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00:05

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

00:23

How many romantic comedies feature a scene where the loving couple is talking on the phone to one another. And when it comes time to say goodbye, each says to the other, you hang up first. No, you know you. It's ridiculous and cute. But sometimes, that's exactly how good it feels to hear the voice you love on the other end of the line. That's how good it feels. Even just to hear the silence around that other voice, the air going in and out of those lungs that you love. But that kind of excitement isn't only the effect of romance. I think it's a testament to the kind of Lifeline that a kindred mind and spirit in any context can represent. I visited Quartz Mountain Oklahoma last summer, where I spent two days at the Oklahoma Arts Institute for high school students. And the poets I met there told me that being together with other aspiring writers, was the kind of experience they didn't want to miss a minute of. Many of them came from families or communities where the wish to become an artist was viewed warily. And so being together in a community of others, with a shared passion was enormously affirming. Walking around the campus at night, I noticed that nobody seemed to sleep much. The young artists stayed up late talking and laughing, dancing and even singing. Some surely basked in the first flash of new love, others basked in the spark of new friendship. In February, Princeton University where I teach hosted a black poetry conference. And I have to admit that over the three days, I felt a lot like those high school kids in Oklahoma. I'm fast and the feelings of communion and reunion with black poets I've known on or off the page for most of my adult life. Poets like Sonia Sanchez and Rita Dove, Yusef Coleman Yaga and Kevin young, Morgan Parker and Fred Moten, and many, many more. We talked about our art, and about the communities we claim. We talked about the histories we poets descend from and the legacies, we're mindful of garden. It struck me as

perfectly fitting that Elizabeth Alexander should be there, because she is a brilliant and pivotal poet, and because her poem, *Ars poetica*, number 28, *African leave taking disorder* seem to be acted out again and again, in what felt like the sacred space of community. *Ars poetica* number 28. *African leave taking disorder* by Elizabeth Alexander, the talk is good. The two friends linger at the door. Urban crickets sing with them. There is no after the supper and talk, the talk is good. These two friends linger at the door half in half out till one decides to walk the other home. And so they walk more talk the new doorstep. The night gown wife who shakes her head and smiles from the bedroom window as the men talk in love and the crickets sing along. The joke would be if the one now home, walked to the other one home where they started to keep talking and so on. *African leave taking disorder*, which names her children everywhere, trying to come back together and talk. The slow down 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 slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter. And follow the slow down on Instagram and Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://www.instagram.com/slowdownshow)