

SUSAN GLICKMAN

Sending a Postcard to Julie in Iceland From San Miguel de Allende

It's not something I take for granted
though the ballpoint skates easily enough
on the slick surface of the card
and the stamp, a Mexican strawberry, 100 pesos, promises
quick and efficient passage.

I jot down a few phrases about the clarity of the air
in these mountains, so pure
"light-headed" takes on a new meaning —
a luminosity that keeps us drunk —
and think of the lengthening nights you inhabit.
What little-used knowledge does constant dark
elicit? Or, more likely,
it's not constant, but a palette of varying greys,
an old-master drawing lit by a few strokes
of white.

Is the world new to you?
Or is it just a species of memory, this landscape,
as all landscapes are, and what's new
is yourself? As though the skin, that tough but flexible
membrane,
were merely a convention, an arbitrary boundary
to keep the soul from dispersal.
I will stop here, you decide, but the *here*
is always changing.

In grade five we made papier-mâché planets,
a yellow sun and silvery moon,
imagined intergalactic conquest as we hurled them
around the room.

The next year our horizons narrowed
to a topographical model of the earth —
I liked the mountains of gritty plaster;
painted oceans were never convincing.
Later still, pages of maps detailed rainfall,
crop rotation, statistics in coloured markers:
a flat and abstract world.

I remember none of the numbers, can barely dredge up
capital cities memorized as a schoolyard game.
Anyhow, many of the names have changed.
But I remember those planets whizzing by, the earth the
size
of an orange, the sun a grapefruit, the delicate moon

a plum; their orbits fixed in my head
forever.

Twenty years later those memories are what
connects us, 7,000 miles apart
as the crow flies
if crows flew across the Atlantic.
I ransacked three atlases looking for
other links; found only
volcanoes, earthquakes, the occasional hot-spring.
Like Canada, Mexico and Iceland are mostly uninhabited —
people live on the edges, the coasts
valleys and plains — everything else
is rock.

So I send you this card, a picture of where I am
and you send me yours
and in this way we annotate memory,
bring our landscapes up to date.
As I write, the late afternoon sun sends long shadows
across the room
and lights the flares of bougainvillea outside
my window. The buds are orange,
open blossoms a gentler rose; sunset flowers.
Now the grackles fly down to roost
in the *jardín*; purposeful birds whose harsh voices echo
the corn-mills
no longer grinding at this hour,
the only thing lovely about them their extravagant tails.

And now the church-bells ring.
Wind sifts the jacarandas,
clouds stormy with oncoming night wash closer
to the horizon and the bougainvillea
goes out.
How quickly day's heat disperses once darkness
comes down! Now I can imagine
Iceland. Write soon.
Tell me what you see, fill in our map.

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