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00:06

I'm Tracy K. Smith, and this is

00:10

the slow down.

00:20

The question I'm asked at nearly every q&a is this. How do you practice self care? The first time I heard it, I was thrown for a loop. How do I take care of myself? I asked the questioner just to make sure. And her reply was, yes. How do you recover from the stress of living in the world as a person of color? And then I understood, she was asking how I was surviving life and a place and time, where views about who we are and what we ought to mean to one another have become frighteningly polarized. She was asking how I fought the urge to unravel from the stress and the anger and the fear of living in such a world. I wish I had been Audrey Lord at that moment, and said, as Lord once did, every woman has a well stocked arsenal of anger, potentially useful against those oppressions personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being focused with precision, it can become a powerful source of energy, serving progress and change. Audrey Lorde, who was both a writer and an activist, changed lives with her finely focused anger. She also immersed herself in a community characterized by immense and generous love. But all I could think of that night on the stage was this. I tried to be kind to myself, I spend time talking and laughing with the people I love and who love me. I nurture my children, which in turn, affirms my sense of hope and purpose. Today's poem by ocean Vong models, another critical aspect of self care, being honest about how difficult life feels and striving to be tender, patient and consoling with oneself. Someday I'll love ocean Vong, by ocean Vong ocean. Don't be afraid. The

end of the road is so far ahead. It is already behind us. Don't worry. Your father is only your father until one of you forgets. Like how the spine won't remember its wings. No matter how many times our knees kiss the pavement. Ocean. Are you listening? The most beautiful part of your body is wherever your mother's shadow falls. Here's the house with childhood whittled down to a single red tripwire. Don't worry, just call it horizon, and you'll never reach it. Here's today jump. I promise it's not a lifeboat. Here's the man whose arms are wide enough to gather you're leaving and hear the moment just after the lights go out when you can still see the faint torch between his legs. How you use it again. And again. To find your own hands. You asked for a second chance and are given a mouth to empty out of Don't be afraid. The gunfire is only the sound of people trying to live a little longer and failing. Ocean ocean Get up. The most beautiful part of your body is where it's headed. And remember, loneliness is still time spent with the world. Here's the room with everyone in it. Your Dead friends passing through you like wind through a wind chime. Here's a desk with a GIMP leg and a brick to make it last. Yes, here's a room so warm and blood close. I swear you will awake and mistake these walls for skin. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.