

theslowdown_20200129_20200129_128

Wed, 9/30 8:08PM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

geese, hypocrites, slow, poem, telling, animals, friend, eludes, dappled shade, hissing, means, wings, sits, inner peace, telepathically, arm, unrest, humans, stroud, snarl

00:05

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

00:22

I have a friend who can communicate with animals, they speak to her telepathically. Let's skip the part where I try to convince you. This is true. Once she overheard a flock of geese who make their home on the grounds of a retreat for people, actually, the geese would say the retreat for people sits on the land they call home. A man and a golf cart drives the ground several times each day, shooing them off the lawn hypocrites. The geese say when they see humans cruising the footpaths of this place, they've come to seeking inner peace. I know that my friend is telling the truth. I know. Because of the way my dog looks at me with such intent. Sometimes she's simply telling me that I forgot to feed her. But other times her message sits on a higher plane, evidence that she understands not only what I'm feeling, but what I need to do in order to write the wrong or ease the unrest or maximize the joy I carry within. Do you know what I mean? And how about other animals, birds that catch your gaze a moment before swooping away? Look up. They seem to be saying get out of your own head. Or Look at this mess. Can't you see what you humans have done. One afternoon, I noticed a family of five slugs that had stretched themselves across my patio cushions. They weren't mute, or insensate. The five of them lounging they're together in the dappled shade. We're happy. But most of the time, we live believing that animals can't talk that their understanding is limited that they live by a set of primitive instincts, their feelings pale in comparison to ours, their desires our base next to our glimmering holy aspirations. When they lash out at us, that's just them being territorial. They can't help it. They know nothing of our intelligence, our benign intentions, the source of our pleasure, like the aim of all our work eludes them. They wouldn't dream of calling us hypocrites. They don't know what a word like hypocrites means. If their chatter or their hissing or the way they curl their lips and snarl means anything at

all. Surely it has nothing to do with us. Today's poem is let me tell you by Joseph Stroud. Ellen's geese attacked me every time I came to visit, they'd see me walk up and the assault was on. They'd rush hissing, long necks, erect beaks that could grip like a pair of pliers and twist an inch of skin off the arm you raised toward them off. And then with their wings, the edge of their wings, they'd slam you with the force of a two by four. And this happened every time I came. They never got used to me. And I couldn't make friends with them. I don't know what it was about me. Maybe Elon was telling them stories behind my back, telling them what a jerk I could be. And 40 years later, everyone agrees. I still can be. And you asked me, How do you come by that scar on your arm? Well, let me tell you.

04:26

The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter. Follow the slow down on Instagram and

04:50

Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://twitter.com/slowdownshow)