

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

There are those like me who can't even tell when an avocado is ripe, and those who know exactly how to perfectly prepare a ripe one. Here's a poem of avocado expertise by Diane Lockward from *The Uneaten Carrots of Atonement*, published by Wind Publications. The poet lives in New Jersey.

For the Love of Avocados

I sent him from home hardly more than a child.
Years later, he came back loving avocados.
In the distant kitchen where he'd flipped burgers
and tossed salads, he'd mastered how to prepare

the pear-shaped fruit. He took a knife and plied
his way into the thick skin with a bravado
and gentleness I'd never seen in him. He nudged
the halves apart, grabbed a teaspoon and carefully

eased out the heart, holding it as if it were fragile.
He took one half, then the other of the armadillo-
hided fruit and slid his spoon where flesh edged
against skin, working it under and around, sparing

the edible pulp. An artist working at an easel,
he filled the center holes with chopped tomatoes.
The broken pieces, made whole again, merged
into two reconstructed hearts, a delicate and rare

surgery. My boy who'd gone away angry and wild
had somehow learned how to unclose
what had once been shut tight, how to urge
out the stony heart and handle it with care.

Beneath the rind he'd grown as tender and mild
as that avocado, its rubies nestled in peridot,
our forks slipping into the buttery texture
of unfamiliar joy, two halves of what we shared.

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