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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

double dutch, girls, hopscotch, imagines, recess, rope, jumping, light, jumper, dust, third grade classroom, bandleader, parabolas, square, shadows, faintest, knee, surfaces, airborne, low gravity

00:06

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

00:23

I remember the days when hopscotch was all the rage at David A we're Elementary School. There were hopscotch grids painted onto the playground pavement. And we'd fill the squares with our rocks and trinkets, markers we'd have to clear jumping from one square to the next. Then it was tetherball, then Chinese jump rope. There was a brief period, maybe half a week, when we girls sought to prove that the game Dungeons and Dragons wasn't only for boys. We lasted one and a half recesses in the shady nook under the stairs outside the third grade classroom. And for the record, my takeaway from the experiment was that girls are capable of playing d&d, but that it is all together too boring a way to spend valuable recess time. Mom, my daughter asks me one evening, did you use to jump double dutch when you were a girl? I can hear and her voice the sense that my answer ought to be yes. And that it would be especially nice if I could regale her with some stories about my days skipping rope with my crew. I know she imagines us with our feet moving fast as propellers barely skimming the ground, and our braids pointed skyward defying gravity. But I tell her the truth. No, I never learned how. And I'm visited by the faintest sense of grief. Because doubledutch that emblem of black girlhood is something that frankly, passed me by Naomi wonders if we can maybe learn together and I can just see it. I'll be terrible. My knees my ankles, I'll be a mess of precaution, but imagining it being black girls together skipping double dutch. A warm happy hope fills my chest. Today's poem is double dutch by Gregory partlow. The girls turning double dutch bob and weave like boxers pulling punches shadowing each other sparring across the slack cord casting parabolas in the air. They whip quick as an infant's pulse and the jumper before she enters the winking nods in time, as if she has a notion to share waiting

her chance to speak. But she's anticipating the upbeat like a bandleader counting off the tune they are about to swing into the jumper stairsteps into mid air as if she's jumping rope in low gravity training for a lunar mission. Airborne a moment long enough to fit a second thought in. She looks caught in the mouth bones of a fish as she flutter floats into motion like a figure and a stack of time lapse photos summed alive once inside the bells tied to her shoe strings. rouse the gods who've lain in the dust since the Dutch acquired Manhattan how she dances patterns, like a dust heavy be retracing its travels in scale before the hive. How the whole stunning contraption of girl and rope slaps and scoops like a paddleboat. Her misted skin arranges the light with each adjustment and flex. Now Heather hewed now Sheen, light listing on the fulcrum of a wrist and the bear jettied joints of elbow and knee and the faceted surfaces of muscle surfaces fracturing and reforming like a sun tickled sleeve of running water. She makes jewelry of herself and garlands the ground with shadows. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.