

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

Jaimee Kuperman is a poet living and working in the Washington, D.C., area, and she shares with many of us the experience of preparing one's self for a visit to the dentist. Do you, too, give your teeth an especially thorough brushing before entering that waiting room?

The New Dentist

Driving to the new dentist's office
the slow drive of a new place
with the McDonalds that I don't go to
on the left, the mall two miles away.
The Courthouse and the Old Courthouse
road signs that break apart, the fork in the road
that looks nothing like a fork or a spoon, in fact
at best, maybe a knife bent in a dishwasher
that leans to one side. And I know the dentist
will ask about my last visit and want to know
in months that I can't say some time ago
and I know he will ask me about flossing
and saying when I'm in the mood won't be
the appropriate answer.
He will call out my cavities
as if they were names in a class.
I brush my teeth before going in.
It's like cleaning before the cleaning person
but I don't want him to know I keep an untidy
mouth. That I am the type of person who shoves
things in the closet before guests arrive.

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