Empty Space – A Poem for Katherine Lee Bates

by Eric Edwards

I.
Where you walked then
we will have to weed to see.

Oh, not the plant kind
(and the trees too big)

I mean the houses, the houses
and the new buildings –

all that empty space
taken up and kept up.

All those sandy dirt roads
implying everything

beneath
now paving and paved

and even the walkways
to one side of the roads

no cobbles or grass,
macadam and tar.

The sky itself at night
clouded with land-lights

like an unearned halo
instead of the prickly stars

you must have seen
down to the edge of the horizon.

When the stars touched the horizon
they suggested a distance

we do not connect to anymore.

II.
Each building for you
surrounded by fields,

and the views from downtown,
ships’ masts and the same

breeze unimpeded
clipping the waves

one moment, coming on,
fretting your hair.

Your feet in the dirt,
every child’s foot

solidly in the dirt
one place to another

from dust to mud
to dust, and all

the time earthworms
working for a living.

So much empty space
even under the land.

III.
This afternoon I drive home
across town after visiting
a picture of your baby picture.

The traffic is close
enough that the SUV
in front of me
bumps into the SUV
in front of it.
They pull over, get out, and begin to meet each other as people.

This is strange, but I don't know anybody on the road either.

As I turn into my street the moon, yellow as a gold coin has been placed on the edge of the featureless evening, and I see that the coin is lustrous and renders a funny face, and that behind it the sky, in one airplane-less moment of no contrail and no cloud — reminding me of your century — is a simple and beautiful, empty blue.

Eric H. Edwards is a Woods Hole poet.

Palmer Avenue forks to right off Main Street. The John Jenkins home and whaling supply shop is seen beyond the Falmouth Village Green. The building with the wide porch, to the right of the First Congregational Church, is the Falmouth National Bank, the first bank on Cape Cod. Photo from *Voice of the Tide* by Leonard Miele, adapted by Jay Avila, Spinner Publications. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.