I Know, I Remember, But How Can I Help You

By Hayden Carruth

The northern lights. I wouldn’t have noticed them if the deer hadn’t told me
a doe her coat of pearls her glowing hoofs proud and inquisitive eager for my appraisal
and I went out into the night with electrical steps but with my head held also proud
to share the animal’s fear and see what I had seen before
a sky flaring and spectral greenish waves and ribbons
and the snow under strange light tossing in the pasture like a storming ocean caught by a flaring beacon.
The deer stands away from me not far there among bare black apple trees a presence I no longer see.
We are proud to be afraid proud to share the silent magnetic storm that destroys the stars and flickers around our heads like the saints’ cold spiritual agonies of old.
I remember but without the sense other light-storms cold memories discursive and philosophical in my mind’s burden and the deer remembers nothing.
We move our feet crunching bitter snow while the storm crashes like god-wars down the east we shake the sparks from our eyes we quiver inside our shocked fur we search for each other in the apple thicket—a glimpse, an acknowledgment it is enough and never enough—we toss our heads and say good night moving away on bitter bitter snow.


Source: Collected Shorter Poems 1946-1991 (Copper Canyon Press, 1992)