

# The Minks

By Toi Derricotte

POETRY OUT LOUD 

In the backyard of our house on Norwood,  
there were five hundred steel cages lined up,  
each with a wooden box  
roofed with tar paper;  
inside, two stories, with straw  
for a bed. Sometimes the minks would pace  
back and forth wildly, looking for a way out;  
or else they'd hide in their wooden houses, even when  
we'd put the offering of raw horse meat on their trays, as if  
they knew they were beautiful  
and wanted to deprive us.

In spring the placid kits  
drank with glazed eyes.  
Sometimes the mothers would go mad  
and snap their necks.

My uncle would lift the roof like a god  
who might lift our roof, look down on us  
and take us out to safety.  
Sometimes one would escape.  
He would go down on his hands and knees,  
aiming a flashlight like  
a bullet of light, hoping to catch  
the orange gold of its eyes.  
He wore huge boots, gloves  
so thick their little teeth couldn't bite through.  
"They're wild," he'd say. "Never trust them."

Each afternoon when I put the scoop of raw meat rich  
with eggs and vitamins on their trays,  
I'd call to each a greeting.  
Their small thin faces would follow as if slightly curious.

In fall they went out in a van, returning  
sorted, matched, their skins hanging down on huge metal  
hangers, pinned by their mouths.

My uncle would take them out when company came  
and drape them over his arm—the sweetest cargo.  
He'd blow down the pelts softly  
and the hairs would part for his breath  
and show the shining underlife which, like  
the shining of the soul, gives us each  
character and beauty.

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