

FIVE POEMS



Jorie Graham

PRAYER

(after Hölderlin)

Should we not speak of you?
Should you ring in us as an idle caprice

pressed into service,
should we not, you deed rampaging destiny, furious,

pressing voice into service,
as if the hurling of hot arrows,

pressing the good into your service,
making it play for you?

And yet you will veil our eyes
that we not perish.

Hard burden. Names and names.
Likewise the river.

I called you once and thought you once.
You travel down to me on your allotted paths,

a light embrace, miraculously omnipresent.

UNDERNEATH (SPEZZATO)

Can call me *by name*

As the keel drives onto the untouched shore

Still mindful of earlier truths

Once son or daughter of

Now in a soldier's wind

Where one must winter

If need be

Technique, yes as sure as you ever saw

Whatever god exactly balanced

And how we must be ready for carelessness

Far from kingdom

Slaughtered suitors on floor if you wish

Other thinking given up

Undergoing the great art acceptance

Making music strong with weeping

Which grows fast like ivy and covers much

What cannot be endured endured or shoved up
into the heart

where the one final boundary, the river, freezes—

the northern border of it giving out

that the one-and-only stream find ultimate shape
via these our fingertips—

Light as a moth your mouth on my thigh—

The consular years

the first land-bounds, loose—
The first clear incision—
The marbles cut out—
Slaves watering the stone to cut it cleaner—
Busts hungered-out/whole bodies—
You never touched a truer stone
than this exile,
this law of finding
the inside of a shadow—
I never touched a truer stone
than this your face
stirring the wind before me
quarried from
the immensity of the good—
All round us the rustling, the miles of grain
And another face not moving we will bend for
Down out of our nationhood the fable
To the furrow of the hard *now*
Day standing by in case needed
Both of us hands tied
half-dead from thinking
if possible sometimes muttering to the gods:
very close to the bottom of the stalk
pick hard love look

UNDERNEATH (LIBATION)

Look the middle period.

Where will the council be tomorrow.

Where will tomorrow

offer prayers to.

Disperse question-marks.

Know what you write at.

Very tired. Speak of.

It is morning it is evening.

Murmur names little exiles.

How many syllables is your nation?

How pronounce it?

Who first spoke it?

Is it the third or the other world?

Could it be mistaken for a book?

Or sadness?

Or a path turned to mud?

Or the hunter who is hunted?

Somewhere in the audience

something not human.

If anything is real then this is real.

The fires burn all the way down

from their mouth the one war.

Hadn't it seemed eternal,

the one war?

With your mouth now

bear in mind.

The one who acts must suffer.

Who rules the house?

Persuasion

UNDERNEATH (WITH CHORUS)

Citizen Sacrifice

My sacrifice: what shall I use

Face dawn and pour out

What shall I use

What offering sufficient

Say act

Be called

What shall I use

Both hands your voice

Coins gathering in us

Do you not see the hands

reaching and touching: as if to defend the object

Your words are terrible

Have they a king

Could a messenger be sent

How can eyes sense enough

Truth under names

What do you mean

I dare not act
Citizens must sanction
What orders have you
(Being born at last
Do you feel no shame?)
What is the name of the place we have entered
Why do we need the safety of the altar
Surely you know
Blind as you are
What is asked is bitter
Have we not talked enough
Yes we are innocent and deserve help
Where are my words they die away as I speak them
The pain of my eyes is piercing
I feel your presence beside me
I know your voice in the blackness
Why should I see
Oh narrow crossroad
What is it that you beg so urgently
A beginning?
A delay?
To have the god reveal to me my duty
Obedience is hard
No good life endures beyond its season
Do you know why I yield
When I have heard your reason I will know

UNDERNEATH (CALYPSO)

I
Sing to me of time and time again
being driven off course
to face another audience
bewitching craving to hold
him back
I apologize to coincidence
I apologize to necessity
Let happiness try to receive the dead
Apologize to the war I steal him from
You must forgive this veil
It's like a laughing time and again
I wanted to be everything
I know nothing can justify the veil
Be brave Let it descend

²
Why should the exile return home?
Era? Period?
Discover: Calypso has shuffled the deck.
Has veiled the early with the late.
Has veiled sequence.
Remembering violent as it must be,
and it all now middle—time. Sleep, love.
What must be inferred under
the blemished mantling shimmers.

How else to keep you.

I apologize to history,

I covered the story with all these words.

Overgrown with eyes.

³
The stress and drag of looking. Look.

Shuffled the deck to veil phenomena, yes.

Strike me says each thing.

Resurrect me in *my* flesh.

Do not pass through me.

⁴
Look how our mouths are bared.

And those, still strapped in their seats, the others.

I am held to myself by force.

No voyage home

over blossoming's broad back.

Forced down instead into the stalk.

Let your soul slip through radiance

Let not radiance cling to you Push through

⁵
How we walk the aisle: in flames.

Frothing time back into its corner.

In anguish here under the veil.

Going broken before some altar.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *spezzato*, Italian for *broken*.