

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.