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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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

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Last year, I visited an exhibition of poet Sylvia Plath belongings at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC, and a small gallery. On a summer afternoon I pored over Platts family photos, drawings and self portraits. Like me, she had once been a Girl Scout, though, unlike me, Plath stuck it out, earning badges and sashes that even now remain pinned to her uniform. I stood looking at her typewriter, trying to imagine those sturdy keys, hammering her singular voice onto a fresh page. And, of course, there were poems, or typed up drafts, edited and tinkered with and pen, revealed how she arrived at her famously well crafted lines. Sylvia Plath was one of the great poets of the 20th century, writing unguardedly on topics of motherhood, mental illness, sexism, and despair. I was in high school, when I first read one of her most widely anthologized poems, Lady Lazarus, which closes with the warning. Beware, beware. Out of the ash, I rise with my red hair, and I eat men like air. She sounded angry, righteous, infallible. Her voice reminded me of an Oracle or Greek god, someone possessed of an unassailable authority. had her life been dull is the prairie platts poems would still be genius. But because of her rocky marriage, and her suicide at the age of 30, there is a cult of fascination around Plath, that will likely last forever. For fans of her work, and I am one walking through a room full of her belongings was like touring the tomb of a pharaoh. One of the most exciting artifacts on display was a piece of the poet herself. Platts long girlhood ponytail,

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still tied in a blue satin ribbon.

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I found myself looking at it with a sense of private loss, as if Plath had been a friend of mine. And I regarded it with hope to as if it might still contain some of the life force responsible for such magnificent poems, poems that have made living more bearable for so many of Platts readers, despite the fact that those same poems ultimately could not save her. Today's poem is self portrait with Sylvia Platts braid, by Kalamazoo, Michigan based poet Diane Seuss unabashed and it's hero worship. This poem lives out its speakers wish to take on some of Platts, courage and to move through the world parting the waters with her might. Self Portrait with Sylvia Platts braid by Diane Seuss some women make a pilgrimage to visit it in the Indiana library charged to keep it safe. I didn't drive to it. I dreamed it the thick braid rope Dover my hands heavier than led my own hair was long for years that I became obsessed with chopping it off. And I did clear up to my ears. If hair is beauty than I am no longer beautiful. Silvia was beautiful, wasn't she? And like all of us, didn't she wheeled her beauty like a weapon. And then she married and laid it down. And when she was betrayed, and took it up again, it was a word weapon, a poem sword. In the dream, I fastened her braid to my own hair at my nape. I walk outside with it through the world of men, swinging it behind me like a tail. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation.