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00:06

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

00:23

I started hearing the phrase 30 is the new 20 just as I was closing in on 29. A decade later it was 40 is the new 30, which made me feel like I'd been born at just the right time. With luck, my generation would live to enjoy a day when old age would suddenly be optional, something we could elect to forego choosing instead, to hover in a never ending state of late youth. Now, I'm not so sure I'd want that. Lately, I've become more conscious of the things I admire about my older friends, friends in their 50s or 60s or 70s. They're the people I turn to for advice. The ones who make things like happiness and security and work life balance seem easy. their level of knowledge and skill is what is often meant by a phrase like an artist working at the height of her power. Best of all, they're not hamstrung by the opinions of others. They're free. In a way I longed to be free. And the only way to get there, I suspect, is to stop clinging to all this nonsense about stopping the clock. So I'm captivated by today's poem by Alicia sasken Ostreicher, which celebrates the upside of getting old. The poem doesn't shirk the anxiety that sometimes accompanies a young person's view of aging. The title itself, our dead friend, acknowledges what all life is heading toward. But the speaker's take on what it felt like to be finally free of her youth. Sounds to me like nothing to fear. It sounds like a kind of magical rebirth. Our dead friend by Alicia sasken Ostreicher our dead friend used to say when she reached menopause, the swamp cleared from her mind. The sun shone brightly for the first time, since girlhood. So she could think clearly, things were outlined, as if in lights. A dog was a dog, and a man was only a man imprisoned in the arms of arrows. You relax, you blur, you have no will of your own. Almost anything can make you tingle with delight, music, art, nature, kisses, touch, the wetness. The pulsing, every glance is sort of soft bullet, she said. How true. And what a fool I made of myself all

those years. Well, we all did you and I honey, we were like those lab mice that will step on the pedal that gives them those thrills, not eating, not stopping until they die. Now, when I look at my body under the spell of gravity, I have to laugh. Oh my god, the way we all lined up like a fleet of taxis at a red light, just waiting and racing our motors. What a joke sexes, though, without it. No avenue to paradise, no human glue.

04:21

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