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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, tracy, hands, movement, slow, drop, straighten, dancing, scoop, descriptive, poetry, cross, describes, interlocutor, production, javier, boombox, bodies, limes, perilous

00:06

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

00:24

Anything a poem causes a reader to see, must be built of words. So when a poem captures a vivid sense of movement, I'm always captivated. Think about it. That's like taking a photo, or painting a portrait using only nouns, adjectives, prepositions, and verbs. And then taking those things from being static images, and making them into a moving picture. I know we do a version of this descriptive work every day in conversation, when I call you on the phone and say, You'll never believe what happened today. But there's a different kind of spotlight operating in a poem, words, way more in a poem than they do in conversation. And there's no interlocutor in a poem telling the speaker, wait, go back, tell me how you got the piano up the stairs in the first place. So a poet who can use words to create action before your very eyes is performing a pretty remarkable feat of translation. I say all of that, because today's poem dancing on buses by Javier Zamora isn't just describing movement. It's operating on the level of choreography. If I do everything the poem instructs me to do. If I raise my hands and look to the left, if I bend down and straighten back up, then I really will be dancing. But wait, there's more. While I'm caught up in the movement of bodies, imagining my own limbs going through the motions. The poem describes, a physical threat breaks into the poem, tempering my movements, with the promise of danger. The longer I think about this poem, the more I begin to understand that the danger it's concerned with is not random, but systematic, pointed at bodies whose purpose is to move, to migrate, to cross from one territory to another, by way of a contested border. Somewhere, as poem puts me in a perilous position, and I feel that peril not so much with my mind, but my arms, legs, hands, feet, and racing heart. Dancing in buses by Javier Zamora. Pretend a boombox blasts over your shoulder. Raise your hands in the air, twist them as if picking limes. Look to the right as if crossing streets. Look to

the left slowly, as if balancing orange baskets bend, as if picking cotton. Do the rump straighten up as if dropping firewood, rake, do the rake, sweep. Do the sweep. Do that pupusa clap fingered Oh clumps clap, do the or chat the scoop your hands a ladle, scoop, reach and scoop. Now duck their shooting duck under the seat and don't breathe. Hands behind your head drop down. Look at the ground rollover face the mouth of the barrel. Do the protect face with hand. Don't scream.

03:59

The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. The number one way people hear about the slow down is from other people who listen. If these five minutes are useful for you, please share the show with others.

04:30

The slow down is written by me. Tracy K. Smith. It is produced by Jennifer Lai, with Tracy Mumford. Our music is by Alexis quadrado. Engineering by Corey shrapnel production support by joy Biles. These episodes were recorded at WWE FM Trenton, New Jersey.