

Clare Proctor

Sappho's Leap

(After Felicia Hemans)

The women are ceaseless. The women are ceaseless as the waves. The women are ceaseless as their own echoing sighs. The only way for the women to be still as the sea-bird hovering on the death wind, is for the women to throw themselves from cliffs.

If the women want to jump from cliffs, they should dive in a perfect arc. The sun should be setting behind them or fingers of the dilated moon sifting over their bodies, the sea a molten silver. Their fragile forms should be the shape of a crescent as they dive, a flattering silhouette. The women can be gentle and sentimental or fierce and tragic, but at all times when jumping from cliffs, the women should be beautiful. Men may want to paint the women later.

The women should hurl themselves into the sea because their love is unrequited. Their unrequited love must not be for other women, but for a man/sea god. The women's pain should be private unless they are jumping from a cliff; they should cry in a pitiful fashion, a few tears on the cheek subtle as pearls. They should avoid ugly crying, or they may not be a fitting subject for a painting.

The women should consider the weather, should pick a day that best fits their form and colouring. They should pair their outfit with the sun/ moon/white cliffs. Their dress should flit around in the wind enough to expose bare legs and should cling enough in the rain/sea mist to delineate their breasts. The women should keep their hair long so that it can whip around their faces and stream behind them as they fall.

The women should fall in slow motion, over and over again, into the mind of the man/sea god. They should never land on the rocks, breaking their body and shattering their face, neither of which would reflect well on the man/sea god. Women who are planning on jumping from cliffs should check the tides.

Women jumping from cliffs should be recovered in one piece, their free dark hair pushed back from their pale faces, which should look at peace now that they can sleep forever in the unslumbering sea, dream about the man/sea god that they absolutely, definitely love.