

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

Where Are You Now?

I position my head on the pillow
where you told your last folktale,
mixing donkey, camel, mouse,

journey, kitchen, trees,
so the story grew jumbled,
uncharacteristically long.

I listened from the other small bed
thinking, not about the story, but,
it's the last one I'll hear from this voice,

remembering two and four and six
when this voice calmed me every night,
thinking, how will I live without this voice?

At one point, I thought you hallucinated.
Politics came in, a rare speck
of religion, even a bad nurse

you'd had at the clinic,
frustration of long illness
tangling with the tale,

Oh Dad, you've been so brave,
to which you replied,
What else can I do?

and returned to the comforting
donkey, bucket of olives,
smoke curling up from twig fire

over which anyone, a lost girl,
a wanderer, a dying man,
could warm his hands.