

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 677

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

I'm devoted to yard and garage sales, and love to spend time with friendly strangers in scuffed front yards and oily, dim garages. Here's a poem by Matthew Brennan, who lives in Indiana, from his 2016 Lamar University book, *One Life*.

Yard Sale

"There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful."

— Emerson, *Nature*

The renters bring out their greasy table,
End of the month again: It sags,
Weighted and warped like them, unable
To hold much more than glasses and rags.

Old clothes and rusty tools compete
For space with magazines they stole
From garbage bins behind our street;
Each shoe reveals a run-down sole.

A few come by, inspect, and leave,
Almost always with empty hands.
But when, at sundown, all things cleave
To slanted light, and when it lands

So rubber, glass, and metal glint—
And for a moment make you squint—
You'll see our neighbors bathed in gold
As if their worth cannot be sold.

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