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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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00:06

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

00:23

We spend so much of our lives perfecting a presentable version of ourselves. But the moments when we are most real, most human and flawed, are precious. When you share that truth and vulnerability with someone you're saying, I trust you, do you trust me too? I think of all the milestones I've crossed with the people who know me best. All the at first tentative steps, taken further and further into an unmitigated honesty, sharing ugly, sharing awful, terrible mistakes, yet still loving one another, still believing in the beautiful that is made up of many things, some lovely, some not. Today's poem reminds me that there are moments when we all share the unretouched version of ourselves with strangers when you catch sight of people who believe themselves to be unobserved. Like the time my mother saw a woman walking down the street, just at the moment when the elastic holding up her undergarment must have given out it fell to her ankles, and then a triumph of poise and unflappability. She stepped out of it, and kept on walking. Sometimes, what we see is less benign, and we come away, shouldering the burden of a stranger's secret. Today's poem is he dreams of falling by Ruth Ellen Coker. at the table in patio seating, a young man starched into my evening in waiter black and white. He's probably named john. Tom, something less spectacular than the busboy named Ari at the table beside me. He is a boy I've seen and I hide that from him. A silence. He doesn't understand, as he turns away, not remembering that a week ago, while waiting for a bus. I saw him step over the legs of an old homeless woman sprawled on the sidewalk, his foot, not clearing her arm, caught, so that he jerked her body, while a consciousness almost found her, but didn't just stirred somewhere below her face. In the spiral where he turned, he glanced not at the woman, but to see who'd seen he saw me watching him, jack lighted and drawn into the warm ceremony that fell through him. I

understood this explosion, the burn from the beginning, there were a bus passes, or a waiter quietly puts down your check. He could be my brother have parents at home in Ohio, where this is a small lie buried in a garden with snow peas, and bazel there may be another breaking the soil dogs who bark into the woods, constellations who see our freeways as spines. Or he may miss a warm climate, groves of oranges measuring the circular scent of weight. Each time a heavy fruit falls. He may know that secretly, the hearts of children conspired to stop when their parents close their bedroom doors. But in this construction, the pace that takes him back and forth in the servitude of strangers. He has forgotten again, to feel for me, eating alone. A woman familiar deep in the eyes, with his same knowledge of movement that bends us forward. The instinct of our heels ready to turn against that jerk a body makes even in dead sleep. The stir that is less than we asked for less than an old woman or a woman growing old. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.