

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 735

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

There's a lot of very wordy poetry these days, but here is a poem of only around 120 words in which every choice is necessary. I recently accepted another poem by Caitlin Doyle, who lives in Ohio, and I said in that introduction that her poetry is "strategic," in that it feels as if the words have been carefully held back until they are just right for the moment. Here, the speaker is a young girl for whom everything is changing. This poem originally appeared in an issue of *The Warwick Review* and has since been included in several anthologies.

The Doll Museum

The stone dolls, found in an Egyptian tomb,
are eyeless, armless, heavy for a child

to hold. Not like the dolls that lined the room
my sister and I shared, their bodies light

and made for being bent, their eyelids mobile,
hair that tangled with our own. "At night,"

our father winked at us, "they come to life."
We never pressed our cheeks against cold stone

as pharaoh's daughters did. The doctor's knife
could not have caught my sister more off-guard

or left me less alone; I had my dolls.
Though, soon, they lay on tables in the yard

with price tags. Even then they looked alive,
survivors with no sickness to survive.

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