publications

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Author : Nancy Willard

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Genre : Fiction, Fantasy, Sports and Games, Sports, Baseball

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## From Reader Review Things Invisible To See for online ebook

### L. Lee Whitlock says

The basic story is about non-identical twins Ben and Willie Harkissian. Willie has the brains but is lacking in moral fiber. Ben is good looking, athletic, and honorable. Ben has the misfortune of hitting a baseball out of the park into Clare Bishop's head causing permanent physical damage. Willie warns his brother to keep silent, and Ben does, but he becomes a love interest in Clare's life. Clare has psychic powers which allows her to journey with "the Ancestress," and she ultimately shares this information with Ben. There are a mixture of adventures that challenge credulity, but the reader is asked to go along with the "magical realism" that is somewhat akin to that of Gabriel García Márquez and others.

What sets this book apart and makes it worth the time is the poetic writing of Nancy Willard. It mixes baseball, war, love, death, fate, and fantasy all into one bag and shakes them all together. I picked up the book to read because of two factors: the title and Nancy Willard. I almost put it down when it seemed that it was going to be a book about baseball; however, like other books or films about sports, baseball in particular (i.e. "Field of Dreams"), her book was more about love and relationship than it was about baseball. Somewhere along the way in Willard's story, Ben meets the personification of Death who has the fortune of having some of the great players of the sport on his baseball team. Death's team and Ben's team plays a game to the, well, death. It's worth reading to find out the score!

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### Katy says

beautiful prose, a lovely read.

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### Andrea says

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Things Invisible To See by Nancy Willard is a book that's been on my to-read list for sometime. I finally found a copy at Powell's in Portland a few months back. It's hard for me to explain this one to y'all. Above all else, it's just beautifully written. The plot is two-fold. First, there's an incident where a young woman (Clare) is hit with a baseball in a freak moment. She falls in love with the hitter (Ben), but doesn't immediately know he's the reason she is seriously injured and must now use a wheelchair. The later plot involves a brush with Death where Ben makes a deal involving him assembling a team to play a baseball team of legends. That said, there are a lot of moving parts, but it's so well-told that I found I wanted to keep reading.

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### Sharon says

Finally a magical realism book that I could understand. I liked this novel. Gentle, some baseball, pleasant to read.

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## **Rosemary Dreyer says**

3 3/4 Stars: A strange little book about death and baseball and war and accidents. It was written in a very lyrical way. At times the leaps didn't make sense. But the characters eventually became well drawn and interesting. Reminded me of *The Book Thief* but not as compelling.

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## **Alan Michael Wilt says**

This is an old favorite book of mine, one that I read the moment it was published in 1984, and have read again several times since. My first edition copy is signed by the author. Baseball, brothers, love, and some magic realism make for a very entertaining read.

The listing of a Cowley edition of the book is obsolete. I worked for that publisher and acquired the rights to publish a new edition, but the company owners shut the house down before the book could happen. I commissioned the watercolor cover image--with the left-hander's baseball mitt and crutches--from the incomparable Barry Moser. Unfortunately it never appeared on the book.

Highly recommended--if you can get your hands on a copy!

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## **Melinda says**

This is one of my favourite books ever. Why aren't there 10 stars to give it? It is a love story between Clare and Ben. It's about baseball- the beauty and joy and Americanness of it. It's a story of a slower time and place. It takes place in Ann Arbor, Michigan and revolves around a wager with the devil based on a baseball game. If you know baseball and Michigan there is so much here of it. The ultimate message is one of believing in yourself and believing that right and good will triumph in the end. But can they triumph when the devil can stack the deck?

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## **Lisa H. says**

Nancy Willard is best known as a poet and author of children's stories. Along the way, however, she also has written two novels for adults, the first of which is *Things Invisible to See*. I still have the copy my best friend gave me in 1985 when she passed through my hometown on her move from eastern Pennsylvania to Oregon (where she has remained for the 25+ years since), so my fondness for the book may be partially tied to my fondness for her :).

*Things Invisible to See* tells the story of Ben, who one summer evening casually belts a baseball out of sight, only later to discover that the wayward ball struck and seriously injured a young woman named Clare. Compelled to help her in any way he can before he goes off to fight in World War II, Ben quickly falls in love with Clare and her eccentric family (which includes a cat named "Cinnamon Monkeyshines".) It is the thought of returning to her that sustains him when the naval ship on which he serves sinks, and he finds himself adrift in a lifeboat with a single strange companion. With his future with Clare at stake, Ben makes a wager with Death: a game of baseball that will pit the young lovers and their families against the best players of all time, with Ben's life as the prize.

*Things Invisible* is magical realism at its finest, and I re-read it every few years purely for the lovely flow of the writing. You will be enchanted.

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### **Danielle says**

I unfortunately am not able to say that I loved this book. While quite possibly the intent, it felt like several short stories brought together haphazardly. The flow, or lack thereof, of the writing and story made it very hard to identify and make a connection with any one character and the story as a whole. I hoped that the story would be brought to a close and the disconnect I felt resolved. This, however, was not the case in my experience with this book.

I can appreciate the author as talented and recognize that she deserves respect accordingly. My own preferences of what I like to read, do not, unfortunately, match up with the authors writing style. I would describe the writing style as lyrical and poetic, showing lots of deep undertones and undisclosed meaning-very poetry like.

This book does, certainly, have the potential of being loved by those with other preferences, so please do not discount this book on my personal review, and take into consideration your own likes and dislikes.

\*I received an ARC of this book through NetGalley.

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### **Rayme says**

This book had promise but in the end I can't recommend it. A mess of a story. Might have been more groundbreaking when it was originally published but has not aged well.

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### **Zoe Brooks says**

Sometimes when I receive a review copy from a publisher, I start reading with enthusiasm and after a while my heart sinks at the thought of writing a review..And sometimes the book is an absolute joy and makes reviewing those other books worthwhile. This is such a book and I will be recommending it to friends and family.

This is magic realism at its best. A deceptively simple fable that works on all sorts of levels, it is a love story and a metaphysical novel. Nancy Willard is a wonderful craftswoman, weaving references into the story without allowing them to overwhelm the tale.

Willard is a poet and it shows.,She writes some beautiful prose, which is nevertheless simple and unflowery. Sometimes I think poets are particularly in tune with magic realism - understanding metaphor and the concept of "things invisible to see". The title is, by the way, a quote from John Donne's poem Go and Catch a Falling Star.

On one level you have the well-drawn world of a small American town in the late 1930s and the two families

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at the centre of the story and on another you have the universal. The book opens: *In Paradise, on the banks of the River of Time, the Lord of the Universe is playing ball with His archangels.* Then it moves to the smallest of human worlds: *In the damp night of the womb, when millions of chromosomes are gearing up for the game of life, the soul of Willie says to the soul of Ben, 'Listen, you can be firstborn and get out of this cave first if you'll give me everything else. Brains, charm, and good looks.'* The story then moves into the material world of the boys' parents: Their mother worked at the front desk of Goldberg's Cleaners and Tailors.

Despite this movement between worlds, the story arc works so well that I found it impossible to put the book down, finishing it in the early hours of the morning. I was genuinely interested in the love story between Ben and Clare, whether Ben will survive the Second World War and whether Clare would overcome her paralysis. For this book is about life and death as a game, but a very serious one. It culminates in a scene in which elderly mothers are playing baseball for the lives of their sons against a team chosen by Death. The referee is a childhood friend of Ben's who has already died in the War. I will not tell you the game's outcome.

One of the things I loved about this book was that Nancy Willard does not hold back in presenting the world as she sees it. There is no writer's irony to hide behind, no fancy tricks, and some people will not like the book as a result. I loved it.

I am very grateful for the publishers Open Road Media for giving me my copy in return for a fair review.

This review first appeared on the Magic Realism Books Blog <http://magic-realim-books.blogspot.com>

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### **Laura says**

Picked this book up because Leah Hager Cohen said in her NYT interview, "Why, oh why, is Nancy Willard's 'Things Invisible to See' out of print? The novel, set in Ann Arbor in the 1930s and '40s, manages to be about life, death, love, hate, innocence, experience and baseball. It begins with casual verve: 'In Paradise, on the banks of the River of Time, the Lord of the Universe is playing ball with His archangels.' Willard is well known as a children's book author, but her 1985 adult novel remains very wrongly obscure." Have to disagree with Ms. Cohen on this one. Wacky story, but not in a good way.

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### **Katherine says**

"(In the jungle it shone on Papa's outstretched )" (7).

"...and he could make a cheap suit look expensive just by wearing it" (9).

"On the pale green Monopoly board of his future, he bought the house they lived in and the lot behind..." (11-12)

"...and Henry Schoonmaker, his parakeet perched on his shoulder like a sky-blue epaulet, and Stilts Moser, who galloped around the bases in such a way as to suggest that God, who winds and watches the footage of humanity, speeded up the reel when Stilts picked up a bat and swung" (14).

"...and a vase in the guise of a white cat. Pink carnations rose from its ceramic head like bright ideas" (17).

"'God broke the mold when he made you,' said Ben.

"'Mold!' exclaimed God. I never repeat myself'" (67).

“To keep from forgetting, she say severely to her ring, ‘I am putting you on the sill,’ or she would remind her watch she was putting in on the china cabinet...” (91).

“Having dibs on the sled was almost as good as having the real sled if you were sick and couldn’t use it” (92).

“...under which a tiger cat slept like an exhibit, offering its belly to the fire” (113).

“The Oriental rug underfoot gave Ben the feeling that all these wonders were precariously balanced on an island of flowers” (113).

“Snow added its cubits to the stature of the roof, the trees, the picnic tables spread as if with that hidden fabric called ‘the silence cloth’ by housewives who keep it under the finer damask one, to absorb the clatter of dishes and silver” (125).

“Under its roof of ice, the river sent up bubbles: the telegraphed laments of the fish” (125).

“...and crumpled April into a ball, which he threw with great dexterity into a basket on the other side of the room” (230)

“The sea was as still as if someone had turned it off, and the silence as deep as if someone had turned it on” (252).

“...in the twilight of the pulled blinds...” (266).

“She did not put Davy back to bed right away but let him stay up to see the stars. With the shortages, he was surprised to see so many” (275).

“...content to watch her hands twinkle the yarn off the needles” (276).

“That night, eating supper with his mother, Willie rearranged the universe in his head” (296).

“‘Some things you never forget,’ said Death. ‘Baseball is one of them.’

“What were the others? Father Legg wondered. Once he would have said ‘love.’ Now it did not seem that simple” (333).

“The stuff of being alive. Morning, evening, the first snow and the last snow, bells, daisies, hubcaps, silver dollars, ice cream, hummingbirds, love” (337).

“‘They remember how it was. All the pain, all the trouble--they’d choose it again--they’d go extra innings into infinity for the chance to be alive again’” (341).

“She had not heard any sound that far off since the last snowfall. All spring she’d heard the usual sounds, the chirp of crickets but not the silence of crickets; the drumming of rain on the roof but not the plotting of rain in the clouds” (342).

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## Uwe Hook says

It's a shame this lovely book is out of print. It's about a young man named Ben who, goofing around with friends, bats a baseball into the night sky and hits a young woman named Clare, sending her to the hospital. He finds out about the accident, and that Clare now can't walk, and seeks her out to try to help. (That's just the beginning.) Magic appears in many forms throughout this story - the end is a baseball game between Ben's team and Death's. It's a quirky, funny, hopeful book, and well worth the trouble of finding it

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## Jean says

The novel was a bit odd but I found it interesting and enjoyed getting to know the different characters.

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