

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

Readers of this column have probably noticed how much I love poems that give us new ways of looking at things, and in this example Faith Shearin does just that. I especially like "four-legged relative / of the moon," which so perfectly describes the coat of a possum in partial light. Shearin lives in West Virginia and her most recent book is *Orpheus, Turning*, from The Broadkill River Press.

Possum in the Garbage

He was a surprise of white: his teeth
like knives, his face a triangle
of albino dislike. I had seen him before,

on our back porch, where my father
sometimes left watermelon rinds,
and he dipped his tongue into them,

his skin glowing beneath our lights,
like some four-legged relative
of the moon. I knew him
as a citizen of the night:

a fainting, ghostly presence
with a tail so naked it was
embarrassed to drag behind him.

But that morning, terrified and violent,
he was different: a hissing fury
at the bottom of the garbage can,
a vampire bathed in light.

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