

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
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## American Life in Poetry: Column 081

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

Readers of this column during the past year have by now learned how enthusiastic I am about poems describing everyday life. I've tried to show how the ordinary can be made extraordinary through close and transforming observation. Here Tess Gallagher goes to the mailbox to post a letter. We've all done that, haven't we? But notice how closely she pays attention to this simple experience, and how she fits this one moment into the meaning of her life.

### Under Stars

The sleep of this night deepens  
because I have walked coatless from the house  
carrying the white envelope.  
All night it will say one name  
in its little tin house by the roadside.

I have raised the metal flag  
so its shadow under the roadlamp  
leaves an imprint on the rain-heavy bushes.  
Now I will walk back  
thinking of the few lights still on  
in the town a mile away.

In the yellowed light of a kitchen  
the millworker has finished his coffee,  
his wife has laid out the white slices of bread  
on the counter. Now while the bed they have left  
is still warm, I will think of you, you  
who are so far away  
you have caused me to look up at the stars.

Tonight they have not moved  
from childhood, those games played after dark.  
Again I walk into the wet grass  
toward the starry voices. Again, I  
am the found one, intimate, returned  
by all I touch on the way.

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