

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

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

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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

All of us have known tyrants, perhaps at the office, on the playground or, as in this poem, within a family. Here Long Island poet Gloria g. Murray portrays an authoritarian mother and her domain. Perhaps you've felt the tension in a scene like this.

In My Mother's House

every wall
stood at attention
even the air knew
when to hold its breath
the polished floors
looked up
defying heel marks
the plastic slipcovers
crinkled in discomfort

in my mother's house
the window shades
flapped
against the glare
of the world
the laughter
crawled like roaches
back into the cracks

even the humans sat—
cardboard cut-outs
around the formica
kitchen table
and with silver knives
sliced and swallowed
their words

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