

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Often everyday experiences provide poets with inspiration. Here Georgiana Cohen observes a woman looking out her window and compares the woman to the sunset. The woman's "slumped" chin, the fence that separates them, and the "beached" cars set the poem's tone; this is clearly not a celebration of the neighborhood. Yet by turning to clouds, sky, and breath, Cohen underscores the scene's fragile grace.

Old Woman in a Housecoat

An old woman in
a floor-length housecoat
has become sunset
to me, west-facing.
Turquoise, sage, or rose,
she leans out of her
second floor window,
chin slumped in her palm,
and gazes at the
fenced property line
between us, the cars
beached in the driveway,
the creeping slide of
light across shingles.
When the window shuts,
dusk becomes blush and
bruises, projected
on vinyl siding.
Housecoats breathe across
the sky like frail clouds.

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