American Life in Poetry: Column 222

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

Coleman Barks, who lives in Georgia, is not only the English language’s foremost translator of the poems of the 13th century poet, Rumi, but he’s also a loving grandfather, and for me that’s even more important. His poems about his granddaughter, Briny, are brim full of joy. Here’s one:

Glad

In the glory of the gloaming-green soccer field her team, the Gladiators, is losing ten to zip. She never loses interest in the roughhouse one-on-one that comes every half a minute. She sticks her leg in danger and comes out the other side running.

Later a clump of opponents on the street is chanting, WE WON, WE WON, WE . . . She stands up on the convertible seat holding to the windshield. WE LOST, WE LOST BIGTIME, TEN TO NOTHING, WE LOST, WE LOST. Fist pumping air. The other team quiet, abashed, chastened.

Good losers don’t laugh last; they laugh continuously, all the way home so glad.