

Postcard

by Margaret Atwood

I'm thinking about you. What else can I say?

The palm trees on the reverse
are a delusion; so is the pink sand.

What we have are the usual
fractured coke bottles and the smell
of backed-up drains, too sweet,
like a mango on the verge
of rot, which we have also.

The air clear sweat, mosquitoes
& their tracks; birds & elusive.

Time comes in waves here, a sickness, one
day after the other rolling on;

I move up, it's called
awake, then down into the uneasy
nights but never

forward. The roosters crow
for hours before dawn, and a prodded
child howls & howls
on the pocked road to school.

In the hold with the baggage
there are two prisoners,
their heads shaved by bayonets, & ten crates
of queasy chicks. Each spring
there's race of cripples, from the store
to the church. This is the sort of junk
I carry with me; and a clipping
about democracy from the local paper.

Outside the window
they're building the damn hotel,
nail by nail, someone's
crumbling dream. A universe that includes you
can't be all bad, but
does it? At this distance
you're a mirage, a glossy image
fixed in the posture
of the last time I saw you.
Turn you over, there's the place
for the address. Wish you were
here. Love comes
in waves like the ocean, a sickness which goes on
& on, a hollow cave
in the head, filling & pounding, a kicked ear.