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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

coco, taylor, blues, poem, jukebox, hand, boast, wished, blue ink, resiliency, pen, rubies, poet, chicago, tall tale, backflips, jostling, talking, burdens, history



00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith.



00:09

And this is the slow down.



00:22

As a poet, when I make use of history and my writing, it's often the result of questions I have about the present. I turned backward in search of patterns, trends, missed opportunities. at best. I'm listening for what voices from another time might be saying to us now. Today's poem makes history do backflips, tossing fact legend and outright invention into a shaker and jostling them into a new and potent cocktail. The hero of the poem is singer Coco Taylor, the daughter of a Tennessee sharecropper, who came to be known as Queen of the Chicago blues.



01:12

Perhaps the impetus for the blues comes from the need to bear witness to life's hard knocks. Say you're out of work, your woman left and it won't stop raining outside. But a blues song is also a place where the spirit and ego can console themselves with grand boasts like, maybe you have loads of luck, or lots of money, or more sex appeal than any one lover can handle.



01:48

She says



01:55

that was Coco Taylor singing I'm a woman. Taylor is the inspiration for Chicago based poet Yves L. Ewing's true stories about Coco Taylor. It's a tall tale style poem that swells its subjects already legendary reputation to stratospheric proportions. But this poem, even with its playfulness, actually has something very serious at its heart. And that's an earnest boast and deep lament for African American culture, a culture that's endured impossible burdens with great resiliency, and in the process, given birth to some of the most meaningful and hard won emblems of American culture. I'm talking about the blues, and its musical offspring. Yes. But I'm also talking about the black church, the civil rights movement, and an ongoing insistence on progress and equality that holds American democracy to the ideals upon which it was founded. True Stories about Coco Taylor, Coco Taylor walked up on John Henry took the hammer right out his hand and bent it and twisted it into a fine necklace, and took him to a real nice dinner. Coco Taylor had 12,000 wigs, one she never wore just kept at home, wasn't chanted, spawned from gold and full of rubies and saying to her at night, in the voice of her mother, Coco Taylor wrote songs with a blue ink pen. Coco Taylor wrote rivers with a blue ink pen. Coco Taylor wrote the Illinois Central rail line with a blue pen just got right on her knees and scratched it into the ground. Coco Taylor was the ghost writer of 17 Beatles songs. Coco Taylor was the inventor of the icebox. Coco Taylor could play chess with checkers. Coco Taylor could bake a pound cake in the palm of her hand by winking. Coco Taylor flew from Memphis to Chicago on a jukebox. The jukebox could grant three wishes, Coco Taylor wished for lipstick, the color she saw in a dream. She wished to be born again. Under a good sign. She wished for a better jukebox.



04:45

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