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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, labyrinth, poetry, learns, speaker, write, child, taught, punishment, johnny, full grown adult, outnumber, slow, spirit realm, drifted, smokestacks, exile, face, milestones, postcards

00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate, Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

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I think it's true

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that reading poetry can offer you a whole different way of thinking about the world. Poetry can rewire your brain, so that you begin to see the small things you had been used to ignoring. It can alert you to other perspectives, like those of plants, animals, and strangers that can enhance your own. If you put all of that together, the cumulative change seems to me to be huge. But I also think it's true that that kind of radical change can come about by small steps. That's why I'm so drawn to today's poem, Postcards from the labyrinth, by poet and translator, Johnny Lauren's, in some ways, it's a 14 stands up autobiography, whereby the speaker examines the events of his life, being born, going to school, moving independently through the world. But the lens he uses to consider these ordinary milestones is well different, is natural development into independence comes to represent a form of exile, exile from the womb, or the spirit realm, or just the part of the imagination children are native to reading along, I enjoy the feeling of being initiated into this new view of life. For example, whereas I've always thought it was a marker of growth when a child learns to write their name. This poem speaker views such a task as a punishment. And I think, having to define yourself by just a few letters you'll be made to write over and over again, I can see how that might represent a diminishing of the boundary less freedom we're born into.

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At the end of the poem,

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even after the speaker is a full grown adult, he teaches me something about choice. He reminds me what it looks like to love the present moment as though it were the last thing of its kind. Postcards from the labyrinth by Johnny lourens I was banished from my mother's sleep. Never again would I be held by her small night without a pillow, unaware of the need to be happy. Other punishments awaited me. I was taught to spell my name. I was left alone with my body, which never spoke to me. I learned to count my days. Money was given me but never to keep. I moved between the machines that outnumber us. I discovered wine, every bottle, a journal of Twilight.

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There are secret

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codes of grief. I know the phone number for the house I lived in as a child. So many legs crossed the empty streets of my eyes. Once the a train drifted away from me, as I sat on the F,

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I saw the face of a passenger there on the other

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side.

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And then I lost that face forever in the labyrinth beneath the labyrinth. From an airplane I studied the smokestacks below the power plant and quiet offices lit by late night janitors. I floated above a floor of stars

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who will write an allergy for us?

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The saddest of species?

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How will the birds name themselves? It was April and my love asked me Is this the last snow?

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One never knows such

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things until later. But I said yes, so I could miss the snow as it was falling. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership

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with the

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