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ileana, coming, leaves, branches, openly, sam, adored, gay, wind, theatrically, brakes, breaks, flirt, broken ribs, repercussions, sweetie, felt, decades, surgery, railroad tracks

00:05

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

00:23

Sophomore year of college. I met a friend I'll call Sam. I adored him, and he adored me. If we saw each other from across the dining hall, we'd jazz run to the center of the room, embrace theatrically and explode in laughter. That winter, when I was stressed, studying for my English 10 day exam, he consoled me with advice, I think up to this day, calm down. nobody's asking you to perform surgery or give birth. All you have to do is learn. Back then, in the early 90s, Sam was openly gay. He told me that his coming out had been a matter of struggling to gather the courage to tell his mom he was gay. Only to hear her say, sweetie, I'm your mother. I know. This was decades ago, a great many people I love are now out. I don't know all of their stories. Even if I did, I couldn't possibly know what that choice and its repercussions must have felt like from the inside. But I am certain that for every coming out story like my friend Sam's, there are countless others that involve the fear and pain of being punished, shamed, rejected, threatened and even physically harmed. Many living openly LGBTQ lives would still say that they too, are subject to similar forms of oppression. That's why today's poem by Texas native Ileana roccia feels so important. It's called coming out. And it pulls readers into a space where time gets slippery, and certainty breaks apart. The past, present and future bump up against one another. Images seem to float in space detached from their familiar contexts. To me, this strangeness of language captures the feeling of being stuck in limbo, worlds away from where you want or need to be. Coming out by Ileana roccia the time to do it is yesterday was was his will the little boy gives me his then he walked into a separate darkness continually walks into will walk will well a darkness separate from mine was his was like this will be he tells told keeps telling will always tell tells my heart brakes, brakes, brakes, brakes, brakes, breaking into no neatness all just like Time passed

passing there is a tree will be covered with golden leaves, leaves shook with each jerk jerking of a branch. He wants wanted to go higher until he will fall having the wind knocked out of him. broken ribs, branches, all of us on the ground together fumbling fumble fumbled for reach a reach of any kind stretches out like railroad tracks leave here the asterisk stars were our will never be any help like a map helped, will help there he was there I his dresses will be scatter pink islands, they say said will surely say they do not does not understand this time sequence of events. But who ever will does. For a while this pause, pausing much like guilt is a pause does not will not did not go anywhere. But planted is planting itself into intestines. Golden leaves emerging flirt with the wind will flirt with other branches hands will always be his his was. The slow down is the production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.