

Santa Barbara chiaroscuro

by [Paul Willis](#) in the [June 15, 2022](#) issue

Morning fog—such a blessing in this town of too much sun.
My wife doesn't think so, being from the Sierra foothills,

but the gray quiet in the oaks is the closest thing we have,
most days, to the moiling clouds of Oregon, where I grew up.

Now that I'm about to retire, we're looking for a new home
with equal parts light and shade—impossible to find, of course.

Milton's celestial radiance with only a slight diminution
during an artificial night would suit her just fine,

something like Alaska at the summer solstice
in an arrangement that continues all year long.

I'm more content in the valley of the shadow of death.
But the psalmist got it wrong, I think—it is *life* he meant.

The shadow of life! Clouds, rain, the water that sustains
our blood, our beating hearts! She gives me the eye.

That eye of hers. *My only sunshine*, I want to tell her.
Except, from me, that wouldn't be much of a compliment.