Kindness

By Yusef Komunyakaa

For Carol Rigolot

When deeds splay before us precious as gold & unused chances stripped from the whine-bone, we know the moment kindheartedness walks in. Each praise be echoes us back as the years uncount themselves, eating salt. Though blood first shaped us on the climbing wheel, the human mind lit by the savanna’s ice star & thistle rose, your knowing gaze enters a room & opens the day, saying we were made for fun. Even the bedazzled brute knows when sunlight falls through leaves across honed knives on the table. If we can see it push shadows aside, growing closer, are we less broken? A barometer, temperature gauge, a ruler in minus fractions & pedigrees, a thingmajig, a probe with an all-seeing eye, what do we need to measure kindness, every unheld breath, every unkind leapyear? Sometimes a sober voice is enough to calm the waters & drive away the false witnesses, saying, Look, here are the broken treaties Beauty brought to us earthbound sentinels.


Source: Poetry 181, No. 5 (Poetry Foundation, 2003)