

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

April Lindner is a poet living in Pennsylvania who has written a number of fine poems about parenting. Here's an example that shows us just one of the many hazards of raising a child.

Dog Bite

The worst for him was his friend turned wolf,
and the blood that splattered as he ran. The worst
for us: the hospital, his upper lip tugged back
to show the gash—the flesh halved deeply,
cleanly—while I hold him for the needle
that rubs pain out. He submits
to the quick stitch, the thread black
against pink skin, calm now he sees
the doctor can be trusted, his voice
soothing, his face clean shaven,
the clues that signal kindness to a child.
He's worried, though, about his pet
who *didn't mean it, Mom*. His voice is flat.
He knows the months he's tried to woo this dog
were over when it leapt for his throat
and caught his mouth. The scars, at least,
will be invisible. At home, he'll sleep,
big boy between his parents, till he's sure
no beast will tear into his dreams. And we
will want him there, our bodies makeshift walls.
We who led the stranger to our home,
fixed him a bowl, taught him to sleep
under our blankets, we who taught our son
to rub the muzzle that sheathes the teeth.

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