

# 20181225\_slowdown\_20181225\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, love, herbert, speak, drew, feeling, recitation, 17th century, poetry, unkind, marred, george herbert, slowdown, poet, dear, grow, sweetly, deserve, struggle, nearer



00:05

I'm us Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith.



00:09

And this is the slow down.



00:22

When I tell people I'm a poet, sometimes they say something like, Oh, I don't read much poetry. But once in a while, if we keep talking, they'll admit that way back when they were kids, they knew a poem by heart. And it's a beautiful gift. To hear a stranger recite a poem they've carried with them for most of a lifetime. Memorizing poems, keeps them alive and in conversation inside of you. It's like having an arsenal of insight and delight whenever you need it. I wish I knew more poems by heart. The few that I do, stay with me, thanks to teachers who believed in the importance of recitation, they rise to the surface of my thoughts now and then, like an old friend, coming around a check on how I've been. Sometimes, they feel like an affirmation. Other times, they seem to be whispering guidance or practical instruction, even as I age, and the circumstances of my life change. The poems I remember, continue to speak to me. I was in college, when I memorized the poem Love Three by 17th century poet and priest of the Church of England, George Herbert, in the poem. Love is a person, a character with the ability to speak and smile, even to reach out and take the speaker by the hand. I'd grown up going to Sunday school, and at the time, love reminded me of Jesus Christ. I saw Herbert's poem as religious in nature, a brief sermon on how much God loves us, despite our human flaws. Years later, when I met

my husband, the poem took on a different tone. It spoke to what was on my mind, namely, the surprise and relief of finding someone with whom love was not a struggle between two opposing wills. That new feeling of effortlessness initially felt very startling. But Herbert's poem assured me that I could trust my feelings, and that despite the failure of my previous loves, I deserved to be happy. Now, I'm a parent, learning to love my children without needing to control them, and learning to love myself, without so many conditions. And so lately, I think the character of love in the poem is really just that love saying, Don't fight it, don't struggle to understand it. Just submit to all this miraculous love that surrounds you just accept it. But I know there's more inside this poem, just like there's more to love itself. I'll get there in time. When I'm able to see things differently. There's no rush. Love three, by George Herbert. Love, bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin. But quick, I'd love observing me grow Slack, from my first entrance in, drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning, if I lacked anything. A guest, I answered, worthy to be here. Love said, You shall be he? I, the unkind, ungrateful, my dear, I cannot look on the love took my hand and smiling did reply, who made the eyes, but I truth, Lord, but I have marred them, let my shame go where it doesn't deserve. And no you not, says love, who bore the blame, my dear, then I will serve. You must sit down, says love and taste my meat. So I did sit and eat. The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.