

# 20181214\_slowdown\_20181214\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

child, slowdown, baldwin, tracy, eat, nasal bridge, jenny, advice, describes, poem, kinfolk, moment, sunday dinners, fed, writes, grew, separable, shadowy, rice grains, folks



00:05

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



00:23

There's a moment in James Baldwin short story Sonny's blues that I returned to often. It's a wonderful story about the struggle between two brothers. in it. The narrator recalls a familiar scene from his childhood, Sunday dinners with his parents and the friends and family members. He describes as all the old folks. As daylight wanes, an evening comes on, the child starts to feel something shadowy, and mysterious. no actual danger lurks. It's not an active threat. He discerns Baldwin writes, he hopes that there will never come a time when the old folks won't be sitting around the living room, talking about where they've come from, and what they've seen, and what's happened to them, and their kinfolk. But something deep and watchful in the child knows that this is bound to end. That's the moment I think about. I think I recognize the sense of safety and worry that the child feels as evening descends. And I love how beautifully Baldwin describes the moment when the child begins to comprehend the fact that the people he loves won't live forever. Today's poem, by National Book Award finalist, Jenny Shia, draws me into a similar emotional space. It's called old wives tales on which I was fed. And it's really just that a list of old fashioned wisdom or superstition, the kind of advice your grandmother or great grandmother might at one time have offered. The advice and shows poem is new to me. I grew up hearing things like a whistling woman and a crowing hen come to no good and eat Black Eyed Peas on the New Year's Day for good luck. If I was really pushing the limits of some adults, patients, I might be told, children should be seen and not heard. None of this advice seemed exactly accurate to me, even as a kid. I knew it came from a time

whose values were mostly gone. But it brought me into contact with a world that wouldn't be around forever. And with the people of that world, all the old folks, people I loved old wives tales on which I was fed by Jenny shear. The number of rice grains left in your separable, foretells how many pock marks will appear on your lover's face. Sleeping on your back will flatten your heads shape, but sleep on your stomach and you'll induce nightmares. Eating the fat inside the crab sharpens the mind. So to the row extracted from the steamed fish. Never let your feet touch cold water from the bathtub or the sea on days when you're menstruating. Pinch the nose before age six when the cartilage is pliable, so the nasal bridge will grow narrow and high. drift asleep with your hair wet and you'll suffer from decades of migraines. You'll wrack your eyesight poring over pages in low light. But looking at all things green, from a distance can coax it back.



04:16

The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. The slowdown is written by me, Tracy k Smith. It is produced by Jennifer Lai, with Tracy Mumford. Our music is by Alexis quadrado. Engineering by Michael Osborne, Liz Iverson and Veronica Rodriguez. Production support by Rob Casper and Lauren D.