



IMAGE: Meredith McNeal

PARIS

Naomi Shihab Nye

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Once my father and I were flying home from the Middle East and we stopped in Paris for 24 hours. Our taxi driver told us what happiness was. "It's when you don't want anything. You don't hate it, You just don't want it. You like it, in fact. You just don't want it." I told him he sounded like a Buddhist, but he didn't want that either. He said nobody in Paris was happy. He let us off on a street where vendors sold cream puffs and hosiery and snazzy yellow-toed shoes and pears and fresh baguettes and wine. The whole day and night I was in Paris, I bought nothing. Not one thing. Not even a postcard. At the restaurant, I asked the waitress to choose for me, partly because I couldn't read French, but also because I wasn't sure what I wanted. We could have changed our tickets and stayed 10 days. My father wanted to. I could have bought Parisian socks, a tin of lemon drops. My father kept shaking his head, asking, "What's the rush?" He told me I'd be sorry later. It wasn't the first time he'd predicted this. But I felt happy in Paris, so briefly, breezing up and down those streets I'd never know with my empty hands.

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