

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

There's something wonderfully sweet about a wife cutting a husband's hair, and Bruce Guernsey, who lives in Illinois and Maine, captures it beautifully in this poem.

For My Wife Cutting My Hair

You move around me expertly like the good, round
Italian barber I went to in Florence,
years before we met, his scissors
a razor he sharpened on a belt.

But at first when you were learning, I feared
for my neck, saw my ears like sliced fruit
on the newspapered floor. Taking us back in time,
you cleverly clipped my head in a flat-top.

The years in between were styles no one had ever seen,
or should see again: when the wind rose
half my hair floated off in feathers,
the other half bristling, brief as a brush.

In the chair, almost asleep, I hear the bright
scissors dancing. Hear you hum, full-breasted as Aida,
carefully trimming the white from my temples,
so no one, not even I, will know.

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