

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

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

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## American Life in Poetry: Column 068

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Here is a marvelous little poem about a long marriage by the Kentucky poet, Wendell Berry. It's about a couple resigned to and comfortable with their routines. It is written in language as clear and simple as its subject. As close together as these two people have grown, as much alike as they have become, there is always the chance of the one, unpredictable, small moment of independence. Who will be the first to say goodnight?

### They Sit Together on the Porch

They sit together on the porch, the dark  
Almost fallen, the house behind them dark.  
Their supper done with, they have washed and dried  
The dishes—only two plates now, two glasses,  
Two knives, two forks, two spoons—small work for two.  
She sits with her hands folded in her lap,  
At rest. He smokes his pipe. They do not speak,  
And when they speak at last it is to say  
What each one knows the other knows. They have  
One mind between them, now, that finally  
For all its knowing will not exactly know  
Which one goes first through the dark doorway, bidding  
Goodnight, and which sits on a while alone.

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