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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

sorrow, flapped, kites, felt, poem, bird, gatherings, light, kenyon, parents, outstretched arms, evening, childhood, immeasurably, living, laughter, skirt, salt, feeling, outings

00:06

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

00:20

When I was little, my parents would put a pinch of salt on cantaloupe or watermelon to bring out the sweetness of the fruit. We'd also add a shake of salt to icing recipes to accent the sweet flavor before spreading it on cakes and cookies. I think it's sound culinary practice. And I believe it demonstrates an emotional truth as well. Happiness is sometimes enhanced by the acknowledgement that pain has been endured. The way love grows when partners make it through to the other side of struggle, and sorrows. True expression is often deepened by just a glimmer of laughter. That's why we cry sometimes out of joy, and why there is always a little bittersweet laughter in the gatherings that follow a funeral. I visited the poet Ia in Beijing, China in April of 2017. Like a good host, she planned many outings and gatherings to introduce me to her city. One afternoon, after a visit to the Temple of Heaven, I spotted a loose helium balloon high in the sky. It was a sunny day with a strong wind and several kites and a few birds soared through the clear air. without any warning. I felt myself choked with tears. So many things moving across the beautiful blue sky reminded me of a gift my brother Conrad once gave me a windup bird named Tim that flapped its wings, and flew in great heart tickling loops through the air. I've been so lucky, is the phrase that popped into my head. My childhood was a kind of heaven with loving parents and kind siblings. We lived together for years, and a house that felt like a warm, safe haven. And then we children grew up and left home. Our parents died. That old life that was so magical, disappeared. Thinking of what I had once had made me immeasurably happy. At the same time, I felt pierced by the fact that all of that was gone. One feeling couldn't exist without the other. When I returned home, I wrote a poem called eternity that included these lines. Outside above the gates, a sprung balloon and three kites swam east on a high fast current, and

something about a bird flapping hard as it crossed my line of sight. The bliss it seemed to make and ride without ever once gliding or slowing. The picture of it meant suddenly, youth and I couldn't help it. I had to look away. Today's poem is evening sun. By the late Jane Kenyon. Kenyon wrote courageously about living with depression, and her poems shed light upon the ways that sorrow can coexist with feelings of clarity, or joy. Evening Sun by Jane Kenyon. Why does this light force me back to my childhood, I wore a yellow summer dress and the skirt made a perfect circle, turning and turning until it flared, to the limit was irresistible. The grass and trees, my outstretched arms, and the skirt whirled in the ocre light of an early June evening. And I knew then, that I would have to live and go on living, what sorrow it was, and still, what sorrow ignites, but does not consume my heart. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.