

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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American Life in Poetry: Column 034

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

In this poem by Pittsburgh resident Jim Daniels, a father struggles to heal his son's grief after an incident at school. The poem reminds us that when we're young little things can hurt in a big way.

Dim

Today my son realized someone's smarter
than him. Not me or his mom —
he still thinks we know everything —
one of the other kids, Nathan. Making fun
of him at the computer terminal
for screwing up at the math game.
Other kids laughing at him. Second grade.
I'm never gonna be as smart as him,
he says.

I'm never gonna be as smart
as half my students if we're talking
IQs. He doesn't want me to explain.
He wants me to acknowledge
that he's dumb. He's lying in bed
and taking his glasses off and on,
trying to get them perfectly clean
for the morning. I'm looking around
his dark room for a joke or some
decent words to lay on him. His eyes
are glassy with almost-tears. Second grade.
The world wants to call on him.
I take his hand in mine.

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