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mother, slow, quizzical look, twin sons, poem, fourth, son, hand, wordless, mused, airbase, roll, plastic forks, paper napkins, hot dog hamburger, shivering, july, fanfare, grow, elusive

00:06

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

00:23

I have twin sons who were Born on the Fourth of July. They were born two months premature. And so I mused that the significance of the holiday was that they wanted to be independent. Haha. When I was growing up, the Fourth of July was the time when I'd ride to the local airbase, usually with a friend's family to watch a fireworks display show. It was always a cold summer night, shivering in a windbreaker and shorts, and oh, the noise. It wasn't until I was an adult, watching fireworks, silent and tiny in the distance over the far shore of Lake Tahoe, that I realized all the noise explosions typically frighten me. The fanfare of American patriotism, falling as it does each year on my son's birthday, holds a strange irony for me, the mother of black sons, I try to imagine a future in which I am not preoccupied by their safety one way or their country celebrates them. Today's poem is immigrant picnic by Gregory genican. It's the Fourth of July. The flags are painting the town. The plastic forks and knives are laid out like a parade. And I'm grilling. I've got my apron. I've got potato salad, macaroni, relish. I've got a hat shaped like the state of Pennsylvania. I asked my father, what's his pleasure? And he says hotdog, medium rare. And then hamburger? Sure. What's the big difference? As if he's really asking? About I put on hamburgers and hot dogs. slice up the sour pickles and bermudas uncap the condiments? The paper napkins are fluttering away. Like last messages. You're running around. My mother says like a chicken with its head loose. Ma I say you mean cut off loose and cut off being as far apart as say son and daughter. She gives me a quizzical look as though I've been caught in some impropriety. I love you and your sister just the same. She says. Sure. My grandmother pipes in. You're both our children. So why worry? That's not the point. I begin telling them and I'm comparing words to fish now. Like the ones in the sea at port side are like birds among the date palms by the Nile.

unrepentantly elusive, wild, Sonia. My father says to my mother, what the hell is he talking about? He's on a ball. My mother says, That's roll. I say, throwing up my hands, as in hot dog hamburger dinner roll. And what about roll out the barrels? My mother asks, and my father claps his hand, why Sure. He says, Let's have some fun, and launches into a polka twirling my mother around and around like the happiest top and my uncle is shaking his head, saying, you could grow nuts listening to us. And I'm thinking of pistachios in the Sinai, burgeoning without end p cans in the south. The jumbled flavor of them suddenly in my mouth, wordless, confusing, crowding out everything else.

04:29

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