

Say Thank You Say I'm Sorry

By Jericho Brown

I don't know whose side you're on,
But I am here for the people
Who work in grocery stores that glow in the morning
And close down for deep cleaning at night
Right up the street and in cities I mispronounce,
In towns too tiny for my big black
Car to quit, and in every wide corner
Of Kansas where going to school means
At least one field trip
To a slaughterhouse. I want so little: another leather bound
Book, a gimlet with a lavender gin, bread
So good when I taste it I can tell you
How it's made. I'd like us to rethink
What it is to be a nation. I'm in a mood about America
Today. I have PTSD
About the Lord. God save the people who work
In grocery stores. They know a bit of glamour
Is a lot of glamour. They know how much
It costs for the eldest of us to eat. Save
My loves and not my sentences. Before I see them,
I draw a mole near my left dimple,

Behind my mask. I grin or lie or maybe
I wear the mouth of a beast. I eat wild animals
While some of us grow up knowing
What gnocchi is. The people who work at the grocery don't care.
They say, *Thank you*. They say, *Sorry*,
We don't sell motor oil anymore with a grief so thick
You could touch it. Go on. Touch it.
It is early. It is late. They have washed their hands.
They have washed their hands for you.
And they take the bus home.

Jericho Brown is author of the *The Tradition* (Copper Canyon 2019), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. He is the director of the Creative Writing Program and a professor at Emory University.

This poem was published in "The New York Times Book Review" on June 21, 2020.