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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, sit, drill, confrontation, sharp, buzz, loose tooth, neighbor, stewing, writing, lim, dental chair, place, history, energy, kids, clamor, overhead, distraction, sought

00:06

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

00:21

Sometimes, when you're writing a poem, you're fully present to your surroundings. You watch and listen deeply. You attempt to absorb the very energy of the place where you sit, and you labor to carry that energy into words. But there are other times when where you are is the farthest place from your mind, times when you've gone inward, and your energy is directed at bringing an imagined place or a psychic state into words. Once a decade ago, when I was working on the poems in life on Mars, I sat on my couch, caught up in an idea and tapping out words, images and ideas on my laptop keyboard. I was onto something. And if I was lucky, that something would give way to a poem, maybe even a good poem. But there was a problem. My neighbor's kids were home, something around in the apartment overhead, their joy, or was it fury, infected my thoughts distracting me from the path i'd sought to follow their racket made me feel almost as if I were being pelted by tiny, sharp pebbles. I was irked, I was outright angry. I had lost my poem for good. And I lost a whole valuable afternoon in the process. And then sitting there stewing in my rage, the kids commotion got me started on something else, another poem, maybe even a better poem. And instead of seeking to block out their voices, their thumping footsteps, the clamor of toys or metal tools being scattered overhead. I let it all in. It led me to a poem called the universe as primal scream, which is only partly about the neighbor, children. Mostly. It's a poem about grief, and wanting to know where we go when we die. and wanting to have an honest confrontation with God, or whatever it is that waits to reclaim us when we leave this life. I should really think those kids who are teenagers now, saidl, Declan, thank you. May your future neighbors and their children be as generous with you. Today's poem is writing a poem by Shirley gak Lin Lim, and it sends me back to that fortuitous encounter within an ignore trouble distraction. In this poem, it is

the distraction of a repetitive, frustrating sound that jostles the speaker's thoughts out of the day today, and into a confrontation with big picture questions of time, history and existence itself. writing a poem by Shirley gak Lin Lim, the air is buzzing. Someone nearby is operating a giant machine. He's scrubbing a just sold building with a high powered hose. None of us are listening. Although we are each hopeless before this Does, does does. If it was a monstrous radiated beetle, we couldn't be more helpless. It's eating up the hours as if they were the sweet nectar of day, which they are. It is impossible to think or write. It's buzz, takes away feelings, takes over ears is drilling a hole in a loose tooth as you sit in history's dental chair, frantic and still the drill hammering the gums until only spit oozes dribbles, spills over, fills cavities you didn't know you had only the drill lives in your head. Only the dull sharp does. Does does. This is how the poem ends. Does does. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation