

theslowdown_20191223_20191223_128

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sunflower, boy, poem, shouted, slow, air force, light, enlisted, roll, letters, picture, scrutinizing, quiet, khaki pants, faraway, punctual, bus stop, courtship, names, challenged

00:06

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

00:22

My father grew up in the 1930s and 40s in a town called sunflower, Alabama. The post office there today is the size of a garden shed. It's not unusual in the rainy months for sunflower kids to canoe to and from school when the waters rise high in the family albums, the earliest photographs of my dad are from high school. He was rail thin, with a beautiful faraway look in his eyes, to think of him as a young boy gliding over the water in a canoe, while the sun just barely touches the sky with morning light. Well, it's almost more than my heart can bear. After graduation, he joined the Air Force. That's when he began writing my mother. The letters that eventually led to the two of them falling in love, getting married and all the rest. I wonder how she pictured him in her mind when she sat at her desk, or lay across her bed, reading his thoughts and feelings and filling pages with her own. Did she picture him as an enlisted man standing at attention in sharp Air Force blues, or a country boy rowing himself to school across the surface of a swollen Creek. Today's poem is penalty shot by Eisen Hutchinson. From its first line, it gets me thinking of my dad, growing up in quiet sunflower, quiet, but surely not dull, for every time and every life is fraught with questions and apprehensions challenges we meet or find ways to safely dodge. I've never read the letters my parents exchanged during their courtship. Perhaps they were too private to pass along to us kids. But in this poem, I find myself scrutinizing the central character, as if he might be able to reveal to me a fleeting glimpse of my own father. penalty shot by Ivan Hutchinson. Then there was this boy who rafted to school, his dad a dark profile in cold morning air, lean and curved as we gathered on the peninsula for early devotions. The punctual light crossing the battlement we answered, present or absent, two names shouted fidgeting in our class lines. Quiet boy, khaki pants rolled up smelling of fish scales and Lyme, Christ, he could strike the football like a killer,

but we were all animals on the play field. And when we ran out of nicknames for him, he became no name boy, because he didn't talk much and never challenged the names we gave. When the see swallowed going home bells, we rushed hell loose to the bus stop firing insults and next days war threats. But he walked slowly, turning it the Cliff's gate, stopping to roll up his pants. I shouted to him one evening as he got down on his knee school tomorrow. He looked through the right angles of his leg. Certain I didn't know his name. A strange thing passed between us a bent ball skidding towards the to open posts. In there I was in the clearing, no defenders, but I stalled at the shot. Until now, I recall his real name in the jerk of memories net. You, CBS Titus.

04:33

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