

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
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## American Life in Poetry: Column 359

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

At a time when a relationship is falling apart, sometimes the news of its failure doesn't come out of a mouth but from gestures. Claudia Emerson, who lives in Virginia, here captures a telling moment.

### Eight Ball

It was fifty cents a game  
    beneath exhausted ceiling fans,  
  
the smoke's old spiral. Hooded lights  
    burned distant, dull. I was tired, but you  
  
insisted on one more, so I chalked  
    the cue—the bored blue—broke, scratched.  
  
It was always possible  
    for you to run the table, leave me  
  
nothing. But I recall the easy  
    shot you missed, and then the way  
  
we both studied, circling—keeping  
    what you had left me between us.

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