

# 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 179

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

I've always loved shop talk, with its wonderful language of tools and techniques. This poem by D. Nurkse of Brooklyn, New York, is a perfect example. I especially like the use of the verb, lap, in line seven, because that's exactly the sound a four-inch wall brush makes.

### **Bushwick: Latex Flat** *2001*

Sadness of just-painted rooms.  
We clean our tools  
meticulously, as if currying horses:  
the little nervous sash brush  
to be combed and primped,  
the fat old four-inchers  
that lap up space  
to be wrapped and groomed,  
the ceiling rollers,  
the little pencils  
that cover nailheads  
with oak gloss,  
to be counted and packed:  
camped on our dropsheets  
we stare across gleaming floors  
at the door and beyond it  
the old city full of old rumors  
of conspiracies, gunshots, market crashes:  
with a little mallet  
we tap our lids closed,  
holding our breath, holding our lives  
in suspension for a moment:  
an extra drop will ruin everything.

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