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# Post Subject A Fable

Oliver de la Paz



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*... history is made by men and women, just as it can also be  
unmade and rewritten, always with various silence and elisions,  
always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated.*

—Edward W. Said

*Gentlemen do not read each other's mail.*

—Henry L. Stimson



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# Address

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## Dear Empire,

These are your ashes. We've carried them for years in baskets, urns, boxes, and locket. A fine dust clouds our skies. A lock of your hair is hemmed by a selvedge. The cloth adorns an altar in your finest shrine.

Dear Empire, we are an obedient people. We are intimate beyond death, and anxious for your return. We've kept your letters close to our chests. Dear Empire, our arenas still follow your lead.

Come back from where you dwell. In the days you have left us, we've nothing to do but count the elements: it is not raining. It is raining. A garland of flowers dries on marble.



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# Atlas

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## Dear Empire,

This is your atoll. Coral crumbles to the touch. The artist paces along the beaches—delicate and glittering. She walks back and forth talking to herself and finds, trapped in a tide pool, a small jellyfish.

Her body softens as she scoops the animal into a little bowl with salt water. Portions of the animal's body are torn. Portions of it blow and settle. Blow and settle. In each of its four quadrants, a square opens and closes. Its little windows blossom into squares of light.

Sea foam dissolves in small puckers, and as the waters pass over sand, the artist's footprints sink beneath its concavity. "Look," she says. "The tide has risen."

## Dear Empire,

These are your battlefields. There are monuments here, the dead atop stone horses with their eyes towards the heavens. Under shadow, the scrawl of graffiti and the hardscape of granite pathways guide foot traffic to the raised hoof of one of your dead generals mounted aloft.

Here, the sun blanches stone, dries lichen into crisp rosettes. Winters, the barren trees lean downward, their branches full of ice as if to bow their heads. No birds.

No other animals except occasional foxes nosing about. So much weight presses this place. The shadows of the statues sink the very ground.

## Dear Empire,

These are your boardwalks. The young are tedious as they hurl their lithe bodies through the promenade. From marquee to marquee, their eyes flit. Neon trails emblaze into the backs of their skulls. A dullness, then.

Shouts from the midway ricochet with every ball-bearing sprung from a gun. The young are fastidious, combing back their hairs before every mirror.

And despite the carnival's charm, ambitions spin with the Tilt-a-Whirl into an operatic frenzy. There are no refunds given. There are no guides through the funhouse. The lights curl in the concave mirrors.

## Dear Empire,

This is your breeze. The sea is a thousand miles away, yet it crushes us still. Blue trees—blue distances wash up on our doorsteps. Off the coast there is a gauntlet of ships, but I cannot smell them from here.

Your children miss the ocean. They sleep in its absence. Cry out for it. Sometimes out of mischief. Sometimes out of genuine longing.

But longing for such a body is no good for us. There are lights here. And arms to keep us safe. We can do without fickle tides, without the spindrift.