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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, family, slow, younger, baby, cried, undercurrents, sister, birth, britannica, ketchup bottle, older, firstborn, barely, yard, role, doted, twin, tabby cat, chant

00:06

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:24

Do you believe

00:25

in horoscopes?

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And the notion that when we're born shapes who we are, what about birth order? Do you think being an only child or a middle child or the baby of the bunch determines how we relate to the people in our family and those in the world. I'm the youngest of five. My oldest sister's in very different ways. Our caregivers. My brother in the middle of the birth order, is the family peacekeeper and diplomat, and the brother who had been doted on as the baby for nine years before I was born, viewed me as an evil usurper when we were kids. Now we're all grown. But the effects of those family roles runs deep. I see it in my own children. A part of my daughter, who's the oldest is still raging or grieving the change in her family role that the birth of the twins brought. Recently, the younger of my son's younger by 13 minutes, referred to his identical twin as his big brother. Come to think of it, those 13 minutes do seem to make a difference. The barely older twin does see himself as the defender of the younger against his sister, and the world. The family cosmology gives us a role to play, and sometimes it's hard to break character. Today's poem is parable of a firstborn by Rebecca Morgan Frank. As a mother, I recognize the line the

speaker seems to be walking between looking after her sister and courting danger. The poems undercurrents of love and resentment, strike me as true to the nature of family. parable of a firstborn by Rebecca Morgan Frank. I never left the yard. I never took a single drop of blood, or let the dog out the fence to die. Only once did I take my sister's hand and lead her across six lanes while she covered her ears to the horns See, and even then, we saying jump rope rhymes and rocked our heels by the side of the road. catch a tiger catch a tiger catch a tiger by his toes. I failed her milk stained bottles with water, cooked noodles and hot dogs. Let her put ketchup on our toast. She barely ever cried. We kept away from the hole in the wall. kept our shoes on when grandpa died. I never once not once told a lie. But we'd sing and chant hoppitty hoppitty hoppitty bees how many rabbits like to eat cheese? Everything we knew was in the big fat books, a 1950s Britannica. The Better Homes cookbook, the one with the tabs. The picture Bible that got lost in the basement or yard. She won't tell it like me. You see, she'll find an angled blame ever since she crossed the river and knew what we hadn't seen. She's like someone who found the blindfold and ripped it off and can never forgive the joke. Everything good roller skates, the tabby cat. She won't tell you any part of that. Once I saw her in the supermarket aisle, she harbored a giant ketchup bottle, a baby in her cart. I saw her face crying up at the lights. The mother looked right through me hard to say who lived last lived first. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter. Follow the slow down on Instagram and Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://www.instagram.com/slowdownshow)