

# 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 124

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

Here is a lovely poem about survival by Patrick Phillips of New York. People sometimes ask me “What are poems for?” and “Matinee” is an example of the kind of writing that serves its readers, that shows us a way of carrying on.

### Matinee

After the biopsy,  
after the bone scan,  
after the consult and the crying,

for a few hours no one could find them,  
not even my sister,  
because it turns out

they'd gone to the movies.  
Something tragic was playing,  
something epic,

and so they went to the comedy  
with their popcorn  
and their cokes,

the old wife whispering everything twice,  
the old husband  
cupping a palm to his ear,

as the late sun lit up an orchard  
behind the strip mall,  
and they sat in the dark holding hands.

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