

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
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## American Life in Poetry: Column 608

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

It's high time that a column about American life can at last offer a poem about romance fiction. Most of us poets are lucky to have a few hundred readers for our books, and that's only a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of devoted followers of bodice-rippers. Here's a poem by Marilyn L. Taylor, who lives in Wisconsin, that offers an explanation.

### Aunt Eudora's Harlequin Romance

She turns the bedlamp on. The book falls open  
in her mottled hands, and while she reads  
her mouth begins to quiver, forming words  
like *Breathless. Promises. Elope.*

As she turns the leaves, Eudora's cheek  
takes on a bit of bloom. Her frowzy hair  
thickens and turns gold, her dim eyes clear,  
the wattles vanish from her slender neck.  
Her waist, emerging from its ring of flesh,  
bends to the side. Breasts that used to hang  
like pockets rise and ripen; her long legs  
tremble. Her eyes close, she holds her breath—  
the steamy pages flutter by, unread,  
as lover after lover finds her bed.

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