

# 20181231\_slowdown\_20181231\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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00:06

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith. And this is the slow down. When my husband and I were first dating, he invited me to join him on a hike. Sounds nice, right? I thought so too. But here's the thing. I love nature, but I don't like to work for it. Growing up in the suburbs of Northern California, my idea of a hike was a once in a while stroll through Muir Woods National Park. It was a nice flat trail full of giant redwoods, majestic trees as old as eight or even 1200 years. I drive there with my family whenever someone visited us from out of town, we'd park in the lot and walk a well defined path to what felt like a tree filled Cathedral. Other times, we'd walk the low rolling Northern California hills, never quite losing our breath while we took in the sunset. But my boyfriend dragged us to Cold Spring New York on a frigid November day, to hustle our way up an icy mountain. This was not the hike I'd planned. I was wearing trendy motorcycle boots and carrying a handbag. My boyfriend and his dog bounded up the slick slope, that all panting wagging, galloping off and back on my boyfriend, to my deep frustration, remained comfortably poised enough to quote lines of Victorian poetry to me. Let me be clear, there came a time on the treacherous descent, sliding upon frozen leaves in my useless shoes, when I thought that I might actually die. But I didn't. And in time, the whole catastrophe became funny. I find glimmers of my own hiking gripe in today's poem by poet and critic Maureen and McLean. But her poem is more than that. In fact, it's big enough to also get me thinking about the life and death of our species, and the fate of the environment. against the promise of a view by Maureen and McLean. A difficult climb to a beautiful view. I don't like it. I don't like the way you make me go positively Protestant. All this deferral up to a future only you've seen, the ascent always leveraged against an alien payoff always prescriptive. When we get there, I'll be dead. Tired, too tired to view the view the way I wanted. I wanted the way to be beautiful as a stroll in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, or the Wisteria Lane in lanes of the Rose Garden in the Bois de Boulogne. As beautiful as a jammed Sixth Avenue

crosswalk in Midtown. I wanted to be going nowhere. Nowhere we know not to have to breathe so hard into a future someone else promised. I know. reputable studies show the capacity to delay gratification makes for a happy person and nation. But oh I just want and want now a perpetual beautiful stroll nowhere. I don't want to look back and say, Ah, that was so worth it. Because even if it was, it wasn't. I don't want to keep my head down for miles alert for insurgent roots, a falling branch. My legs punctured by stinging flies that Harry the way only to be able to say at some notional top, however beautiful. How beautiful and see no insects here. And why not lunch? somehow. It was just the glorious sun and 12 Islands inlaid in a lake and the distant silent powerboats. Somehow, it was a vision of all as dust. If I go on pilgrimage. I want every age to be a stage one can look around and say how interesting and yes, a cup of coffee would be nice. I'm not going anywhere fast but where we're all going. The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.