

Kindness by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of kindness.

How you ride and ride thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out the window forever.
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness, you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you, how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

~*~

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