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 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 re-invented them 
as valentines and they became beautiful. 
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding 
in the eyes of skunks for centuries 
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

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

Credit: