

**The Modest Contribution of Babies to the Protest
at the Member of Parliament's Office**

by Leslie Timmins

Wordless in their bundles, buckled to breast or back,
their faces original and invariably round as their eyes
stare out at our motley assembly, waving our signs
at drivers turning the corner, Arbutus at Broadway,
as we wait for the Member of Parliament to show up.

Just down the hill at Khatsahlano beach, we've all seen
the mussels in their thousands curled against each other,
blue-stone shells forced open by blast-furnace heat,
and star fish splayed, dried-out and barnacles still encrusted,
but dead from the drain of the sea from the reefs
in the scorch of mid-day, an intertidal genocide.

You move over to stand with two schoolgirls at the curb
holding identical signs – *STOP Fossil Fuel Subsidies NOW!*
and join in their laughter when they hoot and cheer
as a woman in a tin-coloured Corolla pounds her horn,
beams at them, a funny look on her face,
a complicated sort of joy, like seeing a falling star –

“There is hope,” Kafka said, “but not for us.”

You glance at one of the organizers still on her phone,
no word yet.

Over our white or blue pandemic masks, we look round
at each other, smile with our eyes, shake our heads
at someone's story about city folks buying up
island land, *bolt-holes*, someone says, *refuge*
from the wildfires burning in the east, smoke
and poisons blowing-in, and you wonder
Where will I run? with your beloved, dear friends,
good neighbours, *Where will we go?*

The young parents have stepped closer to the thin margin
of shade beside the building, their infants now milk-
or heat-dazed, lulled to sleep on a father's chest
or held up by a mother to catch a non-existent breeze,
a silent Greek chorus of irresistible tenderness,
as you look again at the impossibly new soft skin
of the impossibly young children,
a plenitude of the minimum
as Jimenez wrote, *that fills the world.*

What was it the old monks chanted
in their medieval stone halls—
standing all together as they asked
What are we here for?
and their answer, *Propter chorum*,
for the sake of the chorus,
as we wait for the Member of Parliament
to show up.

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