

## Close Talking Episode #106

**"A Stranger" by Saeed Jones**

**August 28, 2020**

**<https://soundcloud.com/close-talking/episode-106-a-stranger-saeed-jones>**

### **Transcription:**

Connor 0:08

Hello and welcome to Close Talking the world's most popular poetry analysis podcast from Cardboard Box Productions Incorporated. I am co-host Connor McNamara Stratton and with my good friend Jack Rossiter Munley, we read a poem, talk about the poem, and read the poem again.

Jack 0:25

Before we get into today's selection, a quick note that if you like what we do here at Close Talking and you have a spare minute, it would mean the world to us if you would give the podcast a rating and review on Apple Podcasts.

Connor 0:36

Those ratings and reviews help boost us up the algorithm and find new listeners.

Jack 0:41

And if you have suggestions for future episodes or comments on this one, you can send us an email at [closetalkingpoetry@gmail.com](mailto:closetalkingpoetry@gmail.com).

Connor 0:50

You can also find us on social media. On Twitter, the show is @close talking. I'm @connormstratton and Jack is @jackrossitermun.

Jack 1:00

On Instagram, the show is @closetalkingpoetry, and on Facebook, it's [facebook.com/close talking](https://facebook.com/close talking).

Connor 1:08

And our website, where you can find all our past episodes is [closetalking.com](https://closetalking.com).

Jack 1:14

On with the show.

Connor 1:19

Hello, and welcome to an all new episode of Close Talking. I am one of your co-hosts, Connor McNamara Stratton.

Jack 1:27

And I'm your other co-host Jack Rossiter Munley.

Connor 1:30

And we have yet another wonderful poem for you today. This one is called "A Stranger" by the marvelous poet Saeed Jones. This poem is actually pretty maybe not like, hot off the press, but it's like, definitely not lukewarm. It's still kind of, you know, when you like, you toast your toast right or you toast your bread to make a toast. Okay, I get it a technicality, and it's not as piping hot when it's straight out of the toaster oven and it's like still a little tough on the fingers. But it's like after you put it onto the plate, you've spread your peanut butter of choice which is ideally extra-crunchy Skippy, but if you're old school go Peter Pan. Not bad. Natural peanut butter - I, I can't argue with you because -

Jack 2:32

It's objectively better for you.

Connor 2:34

Yeah, but you are wrong, I think to do so.

Jack 2:37

No, no love in this house for Jif.

Connor 2:40

I do like Jif a lot. I like Jif a lot. I mean, I love most peanut butters. But then you get it all spread. Get your little cup of and then you take your second bite. That's the heat of this poem right now, which is to say a perfect temperature. It was published in the New Yorker this summer in July, I believe. And it's a wonderful poem and I'm excited to talk about it and Saeed Jones is a marvelous poet and writer. His first book came out with Coffeehouse Press in 2014, which has, I think, in the running one of the best titles for poetry collections of all time, "Prelude to Bruise", which, it's just you can't beat it. It was a finalist for National Book Critics Circle Award. Saeed Jones also recently came out with a memoir, which came out in 2019, "How We Fight For Our Lives". He has a great Twitter presence, @theferocity, and he used to work at BuzzFeed. So you might know him from there. I'm very excited to talk about it.

Jack 3:58

Me too. This is a great one.

Connor 4:00

This is "A Stranger" by Saeed Jones.

I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me.  
I know I don't know her new name. I don't know  
her, not now. I don't know if "her" is the word  
burning in a stranger's mind when he sees my dead  
mother walking down the street in her bright black  
dress. I wonder if he inhales the cigarette smoke  
that will eventually kill him and thinks "I wish I knew  
a woman who was both the light and every shadow  
the light pierces." I wonder if a passing glance at my dead  
mother is enough to make a poet out of anyone. I wonder  
if I'm the song she hums as she waits for the light to change  
or if I'm just the traffic signal holding her up.

Jack 5:03  
Wow.

Connor 5:06  
Really good. And I should say, Sarita who is the dedication for all these episodes except for one, passed this along to me who got it from one of our friends, Brooklyn. So shout out Sarita, shout out Brooklyn, thank you for bringing it to our attention; it is a wonderful poem. And I guess like before we get super deep into it seems like Saeed Jones's mother passed away, I believe, in 2011. And this is a recent poem. So he would have been in his 20s I believe, at the time, probably late 20s. Yeah, the you know, sometimes we do a little play by play of the poem. It's, it's not a super narrative poem. It's kind of I mean, the first sentence, sort of says it all on the first line, I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me. And it's kind of a meditation on what is my, it's like his mother still exists, but is in a different form now that she has died. And so he's like, what is my new relationship with her? What is her relationship with me if she even thinks of me or knows me? Yeah, and and just kind of takes takes that sort of question in a lot of directions. And that's basically a sort of bare minimum of the poem.

Jack 6:40  
Which is such a fascinating exercise because it is like, to some degree when a person dies, who they were, your relationship to them can change as you continue thinking about it, but sort of the totality of their life, you have an understanding of and they are more static than you as a continually growing and changing person, and who you are becomes somebody still rooted in likely who you were when you knew them but different and wondering about that relationship. And I think particularly, I mean, the first line of this poem is so good as first lines go, I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me, is such a call for reciprocity to start the poem. And I really like that both just as a standalone line, it's excellent and full of all kinds of different avenues into it, but also just as intention setting for the poem. And it sets up in a quiet way, a theme that I think runs through the poem, which is oppositions, because you have the implicit

opposition of a dead person thinking and that's like, I think, therefore I am. It's a very life centered statement to be thinking, and it's a dead person doing it. But then throughout the poem, there's the bright black dress like bright and black - that's what? A woman who was both the light and every shadow, the light pierces, again a light/dark kind of thing. And then towards the end, I wonder if I'm the song she hums as she waits for the light to change, or if I'm just the traffic signal holding her up. And that's like an inspiration versus impediments kind of opposition going on. And I feel like the way that all of that is condensed and contained in that opening line...I don't know it almost has you continually reaching back to that first line, even the first time you read through the poem, and it's unfolding, which is kind of interesting.

Connor 8:36

Yeah, cuz it's like, I feel like a lot of times, there's a question of will like, once I pass away, will people still think of me or like, how will I be remembered when I'm gone by those who are living or like, in a somewhat less severe sense, like if I'm, if I'm going away, maybe not; I'm not passing away, but I'm moving or I'm leaving people or a community that I'm close to, it's like, will you still think of, will, they still think of me kind of thing. Yep. This is like, as you were saying, you know, sort of an inverted opposite situation where the one who's who's still living is wondering whether his dead mother is still thinking of him, right. And so rather than the other way around, which I think is is really interesting, and it it like, there's so much there, and it can go a lot of different ways, but the one thing that I, especially as the poem progresses that I was thinking about, especially with a mother or a parent, or like, you know, one of those formative figures in your life, especially when, you know, and I don't know, really anything about, Saeed Jones and his relationship with his mother, but I don't think that really necessary at all for this poem, but like, especially, you know, when it's resolved, like, this might be a silly direction to take it in, but it helps me understand this is like, I feel like there's a big narrative of like, you know, wanting to prove something to your parents or something, like, make them proud or prove that you're not like them, or this kind of sense that the the parents are there and they've set like a kind of path that you take or defiantly not take or something, even even when the parent, you know, is absent - like, I feel like that's sort of a common tension both in life and in sort of art and literature and TV and movies and things like that. And when there's a sort of an unresolved, like, which I think, to some degree, most people have unresolved like relationships with their parents. And just like people in general, because you can't just like, fully resolve, you can't resolve a relationship, you know, but especially when a parent leaves someone at a young age when they're at a young age, and if the relationship itself was complicated, the lack of resolution is like magnified, you know, or often is and it could, I feel like it can create the situation where both the parent remains very present for the person, even though they've passed away this kind of like insistent, almost haunting, which which I feel like is really, in this poem a lot like especially the, the image of the his his dead mother, you know, walking down the street in her bright, black dress, like what a haunting image that is, and the fact that, and haunting to like the mother is never said it's only dead mother in the poem. It's never my mother, and it happens three times. My dead mother, you know, when he sees my dead mother walking down the street, I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me. You know, I wonder if a passing glance of my dead mother is enough to make a poet out of anyone. And dead is also two of those times like the end of the line which might not have come through in

the reading of it, but it's this kind of harsh enjambment of dead mother and really emphasize both the absence but also the haunting kind of ghostly quality in the poem, but also just like, I don't know, the reciprocity that you said that word that's such a great word, I think, for this poem, because there's such a longing for a kind of resolution, which I think is, that's what's such a hard situation. And so it's like you still want something from the parent, but it's impossible to get it. And so this speaker in this poem is like trying to wrestle with that impossibility.

Jack 13:14

I sort of connect that to your earlier point about like, you don't have know Saeed Jones's specific relationship to his mother for this poem. And particularly, because we just talked about a poem where, like, extra-textual biographical information is so recontextualizing for the content of the poem, I feel like that's possible with this. But it's not necessary, sort of, as you were saying, like, you could not say Jones's relationship to his mother and write that into the poem. And obviously, this is a poem rooted in that relationship so it can inform your understanding of it. But in terms of the questions it asks and the feelings it evokes, it does feel like it is taking on a subject that is beyond a specific relationship as well. But I do you think you get, because of the sense of longing within the poem, and as you're saying that longing to like, reach what cannot be reached, resolve what is always forever unresolved, it does then sort of reflect back and it makes you feel like there is some disconnect from life that is still playing out through the poem. And I think some of that, for me comes from the title. And then the stranger who is brought up in the poem because I at least find myself asking about who is the stranger? And who is the speaker of the poem, and how are they related and connected, because in some ways carrying out the kind of reading that we're talking about, where you're acknowledging the distance of time from the person you knew, or the person you were, in some ways that stranger is the speaker, but they're created to be a separate entity. And I'm curious what your thoughts are and how that creation of a separate entity plays into both this feeling of like resolved and unresolved, but also the way that that stranger is and is not connected to the speaker. And in some ways I feel like works as a foil for the speaker to the dead mother in the poem.

Connor 15:14

Yeah, no, that's such a good question. And like such a good way of thinking about it and yeah, I mean, yeah, the the question of this of the stranger is at once very mysterious, and also like, yeah, it's, it's kind of, I mean, so the title is "A Stranger". At first, you know, the first say, three lines, you have to have your title a stranger than you have, I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me. Then you have, I know, I don't know her new name. I don't know her. Not now. I don't know if her is the word. And then it goes to the fourth line burning in a stranger's mind, when he sees. And so the mother is a stranger to the speaker, and at first, like in the first three lines before, like a character, the stranger is introduced. I was like, maybe the mother's stranger. But then we have this stranger who's in the poem. And I think, you know, I also was thinking that the stranger is, in some ways, the speaker, in a way, partly the kind of the biggest clue is like, toward the end of the poem. I wonder if a passing glance at my dead mother is enough to make a poet out of anyone. And so they're like poetry and poet, are like things mentioned in the poem itself. And we also have this kind of quote, you know, like, you know, I wonder if this stranger who's inhaling the cigarette smoke before that, like if this person thinks I

wish I knew a woman who is both the light, and every shadow the light pierces, which like, just sort of, on a very basic level, is incredibly beautiful and poetic, and also in the same tone as the poem itself, you know, and that's kind of like a great. I think, also, I've read much of "Prelude to Bruise" and it's, it's very consistent with the kinds of sort of poetic phrasings and I don't know, like, it's a Jones, it's a Saeed Jones kind of line and so in like a very, sort of shallow detective-y way those are like clues to me, that the stranger is in some ways, the speaker himself. But you're so right that, like the foil is such a good way to think about it and the idea of a speaker being sort of separate from the poet and then there's the other doubleness of the of the dead mother being a stranger to the speaker now, like, being no longer living. It's interesting because if I had skimmed this, and it was like a poem that I was like workshopping, I might have made some quick revision to the title and called it like 'this stranger' or 'the stranger' something even though it is already a novel by Camus. But, like a stranger that the word the article a is so much less specific and less pointy. You know, like when if you say like 'that stranger', it's like, you're, you're like that, like that one over there. You reader know who that is. And if you're like, 'the stranger', it's like assumes a real sense of importance. Whereas like 'a stranger', it's like, could be anywhere. But when I'm thinking through like these sort of different ways that the speaker is sort of the stranger, but then the stranger in the poem is like, also a separate character, and then the mother is also a stranger, it's like the 'a stranger' makes sense in the, because it can hold all of those, if that makes sense. And I think like, a good title kind of orients the reader toward, like, some sort of broader, like, concern of the poem that is, is can be, could be hard to capture in the text itself. So like, all of that, okay. I've said stranger a lot of times, like, what's the point, I guess, is, you know, a question. And to me, I don't quite know, but my first guess is like, it's a question of identity and like, the speaker feels like they've lost a sense of themselves. And I think about, you know, one of the things that I've learned from Sarita in her studies in social work in public health and psychology and stuff is that, you know, one way to think about identity formation is like through relationships that like you become who you are in relation with, you know, first your caregivers or parents or whatever. So the loss of a mother is not just the loss of someone who you care about, but is also like yourself, or a part of yourself, in that that relationship has been disrupted. And I think like an "A Stranger" is such a perfect way of thinking about it, in this sense, because you're still here and you're still somebody, but like, your your mother is gone, but you're not gone, but you don't know who you are as a person without their mother in a way. And so part of the poem seems to be like, both sort of just dealing with the loss of the relationship, but also like, who is this person, now, like with this new relationship, like, okay, I can, I can't have a relationship with my living mother, but I can have a relationship with my dead mother. And then the kind of end question of like, if, you know, I wonder if I'm the song she hums, as she waits for the light to change or if I'm just the traffic signal holding her up, which is such a poignant and kind of devastating question to ask, but is like, to feel like I have can have a new relationship with my dead mother and therefore, be not a stranger to myself anymore. Like I also need to know like, how she thinks of me. And there's that kind of uncertainty about that at the end.

Jack 22:07

I agree with basically all of the points that you made, and particularly ending on that. That sentence that ends the poem, I wonder if I'm the song she hums as she waits for the light to

change, or if I'm just the traffic light, if I'm just the traffic signal holding her up. I puzzled over that quite a bit. And I have not as of yet come to a particularly satisfactory reading of it for myself. Some of what I was thinking is very similar to what you were describing in terms of, you know, you're familiar with the living entity of the person you knew, like, you know who your living mother is. But when a person dies, the version of them that stays with you is your version that you like create over time out of memories and feelings. And so it almost felt to me like some of that was wrapped up in the sentiment. Like, the degree to which that entity of remembrance that you create for yourself is part of how the person lives on or part of how they transition into the afterlife, depending on how you feel about it through whatever religious practice. But if that, if you're thinking of them and remembering them, is also in some ways for yourself an act of creation of the entity of the dead person who you once knew, is that something that is like an empowering thing for them as an entity in the afterlife? Or is that something that holds up or diminishes what they were in life? And how that fullness of them moves on into another state of being?

Connor 23:46

Wow, yeah. Yeah, because the way that the poem progresses is, because one thing I love about that question at the end, too, is that the scene of the poem is preserved in the question, where like, you know, I don't know if her is the word burning in the stranger's mind, when he sees my dead mother walking down the street and her bright black dress. There's a nice, you know, like later than you get the cigarette smoke. And the word is burning in the stranger's mind. There's kind of, you know, some connections there, but the main scene is walking, you know, down the street. And so then at the end, the sort of like embedded metaphors that kind of form the two parts of the question are taking place in that scene, right? So it's like, she still walking in that bright black dress, maybe is humming a song and is waiting for the traffic signal. And it's like, am I that song? Or am I the traffic signal? And also like the progression then too, is like a stranger, it's such a it's like a sort of con, and I think intentionally convoluted way of happening of doing this because there is so much like, distance. But like, I wonder if a passing glance at my dead mother is enough to make a poet out of anyone, which kind of implies that what just happened was this stranger who's like walking down the street, sees the dead mother, has this thought, I wish I knew a woman who was both the light and every shadow the light pierces, which is like, and like, as a side note, I can see Saeed Jones thinking of that line being like, that's a great line. Maybe it's too poem-y, but it's still great. So let me just capture it in this, what this guy was thinking about. And then I can sneak it in there, because it's still a great line.

Jack 25:54

It's an excellent and very poem-y line.

Connor 25:58

Yeah, but then like that experience and then that thought, like sort of he maybe for a moment or maybe for forever, we don't really know, but like, turns that stranger on the street into a poet. And so there's this kind of like identity formation that happens by seeing, but then you're kind of asking like is, Saeed Jones's like poetry and writing, which is like a form of preserving the

memory of his mother, does that provide, like a song that she hums in the afterlife? Or does that like hold her up in some kind of way? Is that kind of what you were asking?

Jack 26:38

Yeah, kind of. And it also just gave me the thought as you were talking about the line that it could also be sort of a reversal of how many people like look for signs of their departed friends and loved ones in the material world. And if you sort of flip the script, and this is the dead mother looking for signs in an afterlife place that's kind of being created in the poem, looking for signs of, you know, Saeed Jones, like humming a song that they sang together and then remembering it and thinking about him or looking at the traffic signal and something about the way it flashes reminds you of, uh, you know, waiting at a traffic signal together. Like, I feel like there's a lot of talk about people noticing things in the world, I mean, like, oh, yeah, my dead mother, you know, she was the traffic signal or she was whatever, like I saw something that made me feel her presence. And this is almost the reverse of that, like, is this a moment where the dead mother passes this stranger and then something happens in this afterlife that reminds her of, of the living person.

Connor 27:51

Right because you know, in a way the stranger who's smoking the cigarette could be Saeed Jones in as like a living ghost in the afterlife or something, right? Yeah.

Jack 28:05

I love the layers that this poem goes through to, like, create just such intense distance through language.

Connor 28:14

Yeah.

Jack 28:16

And just, yeah, I can't get over the opening where there's that like strong, clear yearning and then over and over again, just greater and greater distancing that is never, as you pointed out, it's never resolved in the poem just as life never resolves these things, but like just the, the sheer weight of distance that is piled in, kind of effortlessly through the language without ever having to say, and I'm so far away and I really wish that we could still interact and things is like, shows such incredible restraint as a writer when writing on a subject like this that can be so intense, biographical contexts, like Saeed Jones's mother died kind of suddenly right before Mother's Day like it's a very you know intense personal experience to be writing about and to be so on point as a writer to really capture the feeling and to have such attention to the feeling that you're trying to capture to not stray too far into big language for big feelings is like, one of the hardest things to do as a writer, and I feel like this poem does it really, really well.

Connor 29:23

Yeah, that's such a good point you brought up too like, yeah, just like key kind of craft concepts that I feel like that this poem is just doing so well. I feel like we often talk about distance. Sort



of, like apart from the poem itself. When you create distance from you know, your subject or or something, that's you're creating both the space for the encounter with it, right. But you're also creating the tension that like can exist in some ways. So it's like sort of this necessary, the way that distance works is like, it's also important for the readers' experience with a poem, and just like any kind of audience experience with art, which is people often formulated it as like, an empathy experience where you're like walking in someone shoes for a little bit, which is like, no distance, right? That's what the distance is gone because you're in their shoes, but it's more an encounter or like, you are seeing this thing or experiencing it, but that entails that there is a difference between you and the poem or you and the person that you're witnessing. And the nature of that determines the nature of the encounter. This is like incredibly abstract. So that the the kind of nature of the distance is like a formal question that has like, really intense, I think consequences on the content of the poem in terms of like, what is the way both that the reader is going to encounter what I'm talking about, but also like, how is the speaker encountering or thinking about the subject matter as well? And this kind of beginning, like, I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me, but then like, I know I don't know her new name. I don't know her. Not now. I don't know if her and that's in quotes, is the word burning in a stranger's mind when he sees my dead mother walking down the street. It's like, okay, I said, I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me, okay, there's already distance because no longer living then it's like, I don't even know her name. And I'd actually don't know her at all. And in fact, I don't even know if her if like you can gender this dead mother in this kind of way. And not only is there a problem with language, but in fact, there's a stranger who's the one seeing the dead mother. And I wonder what they think about the dead mother. And so like all of those layers, which, when we talk about it now sounds like very convoluted, but as you were saying, it's just like it happens without you really knowing about it, I think. And the second really important part that you were talking about is like, and I feel like the Marie Howe, "What the Living Do" is just become like a cornerstone poem of this podcast

Jack 32:36

We can't escape it.

Connor 32:37

I know, I mean, hats off, Marie Howe, you wrote a fucking great poem

Jack 32:43

She really tapped into something with that one.

Connor 32:46

But it's also it's just so helpful in thinking about so many other poems, but I always it's a similar kind of poem in that speaker is remembering her brother has passed away. Huge subject, but the end is this remarkable moment of restraint, in a way from the poem where it's like I am living, I remember you. And there's this, like, very basic kind of, like claims, you know, but the tension, the poem gets its power, I think, because of how restrained the poem is, which is in contrast to sort of the intensity of the emotion. And I think similarly here, the distance that the poet and the poem is creating, by like introducing the stranger and by introducing these like

linguistic challenges in the beginning, restrains sort of the poet from being because I, you know, it's like, if you're writing it just for you, you don't need to do this right. It can be what like what you get behind this poem is such you know, an anguished cry of longing, that's also complicated by all the dynamics of their relationship, but to communicate that, the poem says the phrase dead mother three times, which establishes the intensity of the stakes, and so you know, how big it is, right? But then the distance is like, creates the tension between that and it it, it makes the encounter this intense - I don't know, it's, I still haven't quite figured out all of why it works. But it is such a common thing and the both it's like, it's to extend the time that you can sit with this pretty horrible thing because the language is, is manageable on its own. But then the more time you spend with it, it like allows your body to like process that, the horrible thing that's happening is not action, or it's not a narrative, dramatic thing. It's like an emotional state between, like the speaker and his dead mother. But that is super intense. And like, I think, the restraint in some ways, it lets the reader do a lot of the work in like, not just comprehending it, but like feeling it in some kind of way.

Jack 35:38

No, I think that's really right. And I think part of what, again, I keep returning to the opening line, but I think part of what makes that work so effectively is that you get immediate reader buy-in because of the desire for connection that you are refused instantly. And that keeps you working through that period of not necessarily knowing exactly what's happening. And the more I think about it, like we've discussed a little bit how dead mother is like such an evocative phrase, obviously, and really plays into it. But I think calling out thinks as the means of engagement is really important because I'm trying to think of other instances where there are like dead characters or like dead entities in literature that are, are present. And I thought of "The Lovely Bones" where it's a young girl overlooking sort of her family's grief and the investigation of her murder. And so she is technically thinking about what's going on, but it's more of a observer role than feeling particularly super active. Billy Collins, obviously the dead are always looking down on us, they say, again, it's like observer and there's also, I thought of a Tom Waits song called "Green Grass", another amazing opening line, lay your head where my heart used to be. And it's about like visiting a grave site. And it's a lot of directives from the dead person, to the person who's still living, but it's not the same kind of implied, like, critical, extended engagement with the other person that thinks, calls out. Even if those relationships can embody thinking, and by necessity, have to have thinking as part of what they are, it's not calling that out as the important and desired aspect. And I think that that's such an important part of where this poem lays claim to this relationship. It's that I want that like full back and forth because if you're thinking about me, like I'm thinking about you, we are both really connecting in in a deeper way than just I'm seeing you, I feel good about this. I feel something. It's like no, I want to engage with you. I want you to be really like, dwelling on my existence.

Connor 38:15

Yeah, it's just about wondering, you know, there's like, I wonder at least three times and I wish I knew. But yeah, it's only 12 lines, and it really, it gets it gets me every time.

Jack 38:35

Absolutely. Yeah, it packs in a lot. And as you said, taking on something like wondering and wanting, and being so comfortable with lack of resolution is really, it creates a powerful effect when you're reading it, to have that because we especially I think because it's such a short poem. It stays with you longer because of that.

Connor 39:00

Yeah, no, exactly. And I think it this is kind of my last sort of thought about it but like as a poem it like I feel like it can create one of the sort of obvious difficulties of having an unresolved important relationship with someone formative who is no longer living is like, as we've said, you can't. The only place you can try to create a resolution is like in your imagination, almost or like it's, it's in this imaginative space. I think this poem like creates that space in a in a way both for perhaps Saeed Jones himself but like also like any kind of reader can like encounter this and it like also like beyond the language of the poem, it's like a moment of imagining this kind of difficult situation. And like, it can be like a kind of bouncing off point for others to like, think about those situations if they have them, you know,

C: And try to create some resolution with themselves. Should we read it again?

J: I think we should read it again.

C: Alright.

A Stranger

By: Saeed Jones

I wonder if my dead mother still thinks of me.  
I know I don't know her new name. I don't know  
her, not now. I don't know if "her" is the word  
burning in a stranger's mind when he sees my dead  
mother walking down the street in her bright black  
dress. I wonder if he inhales the cigarette smoke  
that will eventually kill him and thinks "I wish I knew  
a woman who was both the light and every shadow  
the light pierces." I wonder if a passing glance at my dead  
mother is enough to make a poet out of anyone. I wonder  
if I'm the song she hums as she waits for the light to change  
or if I'm just the traffic signal holding her up.

(Close Talking theme music)

C: What you been reading, what you been listening, what you been watching? As, I mean I know one poem is all you need for every two weeks, but I have a feeling, no one is a more voracious consumer of the media varietals than Jack Rossiter-Munley. And let me tell you those varietals are ripe right now so.

J: There's a lot of stuff, so I have been reading a really excellent book, "Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City" by Tanya Talaga. It is about indigenous students who were found dead in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and it kind of hops between the present day and historical cases of this happening in the 1960s and of course this has been an ongoing problem both in Canada and in the United States, the disappearance of native people, which goes under-investigated, and the cases are often not given the attention they deserve, so it's a really deeply researched book, it's really deeply reported, and yeah, well-written, fascinating story. And the other thing I've been doing, due to my other current you know, obsession which is the world of strong-man competitions. I have been searching out historical tele-casts of events like the world's strongest man competition, and I found one that took place in New Zealand, and one of the events was seeing who could pick up the most cheese. Like over 1,000 lbs of New Zealand cheddar, and I felt like my interests were converging, because anyone who knows me knows that I love cheese, and these guys had an apparatus hooked up so they could dead-lift the bar and it was just increasing amounts of cheese.

C: Oh my god, 1,000 lbs of cheddar?

J: It was well over 1,000 lbs by the time, it was a max dead-lift event, and so they like would do a weight and then all the competitors would try that weight and then they would add more cheese, and then all the competitors would try again and people would sort of at some point fail.

C: Right because you can only handle so much cheese.

J: You can only handle so much cheese. The final guy lifted over 1100 lbs of cheddar.

C: My god.

J: I believe it was 535kg. Sticking with my theme of one that is very very serious and something else that has taken the edge off.

C: That is amazing, you are a cheese-man. I do remember back in the day there was always cheese sandwich, wheat, I think it was probably the brown-berry wheat maybe, and just like you know those solid 2 x 4 inches of slices of cheddar, maybe like 4-8 slices per sandwich.

J: Oh not on my lunch sandwiches, that was like special occasion sandwiches on baguettes that would have more and then I would have to take cheese nap afterwards.

C: Oh of course. Oh man amazing. Well alright Jack, I can't top you this week.

J: Well I still want to know what you've been listening to or thinking about reading.

C: Ok well I've been listening to a bit of throwback, not too far but the Frank Ocean album "Blonde", specifically Ivy, Self-control, and then that song, Futura Free, where he's just kind of rapping, but I've been driving around, it's been great, playing that on blast. So that's been good. And then I've been reading, I've been on a bit of an Angela Davis kick, I've recently mostly finished "Are Prisons of Obsolete" which was very good, just sort of about state mass-incarceration and she just kind of takes it point by point from the historical perspective, and just like here's all the things that we say we're trying to do with prisons, here's all the things that we're actually trying to do with prisons, maybe they're obsolete.

J: Maybe the idea we have about them is not matched to the reality of what they do.

C: Exactly. One of the yeah, exactly, one of the coolest insights or the most interesting ones is just that prison was like a progressive reform, that progressive reformers pushed for because previously it was basically take you to the gallows and flay you in public and things like that and so, sequestering you in an isolated space is a much more humane, or seemed like a more humane kind of system. And then the other one I've started is her book, "Women Race and Class" it starts sort of in American enslavement and moves sort of towards the presence of. Yeah, that and Frank Ocean.

J: Can't miss. I think I'd also probably be remiss if I didn't mention that this past week was the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of Bruce Springsteen's album "Born to Run", which while not my favorite Springsteen album, I think is unquestionably the album on which it is like basically impossible to pick a favorite track because they're all so good in their own ways, and so that is just a monumental artistic achievement, the anniversary of which we recently passed.

(Close Talking theme music)