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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, poet, man, dear friend, dogged, mother, soul, praying, baptismal, rhyme, life, howe, wrote, stately, verse, impulse, rhythms, forgetful, partnership, weary

00:06

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

00:20

Once I wrote a poem in the All Things Considered newsroom, I read the stories coming in from the field, praying that one of them might ignite in my imagination, whatever it is, that makes a poem come to life. Something did. I read the stories coming in from the field, praying that one of them might ignite in my imagination, whatever it is that makes a poem come to life, something did a story that allowed me to imagine a bus full of people on their way from one life to another, to see the clothes they wore, and the worry that dogged them a story that allowed me to imagine a mother and a child clinging to one another in hope, and desperation. At around 4pm, after a furious few hours of writing, and no small amount of panic, I read my poem for broadcast on the air. I'm glad I did it. But I don't imagine I'd ever do it again. Because it's terrifying. Because writing a poem on demand for a waiting audience can feel so risky. In fact, it can feel like a betrayal of the very impulse to write an impulse that prizes, freedom, privacy, and what the great poet Elizabeth Bishop once described as, quote, a self forgetful, perfectly useless concentration. writing a poem on demand, you can't forget yourself, you can barely concentrate, you know someone is looking to you to say what ought to be said, and the way it ought to be put so as to elicit the feeling that ought to be felt. And of course, you being a poet, after all, have no idea what any of those arts to look like. Today's poem is mother mind, by Julia Ward Howe, who wrote the Battle Hymn of the republic in 1861. I recognize in this poem, a familiar anxiety at the prospect of producing a poem for a waiting audience, and the feeling that a poets best poems are the product of something more mysterious than mere will. Mother mind by Julia Ward Howe. I never made a poem, dear friend, I never sat me down and said, This cunning brain and patient hand, shell fashion something to be read. men often came to me and prayed, I should indict a fitting

verse for fast or festival, or in some stately pageant to rehearse, as if then balem more endowed, I have myself could bless or curse. Reluctantly, I bade them go on gladdened by my poet might. My heart is not so churlish, but it loves to minister delight. But not a word I breathe, is mine to sing in praise of man, or God. My master calls at noon or night, I know his whisper, and his not yet all my thoughts to rhythms run, to rhyme, my wisdom and my wit. True, I consume my life in verse But Woods thou know how that is rent. Tis thus through weary length of days, I bear thought, was in my breast, that greatness from my growth of soul, and weights, and will not be expressed. It greitens till it's our has come, not without pain, it sees the light twixt smiles and tears, I view it or, and dare not deem it perfect, quite. These children of my soul, I keep were scarce a mortal man may see, yet not unconsecrated dear friend, baptismal rights they claim of the the slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.