

When The Earth Breaks Up With Us  
Rob Budde

**MODEL**

## Weather Report (September 25, 2052)

it used to be that cool  
air would sluice down the valleys  
this time of year used to be  
fall—bugs would die down and  
frost would smack your tomatoes  
even though I would run out in my  
underwear to cover them with sheets

you laughed as I came back in shivering  
mouth open hopping foot to foot –  
oh your grin then

it used to be that the idea of a blustery day  
would not bring worry lines, that the idea  
of a windstorm didn't cause us  
to run to the cellar,  
that windfall wouldn't streak and collar the  
hillsides—like hair tossed or kites, but no

it used to be that love was an idea slid free  
from sunscreen and a lack of birdsong, the way  
you held your head tilted to listen for  
the end of the world, the end of tenderness

but no—this is where we are, broken  
up about the land, our hearts  
irrelevant, and all we can do is  
stare across the dry creek bed  
wish for that abiding touch again and again

## Forest Fires and Tinder

she strikes a balance between  
exasperated disbelief and morbid  
pessimism as profiles slide by  
dismissing off hand lit aphorisms for happiness  
and corny torches that disown the kink

mother nature is tired of the game, has  
given up on us, is cancelling her account

matches aren't calculated and predictions fail  
—there is no easy truce between  
you and me and this place

water shortages and rolling blackouts

'hey, in town for 2 days wanna hook up and do  
a line or two?' –this does her in,  
dick pics, the eggplant and  
peach emojis fly into the sky in a plume of hot ash

she can't tell you how to be better; you know all you  
need to know. a stroll to the river  
bank. a hand on bark.

there can be no reconciliation with her—she  
has given up on love. the browser closes  
and the underbrush catches

## Figures in a Post-Apocalyptic Desert

figures that I am standing here struck dumb  
and still stunned on this paltry  
pedestal of late night fine-cut  
and nameless pop-jazz

that I am on this path again  
with you arranging me  
nude, arms restrained and picturesque

that the numbers are in and yes  
2% is impossible and now a desert  
is ascending up the interior into our throats  
as if we were going to speak up anyway

that my shapely pose is just what you  
desired for the moment and your  
dawning boredom let the drawing  
trail off into apathy

that I still lift my arm in that way  
that you instructed—an object  
caught in the light of a too-intense  
sunray and even though my figure

makes me uneasy, I will hold onto  
that artistic moment—frozen, a measure  
of human hubris, my own  
culpability, and where to go next.

## The Weather

1.

I scan the channels for signs—anything,  
wind speed, barometric  
pressure, warm fronts, anything left in the pantry. . .

Maybe the extremes are telling us  
something: about contact, about motion  
in a derelict cream-coloured kitchen late at night.

If you snap your fingers, spirits in the northern  
lights will still answer, cascades  
of whispers raining down on your upturned face, the  
night air crackling with colour.

One year, five months, fifteen days, four hours,  
33 minutes and what in the act  
of waiting fails us? what, in such a state of stasis,  
transforms it into sorrow?

The hail punctured my raspberry plant leaves,  
wrecked the kale, and this constant  
weeping won't even stop when the wolves  
move by the house.

2.

It was partly cloudy, a mix of bulging  
cumulous and high textured cirrus; I  
think 'cirrus' is just the right word too—  
it fits perfectly, it needs for nothing.

The cats are losing their hair. Clouds are red  
with forest fire smoke. The cilantro  
on the window sill dried up. My chest is tight.  
A cat sits on me, staring, with meaning.

On the recording, the weather-woman makes jokes  
about romantic sunsets red with  
smoke and giggles at the thought of how  
evacuees might make do.

Tears don't rain; they're all blubbery a drape  
over a bean-bag chair, drawing  
droopy letters in a drama queen script  
in wobbly lines with y's dripping farther yet.

3.

The weather channel used to have ads for party tents. Extreme weather alerts scrolled like stock market prices.

We argued once that the media representations of global warming was and wasn't overwhelming people into inaction. High UV index that day. I remember.

In stories, it rains for months on end and the story is about how we find ways to float and survive all the water. . . except in desert stories.

Cold snaps pass, droughts end, pestilence subsides, wars tire themselves out, greed runs out of things to consume, the body accepts, receives grace.

4.

I look up at the night-sky lights with your eyes and know you would disagree with how I think you would interpret the green-purple script and call.

How bones are connected to moisture and air pressure. How flesh is connected to the electrical pulses of feeling. How the word 'threshold' sounds.

The word 'solitude' whispered from the borealis. Look—I don't want anything back. The weather is what we imagine it to mean. Caught a cold, in the rain.

Look up, take a picture; this is your mind spiralling into space and yes, I miss you, and tomorrow, the forecast is for more and more.

## Pandemopoetics

### 1. The Year of Slow

I can't help but read "covid-19"  
as "corvid" and I think of Raven

hovering over the remains  
of the season, clucking its pleasure

at the extras, because we overprepared  
our cities for retribution, stockpiling

alibis and why couldn't we just keep  
it simple, keep it in tune with the rivers

and rhythms of anything but a fast  
food takeout meal package blowing down

the empty street and you walked with me  
off the edge of the silent highway

cracking with weeds and other cure-alls,  
to the other side of the cutbank, chuckling

at bad jokes and a Raven flew down below  
by the river, croaked a little derision, wished

us well, because we would need it, and do.

## 2. All People

Who announces what and the economy  
shudders in disbelief that people would be

so essential, so palpable, as they scurry  
for provisions and realizations of what

is really necessary, loved, and the breaking  
news breaks on a shore of relationships

strong ones, a helping hand at a checkout,  
a gift placed on a townhouse step

when it is needed most, and  
viruses in the abstract  
are just doing their thing, like a mouse haunting

our attic, an ancestor or a mosquito  
chasing us home, and we  
respond, accept or retreat, and the air stings

just the same when we face the cold hard  
of the planet, and wait for each other, the sun

to show us what is to be done

### 3. Social Distonance

Quiet streets teeming with ghosts—  
all the calm projections tranquil  
because we have time

finally, to retrace steps, walk to  
the intersection, hold that glowing  
trauma close until it disperses  
in a serene watching

party, shimmering plastic screens a casual  
expectorant, and that fine line  
between individual exceptionalism and  
community will, comes down  
to a low-level hum, a mantra to bring the elders

home again, to calm the fluttering messages  
that spill hourly from loudspeakers  
in the town square,

to cancel that subscription  
to Globalization Quarterly  
because it weakened immunities all along

because its vectors of transmission are fictions  
invented needs we know now how to read

#### 4. Social Media

Tinder now earning its keep,  
keeping profiles and messages safe  
from our marauding bodies, those heaving  
porous gaps in conversation now

eloquent pauses in the day, planting  
seeds and cleaning pantries, I want  
to reach out to you all, stroke

the keys and move you but the measures  
are like glyphs in the window, cut paper  
hearts or shy waves of longing, long

posts about pets and I get all weepy  
over an owl in rehab in Burns Lake—  
listen, we don't know what this all means

but I am listening, hard, to the language  
that is spreading our throats, each alveoli  
a small cheer, a fist pump, you exist

## 5. Essential Vices

Like when the swelling goes down  
and you see the real damage, or  
after a flood and you pick up the necessary  
here and there detritus of our lives without

the toxic structures holding them in place,  
like cash registers, or cruise ships now  
floating monuments to what went wrong

and now, a snake coils in your chest as you  
resist the temptation to turn the virion  
into a meaningful metaphor, as if it was  
not meaningful already, self-replicating

and callous, a capsid like a chief financial  
officer selling off subsidiaries and layoffs  
fill the ER—I Facetimed you the other night

but you didn't answer and my MacBook,  
my pantry, and I are bound to secrecy;  
all receptors are suspect now and

if identity is a story then I am going to keep  
a little quieter, wrap myself in gauze, and sleep

## 6. A Sink Full of Bleach

Peering out the window of information  
all the accounts counting out the left  
out and the economics of a call

across the street, a 'hey, you doing okay  
there?' because yes lines of communication  
break                      social distills the means  
and Jerry on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> & George  
coughs into his blanket at 1:30 am and

curtain-twitching won't cut it Karen;  
J-cloths soaked in 70% what the fuck  
this wanting to hold out, hold on, hold  
you—there is no way to not succumb

hailed as we are by the Chief Medical  
Officer on the hour, a state of being  
beholden to the invisible, stretching

our hearts to hear the faint sounds  
of each other, scrubbing, pondering,  
marvelling at each breath.

## Naikoon

contact upon  
contact, zones of furtive  
creatures in their being  
careful over careful  
listening in on the epiphytes

the belief in that verdant act  
all the while old growth  
wit (wiid?) asserting itself  
in the wet salt air

but instead, unknowing,  
recording the whisper  
of licorice root,  
(little people), and  
strange compulsions to  
catalogue, while nearly  
stepping on the single delight

the forests, the roots of the people  
intertwined, yah'guudang  
or the ongoing art harvest and  
epiphanies of an unsustainable psyche with  
languages pooling around  
ankles—

where are you standing?

(beyond—first house point where Raven  
coaxed the first out and watchers wait,  
honouring ancestors)

you see this colonization and the use of beauty  
held aloft, a flag, a sound boom assertion—  
did you hear them sing?—  
an insignia sunk into the side of the ship

a coin  
left at the base  
of a tree,  
or sold, either  
just a small part  
of the larger murmur  
of turtle island

Rob Budde teaches creative writing at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George. He has published eight books (poetry, novels, interviews, and short fiction) and appeared in numerous literary magazines including *Canadian Literature*, *The Capilano Review*, *West Coast Line*, *Dusie*, *ditch*, *filling Station*, *Prairie Fire*, *Matrix*, and *Dandelion*. His most recent books are *declining america* and *Dreamland Theatre* from Caitlin Press, which was shortlisted for the BC Books Prize Dorothy Livesay Award. Manuscripts in process include *Testes* (a poetic engagement with maleness), *Panax* (a cross-genre relationship with Devil's Club), and *The Salmon Wars* (a speculative fiction trilogy about 'ecoterrorism' in a near-future Northern BC). He co-edits *Thimbleberry Magazine: Arts + Culture in Northern BC*.

