

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

Houdini never gets far from the news. There's always a movie coming out, or a book, and every other magician has to face comparison to the legendary master. Here the California poet, Kay Ryan, encapsulates the man and says something wise about celebrity.

Houdini

Each escape
involved some art,
some hokum, and
at least a brief
incomprehensible
exchange between
the man and metal
during which the
chains were not
so much broken
as he and they
blended. At the
end of each such
mix he had to
extract himself. It
was the hardest
part to get right
routinely: breaking
back into the
same Houdini.

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