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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

small town, hand, poem, billiard balls, corn stocks, toughened, slow, town, irrigation ditches, twirling, novelty, heavy machinery, wild flowers, ride, gearshift, weightless, youth, strip malls, chain restaurants, breeches

00:06

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

00:22

Did you grow up in a small town? Sometimes it can feel like you did even if you didn't. If you ever wanted to get away from what you knew, to outrace all the familiar faces, whose expectations for you felt like a kind of cage. But there's something to love about those places too. Isn't there something that wells up all bittersweet inside you? Because something about those places helped make you what you are. I feel that way. When I pass through suburbs with strip malls and chain restaurants, like the ones where I spent my youth, even though at the time I was raging inside for something more. Today's poem is in defense of small towns by Oliver de la paz. When I look at it, it's simple really. I hated life there. September. Once filled with animal deaths and toughened hay, and the smells of fall were boiled down beets and potatoes are the farm hands breeches smeared with oil and diesel as they rode into town dusty and pissed. The radio stations split time between metal and Tejano and the only action happened on Friday nights where the high school football team gave everyone a chance at forgiveness. The town left no room for novelty or change the share of new everyone's son and despite that, we'd cruise up and down the avenues switching between break and gearshift. We'd fight and spit chew into big gulp cups and have our hearts broken nightly. in that town, I learned to fire a shotgun at nine and ring a chicken's neck with one hand by twirling the bird and whipping it straight, like a towel. But I loved the place once everything was blond and cracked, and the irrigation ditches stretched to the end of the earth. You could ride on a bicycle and see clearly the outline of every leaf or catch on the streets each word of a neighbor's argument. Nothing could happen there. And if I willed it, the place would have me slipping over its rocks into the river with the sugar plants steam or signing papers that a

storefront army desk buttoned up with medallions and a crew cut, eyeing the next recruits. If I've learned anything, it's that I could be anywhere staring at a hunk of asphalt or listening to the clap of billiard balls against each other in a bar and hear my name in difference now. Some I shook loose, but that isn't the whole story. The fact is, I'm still in love. And when I wake up, I watch my son Yon and my mind turns his upswept hair into corn stocks at the edge of a field. stillness is an acre and his body idles deep, like heavy machinery. I want to take him back there to the small town of my youth, and hold the book of wild flowers open for him. And look, I want him to know the color of horses to run with a cat tail in his hand and watch as its seeds fly weightless, as though nothing mattered. As though the little things we tell ourselves about our pasts stay there, rising slightly and just out of reach.

04:28

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