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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

typed, words, urgent plea, humanities, invisible forces, humanities majors, tracy, capacity, left, speaker, poem, hang, pendulum, slow, buried, claim, scold, moment, smith, kearns



00:06

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



00:23

In the wake of tragedy, sometimes you hear the phrase, there are no words. I know I've said it myself, though in my heart, I don't believe it. There are words, words that attest to our capacity for hope, and healing, even in the face of extreme darkness, words that console. By assuring us we have the ability to love to forgive, that we are worthy of compassion and able to give it we need to claim these words and to use them because they remind us of what we can't afford to lose sight of. And there are also words that urge us to search ourselves and own up to our capacity for ignorance, and cruelty. We need to claim and use these words to, we need to use them as reminders of what we haven't yet mastered, reminders of the barriers we sometimes create for ourselves to the ones that prevent us from realizing the full promise of our humanity. Today's poem by New York City poet Catherine Barnett, offers both kinds of words, the ones that assure us and also challenge us, and it does so gently in a voice that doesn't scold. But that also doesn't shirk. It speaker recalls a moment from her own life as a high school student, just a small moment without much seemingly riding on it. But the shadow of the present, riddled with hate crimes and racially motivated shootings, that shadow Mars the speaker's view of the past. And the poem uses these two conflicting views of experience, to fashion what I can only describe as a beautiful and urgent plea for grace.



02:16

The humanities,



02:19

a classmate and I chose pendulums. What happens when a pendulum hangs from a pendulum? How does gravity work then, we were studying invisible forces, and left the classroom heading into the world with just our two bodies, which were to be both string, and Bob. In the woods behind school, he climbed into a tree and lowered himself down, holding a branch. I reached up to his thin ankles, and lifted my bare feet off the ground. Someone must have been there to try to make us swing, record the harmonic oscillations, and take the Polaroids still stapled to this yellowed lab report. It's haunting, to discover it now. To see in the photos, how we hung their smiling, white, safe, and



03:16

how little history we knew.



03:20

If only all feet could come back to stand on the ground, not get buried under it left to hang above, left outside and the told and untold and the toll of hot municipal suns. We didn't understand much of anything, but completed the assignment, typed up the results past physics, went to college and typed and typed and never took another science class. We were humanities majors. Sometimes when I'm not typing now, I run lines with an actor friend and can't get them out of my head. Another heavenly day, says Winnie as the curtain rises. She's buried to her waist in earth. And for a while you think it can't get any worse? the humanities What are they really? Don't let me sleep on.



04:24

The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. The slow down is written by me Tracy K. Smith. It is produced by Jennifer Lai and Tracy Mumford. Our music is by Alexis quadrado. Engineering by Daniel Kearns and Corey shrapnel