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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

boys, lydia, face, lives, sons, smiles, blood pressure pulse, slow, sweetly, segregated, chins, daily, unarmed black, loved, laura, passage, poem, father, park, bundles

00:06

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

00:23

A few years ago I tried writing a short story about a family a lot like my own. My incomplete draft includes this passage. The boys were born eight weeks premature. That same month, a jury acquitted a neighborhood vigilante of killing an unarmed black boy in Florida, a black boy and a black hoodie. The news of the decision didn't incite worry where none had lived before. But it made louder and decisively overt, Lydia and Gerard silent understanding that raising black sons was a very different endeavor from raising white ones. The first time Lydia saw them in the neonatal intensive care unit. The boys were wrapped in tubes, and attached by cables to so many beeping monitors, blood pressure pulse o to saturation levels, that she broke down in guilty tears. Then she held them how quickly that strange life and death Ward became ordinary. All the tiny bundles coming and going matched by the coming and going of parents who spent their days and nights waiting, making their private bargains with God or God knows who photos of older Nick you graduates line the walls at check in kids whose healthy faces and broad smiles or a daily consolation. But for Lydia, in front of all the many faces in the photos, there was always that other face, the one that flashed on the TV screen countless times a day, the black boy in the black hoodie, also smiling, healthy and alive. until suddenly, impossibly he was dead, shot down, gone. The rage that boys face awoke and Lydia assured her the fight she was waging just then to get her boys to breathe and eat and grow so they could come home and start their lives was only a practice scrimmage compared to what the world would eventually require of her. Looking back at this passage, I see that what is true for the character of Lydia is true for me, and of the many things making up my feelings of love and protection toward my sons. Another is how much of my father lives in them, a black man from segregated Alabama, and how much of their father lives in

them, a white man from de facto segregated New Haven, there are many worlds in them. And each of us, these are some of the things that come to mind when I read Laura Kosinski, his poem, boy in park, boy and Park, by Laura, because this key small boy running through the center of the park, on zipping summer, straight down the middle as he runs until all the small boys come tumbling out. All the small boys pouring from the world's Fisher into the world. My father with a ball and bat, my husband with a wooden gun, my son, and a cowboy hat. They're shaving creams and razors, their little shoes, they're untied laces, while a woman, always younger, behind them in a sun dress calls their names, at first so sweetly, before she's angry, and then in panic, come back, come back. She'll have a few sharp words to share if she can ever catch them. Although she knows also, there will never, never never be any time for that. Those boys continuing to run their trembling chins, their little feet. I loved and loved and would kiss again and again. The slow down is the production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter.