

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Home is where the heart. . . Well, surely we all know that old generalization. But it's the particulars of a home that make it ours. Here the poet Linda Parsons Marion, who lives in Knoxville, Tennessee, celebrates familiarity, in its detail and its richness.

Home Fire

Whether on the boulevard or gravel backroad,
I do not easily raise my hand to those who toss
up theirs in anonymous hello, merely to say
“I’m passing this way.” Once out of shyness, now
reluctance to tip my hand, I admire the shrubbery
instead. I’ve learned where the lines are drawn
and keep the privet well trimmed. I left one house
with toys on the floor for another with quiet rugs
and a bed where the moon comes in. I’ve thrown
myself at men in black turtlenecks only to find
that home is best after all. Home where I sit
in the glider, knowing it needs oil, like my own
rusty joints. Where I coax blackberry to dogwood
and winter to harvest, where my table is clothed
in light. Home where I walk out on the thin page
of night, without waving or giving myself away,
and return with my words burning like fire in the grate.

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