Pelicans

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The city like a quarry—a vast stone thicket. Four lighthouses, one for each cardinal direction (beginning
to crumble). Streets aligned according to the path of the solstice-sun. All architecture sacred. Cemeteries in good working order. Wilderness tamed to line the streets. Pelicans with phosphorescent eyes hypnotize the citizens, basking in scenes of meadows projected from the lighthouses as if soaking in amphetamines. Still we sing

our city in a mirror
in a mirror.

Hallways are empty. Infinite hallways are infinitely empty. Hallelujah.

I. Invisible municipal workers operate on vague streets, ticketing abandoned cars and noting landscape violations. They're assigned strict quadrants to patrol, but often hold meetings on their borders in the alleys between houses (the windows on either side projecting rhythmic shades of blue and pink). The familiar alleys full of trash and dead leaves.

The citizens inside basked in balmy conversation, jumping light, and television lullabies. Like when they used to fall asleep at dinner parties and funerals as kids, when they would sit awkwardly with other kids around other televisions on other couches and wonder why the grown-ups wouldn't talk about anything that mattered. That's when they learned to fake interests and force laughs.

They held up inside their houses, talking to relatives and old friends on the telephone, promising plans and wallowing in languorous baths of nostalgia. They went jogging. They stepped outside in the morning and wondered if they looked like they were going jogging. They wore sweats and headbands just to be sure, and ran past neighbors getting their mail, strangers walking their dogs, and the municipal workers asleep on the sidewalk. They considered entering the corporate challenge that year—they could run the marathon—really get in shape.

The City Hall depended on these civilians to bow to celestial splendor, to be hypnotized by the cosmos. The legislators knew that with the populace looking towards some distant place, the path, and all its landscape and tumult, would remain out of focus. These city officials spoke in melodic hums. In heated council meetings, it was not uncommon to be reminded of a radiator symphony.

II. These municipal workers sometimes wandered past their old homes, standing out front and wondering what they'd missed. I remember a few who left keys buried next to flowers, or rigged windows so they could get back inside. They entered quietly: pushing in the keys notch by notch, opening the doors slowly, sliding open the windows only halfway, climbing through awkwardly, trying to avoid whatever may be on the floor. If there even was a floor left, that is.

(After their husbands disappeared, the women often became reclusive. They stayed in their beds for days of apathy with an occasional drizzle of severe depression. Their weariness spread, and their houses deteriorated into wooden skeletons or vacant lots. Eventually the decay radiated from their small Montana town across all of the Earth—dissolved everyone and everything—buildings crumbled and sank into the ground—the wasteland remained—with the poor souls too full, too beautiful to let themselves fade—
the souls with something to live for—)

Owen lifts himself into his old home's open window, knocking his head on the bottom of the window frame. He stifles his grunt and lowers himself onto the floor. It shouldn't have been so far down, he thinks as he dangles, groping for the ground. He touches down on dust and fractured floorboards. The ceiling looks like it's about to collapse: jagged patches worn away, revealing yawning navy sky. The entire house is black as the desert at night. His steps search his old living room, decay surrounding him, pictures askew, furniture leaning over

ready to die. The faint sound and light of the bedroom television drifts down the hall. He fixes his invisible combed hair and dusts off his invisible uniform pants.

He walks towards the bedroom, dragging his fingertips over a long pine table lining the wall—a wedding gift. His hand: catches on candle sticks, caresses picture frames, and dusts off torn books. His feet: kick debris, snap dead leaves, and find unseen artifacts to stumble on. Everything once familiar and welcoming in his home feels monstrous and foreign in the dark—slowly decaying.

He turns down the hall, and sees the silhouette of his dog Jericho, his sleek black fur barely highlighted by the television's rhythmic flashes, staring with his head bowed sadly towards the bed.

Sleep, Alina, suspended in annular sheets.

III. A Dane with wavy mahogany hair traces a peace sign with her foot through tide washed Oregon sand. She has given up her name. She loses balance and laughs a mesmeric laugh. A film of sea washes over her feet, barely catching her nightgown. On either side, two pillars of crystal connect the swaying sea to an overcast dulling the colors of the shore. Like umbilical cords. Mesmeric chords.

The Dane lies down on the sand. Rain drops play a lullaby like a liquid music box. The columns crumble and add tremendous splashes to the weeping symphony of the Ocean Children:

(clouds).

Their leaden bodies lighten and stretch out over Victoria, BC (cradled in a dome of cosmic navy). She'd heard about it first on the radio, driving to the coast with the windows down, smoking:

"A disturbing phenomena in Montana. An expanding force is corroding anything it comes into contact with, turning objects from crops to whole cities into sand within days. Without an understanding of the event there is no foreseeable end to it…"

The Dane dreams: The harbor sings a lullaby of northern lights. The lullaby is born of the wavering reflections of streetlights and sails, and choirs of transparent civil servants humming, Good morning. Aloha. Hello, highway.

IV. Owen pets his Labrador and walks into the bedroom. "Good boy," he says. Pelicans occasionally dive in and out of the holes in the ceiling, swallowing mouthfuls of azure air. Alina hangs by her hands from the ceiling above their bed, pale and comatose, her hands and feet bound by thin rope. His reaches timidly for the knots. Slowly, trembling like fire. her beautiful unshaven legs.

The television projects rhythmic blues and talks to itself about an earthquake in California—then it flashes colors of peaches: electric visions of bombs.

Owen sits down on the bed. "Alina, this place is falling apart." He buried his face in his hands. "I wonder where you're walking. Don't wander far." Her toes barely caress the sheets. He sighs. He looks down at his hands, reflecting a rhythmic blue. The gaps in the ceiling show dull orange clouds, reflecting the lights of the city. Alina sinks into the ceiling like a ghost. "No, darling. Don't go. Where are you? Tell me where you are!"

The television talks to itself about rising sea levels, and Owen falls asleep on his arm. "Manifest destiny," the television says over and over. "Manifest destiny. Manifest destiny."

V. (A small town in Montana. Portland. Seattle. Sacramento. LA. Las Vegas. Phoenix. Albuquerque. Des Moines. Detroit. Quebec. New York. Libraries and museums. Late-night diners and apartment complexes. Car dealerships and soup kitchens. Bars and tourist traps. Ghettoes and suburbs. Roads and walls. Signs and arrows. Soldiers and architects. Gas station attendants and mechanics. Surgeons and priests. Drug dealers and farm workers. Astronomers and journalists. Buddhists and anarchists): all vanished in time.

Visions of Alina: an apparition blushing in the sky. Her faint image pulses and smears and rears out of focus. Alina blushes, looking down through the ceiling. Her eyes spark. She flashes on the walls. "Meee?" she drones, flattered.

Then we were lost to the tundra. The Earth dry, level, and eternal.

VI. Alina stands in the center of a desert basin. The mountains surround her like worn jaws of a long-dead beast—in the east they loom immense, silhouetted by glowing golden dawn.

Good morning. Aloha. Hello, Nevada.

She has nowhere to go. Nothing waits for her past those mountains but more mountains and more sand. She had climbed through three valleys already, and the landscape never changed. She doesn't care. She's just lonely. She doesn't know why. Who does she miss? She has nowhere to look. She crashes onto her knees. A breeze of darkness swims through her mind. Then—it engulfs her like the rush of underwater.

The sun thaws the sky and the sand absorbs her body.

No water, draught of her mind, neon oasis. Fade the desert and the sky. Melted candlelight illuminates the lounge, dripping through the ceiling into a fountain, down from the electric tundra of the desert, lighting the dark faceless patrons.

"Wax doesn't melt. Liquid dawn. Sweet visage, dear siren, pools of obsidian and neon," Alina's mother hums to her, on a couch in the lounge. "You have blown only slightly off course." Alina pushes out a desperate, painful whine. "Hush, dear, hush. You'll be seeing no more of that boy."

"If I went crazy, would he change my bedding?"

"Who, darling?"

"Daaarling…"

VII. Wheat fields hang off of highways like curtains. Good morning. Aloha. Hello, Idaho.

VIII. The Dane walks through the ruins of the Portland, Oregon Merrill Auditorium. A birdbath stands, filled with rain water. The rest of the theatre is rubble. The rest of the city is sand.

Fragments of a stained glass window lay strewn on the ground pulsing into mirrors at a steady rhythm. The Dane brushes back her mahogany waves. Her cheeks are hollow, undernourished. She leans over and watches her form in the stained glass clarify from a yellow-tinted obscurity into her reflection. She rubs the dust off her face like makeup and wonders why she never thought she was pretty.

She stands and takes in the wasteland. The only thing left standing is a birdbath where the courtyard used to be. The landscape is vast and empty and dry and forever. It isn't quite a desert with its endless overcast. More like a tundra. The Dane decides to giver herself a new name. Her old name, new again. Good morning, she thinks. Aloha. Hello, wasteland. I am Aya. She folds her arms and sighs.

In Montana, Jericho collapses to the ground, alone. He paws it desperately and howls, but Aya, the Dane, can't hear. The birdbath glows neon and Alina rises from the column, wrapped in robes, her head wreathed in spinning cosmos. "I've come from Nevada," she says. "Or, I'm going to Nevada? I want to go to Nevada. Do you know the way?"

Aya looks over. "No," she says. She tightens her crossed arms. Alina worries her eyes. Aya sighs angrily. "Yes. It's that way," she says, pointing south.

Alina sits down in the birdbath and dangles her legs off the edge, trying to find her footing. She lowers herself daintily, barely able to stand from weakness. Her legs like stilts beneath her. "You know," she says in her best celebrity voice, "clouds are white because their droplets act like little mirrors—ah—for the sun." She half-moans the last words through a pain in her shin. A fall had turned it into a weather diviner. "I think a storm is coming," she says

(Alina wanders the wasteland, humming "You Are My Sunshine", and quivering with every terrible bloom of thunder.)

Aya leaves her body, takes her own hand, and dances to her memory of "Spiegel im Spiegel".

IX. Alina sleepwalks through the vast tundra. That's why her hands and feet were tied to keep her from wandering from Montana and bringing decay to the entire Earth. Usually the wives of municipal workers lay in bed, heavy with melancholy, missing the lips and hands and voices of their lovers. Few project the decay outside of themselves.

But who could blame her? It's inevitable that ruin comes to all things. It's just a matter of when.

Even I couldn't stop it. Even I was a part of it.

Oh well. Let us be comforted. This is how it has been and will be. Overcast and tundra. Why not let Aya waltz? Why not let Alina wander? Why not let Jericho watch? Why not let Owen wait?

It is my experience to just let things happen here. And etcetera, and etcetera, and etcetera.

X. Aya was twelve when she came home from school to see her mother hunched over on a wicker chair on the front porch—as if trying desperately to fold into herself. She looked as if in tremendous pain, clutching her head, clenching her eyes, ignoring her running mascara and the cigarette she held: neglected and turned to ash. "Where's dad?" asked Aya. Alina fell asleep.

The Dane never knew her mother could collapse so completely that she would radiate devastation and decay. She never knew her house would vanish, but she might as well have. She walked away, never wanting to see her mother or the city again. She walked west. She hitched rides. She scraped by.

By the time she was twenty she had watched Portland crumble on the news, watched the long shot of a field of pavement after the cameraman had vanished, after the station had vanished, after the signal vanished out of mid-air.

Every day you would wake up and there would be less people. Less buildings, less pavement, less fences. Less animals running around. The fences were always the first to go. The wasteland bellows laughter.

XI. "Good morning, aloha, and hello to all you out there in The Quarry," their television said to the mirror one morning while Alina straightened her hair. "Looks like we're going to have some rain out there today, so do be careful when making your way to wherever it is you're going. "

Owen held Alya in her room, comets smearing from her eyes. "But if you fade for the hum…if mom stands below the thawing sun…she'll make a bed of the wasteland…who will teach me piano…take me out west…follow the dome of twilight's veil…she loves you…the tundra…it will all be swallowed by the rays…her beams of decay…"

XIII. Alina sings out loud, submerged in hallucinations of bright spring gardens and fields of Ferris wheels.

Her hair tangled beyond tangle.

XIV. Car alarms and broken windows. Patriots set flags ablaze and begin to fade. Buildings evaporate into sand and scatter in the wind. The feathers of Pelicans burn from the inside out. They evaporate, scatter in the wind. The sun was red all day.

Aya hums to herself, "O quiet, bright Aya, and all goes awaya." She laughs a light, mesmeric laugh that scatters in the wind. It dances through the ashes of flags and maps and magazines until it finds itself resting among them in the sand of the tundra.

XVI. A marble fountain drains. Dead leaves collect on its black surface like a quilt. Aya's arm dangles over the edge of the basin, her hand just below the high water mark. I walk over and cover her with my coat, emptying its pockets and counting the change.

I kneel down and think of pulling her away from the edge. The leaves float up and wreathe her hand, pulling her down into the boundless sleep of the fountain.

She floats over her old neighborhood in an ivory nightgown and watches the houses dissolve into particles the size of doorknobs (an infinite hallway). An orchard of disembodied fruit. They tremble and break away, orbiting her head. The galaxy pulses and beams, whispers, tattered by static, "Good morning. Aloha. Hello, darling. Blush pale rose, darling." Aya closes her eyes and drapes her arm around her waist.

(A marmoreal statue sailing through sleep and space.)

I cry as she fades.

The particles implode.

XV. "I can't see my back!" I yell. "I can't see my eyes!" Distant, insane laughter bellows through the wasteland. "Good citizens! Behold! I can't see my eyes!"

XVII. Owen turns and shifts, trying to find a comfortable position where he can lay still and never move again. "God damn sand," he says.

He cradles his head on his shoulder, staring at the horizon. There is distant bulge where overcast meets tundra. He sits up on his elbows. A voice emanates from the form. "Da… Da… Da..."

XVIII. Owen finds Alina naked, using a block of stone from the Merrill Auditorium as a pillow. He kneels down beside her, sobbing quietly and whispering, "Where did you go? Where did you go? Where did you go insane?"

The stars' slow collapse—tricking through the overcast—Owen lays on his back next to her, watching the star lights fall down at them like molten streams, pulsing rhythmic blue.

Alina turns over and flutters her eyes. Owen fades in and out. "Daaarling…"

A shock of white cracks the overcast, and the clouds split. They embrace, flesh and bone, as the starlight crashes through their frail bodies.

XIX. I sift through the sand in my pockets: once stones saved from the ruins of our fair city. I scatter it on the ground, here and there, like seed that might grow. I've found a few blades of grass breaking up through the sand—I even thought I felt hungry once between the mirrors.

Good morning. Aloha. Hello, Oregon.

XX. Birds nest in Alina's bare skull. Mirrors face one another, constructing an infinite hallway—then implode. Their shards rain down on the earth.

And etcetera, and etcetera,