

Foreboding: A Eulogy

Appel Fellowship Summer 2020

Elizabeth Mitchell CMC '20



[Insert Image Here] [Insert Image Here]

A Note from the Author

This collection of poems was created under the funding of the Appel Fellowship. The initial aim was to travel to The White Cliffs of Dover, the city of London, and the city of Venice. By visiting these three locations, I planned to experience the beauty, culture, history and importance of these places. Through the medium of poetry, I hoped to paint a picture of what would be lost if these places were to fall to the axe of climate change, as they have been particularly negatively impacted. Yet, in early March the COVID-19 pandemic shut down travel leaving me at home in Connecticut writing about places I had only seen on a screen. The focus of my project shifted to include Block Island, RI as that is where I spent the months of May, June, July and August. By placing Block Island at the start of the collection, I am able to showcase the location that I was able to witness. The poems reflective of The White Cliffs of Dover follow in sequence as that location was still viable until the end of March. Venice concludes the collection as it was the first to close down due to the pandemic, and thus it felt the most out of reach. I left my poems connected to Venice and The White Cliffs of Dover untitled as they feel unfinished. They were written with the use of only second-hand knowledge. I walked their streets through Google Earth and YouTube video blogs. I read about the magic, but I was unable to view it through my own lens. Poetry offers intimacy, something I was not able to get with the locations in Europe. I am so grateful to have had this experience, and I am happy with what I was able to accomplish given the situation and current pandemic. Hopefully, I will be able to visit The White Cliffs of Dover, London and Venice giving names to the final poems.

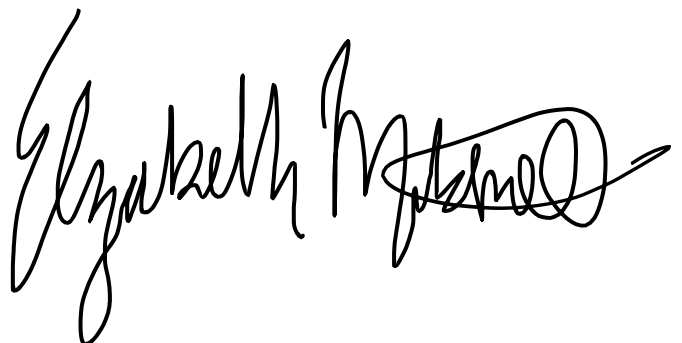
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and a stylized "J".

Table of Contents

i.	A Note from the Author.....	2
ii.	Block Island.....	4
	1. To Know My Name.....	5
	2. Vantage Point.....	6
	3. Matterhorn.....	7
	4. The Hunt.....	8
	5. You Can't Catch Me.....	9
	6. Detracting Value.....	10
	7. Will Our Children Know?	11
	8. Mother, forgive me for I have sinned.....	12
	9. I'm sorry It is our fault.....	13
iii.	The White Cliffs of Dover.....	14
	1. The White Cliffs of Dover 1.....	15
	2. The White Cliffs of Dover 2.....	16
	3. The White Cliffs of Dover 3.....	17
	4. The White Cliffs of Dover 4.....	18
	5. The White Cliffs of Dover 5.....	19
	6. The White Cliffs of Dover 6.....	20
	7. The White Cliffs of Dover 7.....	21
	8. The White Cliffs of Dover 8.....	22
	9. The White Cliffs of Dover 9.....	23
iv.	Venice, Italy.....	25
	1. Venice, Italy 1.....	26
	2. Venice, Italy 2.....	27
	3. Venice, Italy 3.....	28
	4. Venice, Italy 4.....	29
	5. Venice, Italy 5.....	30
	6. Venice, Italy 6.....	31
	7. Venice, Italy 7.....	32
	8. Venice, Italy 8.....	33
v.	Next Steps.....	34

*****THE ISLAND OF BLOCK ISLAND*****

To know my name

Here, my name holds no importance
We cede our existence to the brush
Even those whose names line road signs, trail markers and store
awnings
They fall into love, some generationally, some to individuals
Some even just to the wind
Reach their hand out, with no desire for compensation
No reparations, because they know their luck
The continuity of the bustling summers followed by unearthly winters
Stamps are licked and applied to your flighty green
When another stake is placed, you are promised more

Vantage Point

The peripheral filled of blue
In front – green speckled with weathered grey
All of life, ignoring two hovering deformities
Isolated – yet, inhabitants seek the warmth of others
The higher bidder latches
Onto the ability to securely
View the horizon – unobstructed.
Exclusivity is not the goal

 Private is relative...is it July or January?
From where I stand, the collective
Bunches on either side of the green
They flock to the blue, one is deeper
In color, in capacity, in memories
The other allows for the land
 To disappear
 Into the blueness

Matterhorn

Found a replica domestically
Go to the edge
Only at the lip of your adventure
Clay masses freckled with pebbles
Remind you, there is a limit
Behind you, those that crumble

For once, the fence exists only to your rear
It's gentle nudge on the small of the back
No longer an obstacle but an advantage
You may exist here for your human lifetime
But, as the clay crumbles
Less of the Matterhorn lives on.

The Hunt

We've dangled the carrot as they say.
No stick needed.
Put your fingers in mine, jumping
Down off of those mopeds.
You know they kill right?
You say you do it because you want to "See it all"
The pavement winding tracks of a rollercoaster
Strapping in for the same ride each day,
Unbuckle, put your feet to the ground
If I promise a reward will you follow me?
Behind that misshapen thirsty tree lies an orb,
The brittle bark – don't ignore
Find the brown and scratchy moss, one is hidden
Yes, lift your eyes up to see the vast blue
Not all bad
Pilings, they don't scratch with barnacles
You wonder where
The lines have gone, the tide never went out
Congrats. - you escaped the carnival, all it took
Was a sphere of glass
Please
Please
Look through it.

You Can't Catch Me

Explain. We let roots
Grow and dream.
Hope to connect.

THEN

We go in and slice
Cut and wreak havoc
For us to trample upon the roots.

What hypocrites.

Only we can blindly believe
Our desire is to outrun our footprint
It breaks out ahead of us
All while imprinting our hasty chase just as deep.
Just as damaging.

Detracting Value

Was the most common phrase,
Yet the tales of reduction always came next.
What about when there is nothing left?
What if this ends up being the last great hope?
What will we do the?
They do turn
But all I hear are the grunts and sighs.
I want to pinch the top of their ear, drag them to the old clam beds,
demand them to tell me another solution, kick them till they concede,
cry hot tears while them watch.
But no – I just say a thanks.
They do turn.

Will Our Children Know?

Does the sun kiss
Or scorch? Is it nurturing?
Or vengeful? It shows its love
By branding your skin
Are you being rewarded?
It feels different when my toes
Curl between the fiery grains of sand
I don't think my appreciation
Fades – I don't yearn for the chilling waves
Hits harder than a set of knuckles
To the jaw, and the memories
Only resume in full color in the flames
Of the bonfire at the water's edge
Will these breaths of air filled
With care and recognition be a taunting
Story we whisper to our children

Mother, forgive me for I have sinned.

Don't take it personally.

We didn't mean to do all of that.

We didn't know how much it could hurt you

Don't place your guilt on me.

It hurt me, so I can't tell you I'll be okay.

Take responsibility for the holes you dug.

I'm sorry It is our fault

I owe it to you to say ~~say~~[^](stop saying)

I'm sorry.

Take responsibility. To continue to
take my guilt and toss
pebbles of my tears will
one day stone you to death.

I think of you, yet not always.

Wow, that's sounds worse written out.

Yours truly, I don't act like one of yours.

I toss it out, down the dark.

I can't see your reaction.

Making it easy to hide

*****THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER*****

[The White Cliffs of Dover 1]

Let the air know it
Should fill my hair, cheeks,
Pages with its sweet gust

Take the slice from my tongue
Wipe the sleep from my eyes
Replace the frustrated tears
With those salty from the sea

Let the air know
It smells different here, more like itself
Without that, the suffering of the young
Straining to beat the truth into
Everyone else

[The White Cliffs of Dover 2]

A white flag

Sits upon the edge

Of the sea

As if an invader

Approaches her shore

It retreats

[The White Cliffs of Dover 3]

As a boat skims the surface, defying the Great Isaac,
The whitest bubbles are left behind.
How does something so seemingly blue
Foam into an ivory hard to reproduce?
It can shapeshift without us, yet the waves that crash at shore were
Always meant to be a part of the sea.
The mates who travel through the abyss
As if they, the lonely man, can walk
On water - invalidates the old men of the sea
They skim the surface while the crashing shore has gathered Energy
from all the way to the murky bottom.
Who gave the permission to recreate that?

[The White Cliffs of Dover 4]

A shove from behind
All five fingers curl
To leave that slight
White imprint. They
Had to push against my soft skin
Lined with peach fuzz
Nails cut short, so no
Skin scratched

Given the first step,
I begin to place my feet
Under me. I am running
In a race, chased by a _____
I can't seem to outrun

[The White Cliffs of Dover 5]

Drown out the ambient noise
Comfort the child

If they get too used to silence, who
Knows what they will be like

Soothing, run your hand
Through a dry bowl of rice

Nothing in that bowl breaks
Through to your skin

The starch coats the wrinkles
Of your palm

~SENSATIONAL MEMORY~

When the parent who dreams
Of sleep presses play on “crashing waves”
Do they know the force
of the ocean?

The same thing
Stripping coastlines,
Sinking islands,
Bleaching its inhabitants,
And starving humans

Is rocking their child
To sleep, so soothing.

[The White Cliffs of Dover 6]

Take roughest sandpaper
Accelerate the demise
Rub the edges – so they smooth
Making it all look prettier
Doesn't have to come at such a cost.
Each year
 The beaches change
 Some paths narrow
 Some paths widen
 Some paths are lost
Those men in boats
They couldn't recognize this as land
Not the same they once saw

[The White Cliffs of Dover 7]

If I could I would construct a moat locking up the residents taking the mirror to their face I would wait for the shift the one that'll take my breath in its hand like a small bird unable to fly the stakes I place with the sand splinter the tips of my fingers it runs parallel to the skin visible to my eye yet to remove requires the removal of a large chunk of skin something I'm unable to complete myself

[The White Cliffs of Dover 8]

You must be tired.

You defend us without much gratitude.

I see those wrinkles, deep like trenches.

Are they from your tears?

You crack under the heat of the sun.

You turn from grey to chalky white.

I know those who fear you.

Do you choose not to catch us when we plummet from your edge?

I'd get us if you watch and do nothing.

[The White Cliffs of Dover 9]

Okay, so here is the situation
The beauty before you
May not be at your disposal
The next time you want a weekend getaway

You don't just get to sit in
Your London flat, every light on
Every appliance plugged in
Then come to the coast, ignorant to
Your place in this mess
Are you starting to get it?

Your Instagram stories, tweets
And Sunday farmers market
Don't change the fact that the coast
Continues to creep closer to you.
Are you starting to get it?

If your flat looms on the top floor,
if you maintain a perch within the top
One percent, then you, yes you
"Use 175 times more carbon on average
than some from the bottom 10 percent¹"
Are you starting to get it?

It feels like you don't see the world around you
Take off those rose-colored glasses, because
The smoke is getting in my eyes
My sky is orange, but not in a beautiful way

¹ <https://ypn.poetrysociety.org.uk/workshop/turn-up-the-volume-poetry-challenge/>

In an evacuate from your home kind of way
Are you starting to get it?

Because if you aren't.
That would make me shred the
Last piece of hope. This isn't a fight
For beauty. It's for survival

*****THE CITY OF VENICE*****

[Venice 1]

If you took away inspiration
Wind under the arms of the CREATIVE
A dictionary littered with a lost language
A painting stands as an ode to a relic
Landscapes capturing a history not forgotten

“I never thought there would be a day that it had to be explained”
The little boy asked, “Is that real?”

Gentle patience came over, a lump in the throat

“Where I grew up, I wish I could whisk you through the streets as my
father had”

Cobblestone cradling my first steps
Canals, the streets, unlike those paved endless highways

I couldn't save it alone.

[Venice 2]

The streets are flooded

Once a metaphor

 No no, move up!

Duels as a statement

Bridging two wandering sockets, without. You couldn't.

Straight – window or concrete?

Down – blue or murky grey

Up – blue, but it's comforting, familiar and expected

The blue invades the ashen stone

 A lackluster attempt leaves the phenomenon with the name "Aqua
Alta"

Expected, not welcomed

Slam, the dreams of many

Wanderers and shopkeepers alike

[Venice 3]

Fleeting, eyes locked on the pixels
As thin as the feeling of a coat of salt – would've been
Sitting upon them, more floating in the air
It would require grace and balance

Directly below, appearing
Full and dense – resembling a cotton ball
Straight out in front – but untouchable
If we stop needing the temp checks and boxes of tissues
Then I could breathe in the air under those clouds
For now, they become the cotton pads
Used to wipe the streams of black
Under my eyes. Because this isn't
How it is supposed to go.

[Venice 4]

Before 1966 no one believed I could be lost
Water whipped into stiff cream peaks
Cathedrals don't bob on the surface
Not rubber ducks for the bathtub

Now they think I "float"
I made them see it this year
Stores locking up, tourists wearing waders
Leave I tell them!

Se non conosce le mie strade
Lasci!
Se non legge I segni
Lasci!

[Venice 5]

Beauty stands old, worn
Old lines, look at the buildings
Zebra stripes mark the marble
The old man on the corner, ask him
Tells tales of each mark, the people
Who stay don't forget.

Ear to the ground, oars
Slice the water, the summer heat
I don't feel. At least I can place my cursor on
Street view, my body horizontal
If the lines are hidden by the time
Our masks are in the trash – I won't
Be surprised

[Venice 6]

Instagram made it famous,
I guess it's good for one thing
Making people feel as though they
Are connecting, helping, fighting

Libreria Acqua Alta
Someone had to make
It appealing, inviting
"Instagrammable"

A neat trick
Everyone amused
The New York Times
Even covered it

The books floated
In their safe ceramic
Home away from
The relentless water

Seems like a
Band-Aid for a city
That will lose
Written history

But for now, we will
Run the tubs for our little ones
Leaving the light on behind us
Ignorant. Unable to connect the dots

[Venice 7]

The truth is that this is not just about the
Loss of a dynasty, but a place
Where children are born
Where memories are made
Where water continues to rise

The truth is that this is not the
Only place that needs protection
Where tides are rising
Where water is polluted
Where people are forced to flee

The truth is that this beacon
May be beyond our saving
Where floods are common
Where living is unsustainable
Where the history may be lost

This is the truth! This is the truth! This is the truth! This is the truth!

[Venice 8]

Listen,
First it was the streets lining
The front of the cathedral
Next?

LIsten,
Then it was the first floors
The homes of many
Next?

LISten,
Then it was the above the raised walkways
Nowhere to walk
Next?

LISTEn,
Then it was above our rainboots
The tourists didn't leave
Next?

LISTEn,
Then it was past the boarded-up windows
Unsure how to protect the lives
Next?

LISTEN,
I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO
MAKE YOU REALIZE YOU ARE THE ISSUE
Next? – It is your home.

*****NEXT STEPS*****

Next:

You. Me.

Wonder why we can't see the sky.

Dreams of silky blue above.

You. Me.

We have read the paper and seen the IMAX

Dream of ease and takeout

You. Me.

I.

I dream of the day where the plane touches the tarmac and I get to see these places take disposables and show them to my kids but if the pandemic continues and the jet planes keep running with no one in them puffing out the toxic air then

You. Me.

We will dream about returning to a place we will never reach.

We will tell the stories of the days of the times of the memories that will never be recreated and that is our legacy one of fights and hypocrisy

You. Me.

We need to see the red haze in the sky

Stop dreaming of blue

AND MAKE IT HAPPEN.