

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

American Life in Poetry: Column 653

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

I'm very fond of poems in which the poet stands at a distance from whatever is going on and offers a report. This poem by Dorianne Laux, from her book *What We Carry*, (BOA Editions, Ltd.), gives us the flavor of an entire high school homecoming by observing just one father and daughter. And the third person in this third-person poem is, of course, the poet. Laux lives in North Carolina.

Homecoming

At the high school football game, the boys
stroke their new muscles, the girls sweeten their lips
with gloss that smells of bubblegum, candy cane,
or cinnamon. In pleated cheerleader skirts
they walk home with each other, practicing yells,
their long bare legs forming in the dark.
Under the arched field lights a girl
in a velvet prom dress stands near the chainlink,
a cone of roses held between her breasts.
Her lanky father, in a corduroy suit, leans
against the fence. While they talk, she slips a foot
in and out of a new white pump, fingers the weave
of her French braid, the glittering earrings.
They could be a couple on their first date, she,
a little shy, he, trying to impress her
with his casual stance. This is the moment
when she learns what she will love: a warm night,
the feel of nylon between her thighs, the fine hairs
on her arms lifting when a breeze
sifts in through the bleachers, cars
igniting their engines, a man bending over her,
smelling the flowers pressed against her neck.

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 Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©1994 by Dorianne Laux, "Homecoming," from *What We Carry*, (BOA Editions, 1994). Poem reprinted by permission of Dorianne Laux and the publisher. Introduction copyright ©2017 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.