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

My mother's best friend, Ruth Stickfort Kregel, was "Aunt Sticky" to my sister and me, and today I feel like telling you a little about this woman we loved. This poem is from my new book, *Kindest Regards*, published by Copper Canyon Press.

Post Office

The wall of identical boxes into which
our Aunt Sticky sorted the daily mail
was at the far end of her dining room,
and from the private side looked like
a fancy wallpaper upon which peonies
pushed through a white wooden trellis,
or sometimes like crates of chickens
stacked all the way to the ceiling.
I'd learned by then – I was a little boy –
that a thing can look like one thing
on one day and another on another,
depending on how you might be feeling.
There were times when we were there,
having our coffee and sweet rolls,
when some woman on the lobby side
would with a click unlock her box
and leaning down, peer inside to see
if she had mail, and see us at the table,
Mother and Father, my sister and I
and our postmistress aunt, and call out,
"Yoohoo, Sticky! I see you have company!"
and waggle her fingers, waving hello.

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