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Antlers Against the Sky

By S. Omar Barker

On a high ridge where the wind blows keen,
And tall firs finger at the blue,
The buck has paused to watch again
   The red miracle of dawn break through.

His haunch is round with fat, for life—
   The good life of the mountain tops—
Has groomed and grown and ripened him.
   Waiting, my gun clicks as he stops.

Softly! For he has not heard
   This faint prelude to death, nor knows
That I am near. Softly . . . . Now
   Against the sky his proud head shows!

Spear-clustered antlers, sharp as fear—
   The old buck wears them with a pride
That recks not now of hunt nor hunter.
   Red gleam the dawn rays on his side.

He stamps a sharp, black hoof. Well down
   In a cove, a fawn bleats for its mother.
But high ridge winds salute the king!
   King of the ridges, he, no other!

Steadily now! Aim well the rifle!
   And quickly, too; for now he swings
Those lordly antlers high for flight!
   (God pity all wild frightened things!)

Gently I ease the rifle down.
   His gallant leap salutes the sky.
   The good life of the hills be his!
   We are of the ridge tops—he and I!