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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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00:06

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

00:22

The very first photograph taken of my daughter Naomi reveals her character perfectly. She is curled into a coma. Tiny muscles clenched to little dimples Devitt her brow, as if there is a sharp thought lodged inside, and the expression on her face is a mix of excitement, and anger. I've seen that very body language, that very look when Naomi is mad when she's strategizing. And I know being born was stressful, infuriating, even a negotiation in which she was forced to cede the upper hand. When my twin sons were born, the doctor noted that the umbilical cord linking Sterling to my placenta was significantly shorter than his brothers. Sterling's in utero meals reached him more swiftly. I imagine he became habituated to something like a month long cruise ship buffet. Even now, if you ask him to describe how he feels, there is a good chance that hungry will be among the first three adjectives off his lips. It's appealing to believe that the conditions of our birth announce our most characteristic traits, and that we are born with an essential personality that becomes more and more legible to the people who love us over time. But I have precious little to go on in making this claim. I've heard of people using regression therapy to revisit the moment of their birth. They say they overhear the statements or observe the circumstances which have imprinted them a state of crisis, danger or fear enveloping the room. I've heard of some such stories actually being corroborated by adults present at the time. The aim of such therapy for those who seek it out is to free oneself from the lingering legacy of whatever negativity attended their birth. But most of us never managed to go back and witness our births for ourselves. In fact, as much as we like to believe in the immutable consistency of our characters, things change. My children surprise me with new talents and inclinations. As I write this episode, my passionate daughter is attempting to teach her brothers to meditate. She is very patient at first speaking

softly. She has found a two rupee coin to give Sterling as an object of focus. I count 123 Atticus loses focus and begins to twirl a stuffed tree frog in the air tries she might Naomi's calm is beginning to buckle. Sterling asks for something to drink. Naomi's hands balled into fists, and she stomps off down the hall. Maybe it's no use trying to change. Maybe we are who we are. And that's that. Today's poem is interrogation suite. Where did you come from? How did you arrive by Rebekah bingum Russia. I ripped my mother being born and I am the only the oldest ripped my grandmother and still came more. We have a family history of losing our heads. Have no one listening of telling someone before. We are raucous and willful loud is thunder. No one can forget us. We bear our teeth. We pass through bodies like summer heat. We eat and thicken worry men. They plead and suffer calm again. I entered the world a turning storm. But no one stopped me though they had been warned. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.