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 Ells 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.


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