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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

gave, story, offered, spun, felt, spotted, temp agency, man, curran, alberto, confided, immovable, previous day's, trenton, falsehoods, pointed, slowdown, told, cornell, daughter

00:06

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

00:23

What have you been given?

00:26

Once, years after we graduated from college, a classmate spotted me on the two train in Brooklyn and offered me a job. Later, she confided that she did so because I looked so hopelessly sad. That job by the way, it saved my life. What had I been doing for money? I remember a temp agency that sent me into Manhattan for a season and writing copy for a home magazine. I was constantly hungry. I felt like an absolute failure. And then my old friend Curran saw me and offered a helping hand. Now that my life is on track, I give wherever I can, to organizations and to individuals. I try to be generous, because of Caryn and my brother Conrad, and my sister Jean, and Anita, and an upstairs neighbor I had once in Somerville, Massachusetts, and all the kind strangers who summoned me with a gaze and offered me a place to sit or pointed out a bargain, or told me my bag was open, or saved my life in some other small way. One day, I gave \$20 to a man outside of Brooks Brothers in Princeton. He spun a long rambling story about a bus ticket and a daughter's graduation, a story shot through with glaring gaps, just like his smile. He said he was a professor someplace and dropped a few names. Cornell West, Angela Davis, the next day, again with my daughter, we spotted the very same man outside the train station in Trenton. He saw us too. I felt something passed from him to me. recognition, fear, apprehension, and then something like ownership of the previous day's lie and acknowledgement of some deep immovable obstacle that was and would remain is all of that traveled between us in a quick flash. boarding our train. My

daughter told me she'd known the man hadn't been telling the truth. She pointed out all the inaccuracies, all the likely falsehoods in the story he'd spun for us the day before. I was impressed with her recall. And her savvy.

03:02

I told her, I agreed.

03:05

But I also explained why it hadn't stopped me from giving him something. Because clearly, he felt himself to be in need and needing something you don't have. is a terrible feeling. Today's poem is when giving is all we have by Alberto Rios. One river gives its journey to the next. We give because someone gave to us. We give because nobody gave to us. We give because giving has changed us. We give because giving could have changed us. We have been better for it. We have been wounded by it. Giving has many faces. It is loud and quiet. Big. Those small diamond in wood nails. Its story is old. The plot worn and the page is too. But we read this book anyway over and again giving his first and every time hand to hand mine to yours. Yours to mine. You gave me blue and I gave you yellow. together. We are simple green. You gave me what you did not have an I gave you what I had to give. together. We made something greater from the difference.

04:46

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