

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

What a marvelous gift is the imagination, and each of us gets one at birth, free of charge and ready to start up, get on, and ride away. Can there be anything quite so homely and ordinary as a steam radiator? And yet, here, Connie Wanek, of Duluth, Minnesota, nudges one into play.

Radiator

Mittens are drying on the radiator,
boots nearby, one on its side.
Like some monstrous segmented insect
the radiator elongates under the window.

Or it is a beast with many shoulders
domesticated in the Ice Age.
How many years it takes
to move from room to room!

Some cage their radiators
but this is unnecessary
as they have little desire to escape.

Like turtles they are quite self-contained.
If they seem sad, it is only the same sadness
we all feel, unlovely, growing slowly cold.

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