

**Portrait of A Mountain**, a poem by Eliza Bienstock

Today, I was told to look at a mountain. I've seen them before. Cradling one town after the next in the seeming security of their strong sierra peaks. They're unavoidable really.

I suppose I've found fleeting senses of safety in our brief city stops, where concrete streets replace winding pebbled pathways. Where my shoes stand out against solid grey slabs instead of disturbing sparkling sedimentary collages. Where air is shared with the many man-made moving pieces of urban activity instead of with green forests and brown feathered birds.

It's harder to breathe in these synthetic centers. But when I look out the window, the sharp square skylines built on the back of concrete condos sting less than those made up of asymmetrical mountain summits.

Today, I was told to look at a mountain. To describe every inch of its dignified and destructive frame. To dissect and display the clandestine and cryptic nature of my relationship with it.

I suppose my race running from the mountains is over. It's ironic really, losing to that which stands still.

So here's a portrait of a mountain. Outlined with trivial visual truths, colored in with painful paintbrush memories. I strive for accuracy but like the motionless mountains, time is hard to keep up with. Each day marks murkier memories and I struggle to distinguish past reality from my own embellished fantasies.

The snow-covered caps are us at the movie theaters. We're leaning over the cloudy candy counter, counting on those ten minutes of previews to secure our snow sprinkled chocolates, our own mini-mountain tops, in peace. We're late so we pay in both dollars and the opening act of our chosen feature. Chocolate caps secured, we push off the glass, leaving behind sweaty fingerprints, and shuffle into the theater. The higher our tiptoes, the louder our mini-mountains rattle, cueing one pointed look after the next. Soon, it's us against Cinema Seventeen.

The naked rock, fancied and favored by the sun, is your body, sunkissed and rare. Chiseled, like the sharper rock ledges protruding through the daisy sprinkled slopes. You got tougher every year, but kinder to: a feat rarely triumphed. The finer formations imitate teeth, wide like your grin, which lit up my world, and our world, and her world, and his world, and their world. You accepted others like those meandering mountain paths, caring for those who sought your aid, regardless of factors that everyone but you noticed.

The falling water is you in your last moments and the whirlpools are everything after-- deep, disturbed, and lost. The cliffs make me mad and, in an alternative universe, I'd bestow them with a newer and more artistic meaning. For now, it's too soon. I'll disclose, though, that the green circled bunny hills of upstate New York don't pose commensurate precipices. Seeing these in their complete and irrefutable beauty taught that you went out in a place comparable to your own magnificence. You deserved that.

This mountain is its own and so were you. Unique and bold and so brave. When I walk away, it will be gone. I'll call upon memories, which will appear at first and then gradually become less clear. I'll know posed pictures and written words won't aid remembrance because, this time, I've lost a mountain before. I'll miss this mountain, but I've missed you more, so I know I'll be okay.