

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 455

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

I don't remember ever having a blind date, but if I had, I suspect it would have gone just as the one goes in this poem by Jay Leeming, who lives in New York state.

Blind Date

Our loneliness sits with us at dinner, an unwanted guest
who never says anything. It's uncomfortable. Still

we get to know each other, like students allowed
to use a private research library for only one night.

I go through her file of friends, cities and jobs.
"What was that like?" I ask. "What did you do then?"

We are each doctors who have only ourselves
for medicine, and long to prescribe it for what ails

the other. She has a nice smile. *Maybe, maybe . . .*
I tell myself. But my heart is a cynical hermit

who frowns once, then shuts the door of his room
and starts reading a book. All I can do now is want

to want her. Our polite conversation coasts
like a car running on fumes, and then rolls to a stop;

we split the bill, and that third guest at the table
goes home with each of us, to talk and talk.

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