

# theslowdown\_20200825\_20200825\_128

Wed, 9/30 8:39PM 5:00

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

thrift store, photographs, friend, anonymous, african diaspora, black, places, dark wood, lifted, carolinas, families, slow, occupants, christening, penmanship, swept, full, stores, cinders, flecks

00:06

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

00:22

years ago, I wandered through a thrift store with a poet friend. I wish I could recall where we were in America, Texas, the Carolinas. But it was a long time ago now. And anyhow, when you set foot into a thrift store, don't you suddenly feel yourself to exist differently in time and space? Maybe it's because underneath it all, these stores all bear the same faint smell of age, and loss. They all make you feel as though you should tip toe so as not to wake the rightful occupants of a space so full of memories. Sometimes, the things you find in stores like this are magical, like earrings and belt buckles, or postcards that bear the old fashioned penmanship of grandparents and great grandparents. Sometimes they're saddening, places, places that awaken your frustration. Like when out of the blue, you happen upon a shelf of black memorabilia figurines, you know the ones and the dark knowledge of what it means to belong to this country begins to cloud and otherwise sunny day. On the afternoon, I'm remembering my friend led me to a wicker basket full of old photographs, faded snapshots and studio portraits of families, and young couples, and children dressed for christening. Not a collector myself, I was surprised when my friend told me she collected photos like these. My friend who was also black, sifted through the pile, and gently lifted out images of black families and couples and babies to examine. Wherever we were, I remember the thought occurring to me that perhaps not everybody in such a place would dwell so lovingly over these particular photographs. I felt protective of them. I didn't want to think of someone passing them over in impatience, or lifting them up to pair them with anything but love. When I think about what it means to belong to the African diaspora, I'm drawn back to the feeling I had in that thrift store, looking at images of strangers, and believing that what I saw with some facet of my own concern, some version of kin. Today's poem is I found kin in a thrift store photograph

by Aaron Coleman. above my bed, a black boy leans his chin down on the dark wood of a small bridge, his arms loose over the edge, far above the rushing water. His fingers let the winds anonymous grace spill through him. The night is cinders. flecks of bluish white and human red trapped inside the sky. His face so swept up in shadow, his expression is full of the unknowable. A black boy's body is a language sculpted out of silence. Outside of time, inside the picture, this anonymous child has come to be my family. Somehow, his legs sway with the framed waves. at the same pace. Loneliness slips beneath the surface of intuition, floods the current called desire. On the far side, I will never see his spine is my creation myth, a bone river of redemption, a choice to live despite uncapable love this religion of slow loss balanced on the balls of his feet.

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