

WE SAY THIS PRAYER

You opened up like a plum,
more than a plum,
you opened up like a wave,
more than a wave,
you opened up like a book,
more than a book,
you opened up like a wound,
like wood split along the grain,
like dry, cracked soil,
you opened up as I did,
I opened up as you did,
and the stag swooped in:
on one antler there were tanks mired in the swamp,
on the other the eyes of burning cities,
on one antler an infant tied by string,
on the other a toad, machine gun tucked between webbed
feet,
on one antler a church, the nave caved in,
on the other a linden tree in a rainstorm,
on one antler a moonlit boat,
on the other crosses of rye,
crosses of windows, of wood,
on one antler the sun disk of your face,
on the other the sun disk of my face,
and we say this prayer
for all time:
do not let our hearts be torn out,
sun god,
do not drown us in darkness:
we dance only once
here on the grass,
only once before you
can we be stone, water, flame,
birdwoman and birdman.

translated by William Jay Smith