

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

Although this poem by North Carolina native Ron Rash may seem to be just about trout fishing, it is the first of several poems Rash has written about his cousin who died years ago. Indirectly, the poet gives us clues about this loss. By the end, we see that in passing from life to death, the fish's colors dull; so, too, may fade the memories of a cherished life long lost.

Speckled Trout

Water-flesh gleamed like mica:
orange fins, red flankspots, a char
shy as ginseng, found only
in spring-flow gaps, the thin clear
of faraway creeks no map
could name. My cousin showed me
those hidden places. I loved
how we found them, the way we
followed no trail, just stream-sound
tangled in rhododendron,
to where slow water opened
a hole to slip a line in
and lift as from a well bright
shadows of another world,
held in my hand, their color
already starting to fade.

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