

The Postcards on the Wall

By Kiana Rawji, 2018

POSTCARDS like string lights hang across the walls of my dorm room. It is the end of April and I have four weeks left of high school and the sunlight is pouring onto my carpet and postcards like string lights hang across the walls of my dorm room. I am sitting alone, sitting in silence, starting to think about the things I have seldom had time or room to think about and when I look up to the walls, I see the postcards, strung along a piece of golden thread. Over four years, my collection has grown; pictures of vibrant Indian street shops, a vast Jordanian desert, short buildings stacked along an Italian coastline, and an enchanting cityscape glowing against the Singaporean sky have joined the ranks of curvy Cancun palm trees, a Tanzanian dhow against a red sunset, a smirking Parisian painting, a freshly powdered Albertan mountaintop.

I have been to all of these places, and I have both found and left behind parts of myself in each. Here, in this place—a dorm room in Deerfield, Massachusetts—I am what I learned and felt and was in each of those places on the wall. Yet there are also things I learned and felt and was in each of those places that will remain there, that I can never take with me beyond those borders. That I can never have again, can never go back for who I am going back is not who I was going for the first time.

Can we ever relive a memory? Is a memory a pure, lovely thing because we can replay it, re-feel it upon diving into those deep bowls in our minds where memories accumulate? Or is a memory beautiful precisely because it can never exist again?

Take an adult remembering lifting her pillow one Saturday morning in July, when she was six years old, checking for the money that the tooth fairy left behind. Perhaps she can say she remembers the joy, the wonder of imagining a small, flying creature gracefully tucking a dollar under her pillow at night. But knowing now that such a creature is nonexistent, she cannot possibly feel again what it is like not to know that crucial piece of knowledge. We cannot experience the same moment the same way after having sailed awhile on our canoes along the stream of time; certainly, we can use the oars of memory, stroking the water this way and that so as to turn around, go backwards momentarily, to a rock we had sailed over in the past... but returning to that rock, we are coming from a different angle; we cannot glide over it in the exact same manner—it will not strike the bottom of the boat as it did before, and water will not splash into the boat, or slap cold against our bodies in the same places and in fact, the water may not splash at all...

But postcards. Why did I start collecting them to begin with? I began during the summer before ninth grade; I wanted to be able to say that I collected something—it could have been pens, bottle caps, coins, or curious rocks, but I happened upon a postcard in a gift store—where in the world it was, I do not remember—and it was convenient; I wanted to possess some simple marker of identity that was unique, that I could fold neatly into one sentence that triggered attention, interest; I was a girl, a student, a Canadian, all these things that many people are, but what I was that the next girl student Canadian was not was a collector of postcards.

And yet, aren't we all collectors? We are constantly amassing the things that happen to us each day, keeping stock of our experiences, our conversations, our body's signals—it's greatest ecstasies and most miserable defeats throughout a day—collecting

firsts and lasts, moments and ghosts of moments, gained things and remnants of lost things, collecting the myriad of *things* happening to both mind and body—and all those *things* happening to us, the *things* of life and of living keep flowing like a stream of water trickling, sometimes pouring, into the cupped hands of our souls. And when the water overflows, those hands release our collections of things into bowls stored deep in ourselves, in places that are reachable but only with conscious effort. And after much time, we reach back into those old bowls, and find that the water has dried, hardened into thin rectangles of paper like postcards, the edges folded, curved, frayed even if so slightly... now in my mind, postcards swirling, postcards trickling, postcards pouring...

The postcards are falling. One end of the golden string has slipped off its hook, and postcards are falling down, hitting the ground, hitting each other, making a mess. It is the end of April and I have four weeks left of high school and the sunlight is pouring onto my carpet and now I must clean up my postcards.

Inspired by Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall"