

4 Cats, Ink writing sample: Excerpt from future book

**Denver Colorado based 4 Cats, Ink is the innovative, high-quality freelance writing team of Kelly Jo Eldredge and Eric Mott.**

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# Sample chapter: future book concept

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## Chapter 1

### San Diego, 2102

A single California brown pelican flew only feet from the ocean's surface, veering deftly around the streetlights and lampposts emerging as obstacles from the water's surface. The abandoned skyscrapers formed deep canyons, whose walls towered over the bird as it flew toward open water. Bouncing shades of green, orange, and blue greeted the pelican at every turn as predawn rays of light reflected off glass, metal, and gently rolling waves.

After emerging from the forest of tall buildings the large bird saw a great concrete wall approaching; an unfamiliar figure atop the wall caught its attention. The graceful creature set its wings in a glide, and arced upward from the surface of the ocean, alighted on the wall with an elegant swoop, and took a few tentative steps toward what captured its curiosity.

\* \* \*

In the dim morning light, Elizabeth Carson looked sideways at the curious bird that stood several feet from where she sat hugging her knees. The pelican flapped its wings proudly, folded them against its body, and took a few tentative steps toward Elizabeth. "Hey," she said affectionately to the bird. "Get outta here—go catch some fish!"

Elizabeth's investigator squeaked in surprise and leaped to the air with a hop of its legs and a whooshing flap of wings. It flew west once more, skimming along the ocean's surface to

rejoin its mates. She followed the bird as it receded into the distance while trying to recall what her zoology textbooks said about the relative intelligence and visual acuity of pelicans.

Due west the bird flew, out into the harbor and a tall tower that stood sentinel at its center. The sea held the out-of-place obelisk in a death-grip of barnacles, mollusks, and slimy algae that crawled up its crumbling concrete sides. Rusty colored streaks of stain marred the smooth, white surface of the radar dome at the tower's pinnacle.

The early morning light reflected the city skyline, framed in orange, in the few panes of glass that remained on the upper control room windows. A living movement roiled in the upper levels of the tower, details indiscernible in dark shadows at first, then slowly revealed in the waxing light as a colony of pelicans that clung to each ledge and flat surface.

The light of the new dawn painted the pelicans with rose-colored hues as they perched on their tower that rose above San Diego Bay. Stirring with newfound warmth, the birds began to stand and stretch their wings to energize themselves for a new day of fishing. A flock of sea gulls floated overhead, hovering in the air above the platform, held aloft there on ocean-born air currents. The covetous gulls sought to land on the tower, but each time one felt brave enough to attempt it, the jealous pelicans chased them off with an angry eruption of flashing orange beaks and squawked warnings.

A few impatient pelicans took to wing, starting their day by diving down off the tower, pulling up as they reached the water, and then flapping resolutely west toward the open ocean only feet above the surface. Either due to their hunger or their annoyance at the gulls, the remaining pelicans soon followed their peers with a burst of noise and energy. The gleeful gulls landed in the pelicans' wake and took up their own raucous watch on the decrepit tower.

The young woman smiled at the diminishing shapes of the pelican flock and stood in her place. Turning to face the rising sun, she spread her arms and looked inland toward the horizon, letting the warm glow envelope her face and body. The rising sun colored the horizon red and orange, providing a warm backdrop to the dark monolithic shapes of the skyscrapers of old downtown. Tendrils of purple clouds lanced the orange sky and appeared to be reaching out like a hand toward the old buildings as if to yank them from the ground. The image intrigued Elizabeth. *That would work—they are all coming down, anyway.*

Elizabeth greeted each sunrise by sitting on her high seat on San Diego's Great Sea Wall and watched the pelicans and gulls fight over their favorite perch on the old control tower. It was her favorite place to meditate and slow down; to recharge her high-energy personality; to process and absorb the incomprehensible events of the last few years; to seek healing.

She gained inspiration and hope from watching the pelicans thrive in a place where they were once thought to be extinct. The old control tower certainly helped, giving them a safe place to spend the night, high above any threat of danger. Elizabeth wondered what Charles Lindbergh would have thought knowing that the only flights that now launched from the airport that bore his name belonged to the large, funny looking birds and the annoying gulls. The abandoned air traffic control tower the pelicans and gulls called home once guided planes safely to land at Lindbergh Field—San Diego International Airport.

Turning again toward the bay, Elizabeth squinted in the increasing light toward Point Loma Island, looking for her pelican companions. She saw nothing of them against the backdrop of the hazy, purple shape of the land mass four miles to the west. The birds were long gone.

The young scientist sighed deeply, playing in her mind the events of the world that had occurred in the one hundred and seventy-five years since that great American hero took off from

the air field submerged at her feet to New York City, en route to his history making trans-Atlantic flight. A slight queasiness took residence in her stomach; she shook her head sharply to clear the foreboding from beginning again. *No, stop it! We are all still here, aren't we?*

The words of Lindberg came to Elizabeth's mind, and they gave her hope. *If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea . . .*

That phrase certainly applied to the pelican that had visited her on the sea wall. She longed to go where the pelican went and see what it would see. Perhaps the bird represented a good omen, however. Would it bring her luck today? To where would she take wing, and what would she see?

It was time to go.

Elizabeth clambered down the back side of the wall, jumping from slab to slab with athletic confidence and aimed for the point where she dropped her bicycle on the ground thirty minutes earlier. Just before she hopped off the last boulder to the ground, a blue, metallic object caught her eye in a crevice at her feet. Dropping to her knees, she reached into the crack, straining to reach the mysterious object. She lay down on the boulder to reach further down into the opening, and her slender fingers finally gained a grip on her prize.

Elizabeth wondered why she had never seen this thing before in the years she had been making her daily morning sojourn to the wall. She grunted as she strained to pull the object from its rocky resting place. It popped loose with a loud scrape of metal on rock, and she could then see what it was.

She held an old road sign: a blue shield with a red stripe on top. The blue field surrounded a white number five emblazoned at the center. Elizabeth's eyes opened wide with recognition. She reverently placed the sign standing upright on the lowest concrete slab she

could reach and hopped the last jump down to the ground. She retrieved her bicycle from its resting place and mounted it. Looking over her shoulder at the sign she had just rescued, she paused thoughtfully and then sped away, cranking her bike up Laurel Street toward her home.

The massive fortress wall that saved greater San Diego from the rising sea was once Interstate 5—the San Diego Freeway.

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Elizabeth pulled up in front of her retro-bungalow home located a mere two blocks east of the wall and left her bicycle leaning on the sidewalk against the whitewashed wall surrounding her courtyard. She bounded up the porch stairs two at a time and let herself in the front door.

The house once belonged to her parents, one of the oldest homes in Park Hill, and Elizabeth's grandfather teased her for wisely choosing such prime oceanfront property. "How's life in *New Harborview*?" he would ask her. Her Grandfather had a sick sense of humor. She pointed out to him countless times that the house was nowhere near the water when it was built, and that each time a cyclone hit she took a terrible chance in staying. The irony was that Grandfather knew better than anyone why the cyclones continued as they did in those days—his black humor was his way of coping with what happened.

A framed photograph stood on the console table just inside the front door. Elizabeth stared at the picture for several heartbeats. The picture showed Elizabeth and her grandfather, Dr. Grant Sorenson, posing in an embrace at the summit of Pikes Peak on Christmas Day many years ago. Grandfather Grant appeared like a healthy, robust man for his age in that picture, but that was actually the last time he summited the mountain under his own power. Soon afterward he was fitted with his first exo-assist implants, the robotic framework that helped maintain his

mobility well past his eighties, which he seemed determined to test to its limits with reckless abandon as if he were some Chuck Yeager-style test pilot or something.

What Elizabeth remembered most about that day, however, was her grandpa muttering constantly about climbing a fourteen-thousand-foot mountain in late December without needing snowshoes or heavy clothing despite her exasperated pleas for him to “shut up and enjoy the hike.”

Two bags sat on the floor at the foot of the table: one, her briefcase; the other, a duffel full of clothes. She winced suddenly at the image of her grandfather, and she felt the familiar pain in her gut spread outward. *Why do I keep that picture? I've paid so dearly for his vanity! A* loud crack pierced the hallway as she snapped the frame face down on the table. Then, effortlessly picking up both bags at once, she turned heel and blasted out the front door. Before she closed it, however, she grimaced and stopped, realizing she had forgotten something. She pivoted and returned to the entryway. At the touch of her hand a monitor embedded in the wall lit up and chirped softly. She entered her access code and punched a few icons to set her roof-mounted solar generator system to: *Track: Auto-charge system*. Forgetting those items two days in a row would not have been good. *Cold shower again, no way! I'll need to replace this antiquated device one of these days, too. Nobody does solar anymore. There's always something* . . .

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Elizabeth Carson enjoyed her daily bike ride to work as much as her meditation on the sea wall. The ascent up Laurel Street toward Balboa Park was hardly challenging for her triathlon-induced stamina, but she relished the workout nonetheless. Her twentieth-century mountain bike was one of her prized possessions and was her way of giving a nod to the old

times and to the thought of what might have been if the gasoline burning cars had not choked the roadways the previous century.

Daybreak was complete as the morning sun was now rising above the rooftops surrounding the street, enveloping Elizabeth in comfortable warmth. Her neighbors began to stir as well, and she saw familiar faces emerge from their apartments and homes along her route. She waved to them and smiled as she passed, though hardly slowing down her pedal cadence as she did.

These were her people—the people of Park Hill neighborhood. Tough, adventurous souls—a crowd that for better or worse stayed and refused to let San Diego die. Many were refugees from sections of town that had sunk. Others arrived from points inland to be near the Coronado desalination facility—the only reliable source of fresh water for miles in those days. It was a bitter catch-22, as seawater was both an enemy and an ally in a world turned upside down.

Elizabeth had a double incentive to stay as she could not abandon her job at the San Diego Zoo. Someone needed to advocate and care for those animals even in the worst of times; she was determined that it should be her, so she refused to leave.

To Elizabeth's mind, the community had just begun to exhale, ready now to move on two years after the crisis had climaxed. People began to believe and have faith in the reprieve they had been given. Many buildings along Laurel Street were undergoing long-overdue repairs; Elizabeth noticed that boarded-up windows and storm shutters were coming down at a fast pace. Finally, all the derelict gasoline-powered cars had been removed from the curbsides to be sent to the plasma reclamation plant. That made her happy, as it gave her an unobstructed bike path up and down the roadway.

Ten blocks from her home, Laurel Street crossed 6<sup>th</sup> Ave and Elizabeth entered Balboa Park on El Prado. She had just begun to break a sweat as she did. She plastered her moist blonde hair to her temples with the back of her hand and powered on, crossing the Cabrillo Bridge.

Elizabeth put her head down and dug into her pedals with increased tempo. She enjoyed crossing the bridge and hearing the old lampposts whiz past her ears. Once across, the arched gates of the Plaza de California loomed ahead. Echoes of tires and chains reverberated off the walls as she passed through the first arch. Scaffoldings enveloped the crumbling ornate tower of the Spanish mission church, and a brief glance upward revealed workers already busy at their day's work restoring the nearly two-hundred-year-old building from years of storms and neglect. Renewal—San Diego was being reborn.

Seconds later Elizabeth rocketed out of the second arch and through to the other side; her pulse pounding now with exertion and adrenaline. More construction workers scrambled to hop out of the young woman's path as she flew past the fountain adorning the center of the Plaza de Panama. El Prado continued on its way east on the other side of the plaza, but Elizabeth cut sharply left and sliced her way through the old parking lot between the two art museum buildings, heading for the abandoned botanical building. It had been many long years—not in Elizabeth's lifetime—since the lawns and gardens surrounding San Diego's great art and cultural centers had been green and lush. Without feeling too guilty Elizabeth typically finished her daily ride with a thundering off-road romp across the dusty grounds up to the zoo's administration building.

What she saw this day, though, nearly unseated her, and she gripped her brakes until her knuckles turned white. The bicycle's rear tire nearly slipped out from underneath her as she skidded to a stop in a cloud of dust and a rain of rocks. When the dust settled, Elizabeth looked

upon the grim face of a gardener holding a rake; she could see the muscles of his jaw working tightly. She shrugged sheepishly and offered her new friend the sweetest smile she could muster.

They were reseeding the lawns—more signs of renewal!

Nimbly hopping off her machine, Elizabeth hoisted it effortlessly to her shoulders and tip-toed off the soon-to-be-restored lawn as gingerly as she could, waved goodbye to the still-speechless grounds person, and jogged the remaining quarter mile up to her office at the San Diego Zoo.

