

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 654

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

Here's a beautiful poem evoking a vivid memory by David Mason, who teaches at Colorado College and has served his state as poet laureate. There's not one extra word in this, and every word—with that word's singular music—is set in the perfect position. This poem is from his forthcoming book, *The Sound: New and Selected Poems*, (Red Hen Press, 2018).

Mending Time

The fence was down. Out among humid smells
and shrill cicadas we walked, the lichened trunks
moon-blue, our faces blue and our hands.

Led by their bellwether bellies, the sheep
had toddled astray. The neighbor farmer's woods
or coyotes might have got them, or the far road.

I remember the night, the moon-colored grass
we waded through to look for them, the oaks
tangled and dark, like starting a story midway.

We gazed over seed heads to the barn
toppled in the homestead orchard. Then we saw
the weather of white wool, a cloud in the blue

moving without sound as if charmed
by the moon beholding them out of bounds.
Time has not tightened the wire or righted the barn.

The unpruned orchard rots in its meadow
and the story unravels, the sunlight creeping back
like a song with nobody left to hear it.

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