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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mother, poem, dieting, changeling, mirror, ate, dinner, new fad, slow, ugly, hourglass figure, reminds, diet, body, tells, hashbrowns, laugh, self criticism, beautiful, dieters

00:06

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

00:22

Throughout my life with her, my mother was always either dieting or the moaning her need to do so. She looked back on photos of herself as a young mother of three with an enviable hourglass figure, and say things like, I used to be able to go to the gym for a week and take off five pounds. But those days were behind her. Maybe it was the birth of my older brother and me that had hasten their end. Once in a while, the two of us would sit down together to the classic 1950s dieters plate of cottage cheese and canned tuna on Iceberg lettuce. Early on, I came to understand that dieting was a part of every woman's life. There was one winter when my mother and a friend tried out a new fad diet in which you ate dinner at breakfast time and breakfast at dinner time. I now suspect that the diets aim was to eat a larger meal in the beginning of the day. And to taper off to just a little cereal, or a boiled egg and a slice of toast for dinner. But we followed the diet to excess eating a full sized Sunday dinner before I left for school in the morning, and then tucking in that evening to waffles, scrambled eggs, bacon and even hashbrowns. Needless to say, nobody lost an ounce. My mother let me know I was precious to her. She told me I was perfect. But silently my inheritance was the same dissatisfaction with my own physical body that she had with hers. Today's poem changeling by Hugh Jackman when reminds me of the ways this legacy of self criticism, sometimes bordering on self hatred, is passed down. Here. It is passed down from a self critical mother to her son and knowing how much his mother hates the image she sees of herself as ugly and fat. How can the son love the self he sees in the mirror as neither thin nor beautiful. My own young children have heard me lament my aging body like my mother used to. This poem reminds me that I owe them another narrative. One of unconditional love and appreciation for the body that I have.

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changeling by hue men when

03:09

standing in front of a mirror. My mother tells me she is ugly. Says the medication is making her fat. I laugh and walk her back to bed. My mother tells me she is ugly. In the same voice. She used to say no woman could love you. And I watch her pole at her body. And it is mine. My heavy breast my disappointing shape. She asks for a bowl of plain broth, and it becomes the cup of vinegar. She would pour down my throat. every day after school. I would kneel before her. I would remove my clothes and ask her to mark the progress. It's important that I mentioned I truly wanted to be beautiful for her. In my dreams. I am thin and if not thin, something better. I tell my mother she is still beautiful. And she laughs the room fills with flies. They gather in the shape of a small boy. They lead her back to the mirror, but my reflection is still there. The slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter. And follow the slowdown on Instagram and Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://www.instagram.com/slowdownshow)