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00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:18

For some reason I'm remembering one morning from my 30s. I must have been home for Christmas to visit my father. For money's sake, I come alone, leaving my first husband behind in New York. It was still years before that marriage would end, freeing me to begin my actual life. The morning I'm remembering my dad and I set out for the San Francisco Airport so that I could return back to New York. We rode without talking much listening to Simon and Garfunkel. I don't know why it was hard for me sometimes to make conversation with my father. Was it because there was so much in my life that couldn't have made sense to him? Igor, my husband made no sense to my father. The life I was living was meager hand to mouth, a struggle, it would have struck him as irresponsible. So we drowned out our silence with music. When Finally we neared the airport, I felt myself choking on feeling. They were just kids when they wrote these songs, I said, tears beginning to streak my face. I didn't know if it was true, but it felt true. And I felt that way too. Just a kid exhausted from my life, and I feared guilty of failure in my father's eyes. In my family, we had no problem telling one another. I love you. That morning, saying goodbye. I hid what I didn't know how to say in that familiar phrase. Today's poem is cancer by su Kwong feet on dashboard. god awful music blaring from mixed cassettes. My father let me have my way as he played chauffeur, never easing his grip on the wheel down straightaways for hours to my college dorm across New Jersey and the Poconos up through Scranton to the Gulch of Broome County in upstate New York. Not a word passed between us mile after mile markers on fence posts, yellow dashes, streaks of trees, blurred Liturgy of autumn, spring, summer into winter into summer, taking off hours that measure the distance as he drove, and I watched the road that held nothing but our widening Gulf. My father taught me willful reticence folding desire into cellular spaces. Perhaps

one day, I will enter this dusty warehouse filled with neglected boxes, find the one labeled for my daughter and unpack its long held secrets. For now, I let him seal their seams with tape, stuffed them into corners. Recently when I visited, he sat across the dinner table as mom prepared our holiday meal. Both of them aging exponentially, like radioactive particles, with some of his former self, barely recognizable, recited the Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. They had just taken out his kidney, the half life of failure. Suddenly, he opened his eyes looked straight into me and said, I know you. You have a frontier spirit. Where did he even get that word? frontier? We nodded in agreement than eight inside silence like we always do, losing our nerve. all I've ever wanted him to say is Tell me something. Tell me everything. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.