

# 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 055

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

A circus is an assemblage of illusions, and here Jo McDougall,  
a Kansas poet, shows us a couple of performers, drab and weary  
in their ordinary lives, away from the lights at the center of the ring.

### What We Need

It is just as well we do not see,  
in the shadows behind the hasty tent  
of the Allen Brothers Greatest Show,  
Lola the Lion Tamer and the Great Valdini  
in Nikes and jeans  
sharing a tired cigarette  
before she girds her wrists with glistening amulets  
and snaps the tigers into rage,  
before he adjusts the glimmering cummerbund  
and makes from air  
the white and trembling doves, the pair.

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