

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 511

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

Just as it was to me, Insha'Allah will be a new word to many of you, offered in this poem by Danusha Laméris, a Californian. It looks to me like one of those words that ought to get a lot of use.

Insha'Allah

I don't know when it slipped into my speech
that soft word meaning, "if God wills it."
Insha'Allah I will see you next summer.
The baby will come in spring, insha'Allah.
Insha'Allah this year we will have enough rain.

So many plans I've laid have unraveled
easily as braids beneath my mother's quick fingers.

Every language must have a word for this. A word
our grandmothers uttered under their breath
as they pinned the whites, soaked in lemon,
hung them to dry in the sun, or peeled potatoes,
dropping the discarded skins into a bowl.

*Our sons will return next month, insha'Allah.
Insha'Allah this war will end, soon. Insha'Allah
the rice will be enough to last through winter.*

How lightly we learn to hold hope,
as if it were an animal that could turn around
and bite your hand. And still we carry it
the way a mother would, carefully,
from one day to the next.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org),
publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of
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