

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

I love poems in which the central metaphors are fresh and original, and here's a marvelous, coin-y description of autumn by Elizabeth Klise von Zerneck, who lives in Illinois.

Like Coins, November

We drove past late fall fields as flat and cold
as sheets of tin and, in the distance, trees

were tossed like coins against the sky. Stunned gold
and bronze, oaks, maples stood in twos and threes:

some copper bright, a few dull brown and, now
and then, the shock of one so steeled with frost

it glittered like a dime. The autumn boughs
and blackened branches wore a somber gloss

that whispered tails to me, not heads. I read
memorial columns in their trunks; their leaves

spelled UNUM, cent; and yours, the only head. . .
in penny profile, Lincoln-like (one sleeve,

one eye) but even it was turning tails
as russet leaves lay spent across the trails.

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