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Two Poems

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A Type of Low-Lying Cloud Resembling Stratus and an Altered Line from Shelley

In San Francisco the fog has fizzled out. Pacific feelers enlase the night no longer. No fingers slide into the headlands' gloves.

Tidings flood my inbox. *Powder keg in the Eastern Mediterranean. China's coal régime.* My phone has me lost.

The queen is dead and salmon probe riverbanks, attempting to escape polluted waters. I take in *circenses* in cloud-cuckoo-land.

The western snowpack has thinned, high-elevation wildfires to blame. It hasn't rained in three months. Two millimetres. I round down to nothing.

My hair is styled with sanitizer. I sip from reservoirs of neglect. What has my life done to me?

In the pipeline: pipelines. Fracked-gas mega-projects. An anxious hum, my constant friend.

The horse I flog won't drink so I change midstream, ride a mackerel instead. One's unself I sing.

There is no keeping up. From the channel, no exit. No air.

There is no leaf upon the forest bare.

Afternoon with Back Pain and an Altered Line from Keats

Almost dark, too late to accomplish anything. The street is a river, the fault of the house opposite, a behemoth under construction. For reasons I don't care to understand, groundwater gushes night and day from the pit. The fault of the owner. A vain fellow, circumventer of bylaws, disruptor of parking. Excavator of rock.

I am a man with little to complain about complaining about a man with even less.

In an hour, new words will amble home from kindergarten. Against the current, *squelette*. *Chauve-souris vampire*. *Loup-garou*.

Ever the naturalist, I once explained that nighttime hooting was only the neighbours' dog. Then the barred owl presented itself, naked and unmistakable, on the power line. Opening the door, *Look! Look!*

The forecast: fifty knots off the coast. No reason to go out, nothing to be gained. Werewolf wind, demon poesy. *Ubi sunt*, woodpeckers of spring?

Not properly the back, but injury to the hip that radiates pain. It is absurd and debilitating. The gluteus, both maximus and minimus. The long and the short of it. Alpha and omega.

Ponce de León died from the sap of a poisonous tree.

I fish my jacket from a wet heap. Hat on, hood up, I slink out. I have slunk. Headlamped, I am cyclops limping before all who approach.

I fetch my son, our Gore-Tex shells twin palls.

The night is clouded but no rain falls.

NICHOLAS BRADLEY teaches in the Department of English at the University of Victoria. His most recent book is *Before Combustion* (Gaspereau Press, 2023). He lives in Victoria, BC – in lək'wəŋən territory.