

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 Kansas poet, Wyatt Townley has written a number of fine poems about the swift and relentless passage of time, one of the great themes of the world's poetry, and I especially like this one.

Finding the Scarf

The woods are the book
we read over and over as children.
Now trees lie at angles, felled
by lightning, torn by tornados,
silvered trunks turning back

to earth. Late November light
slants through the oaks
as our small parade, father, mother, child,
shushes along, the wind searching treetops
for the last leaf. Childhood lies

on the forest floor, not evergreen
but oaken, its branches latched
to a graying sky. Here is the scarf
we left years ago like a bookmark,

meaning to return the next day,
having just turned our heads
toward a noise in the bushes,
toward the dinnerbell in the distance,

toward what we knew and did not know
we knew, in the spreading twilight
that returns changed to a changed place.

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