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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

comply, humans, crowded subway, bus, balloon, seat, expelled, long, production, tracy, social distancing, pass, mailbox, mask, eyes, fact, room, family members, car, slow

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

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This spring I've watched from a surreal distance as colleagues, friends and family members have been hospitalized with COVID-19. The peril is real, and the road to recovery is not always easy. Which is why I do my best to comply with the responsible public health directive to stay home and to wear a mask in public. It's amazing to me how much of this new safety practice has already become habit. One thing I haven't figured out is how to register the fact that I am smiling at another person from behind my mask. Sometimes I contemplate adopting a friendly wink instead. But then I hesitate and the moment is gone. When the need for social distancing has safely passed, we'll find ways of coming together again, though, I suspect they'll be different. Remember sitting on someone's lap in the backseat of a full car. That has long been a thing of the past. But squeezing into a crowded subway car or bus might soon become a relic of the past as well. I read an article that speculated that kissing someone on one or both cheeks as a form of greeting is over. It was often awkward enough that I don't believe I'll miss it for long. I have long missed the salesman who used to measure your feet, then kneel before you and guide your foot into a shoe. I fear they are gone now for good. If kids in grade school will be made to respect a safe distance from one another. Maybe lice will go extinct. I worry my sons will forget to comply. But I'll have to trust and what I've always experienced as true. The fact that part of what we're wired as humans to do is look out for one another. Today's poem is full capacity by rose McCarney. It's called a kneeling bus because it lowers for those who need it. And we bend our knees to allow others to pass. Here. We're humble. The woman holding her briefcase the whole time so it won't slip onto my side. The man mouthing every word he reads, but careful not to make a sound. Each person trying to fit some task into the bounds of their small seat and our all

diligence, drawn elbows and dropped eyes. There is not enough room to unfold the newspapers black headline, habitat destruction, but somehow hope fits. The others two headed home must look out the window when we pass a building with a balloon tied to the mailbox. Imagine that was your welcome you are wanted in this place. How often can humans feel less than harmful to where we are balloons just outline the space occupied by the air we would have expelled anyway. But they fill a room with the promise of cake sugar paste connecting one layer to more of itself. bus riders stack on board scanning for seats. There are open spaces, if only in our searching eyes.

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Slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. The slow down is written by me Tracy k Smith. It is produced by Jennifer lie with Tracy Mumford. Our music is by Alexis quadrado. Engineering by Eric Romani. Additional production by Chrissy Pease production assistance by Brenda Everson Editing by Phyllis Fletcher.