

Overnight

While wicker chairs overwintered
on the porch, and the color of spruce
seeped through the woods –
the elk gathered and lay down
like a fall of winter snow.

They drifted in moonlight
as if they were weightless
though the blank spaces they inscribed
smelled of musk and dried blood,
reminiscent of other high places.

Such dark creatures –
routine messengers of survival –
congregated like fugitive thoughts
around our amber windows
before migrating on.

By dawn, nearly thirty elk were gone
though they were beyond
recollection or numbers – legs unfolding,
steam rising from ancient backs – the sight –
something immaculate to pass on.

They chose where to repose:
our helpless house blocking the winds.
Sometimes this happens when we are not home –
before ever we arrive. Then we are the visitors
to the inscrutable elders of Watson Divide.

With no door opened,
no camera seized,
no gun reached for,
that was I who was
not watching you

who remembered
to see whether you are there
who waited
and did not forget
our truce of falling snow.

-- Jane Shaffer