

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

Perhaps you've seen miniature portraits enclosed in locket. Well, here's a little portrait enclosed in the pages of a chapbook by Pennsylvania poet Paul Martin called *Mourning Dove*, from The Comstock Review Press. Here, the subject is not frozen in its pose, but alive, up in the morning, coughing, beginning to move around.

Turning Over

In zero cold the engine's slow
to turn over, coughing
awake like my father sitting on the edge
of the bed staring at the blue linoleum floor,
coughing again, lifting his heavy body
into another day on the railroad section gang,
the icy wind through Lehigh Gap blasting
down on him as he raises the sledge hammer
and strains against the crowbar.
But now he's drinking coffee,
looking toward the dark window,
thinking of what?
Maybe watching Friday Night Fights
or ordering tomato seeds,
maybe the ghostly face in the window
staring back at him.

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