

Photographs of Mountains

*the face was the face of a stranger. It came upon
him nearer now, quite as one of those expanding fantastic
images projected by the magic lantern of childhood. . . .*

Henry James, *The Jolly Corner*

His desk in those days faced a dark wall panelled
in fluted, false maple. Over the cracks, the imitation
knots and oddly symmetrical pattern he pasted photographs —
small spots of colour arranged
at eyelevel like little panes of stained glass or even
mailslots on a dark door — open
to sharp light and a flurry of postcards
from remote places —

and the slot slapped closed.

So his mountains
his sunblue portraits of slopes and long rows
of snowcliffs in the April light
(he tried to transpose them from frame
to the square page on his desk)

went dim,

himself, a small flaw
figured on the ridge
on the white margin
of a photograph, vanished
when he lowered the desklamp —

He left that room, the rooming house
years ago and went west, settled in the mountains —
wonders now if he returned
would he find those little windows
boarded up, drafts seeping through cracks in the panelling
dust clotted in the corners like forms of transparent snow —

and if on the way out the young climber he left
should pass him quite unexpectedly on the stairs —

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