

# 20190529\_theslowdown\_20190529\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poems, lucy, life, town, mill, silver, reader, built, mined, hatred, collapse, pure, blondes, poetry, bars, kiss, resolves, silver mines, metaphorical, american public

00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:19

I took my first poetry workshop in 1992 with the late Lucy Brock brighto. If I tell you Lucy was a magical being, understand that I am not being metaphorical, she was made of pure magic. And she taught her students to recognize the moments when what a poem achieves through craft, and imagination creates a spark of something potent and alive and its reader. On the first day of class, Lucy handed out a thick course reader made up of more than 100 poems, quotes and manifestos designed to inspire us into a relationship with all the many things poems could do. I sat that autumn and the next two, wrapped by her voice, her playful wisdom, and the intoxicating scent of hyacinth that followed her everywhere. Lucy's class reader introduced me to poems that have become lifelong guides, to writing and to being in the world, my internal dialogue, the conversation I have with myself, as I move through life, includes lines from the poems Lucy gave me. I believe those poems have made my life a more hopeful, even a more joyful kind of enterprise. Today's poem, degrees of gray in Phillipsburg by Richard Hugo is one of the poems that taught me poems could ask questions, the kind of questions that don't always bother waiting around for answers. degrees of gray in Phillipsburg by Richard Hugo you might come here Sunday on a whim say your life broke down. The last good kiss you had was years ago. You walk these streets laid out by the insane past hotels that didn't last bars that did the torture try have local drivers to accelerate their lives. Only churches are kept up the jail turned 70 this year. The only prisoner is always in not knowing what he's done. The principal supporting business now is rage. hatred of the various grades the mountain sense hatred of the mill, the silver bill repeal the best liked girls who leave each year for beaut. One good restaurant and bars can't wipe the board out. The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines. a dance floor built on springs. All memory resolves itself

engaged in panoramic green you know the cattle eat or two stacks high above the town to dead kills the huge mill in collapse for 50 years that won't fall finally down. Isn't this your life? That ancient kiss still burning out your eyes? Isn't this defeat so accurate? The church bells simply seems a pure announcement ring and no one comes. Don't empty houses ring are magnesium and scorn sufficient to support a town not just Phillipsburg. But towns of towering blondes good jazz and booze The world will never let you have until the town you came from. dies inside. Say no to yourself. The old man 20 when the jail was built, still laughs although his lips collapse. Someday soon he says I'll go to sleep and not wake up. You tell him No. You're talking to yourself. The car that brought you here still runs. The money you buy lunch with no matter where it's mined is silver. And the girl who serves your food is slender, and her red hair lights the wall. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.