

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

American Life in Poetry: Column 736

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

I was very sorry to read that the literary journal *Field*, with a long history of publishing the finest of American poetry, was ceasing publication. All good things must come to an end. Here's a poem full of mystery from the final issue. It's by Mark Irwin, who divides his time between California and Colorado, and whose most recent book is *A Passion According to Green* (2017).

Open

When they entered the house, which was a very large house
the way a cloud is large, the pages of their story
seemed like cracks in the earth, a man's shirt, or a woman's
blouse, and the stranger in the house told them to make
themselves at home in the house that was not their house,
and told them to write down the three most important gifts
in each of their lives, and then continued to explain how
there were three doors in the house and at each door they must
forfeit one of these gifts, and how the real story always begins
at the third door, where each of them will pause and begin
to crawl, leaving the field of time, where now you pause,
touching the door of this page, wiping away each word, waiting to enter.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2018 by Mark Irwin, "Open," from *Field*, (No. 98, Spring 2018). Poem reprinted by permission of Mark Irwin and the publisher. Introduction copyright ©2019 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.