

Ornithology

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Ornithology

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[PEARL]

Statement of an *absolute idiot*-

[GRIAN]

Hey!

[PEARL]

-regarding an ill-advised trip to go see a woman who *turns people into living statues*, *Grian*-

[GRIAN]

Look, I assessed the risks, I knew it would probably be fine-

[PEARL]

You're not fine!

Notes

This statement follows after [The Statue Garden](#), and that one should probably be read before this one for context? It also follows [The Wastes](#) and [Golden Eagle](#), specifically when it comes to Grian's narrative.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)



[Click]

[PEARL]

Statement of an *absolute idiot*-

[GRIAN]

Hey!

[PEARL]

-regarding an ill-advised trip to go see a woman who *turns people into living statues*, *Grian-*

[GRIAN]

Look, I assessed the risks, I knew it would probably be fine-

[PEARL]

You're not fine!

[GRIAN]

I am so!

[PEARL]

You've got *feathers!* I can see them!

[GRIAN]

They *barely* even hurt anymore.

[PEARL]

That is *not* the point!

[GRIAN]

Look, I haven't made a big deal about *your* stuff-

[PEARL]

We're not talking about me right now! Take your sweater off!

[GRIAN]

What? No!

(Brief sounds of scuffling)

(Silence)

[PEARL]

Grian...

[GRIAN]

I told you, it's *fine*- what are you doing?

(Drawers opening and closing)

[PEARL]

I'm looking for a- a pliers, or something, or a- I don't *know*, what do they use to get splinters out again?

[GRIAN]

That's not going to *work*-

[PEARL]

How do you know?

[GRIAN]

I- I don't- I just *know*, okay? It'll hurt and it'll bleed and they'll *grow back anyways*, so just- leave it? Please?

(Silence)

[PEARL]

...Fine. But you're *telling* me what happened.

[GRIAN]

Fine. (*quickly mumbling*) ...Statement recorded direct from subject June 25th, 2022, statement begins.

[PEARL]

You didn't need to- oh, alright.

[GRIAN]

I just... wanted to know about the books.

It's been bothering me for- months, I suppose, but especially ever since she dropped that tape off with Joe Hills himself on it. The last statement I recorded, about the poetry book that created a wasteland, only cemented it. I wanted to *know*, and I knew there was one person who could put me in touch with him. I already had contact information for her and everything. And I knew she wanted something from me, too, which meant she might just be willing to bargain. I was willing to bet on it, at least.

I *know* I probably should've taken more precautions, but I've never been good at thinking bad ideas through. You probably know that better than anyone. At the end of the day on Friday, I thought it would be a good time, since it would be a couple days since I had to go to work again. So I found her number in the file, and gave her a call.

She was excited to hear from me. Really excited. Gave me her address and directions before hanging up in a hurry- she said she had to 'get some things ready.'

She was waiting for me on the front steps when I got there. Just sort of sitting there, waiting. Put me in mind of a spider or something, sitting on the edge of a web. And when I walked up to her, she grinned, and said, 'Archivist! You know, I really didn't think you'd take me up on my offer.'

I told her I figured we could help each other. She wanted me to pose for one of her statues or whatever, and I wanted her help getting in touch with Joe Hills. So I told her I'd be one of her statues for a day in exchange for a meeting. I figured that was fair. She bargained me up to three days. I agreed, and we shook on it. I didn't want to lose the chance to finally, *maybe*, get some *answers*.

I followed her into her house, and back to her... studio, I guess. It was a big room at the back of her house, bright lights, dropcloths on the floor. The windows were all blacked out.

The statues were the worst part. It's- they were just *standing* there, shoved off to the side, all jammed together, not moving. Not even breathing. Their eyes didn't even move, I think that was the eeriest part. I guess they were her- raw materials. Or works in progress. I didn't really want to take my eyes off her, but I couldn't keep from looking over at them. I kept wondering what they were thinking, if they were thinking. What their stories were.

And then she told me to hold still.

I didn't- okay, I *know* I didn't think it through, really, okay? You can't give me that look, you know I don't think!

But I hadn't thought *that* much about what it would be like. I sort of assumed it would be like sleeping, like I'd just... lose consciousness and wake up when the time was up. It wasn't, though.

It was just... exactly the same, except I couldn't move or blink or breathe. It was like my brain was sending signals and they may as well have been going to a mannequin.

She stared at me for awhile. Pulled my sweater off and poked at me a bit, as well. It's a horribly weird and uncomfortable feeling to have somebody else move your arms and head around and just have them *stay*. And I could tell, as soon as she had me freeze, that she wasn't really seeing me as a person anymore. Maybe she never had in the first place, and I just hadn't noticed until I had nothing to do but stare back at her.

At that point, though, it was out of my hands. I couldn't exactly tell her *to stop*. I couldn't tell her anything. She told me to wait- as if I could've done anything else- and left my range of vision. I could still hear her moving around, going through some shelves and such, but I couldn't see her.

When she did come back where I could see her, she was grinning, and she was holding a very alarming-looking sharp thing- an awl, I think? And, um. You know how sometimes, you do something stupid? And you spend a lot of time thinking about how it'll probably be fine, and then you do the thing, and you have a moment after like... you're falling off a bridge. And you can't exactly go back and not fall off the bridge, but all you can think about is how much you shouldn't have climbed up on the railing in the first place.

And then the pain started.

I've- honestly, I've never been scared of needles. Never had trouble giving blood or getting shots or anything. But when you can't even move your head to see what's coming- it wasn't fun, I'll say that much.

It wasn't... regular. She started at my wrists and worked her way up- she would stab me with the awl, and then stick something I couldn't see under my skin, and then just *leave* it there, to *sit*, until it... settled. Stopped hurting. It got hard to track what was going on. After awhile I mostly stopped trying. Like I said, all the windows were covered, so the only things I had to pay attention to were the spots of pain crawling up my arms and her, whenever she was in front of my eyes.

It feels impossible that I was only there for a few days. I think most of the people stuck in her house are probably entirely mad, by now. Sometimes she'd go away and just leave me there to sit for what felt like hours- I guess she was probably sleeping? I didn't get that luxury, of course. It's hard to fall asleep when you can't close your eyes or readjust yourself at all or *breathe*.

She would talk to me, sometimes. Or, not *to* me, exactly- I sort of got the impression that she didn't even remember I could hear her. But she would talk, and I would listen, because it's not like there was anything else I *could* do. She complained a lot about how she wished she'd... prepared better for me. Had more parts ready. Or she'd complain about what a pain it was that she was going to have to let me go eventually. I paid a lot of attention to that, since it was the only way I could tell when and if she might be intending on letting me *go*. Sometimes she just talked about how nice I was turning out, and I think that was actually my least favorite of the bunch.

Eventually, she stopped, and stepped away to just... look, I guess, for a long time. My arms hurt and so did my chest and my neck, and I couldn't see what she'd done to any of it, but at least I wasn't having holes stabbed in me anymore, so I took that as a relief, even if it was only a temporary one.

She brought me outside. She was... gentle about it, I guess, but in the way you might move something fragile you didn't want to break. I *really* don't want to think about what happens if one of her statues gets hit by something, or falls over. I'm sure it's not pretty or pleasant. It was nice to be outside again, though.

Behind her house, she has this big garden with a tall fence around it, I'm guessing so neighbors can't look in. Most of her finished statues are out there. They look... well. None of them look terribly human anymore. I was staring at them, trying to guess what I must have looked like by that point. I can't say it was very fun to think about.

She said, 'I wish we had more time together, you know. I really do. But for as long as I've still got you here, I've got to display you for at least a *little* while.'

And she set me down to perch on a rock- *horribly* uncomfortable, *by the way*- and tilted my head back a little, so I was looking up at the sun. And... I sort of panicked. The sun was so bright and I couldn't look away or close my eyes, and... she didn't care if I made it out of there intact, was the thing. She didn't care if I made it out able to *see*. Not in a malicious way, either. I just don't think she even thought about it.

I was staring up at the sun and I couldn't do anything about it and there was something inside my head that was *screaming*, and I couldn't lose my eyes because I *needed* them.

I don't know how long I was out there, because I couldn't pay attention to anything, but eventually the sun set, and my eyes *hurt*, but I could still see.

They still hurt.

Eventually, she let me go. I didn't realize that's what she was doing until there wasn't anything holding me up anymore, because I just collapsed. She complained at me about putting her hard work at risk, but I was a little distracted by how it felt like all my nerves were on *fire*, *so*.

It was a relief just to be back in control of my own body again, even though I still mostly couldn't move because all of my muscles had been stuck in one place for days on end and now they were all screaming at me. I curled up a bit and waited for everything to hurt a little less, and eventually I think she got tired of waiting for me to stand up on my own because she picked me up and carried me inside.

It was nicer on her couch than on the ground in her back garden, I'll give her that much. She had a cup of tea for me, and a mirror. As soon as I figured out how to talk again, she wanted to know what I thought, so I had to look, and... well. I mean, you've seen them. They're feathers. They're... pretty, was the first thing that came into my mind, honestly, all reds and greens, just... well.

Most of them fit under my sweater, which is convenient, but they go all the way up the backs of my arms, and they're on my collarbone and up my neck. I just sort of stared at them for awhile, trying to get used to the look of them. I'm still... not, exactly, I don't think- used to them, that is- but, uh, they've grown on me? (*Silence*) Aw, come on, not even a laugh?

[PEARL]

No, I'm still angry with you.

[GRIAN]

I told you, I'm *fine*. Especially now that I'm back here.

I didn't even get to meet Joe Hills, though! She said she'd left him a message saying I wanted to talk and that she'd let me know when he could meet, but that wasn't our *deal*, and obviously I can't trust her *anyways* because she kept me for twice as long as we agreed on- *ugh*.

[PEARL]

Well, I don't feel sorry for you. What did you expect?

[GRIAN]

I don't know! A little mutual respect, at least?

[PEARL]

From a monster who turns people into statues? I'm honestly shocked she even let you go.

[GRIAN]

Yeah... you know, I don't think I was ever scared she wouldn't? Probably horribly stupid of me, honestly, but, well, you know me and my two braincells.

[PEARL]

And now you're just *fine*? With- all of this?

[GRIAN]

I mean... I guess? It could be worse. I feel like they should bother me more than they do, but I don't hate them. They're warm. I think I'll get used to them.

(Silence)

[PEARL]

Do you ever wonder how we ended up here?

[GRIAN]

What, at the Institute?

[PEARL]

Yes. No. You know what I mean.

[GRIAN]

Yeah, I do. I don't know. Could be worse, though.

[PEARL]

Yeah?

[GRIAN]

I think so.

[PEARL]

Mhm. You're probably right. Because it's not really that scary, right?

[GRIAN]

Yeah, exactly.

[PEARL]

Do you think it'll get worse?

[GRIAN]

I mean, I don't think it's going to stop. I'm not scared, though. Are you?

[PEARL]

I'm not sure. I guess it doesn't matter if I am or not, though. The moon's not going to stop falling.

[GRIAN]

Yeah. I'll still be here, though.

[PEARL]

Me too. Guess we're in this together, huh?

[GRIAN]

(Laughs) As ever.

[Click]

End Notes

shoutout to ao3 user peregr1ne, who mentioned in their comment on the last statement that grian might be currently getting turned into a diorama by cleo. congratulations!! you were right

haha he's got feathers now! this is another one of those statements i've been working my way towards for awhile (that is, i started thinking about it very shortly after the literal first fic in this series was posted), and i'm very proud of it. this is also the 20th fic in this series, which... hey what the fuck. when did that happen.

anyways, since this is the 20th fic, thank you so much for reading this far! i hope you've been having fun, because i definitely have. as always, you can find me on tumblr @sixteenth-days, and this au is inspired by @chrisrin's hermit archives posts. [he also did art of grian following the events of this statement which i literally have not been able to stop staring at](#) so!! go look at that rn

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!