

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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In many of those Japanese paintings with Mt. Fuji in the background, we find tiny figures moving along under the immensity of the landscape. Here's an American version of a scene like that, by Stanley Plumly of Maryland, one of our country's most accomplished poets.

Off A Side Road Near Staunton

Some nothing afternoon, no one anywhere,
an early autumn stillness in the air,
the kind of empty day you fill by taking in
the full size of the valley and its layers leading
slowly to the Blue Ridge, the quality of country,
if you stand here long enough, you could stay
for, step into, the way a landscape, even on a wall,
pulls you in, one field at a time, pasture and fall
meadow, high above the harvest, perfect
to the tree line, then spirit clouds and intermittent
sunlit smoky rain riding the tops of the mountains,
though you could walk until it's dark and not reach those rains—
you could walk the rest of the day into the picture
and not know why, at any given moment, you're there.

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