



TRACY K. SMITH

My God, It's Full of Stars (Part 5)

When my father worked on the Hubble Telescope, he said
They operated like surgeons: scrubbed and sheathed
In papery green, the room a clean cold, a bright white.

He'd read Larry Niven at home, and drink scotch on the rocks,
His eyes exhausted and pink. These were the Reagan years,
When we lived with our finger on The Button and struggled

To view our enemies as children. My father spent whole seasons
Bowing before the oracle-eye, hungry for what it would find.
His face lit-up whenever anyone asked, and his arms would rise

As if he were weightless, perfectly at ease in the never-ending
Night of space. On the ground, we tied postcards to balloons
For peace. Prince Charles married Lady Di. Rock Hudson Died.

We learned new words for things. The decade changed.

The first few pictures came back blurred, and I felt ashamed
For all the cheerful engineers, my father and his tribe. The second time,
The optics jibed. We saw to the edge of all there is—

So brutal and alive it seemed to comprehend us back.

Tracy K. Smith is a professor of English and of African and African-American studies at Harvard University. She is the author of five books of poetry and a memoir. Her father worked as an engineer on the Hubble Space Telescope in the early 1980s.

This poem is featured in the Poets for Science exhibit created by the Wick Poetry Center at Kent State University and poet Jane Hirshfield. Opening in April to coincide with National Poetry Month, the exhibit is on view through September 8, 2023, at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC.

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