

theslowdown_20200730_20200730_128

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

sit, coffee, father, slow, early, silence, poem, wordless, soot, cafe, dimly lit, downstairs, red haired girl, video cassettes, tin cans, feelings, fill, chumps, humiliations, public library

00:06

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

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after he'd retired, my father would wake up early and sit at the counter with a pot of coffee, weekdays, weekends, when I roused myself from bed and came downstairs. That's often where I'd find him with a plate of breakfast and the local newspaper, or being a sleepy 20 something at the time, it was more likely that that's where I'd find evidence of him. The crossword filled most of the way in a napkin where his place had been. Sometimes he'd sit there in the late afternoon with another cup of coffee. This was a time in my youth when often I had nothing to do. We might find ourselves downstairs together, me in the living room, and him at that countertop we called the bar, because when you sat there someone standing in the kitchen could hand you a plate of food, or something to drink through a cut out window, like a bartender. What did we talk about, like the only two patrons in a cafe, I found it difficult to crack into the profound feelings that lived with us during that period in our lives, when my father had only just become a widower, and I was a daughter in wordless grief. But we must have chatted about small things to fill in the silence. Plans, Aaron's movies. This was the period when I was bringing home stacks of video cassettes, from the public library to help pass the hours. What I remember most about that year, are the mornings and late afternoons sitting in near silence with my father, feeling the enormous source of our feelings. They're with us, large, but unseen. Now, decades later, I sit at my own kitchen counter with a cup of coffee at these very same moments of the day, early morning, late afternoon, like my father, these are the times when I to favor silence. What am I doing, thinking, feeling? Sometimes I'm worrying. I suppose a great portion of every life is spent in reflection, and anticipation. Where have I been? What have I done? Where am I going? What will I do? More than our most public feats? I wonder if it is this sitting and thinking that constitutes our greatest human

heritage? Where have we been? What have we done? Where are we going? What will we do? Today today's poem is early Sunday morning, by Edward Hirsch. I used to mock my father and his chums for getting up early on Sunday morning, and drinking coffee at a local spot. But now I'm one of those chumps no one cares about my old humiliations, but they go on dragging through my sleep like a string of empty tin cans rattling behind an abandoned car. It's like this. Just when you think you have forgotten that red haired girl who left you stranded in a parking lot. 40 years ago, you wake up early enough to see her disappearing around the corner of your dream on someone else's motorcycle roaring onto the highway at sunrise. And so now, I'm sitting in a dimly lit cafe full of early morning risers where the windows are covered with soot and the coffee is warm, and bitter.

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