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On the Sixth Day of April This Year

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ON THE SIXTH DAY OF APRIL THIS YEAR

On the sixth day of April this year
I picked a blade of grass
From a yard in Denver,
Colorado. It was
A dull and dusted spear,
Sprouted in soot, fed by fear
Of trampling feet;
Not knowing sun at all or a clear
Swept look that sky can have.
And back behind the cave
The city made I could hear
Mountains bellowing.
I heard them I swear
Under a sun yellowing.

I picked a twig of sage two days before
On a mountainside on April four,
Near Fort Collins, Colorado, this same year.
I'd been driven there
In an ancient car
By a young college pair.
He lean in tight jeans; she pregnant, fair,
White teeth, red lips, gold hair.
The trees whistled and whispered and
I crushed the brittle grey-green sage.
The pines were using the wind for a tongue.
I smelled the sage on my hands;
Then saw the small-balled dung
Of mule deer. "Look here!"
And before a crow could call
Or a magpie fall
Into a fir or a ponderosa pine,
The trio of deer walked into the clear
Before the trees on the mothering mountain.

One a young buck with antlers shy,
Two does with great dark eyes.
With watchful step they passed by.
Already the tall young mountain man
Had shot all three
With his camera slung
On his arm. And was creeping like a fourth,
Slowly after them down the north
Slope, as if compelled. The sky yelled
And raced around the snow-stained peaks
And dashed its light in striped streaks
On everything. On the boy who was moving
Like a muscled wild thing, shoving
The deer before him. You understood
He could stroke their long ears if he would;
They would stand and never move.
I heard the mountains.
I heard the mountains bellow
Under the sky of yellow.

I folded my piece of sage
In a handkerchief, and climbed in a cage,
On a later date,
On April eight
This year,
Of a railway train that rattled and battled
And shuttled and bumped
And swayed across a continent;
Eastward, downward, to Washington.
In a box of bricks
Under a tree of sticks
Where a lonely starling shrieks,
I opened the cloth.
From the green-grey stuff the scent came up.
Three deer, the buck and both
Dark-eyed does walked through the walls.
I crumpled the sage leaves in the cup
Of my palms and laid them to my face.

The deer stood
Watchful in a green-glowing aspen wood
In my house in Washington.
Mountains muttered.
Mountains roared.
They bellowed.
I heard them I swear.
I heard the mountains bellow
Under my walls of yellow.

—HELGA SANDBURG

THE WARNING

The sea shone
and the earth trembled
and man arose from the dust
of the street where he had been struck
down and turned his eyes
to the sky: at his side
stood the children and behind
the women with their aprons
twisted in their hands

and a voice from the mad
sky said "I am chaos:
I am blood: I am ruin
and devastation," and the trees
bent in the wind and the ships
at sea sailed into a new darkness:
there was only a hum
there was only a dull throbbing
there was only a weird whistle
in the world's brain.

—E. HALE CHATFIELD