

# theslowdown\_20191204\_20191204\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

kissed, gate, poem, tabletops, passengers, man, heads, overflows, portland airport, gazed, arrives, nearby, bermuda shorts, airport, carry ons, ellis island, looked, sight, flight, woman

00:06

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

00:22

I'm writing this episode in the airspace over New Jersey after a morning spent in the airport. The day started off promisingly enough, I made it to my gate with time for breakfast at a nearby restaurant. One of those high convenience places whose tabletops are covered with iPads, so you can type in your own order, pay for your food before it arrives, and surf the internet while you eat. People watching has become largely a matter of resting your attention away from your personal handheld screen, only to catch sight of others in Thrall to their own glowing buzzing devices. I boarded my flight to Austin. But as soon as everyone's luggage had been stowed, the captain came on the intercom to inform us that the plane's communication system wasn't working. We disembarked migrated to another nearby gate, where we sat waiting to queue up again according to degrees of elite status several times, taking in the sight of us with our heads bowed with our real and symbolic baggage taking up more than the allotted space, a grim label formed in my mind, humanity 2.0 today's poem is Ellen basses gate, see 22 It's exactly the poem I needed on a day like today, because it overflows with the feeling of human beings alert to ourselves, and one another beholden to the real alive in the immediate and unscripted moment. Gate c 22. by Ellen bass. At gate c 22. In the Portland airport, a man in a broadband leather hat, kissed a woman arriving from Orange County. They kissed and kissed and kissed long after the other passengers clicked the handles of their carry ons and wheeled briskly towards short term parking. The couples stood their arms wrapped around each other. Like he just staggered off the boat at Ellis Island, like she'd been released at last from ICU, snapped out of a coma, survived bone cancer made it down from Annapurna, and only the clothes she was wearing. Neither of them was young. His beard was gray, she carried a few extra pounds. You could imagine her saying she had to lose, but

they kissed lavish kisses, like the ocean in the early morning, the way it gathers and swells sucking each rock under swallowing it again and again. We were all watching passengers waiting for the delayed flight to San Jose, the stewardesses, the pilots, the apron woman icing cinnabons, the man selling sunglasses, we couldn't look away. We could taste the kisses crushed in our mouths. But the best part was his face. When he drew back and looked at her, his smile soft with wonder almost as though he were a mother still open from giving birth. As your mother must have looked at you, no matter what happened after if she beat you or left you or you're lonely now. You once lay there, the vernix not yet wiped off, and someone gazed at you as if you were the first sunrise scene from the earth. The whole wing of the airport hushed all of us trying to slip into that woman's middle aged body. Her plaid Bermuda shorts, sleeveless blouse, glasses, little gold hoop earrings, tilting our heads up. The slowdown is the production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to [slowdownshow.org](http://slowdownshow.org) and sign up for our newsletter.