

The Statue Garden

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The Statue Garden

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

Statement of Cleo... last name withheld for privacy-

[CLEO]

Good.

[GRIAN]

...um, (*nervous chuckle*) regarding a book of statuary. Statement recorded direct from subject, May first, 2022. Statement begins.

Notes

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[GRIAN]

Statement of Cleo... last name withheld for privacy-

[CLEO]

Good.

[GRIAN]

...um, (*nervous chuckle*) regarding a book of statuary. Statement recorded direct from subject, May

first, 2022. Statement begins.

[CLEO]

I just start talking, then? Alright.

So, I'm a schoolteacher, or I was, at least. Suppose I'm more of a... freelance artist now, let's say. But when this all started, I tended to get home pretty late. One night, I was coming home, and I almost tripped over something on my front walk. It was- about yay big, pretty heavy, wrapped in that brown paper they use for books and such sometimes. I figured the postman dropped a package by accident, and I'd just take it inside and see if I could reach whoever it was supposed to go to, because it was probably one of my neighbors.

Once I was inside and sitting at my kitchen table, I could see there wasn't any address or return address on the paper. Not even any stationary, which was pretty odd. So I unwrapped it, and it was a book. The title was pretty simple- *Beginner's Guide to Statuecraft*, or something like that. No author listed, but inside the cover there was a little stamp that said *From the Library of Joe Hills*.

Now, listen. Judge me all you like, I'm not about to get a mysterious book dropped on my doorstep and *not* flip through it. Especially because it was too late to do anything about it then anyways. I figured I'd try and find this Joe Hills in the morning, and in the meantime, no harm in taking a look.

It started out pretty ordinary. I've always been a bit into art, myself, and the first chapter or two were all familiar- you know, materials, form, whatever. There were a few strange word choices, but nothing too bad. But then it started to talk about... posing. Like- techniques for posing frameworks of anything you like into position, for modeling and such. It all sounded rather- silly and magical, honestly, but I had a bucket of lollypop sticks around from an art project I'd had the kids do at work a couple weeks before, and I wasn't going to do anything else with them, so...

Well. I gave it a try.

To be honest, it was a lot easier than the book said it would be. When I met Joe eventually, he said I had 'a sculptor's hand.'

[GRIAN]

Wait- waitwaitwait. Sorry. You *met* him? *Joe Hills*?

[CLEO]

Yeah?

[GRIAN]

Wh- well, where is he? I cannot *believe*-

[CLEO]

Oh, I'm not telling you that.

[GRIAN]

I- Why *not*?

[CLEO]

He's my friend, and I didn't come here to talk about him, did I? Do you want to hear about the book or not?

[GRIAN]

I- *aughhhh*. *Fine*. Continue.

[CLEO]

So, the lollypop sticks. It was so simple, but- I suppose intoxicating is the word. The book started out just talking about sticking them together into bodies, making them stand or sit without support, but once I got the hang of it, I could make them *dance*. I spent all night like that, making little makeshift dolls, working my way up. Pencils, then forks and knives- I had a few old wooden folding chairs I pulled apart and used when I wanted to try working on a larger scale, though those dolls came out rather messy. And it *worked*. I thought at some point they would just fall apart, but they didn't! It just got easier and easier.

The only limitation was with materials. I could do amazing things with them, but- well, you know, when your joints are just snapped lollypop sticks, you're going to have some trouble holding a pirouette no matter what.

Bones were the obvious answer, really. I mean, they're *made* to fit together and hold a body in place.

I didn't go right away. Because it was ridiculous, you know? Who goes and digs up graves for *that*? For *art*? And I had a *job*. Imagine if I got arrested! But I kept playing with the little wooden dolls I already had, and got a lot better at detail work, at least given what I had to work with. I started giving them hair with string, fingers and toes out of broken toothpicks. One day, I went and bought a few actual dolls, just as an experiment, but there was something... missing with them. They were too easy to work with. All the work was already done. There wasn't any artistry to it.

I went to the graveyard for the first time about a week after I found the book. I don't want to talk much about that part- it was mostly really *really gross*, to be honest.

I tried to mostly go for older graves, so they'd be all skeletonized, or mostly, but a few of them- *weren't*, exactly. And the whole time I was thinking that this was... insane. And horrible. I mean, it's basically the most ghoulish thing you can do, isn't it? But I kept digging them up anyways. I just wanted to see what I could do.

On the upside, bones are pretty light, when they're properly dried out. It's easier than you'd think to pack a suitcase full of them. It was mostly a matter of making sure they didn't break. And it's funny- looking back on it, I don't think I was ever once scared of what would happen if I got caught. I don't know why I wasn't.

I got home, and I got to work. I don't think I slept for two days. The school called when I didn't turn up to work on Monday, and I told them I had a fever and wasn't feeling well. I was *busy*, you know? Bones just worked so beautifully. They fit together so easily, and once they did, they would just dance however I wanted them to. It only took a day or so before I had a skeleton taking a graceful bow in my living room. That was when I realized I could actually be a sculptor.

It sounds silly to say now, but up until that point, I was still thinking of it as a sort of... side investigation. But when I looked at that skeleton, that's when I realized it was *more*. I was standing there and thinking about the possibilities if I cast it in bronze, or coated it with plaster and paint, if I got my hands on a cow skull or something similar to make it less human, more *interesting*... it was as though I'd been handed the keys to unlock a whole world of artistic potential. It was just a question of what I'd do with them.

The next day, I called to quit my job.

Bones served me well enough for a while. I kept branching out- I went out looking for animal

bones in the woods and roadkill on the highways, learned how to clean the meat off of them. Some of the little pieces I made from that brought in some money, too, because I could sell them at craft fairs. A bit hard to sell things made from human bone, you know, but animal bones are much more marketable, so long as it's hygienic and I don't use anything endangered.

I even started learning things the book didn't even mention. Detail work, like I said. It's got a lot of my own annotations in the margins, now- that was another thing Joe was really excited about, when I eventually met him.

[GRIAN]

(Scoffs)

[CLEO]

Oh, don't be like that. He's really not that bad a guy, you know.

I started setting up scenes, making bigger and bigger pieces. Before long, my whole house was full of them, and my backyard was becoming more and more of a statue garden. They were looking less and less human, too. You know, the human form is lovely, but it can get quite boring after a long time, can't it? Why not change it up?

But I started to hit that point again where it felt like I was... plateauing. Like it was getting too easy. I wanted to try something more difficult again, something more complicated, something that would open up new possibilities all over again.

And again, the answer was... obvious, really. I'd done so *much* with dead bodies. Just bones! Bones aren't much at all of everything the body has to offer. Bone weight is only about fifteen percent of your body weight, did you know? Less, once they dry out! So much of that useful material, once you're dead, it just rots away! It's a crime, honestly.

So I thought, I'd done so much with dead bodies. Just *imagine* what I could do with *living* ones.

The hardest thing was just making myself do it, the first time. I was scared, and... I think a little horrified at myself. I felt the same way I had that first time in the graveyard, digging my shovel into the ground for the first time. But I thought I'd let myself down if I didn't. You know, what would you think of a painter who only worked with the cheapest paint he could find, because he wasn't willing to put everything he had into his work?

It was just somebody who knocked on my door, the first time. I don't know what he was even there for. He had a clipboard. But he had a good face for art- that's what I told him. I asked him if he'd be interested in modeling for me, and he came inside, and then I told him to stand still, and he did. And I got to work.

In a lot of ways, making art out of living people is actually easier than working with dead ones. Like, yeah, they're a lot more complicated, but on the other hand, all the base framework is already done for me, and most of the details besides. I don't have to worry about holding it all together, just about holding it in place, and adding or modifying whatever I see fit.

You know, if you were in my sculpture garden, I think I'd give you... feathers. Yeah, and more eyes. Or no eyes. Something to do with eyes, definitely.

[GRIAN]

...Why?

[CLEO]

Mmm. I don't know. It's just the feeling I get. You get a sense for that sort of thing, when you do my type of work.

[GRIAN]

(Uncomfortable shuffling) Um, continue, please.

[CLEO]

Right, right. Well, if you're ever interested, give me a call. You've got my number there somewhere, haven't you?

[GRIAN]

Interested in getting turned into a living statue?

[CLEO]

You never know! Some people are! I've had a few, now, people who've heard of me and come find me and ask me to make them into works of art. They're rare, but they're always my favorite subjects.

Anyways... where was I?

Starting my work with living things, right. That was really the last lesson I needed to learn from the book. It was the last section, right near the back, labeled 'Preservation.' When I glanced over the table of contents when I first found the book, I assumed that meant things like... treating paint so it didn't flake, and such. And there were some notes like that. But it was mostly about keeping living things alive, indefinitely.

It's really marvelous, you know. Do it right, and they just don't die! I can cut them open, stitch them back up, cut things off, sew things on- I've gotten really quite good at sewing. Technically, I *could* just make things stick together, like I did at first with the lollypop sticks and the bones, but I've come to like the security of stitches. And I think they add a little something.

[GRIAN]

I did notice you've got some there, on your...

[CLEO]

Ah, yeah. You know, it's like I said. What would you think of an artist who wasn't willing to put everything of himself into his work? No artist at all, I'd say.

[GRIAN]

What happened to the book?

[CLEO]

Oh, I gave it back to Joe. Don't need it anymore, and it was his anyways.

[GRIAN]

You're not worried it'll wind up in someone else's hands? He's not exactly well-known for holding onto the things.

[CLEO]

(Laughs) Are you asking if I'm worried about competition? That's cute! No, I'm not. I don't think anyone else could do what I did with it- and, well, so far as I'm concerned, if anyone tries, that's just another volunteer model to me.

You know, you really should come by my statue garden sometime. You'd fit right in.

[GRIAN]

I think I'll pass, *thanks*.

[Click]

[Click]

[GRIAN]

Is she gone?

[PEARL]

Yeah, I walked her out. Are you good? You look a bit... spooked.

[GRIAN]

I'm fine. I think I was threatened with- I think I was threatened? How did the backgrounding go?

[PEARL]

Well, her story of her quitting checks out with the school where she worked, and she does do pretty good business selling artwork made of foraged animal bones and feathers and such at popups and street fairs. Everything else is pretty unverifiable. There have been a few unsolved graverobbing incidents in her area, but not a lot more than the national average- same for disappearances. There's not much else we can check, unless you want to-

[GRIAN]

I am *not* going to her house.

[PEARL]

(Laughing)

[Click]

End Notes

whoops i saw [@chrisrin](#) posting about his hermitcraft tma au on tumblr (specifically [this art](#)) and immediately got my brain so full of ideas i wrote this in a day and am now posting at about 1 am. i haven't listened to a magnus archives episode in like two years.

might write more of these? i dont know? kind of want to write about Scottsmajor's Last Life Camping Trip From Hell. we'll see

Works inspired by this one

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