

Naomi Shihab Nye

JOHNNY CARSON IN BAGHDAD

What if we had sent Johnny to Baghdad
instead of all those other folks,
all that hardened apparatus,
all those dun-colored supplies?

It would have cost less, even if we paid him
what he was worth. Maybe we could have sent
a curtain with him, so he could walk out everywhere,
surprising people with his endless cheer,

lifting his eyebrows when someone said something
weird, handing Saddam a monkey, or a tarantula,
at an appropriate moment, asking the right questions
that would make things fall into focus,

inspiring the vast Middle Eastern laugh
so buried in these times.

Who do you trust?

He might have put on that turban, too,

or dressed as a woman now and then,
and things would have gone better.
If they got rough, he could invite the little bear
to drink out of someone's coffee cup,

and I promise, no one would have harmed him,
or wanted to.

He would never have broken down a door
or been cruel to a prisoner,

but when everyone was laughing, might have done
some sleight-of-hand to move people
to a better place, make them look
more agreeable, more like one another,

the way they truly are, instead of this stupid
wreckage that lessens us
on both sides of the sea.
Don't you wish?