

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

A honeymoon. How often does one happen according to the dreams that preceded it? In this poem, Wesley McNair, a poet from Maine, describes a first night of marriage in a tawdry place. But all's well that ends well.

For My Wife

How were we to know, leaving your two kids
behind in New Hampshire for our honeymoon
at twenty-one, that it was a trick of cheap
hotels in New York City to draw customers
like us inside by displaying a fancy lobby?
Arriving in our fourth-floor room, we found
a bed, a scarred bureau, and a bathroom door
with a cut on one side the exact shape
of the toilet bowl that was in its way
when I closed it. I opened and shut the door,
admiring the fit and despairing of it. You
discovered the initials of lovers carved
on the bureau's top in a zigzag, breaking heart.
How wrong the place was to us then,
unable to see the portents of our future
that seem so clear now in the naiveté
of the arrangements we made, the hotel's
disdain for those with little money,
the carving of pain and love. Yet in that room
we pulled the covers over ourselves and lay
our love down, and in this way began our unwise
and persistent and lucky life together.

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