

The Bearer

By Hayden Carruth

Like all his people he felt at home in the forest.
The silence beneath great trees, the dimness there,
The distant high rustling of foliage, the clumps
Of fern like little green fountains, patches of sunlight,
Patches of moss and lichen, the occasional
Undergrowth of hazel and holly, was he aware
Of all this? On the contrary his unawareness
Was a kind of gratification, a sense of comfort
And repose even in the strain of running day
After day. He had been aware of the prairies.
He had known he hated the sky so vast, the wind
Roaring in the grasses, and the brightness that
Hurt his eyes. Now he hated nothing; nor could he
Feel anything but the urgency that compelled him
Onward continually. "May I not forget, may I
Not forget," he said to himself over and over.
When he saw three ravens rise on their awkward
Wings from the forest floor perhaps seventy-five
Yards ahead of him, he said, "Three ravens,"
And immediately forgot them. "May I not forget,"
He said, and repeated again in his mind the exact
Words he had memorized, the message that was
Important and depressing, which made him feel
Worry and happiness at the same time, a peculiar
Elation. At last he came to his people far
In the darkness. He smiled and spoke his words,
And he looked intently into their eyes gleaming
In firelight. He cried when they cried. No rest
For his lungs. He flinched and lay down while they
Began to kill him with clubs and heavy stones.

Hayden Carruth, "The Bearer" from *Collected Shorter Poems, 1946-1991*. Copyright © 1992 by Hayden Carruth. Reprinted with the permission of Copper Canyon Press, P. O. Box 271, Port Townsend, WA 98368-0271, www.coppercanyonpress.org.

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