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

So many contemporary poems fail for the lack of strong endings, but here's one with a masterful latch that snaps closed at the end. Tami Haaland served as Montana's fifth poet laureate and she teaches at Montana State at Billings. The following poem is from *South Dakota Review*.

Returning

When I open the door
and reach to the light switch
the world opens as it did each time.

The garlic jar on the ledge,
the ceramic cup holding
cheese cutters and paring knives.

Outside a branch
from the ash tree
worries the window.

It was a place where I knew
the drawer pulls, the feel of steps
to the basement, the smell of cool cement.

If I open the middle cabinet,
the linen is there as you left it,
well-ordered, none of it fine.

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