

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

A poem is an experience like any other, and we can learn as much or more about, say, an apple from a poem about an apple as from the apple itself. Since I was a boy, I've been picking up things, but I've never found a turtle shell until I found one in this poem by Jeff Worley, who lives in Kentucky.

On Finding a Turtle Shell in Daniel Boone National Forest

This one got tired
of lugging his fortress
wherever he went,
was done with duck and cover
at every explosion
through rustling leaves
of fox and dog and skunk.
Said *au revoir* to the ritual
of pulling himself together. . .

I imagine him waiting
for the cover of darkness
to let down his hinged drawbridge.
He wanted, after so many
protracted years of caution,
to dance naked and nimble
as a flame under the moon—
even if dancing just once
was all that the teeth
of the forest would allow.

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