

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

One of my many peculiarities is a fascination with deserted places, especially old houses, and I've written far too many poems about them. But that doesn't mean that I don't love it when others take on their own depictions. This poem by Richard Jarrette, a Californian, takes on not only the description of an old house, but what might have happened there and what might happen anywhere. It's from his book *The Beatitudes of Ekaterina*, from Green Writers Press of Brattleboro, Vermont.

Happiness

Abandoned house roofless three walls
no floor a ruin if you think *house*—

to brown towhees a place to scratch
in the leaves for bugs and worms,

for the male to sing a territorial song
from what remains of the chimney—

an imagination problem like the time
friends said we must be very happy

in the beautiful house we built because
they couldn't see the ruins inside us.

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