

20181218_slowdown_20181218_128

Wed, 9/30 10:12AM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

man, poem, hand, tracy, woman, donna, strode, sisyphus, slow, turned, washington square park, existential philosophy, waiting, offer, rolls, union station, stood, greek mythology, slowdown, quickly



00:05

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



00:23

Last week, I stood waiting to board a train at Union Station in Washington DC. The man in line ahead of me, turned around to ask if the lines were always this long. They move quickly, I assured him and he turned back around. It was early morning. Some people waited in pairs or groups, but most seemed to be waiting alone. I was on my own drinking a cup of tea, lost in my thoughts, thinking back to yesterday, last night, and ahead to the new day's tasks, thinking of my children getting ready for school just then, and their dad making their breakfast packing lunches. An older woman walked toward us and stopped. She was speaking to herself loudly, something about how difficult it was trying to help people here. Then she looked at the man in line ahead of me. And I couldn't make out exactly what she said. I think I heard the phrase, get something to eat. My hand went to my wallet. I fingered the bills thinking to offer her \$1 to a token of compassion, and guilt. But then quickly, she strode away. And then the man turned to face me again, with a stunned expression on his face. In his hand, he held the gift card the woman had handed him before she'd gone on her way. Whatever her circumstances were, she felt capable of taking charge, offering him something she saw as necessary. She must have believed we all stood there in line for God knows what hungry and afraid to ask for help. Here you go, sweetheart, go get yourself something to eat, is what I want to believe. She said to the man. Because if you can see clearly enough into a person, of course, what you'll find there is hunger for something. Today's poem by Manhattan poet, Donna masini reminds me of that train station scene. The woman in the poem might pass for invisible in a city like DC,

or New York, but here or let in on her conversation. And she's talking about Greek mythology and existential philosophy. And we do notice her. She goes from being potentially invisible to being absolutely unforgettable. Woman on cell phone dragging an empty cart through Washington Square Park, by Donna mazzini. It's called Sisyphus. No. Sisyphus. Yes. Apparently some Greek myths, this guy is punished for punished. Yes. For something and has to roll a rock up a hill every day. And every day it rolls. A rock. Yes. And every day it rolls back down. Something about the absurdity of life. khemu says can move says it's about the condition of a man and that it's meaningless. And we just have to keep doing it and the rock Yes, rolling the rock. And that gives our life meaning. Yeah, well, if that don't drive you to God.



04:06

The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slow down show.org and sign up for our newsletter. And follow the slow down on Instagram and Twitter at slow down show. The slow down is written by me Tracy K. Smith. It is produced by Jennifer Lai,



04:36

with Tracy Mumford.



04:39

Our music is by Alexis quadrado.



04:42

Engineering by Michael Osborne, Liz Iverson and Veronica Rodriguez. Production support by Rob Casper and Lauren D.