

# 20191023\_theslowdown\_20191023\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

traffic, desdemona, poem, hugged, remember, cindy, freedom, momentary, ensconced, prison, poetry, reader, fetched, life, surmountable, never ending, slowdown, feelings, mcdonough, imparts

00:06

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

00:23

Even the most fortunate among us don't always feel free in our own lives. Sometimes things like confusion, suffering and fear seem to surround you on all sides, making it impossible to think or even feel clearly. I remember the winter of my junior year of college, when I felt myself moving through a kind of never ending fog. I wish I had known to seek out help at the time, my main means of finding calm and momentary peace was to pick up a book and read. Anyone who loves to read knows that one gift of literature is the clarity it imparts to the reader, facets of your life. feelings you may not know how to name can seem manageable, even surmountable. When you encounter them in the lines of a poem, or the life of a character. That's the great gift writers give to readers. They locate our most powerful and bewildering feelings, and miraculously fit them into language. Or we can take them in slowly, perhaps even repeatedly, until they begin to make sense. I was lucky, I was a 20 year old ensconced in the safety of a major university when poetry saved me from confusion and despair. I know poetry serves a similar or perhaps even more urgent purpose for people living in prisons, detention centers, or under other conditions where freedom of any kind is not something that can be taken for granted. What I love about today's poem, Cindy comes to hear me read by Jill McDonough is the fact that it engages with the sense of freedom as a literal state that a great many people live without access to. It also celebrates the way that literature can afford those living without freedom, a kind of sanctuary. Mostly, I'm grateful for the way McDonald's poem models a form of community that ignores the difference between someone who is incarcerated, and someone who is not many of us with the ability to cross that divide. fail to remember such a thing is even possible. Cindy comes to hear me read by Jill McDonough. Cindy, not her real name. I met her in prison and people in prison I give the fake

names. I taught her Shakespeare remember her frown wide eyes terror of getting things wrong? Her clear arguable thesis on Desdemona his motives. Desdemona is past. The last days were hard on her. It taking visible work to see things could be worse. Imagine I did, but now she's out in jewelry and makeup, new clothes haircut she chose and paid for. We hugged. We'd never hugged. It's not allowed. On the outside. You can hug whoever you want. She told me she has an apartment now. A window and ocean view. She has a car she told me and we both cracked up the thought of it wild as far fetched then, as when you're a kid playing grown up playing any kind of house. She has a job. She drives there in traffic. Each day she sees the angry people. Sweet, silly people mad. God bless them at traffic at other cars. She laughs she told me laughs out loud alone in her car. People around her angry as toddlers, whole highways of traffic everybody at the work of being free. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.