

theslowdown_20200511_20200511_128

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

how many, mother, wailed, poem, intrudes, morning, slow, chance, illness, dumplings, gave, yoko ono, forget, grapefruit, mind, gardenia, ex lover, excerpt, hospital, stories

00:06

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

00:27

losing a loved one to illness is harrowing. Of course it is. The loss waiting up ahead in the distance is something you want to ignore. Forget, deny. But of course, it's always on your mind. It intrudes at every turn, as a series of terrible questions. When will it happen? How are we sure? Are we absolutely certain that nothing more can be done? And later, afterward, what will life for the rest of us feel like? How will we manage but sometimes total surrender to the demands of the moment to the need for clean sheets, and daily doses of medicine and food can momentarily outweigh thoughts of death. cooking for my mother, during her illness cleared my mind of the future. By taking me back to memories of the past. I stirred sugar and milk into her coffee. Remembering the way I thrill at the chance to taste sips from a parent's cup. As a child, I needed dough into dumplings and dropped them in a pot. Just as my mother had done for me countless times when I was a child requesting chicken and dumplings every chance I got. I'd stand in the kitchen, not fully in the present, but rather more someplace between the sweet past and the unbearable future. Then I'd carry the tray of food to my mother and try to persuade her to eat. I've lived through such an experience as a daughter. And the moments of profound intimacy it offered my family and me is a form of inheritance, a legacy. We don't talk about such things enough. And so I'm grateful for today's poem, an excerpt from 13th balloon by Mark bibbins. In case what Yoko Ono said is true. That to name one's enemy in one's art, injures the art more than the enemy. I won't tell you who is president now. I forget the name of the woman who gave you acupuncture, but not of your ex lover who mornings toward the end washed you when you could no longer walk to the bathroom. We argued over which of us would give you your sponge bath each morning. I ended up able to bear it once. I forget who brought to your hospital room, a single gardenia blossom

because you loved Billie Holiday. But I haven't forgotten the name of the man who at the party after the reception after your Memorial, flung himself into a fit of wailing next to the Margarita machine. He wailed out of grief over you. And because as we would learn, but did not yet know he had it too. For years, I would say Magnolia when I met gardenia, and would flinch whenever I smelled one, all sweetness and rot. How many thousands of stories like yours have been told and forgotten? How many stories of lovingly durable nurses of hospital sheets of IV tubes dripping sailing, and morphine. How many stories of drugs that would haul you along in their wake for a while. But finally, let you sink. How many versions of your scrotum becoming so swollen that the only thing I could think of is I dabbed at one morning with a washcloth was a grapefruit then couldn't eat grapefruit for years. The slowdown 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 slow down on Instagram and Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://www.instagram.com/slowdownshow)