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poetry, poem, write, heartbreak, shaughnessy, tracy, love, pulls, kindling, ate, slow, sock, full, heart, loneliest, uncountable, linoleum, wallowing, braided, field

00:05

I'm pilot Brenda Shaughnessy filling in for Tracy k Smith. And this is the slow down.

00:27

I love the way poetry keeps me company. When I'm at my loneliest, it can strike up a conversation that suddenly has my full attention that pulls at my deepest concerns that blows past small talk and gets to the heart. I've always turned to poetry when it seems nobody could possibly understand what I'm going through. I feel like I could write a love poem to the ways that poetry has always allowed me to be brokenhearted. The way it allows me to time travel, letting memory and loss and regrets be something more than just a sore spot. Poetry has let heartbreak be a kind of solemn celebration, like psychically going on a reverse honeymoon to the same spots where the bliss of love took place in happier times. I worked through all my romantic breakups by writing and reading poetry. It seems only poems had the patience to hear my wallowing to resist my desperate desire for do overs and making up. Only poems could withstand my urge to forget and turn into stone. Poetry has the room to let me stay over when an empty bed and a broken heart turns sleep and peace against me. Poetry is a place where you can think about where you've been, and not have to think about where you're going if you're not ready to face that yet. Today's poem is the opposite of the ocean is no ocean by Kathy Lin che. This poem of heartbreak seems so strong to me, with hard earned wisdom, so full of the willingness to be sad, and to miss someone, while also taking some comfort in how much love was also had. This poem faces the full adventure, of loneliness, of love, of what it means to have a heart give it away, and somehow, with a lot of tears grow a new one. The opposite of the ocean is no ocean by Kathy Lin che. These days I fall asleep to the sound of my own reading. I haven't ridden a roller coaster since my 20s I held a fistful of coins then numbered them, but really they were uncountable. Yesterday, I wrote a love song. The radio dressed up and called into a field. That echo of dreaming once a man smiled

at me with all his teeth. Then the field was lavender and the wind braided into my hair. I am sitting in the kitchen without socks, just skin against linoleum. Last year we went to New Orleans. It was Valentine's Day and we ate kings cake. excavated a baby from its sweet sticky flesh. I kissed your cheek. We ate Gulf shrimp at around table at the back of a smoky bar. We were so full in those days. Then I reached into the hearts and pulled out the kindling. You sustained me with the warmth of that low fire. How does it feel to sleep alone? one sock by the bed one on your foot. You were the foothold that offered itself up. I'm not crying. But oh I cannot stop.

04:13

This slow down is a production of American public media in partnership with Poetry Foundation. This episode of the slow down was written by me Brenda Shaughnessy. The slow down is hosted by Tracy k Smith. It is produced by Jennifer in line with Tracy Mumford. Our music is by Alexis quadrado. Engineering by Corey shuffle and Veronica Rodriguez. Production assistance by Brennan Everson and Phyllis Fletcher.