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00:06

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

00:23

There are walls of windows in my house. I love them, because I can see outside trees, grass, animals. I don't especially relish seeing humans walking past, looking sometimes in at me, but I accept it as a fair trade off. Maybe the outside world feels the same way about me looking out at it. Sometimes birds crash into the glass. Often, they will get up after a moment and walk or hop or even fly away. Occasionally, they don't rise. There are ways to prevent this from happening, but none is 100% effective, and we must go outside to bury them respectfully in the ground. Seeing birds caught in airports, or shopping malls is heartbreaking. I say that, because I myself hate the degree to which I've become a prisoner of these human spaces. Once in Manhattan, a pigeon hopped down from a low cornice and landed briefly on my shoulder before dropping down to the sidewalk to forage for crumbs. I guess he saw me as a useful intermediary. To the extent that I have bought into the mythology of New York City pigeons as vermin. I was horrified. But I also felt a bit of respect for the creature, to whom I as a human may well have represented a kind of unfortunate infestation. I sometimes used to see pigeons in New York, picking the breeding of fried chicken leavings littering the street. The image of a bird pecking at winged bones struck me as depraved. But again, perhaps we humans had left them little choice. I like the birds who look you in the eye, as if to say, Hello citizen. I've been persuaded to accept you as my equal. Sometimes, crows up on a building seem to be laughing, living it up on a break from work, or else stealing time from a miserly boss. There are tiny birds who scurry away from human traffic, but even they can turn fierce and protection of their young. Today's poem is Fransisco eeks Allah guns, the birds of New York. The Birds of New York live out on cornices, chimneys and roofs, on top of tall buildings amid granite and cement. Every morning, they sing Thanksgiving chance to the

busy son of summer. The Birds of New York are confused by so many city lights and take turns flying around day and night. Trapped in cages. They die fast. They've never known wild grain. But they are true culinary connoisseurs of city garbage. The Birds of New York make love in full flight, because there's no space reserved for them on the ground. Playing. They chase each other around the tips of towers, waving their wings, they laugh at the traffic of the avenues below. The Birds of New York dream of being poets of the air, artists that paint with their feet masterpieces. Nobody sees. Some mischievously dive like Kamikaze fliers, and bombard disgruntled executives crossing Wall Street. The Birds of New York are the most streetwise in the world, the cruelest and yet in the nest, the tenderest of all as well. Some grow tired and crash against glass windows that prevent them from entering and smelling the fresh flowers and bases. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdown.show.org and sign up for our newsletter.