

# A Valentine for Ernest Mann

You can't order a poem like you order a taco.  
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"  
and expect it to be handed back to you  
on a shiny plate.

Still, I like your spirit.  
Anyone who says, "Here's my address,  
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.  
So I'll tell you a secret instead:  
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,  
they are sleeping. They are the shadows  
drifting across our ceilings the moment  
before we wake up. What we have to do  
is live in a way that lets us find them.

Once I knew a man who gave his wife  
two skunks for a valentine.  
He couldn't understand why she was crying.  
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."  
And he was serious. He was a serious man  
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly  
just because the world said so. He really  
liked those skunks. So, he reinvented them  
as valentines and they became beautiful.  
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding  
in the eyes of the skunks for centuries  
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

Maybe if we reinvent whatever our lives give us  
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock  
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.  
And let me know.

--Naomi Shihab Nye

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## Journal prompts:

- Write about an unusual gift you've given, or received.
- Write about a time you reinvented something your life gave you.
- Where do your poems hide?

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