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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

harp, granddad, stoop, blow, man, lean, slow, tuesday, harlem, poem, blackbird, bell pepper, church, selling, pinkie ring, hand, note, cotton, ai, jingling

00:05

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

00:22

Today's poem is a city Symphony, a little cinematic Street Scene bustling with the life of a place. It guides me to zoom in on one person in particular, and to see many things in him at once. History, necessity, and a wellspring of contagious joy. outside my Harlem window by Lauren Whitehead on the brick red stoop of the brownstone next door is a steady rock black man selling harps to the neighbors by blowing a blues riff. Like it's nobody's business. Except it is his to remind us the potential impromptu music on a Tuesday, on top of Sugar Hill has to make you want to wear your church shoes and creased slacks for no reason other than to give up joy. This man with two hands full of harp having church on the stoop of the brownstone next door is with his right hand blow in this, which he called Blackmagic. Slow into a soprano note on the far side of the harp, first, sliding low as he can go. Then catching each and every note in between and reiden Hi, the riff back again to the peak which Pierce clean, like the call of some sacred steel winged Blackbird ain't no fear filled trill on the stoop. Not this Tuesday. Not this Harlem broke open early, like popping into an August bell pepper with your fingers. And all this seed and fruit inside of you is exposed now. And yellow or green, and red and black magic. And he has wide nose and he has Pinkie ring. He is my grandfather, this man, old time and swag and all gray leaning over the back of a barber shop chair saying something of how the sunsets in the south come in colors you ain't never seen, like the rural red on an Alabama backyard. The white peach pink of a cuticle peeled back to the flesh from Poland cotton from the hole. And sometimes he'll push his left hand out to show you exactly where. And sometimes he'll get to jingling the coins in his pocket. And sometimes he'll get to lean in on his back leg, poke his breast out, pull a harp from his chest pocket and get to blow in like a yellow headed Blackbird. All his unrest and scar and laughter

building its own back beat on a blues harp for 3000 people at a Tuskegee Jubilee. He is for ah ha Grayson, heart blowing, handsome. And somehow you know your granddad is James cotton is Jr. Wells broke and black is Alabama ever and trouble. Man y'all don't even hear me. he'll stop to say, but I do hear you granddad all the way out here in Harlem, where the steady rock black man make a mimic of you selling Old Spice and wisdom holding church on a Tuesday on a stoop for the other men who gather double park on roll their windows unfurl for a minute. Listen, if he didn't have his other hand full of wanting of his wanted work to sell. He would put both hands on his harp smile his lips over the harp. He would lean back like my granddad like an old tree. Let the wind blow through him and make a miraculous and joyful noise.

04:36

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