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00:06

I'm Tracy K. Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:23

In the last five years, I started hearing a certain phrase that gives me pause. I hear it in my hometown, and on my travels in restaurants and retail stores, sometimes even in classrooms. It's the response elicited by the phrase, thank you, which all of the sudden went from being you're welcome to? No problem. Thank you. I say grateful for a hot cup of tea that I didn't have to make myself. No problem. The barista says, smiling back at me or turning to face the next customer. Thank you. I tell the waiter who has delivered my entree to the table. Not a problem. He replies ever so slightly tamping down my gratitude. There is perhaps only a small degree of difference between no problem and you're welcome. But in that sliver of space, I moved from feeling like a welcome and deserving fellow being to feeling at best like an exception has been made for me just this once. At face value. No problem means I'm not a problem. Not the big awful bother everyone else out there must be. But it fosters the anxiety that if I'm not a problem now, maybe soon I will be. Today's poem is no apology, a poem of Festo by Carmen Jimenez Smith, which opens with an epigraph. The poem takes issue with a different phrase that has crept as filler into everyday parlance, perhaps more so for women and girls than boys and men. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Oh, God, no, I'm sorry. The poem speaker guilty of its overuse, determines to excise it from her vocabulary, and with it, to shed the implicit notion that she's overstepping her bounds imposing on others with her very presence. no apology, a poem of Festo by Carmen Jimenez Smith. Isn't there a line by Yusef Coleman? Yaga. I apologize for the eyes in my head. Maybe what I'm trying to say is that I apologize for the sight in my eyes. Susan, Briana J. I would love to make a proposal. And it is out of love. Not patronizing love, but true revolutionary love, and it won't upset the orbit tomorrow. So here's where I'd like to begin. And this might be the hardest thing you've

tried to do. Or maybe you already do it. And I'm grateful for you because you've inspired me. I know it's the hardest thing for me, because I haven't done it consistently. Not at all. Sorry. But I want to recommend that we stop apologizing. Today, I counted. And I said I'm sorry, approximately 22 times. I apologized for my setting my stuff down on the counter at the Kroger's. I apologized for being behind someone at a coffee machine. I apologized for someone else bumping into a stranger. I apologize for taking longer than a minute to explain an idea. Suffice it to say I am sorry all the time. I won't tell you what to do, because that makes me an implicit solicitor of sorry. Personally, when the word comes into my mouth, I'm going to shape it into a seed to plant in another woman's aura. As love. I only ask that we get started. This will be our first step in world domination. The slowdown is a production of American public media in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter. And follow the slowdown on Instagram and Twitter at [slowdownshow](https://www.instagram.com/slowdownshow)