

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 187

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

I thought that we'd celebrate Halloween with an appropriate poem, and Iowa poet Dan Lechay's seems just right. The drifting veils of rhyme and meter disclose a ghost, or is it a ghost?

Ghost Villanelle

We never saw the ghost, though he was there—
we knew from the raindrops tapping on the eaves.
We never saw him, and we didn't care.

Each day, new sunshine tumbled through the air;
evenings, the moonlight rustled in dark leaves.
We never saw the ghost, though: he was there,

if ever, when the wind tousled our hair
and prickled goosebumps up and down thin sleeves;
we never saw him. And we didn't care

to step outside our room at night, or dare
click off the nightlight: call it fear of thieves.
We never saw the ghost, though he was there

in sunlit dustmotes drifting anywhere,
in light-and-shadow, such as the moon weaves.
We never saw him, though, and didn't care,

until at last we saw him everywhere.
We told nobody. Everyone believes
we never saw the ghost (if he was there),
we never saw him and we didn't care.

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