



Girl in Paper Mache

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Start with a wired frame—an empty cage of sorts. For now her head is a waiting absence, a vacant perch. Space to be filled. A different sort of empty than the cage. The constraint will one day prove a most effective stage for the tensions we will place in it, until she is so full she must soon be seized—and these cycles of bursting and barrenness will follow her always. Stand her on a lamp. One day her womanhood will illuminate a musician trying to read notes in the dark. She stands on one leg—thoughtful, meditative like a crane, but impractical. Arms? stationary



She begins, stationary, in a closet. Silent. Bare. Slowly she is brought out to the foyer, prominently displayed but still silent. Soon she is filled with observations of coming and going and the same few faces in between. She hears only strings of conversation that snatch on her rough edges. Incomplete. The incompleteness fills her. Coats are tossed on her. Umbrellas are hung from her wireframe orifices. She offers no resistance, no complaint. She assumes these familiar objects into her form. An anchor for the shelters and shells of others. And hidden she is comforted, content to watch, listen, and absorb. Her steady strength the anchor for the old, a collection of canes dangling from her assembled bones, relieved at last from curled and feeble hands that clutched too tightly.



When she has begun to look more like a girl, closer to human, she is recollected to the living room. She will make a fine conversation piece—straighten a few bent wires, remove a few extra appendages and with them the weights they held, and smooth the lumps in her shape. Perhaps tailor the jacket—or not. She is not a woman yet.

Put a bottle in the cavern of her chest to function where a heart might. After all, it's in the blood. Her grandfather was a drinker, on her father's side. She will carry their same burden, but it will brace her for the shock. Bury it where no one will find it, where it will

serve her when age and disuse are all that wrap around her. The chill will preserve its bite. Bury it where the hardness will surface only slowly. It isn't desirable in one so soft and young as she will be when we've quite fashioned her to be complete. Have you brought the feathers and soft stuff with which to stuff her? There's a girl taking shape now.

Replace her with glass as the wires start to bend from reckless child play. Much more fragile, more delicate, but so beautiful when the light strikes her just right. A prism of hidden shades. Fill the jar with sound to reinforce the hollow structure. The sound of crunching gravel under swift feet. Of winter boots crunching fresh snow. These sounds will give her hard strength. The sound of rubber wheels gliding over fresh pavement, of a brass bell lifting notes slowly higher through the curving pipes and valves. These will give her a smooth fluid strength. But for the sound that will be held and released in the steadily expanding bubble over the cage, now bell jar, something softer, something mellow, something strong but handled with a delicacy suited to her glass composition—the sound of equine hair pulled across a thin nylon string.



She cannot see the world her light reflects yet, but soon. And when she does, she must have a voice to gasp with. Stand by with bellows to give her words volume when she is ready, echoing the organ's maestoso cadence. For now, sprinkle a few scraps of clean white paper to catch what thoughts come through. It is too early to be concerned about mixing metaphors.

But what shall the bell jar rest on?

Set her on a pedestal. Doric, if you can acquire one. Give her history and support her in these stationary years as she shapes herself with sound and unsounded thoughts. She's not going anywhere yet. When she is ready to test her motion—as no doubt she will be anxious to do, the sound of wheels moving in her always—put her on a pulley. Keep it wide and low to the ground. She needs balance, and guidance. Stable ground to test her weight and its distribution.



Do not burden her with more than she can contain within her bell jar—her arms find no hold on the smooth gloss of glass. She holds all her weight at the center, and has no strength for the weight falling at her side.

She will blossom soon. Arms strong enough to carry the sky, womb enough to hold the whole world down her throat. She will not step from her pedestal, but rather leap and never touch back down. But she is not ready to be seen. Cover her in shadows for the time being—all the more flourish of a dramatic unveiling.

Now she is gaining substance. Now she is collecting weight and filling the empty spaces—but this is still just the form of amassed miscellany. The shape of unshaped composition. Compost. Earthy, breathing, beautiful—but not yet human. Still a wild girl—after all, it takes a reckless soul to put wings to flight. Do not let the cracks or fragile veneer fool you. She'll be flying soon—that shell's not breaking, it's hatching. She hides her wings beneath the skin, patterns traced in pale blue veins.

She'll have had to leave the living room by now, of course. She is not merely a conversation piece anymore. She is the conversation. She'll be malting soon, then will come the pellets of undigested thoughts and words wound in tight bundles of bone and unused matter, prized by school children learning to analyze each discovery. Wait a few eons—two, maybe three. These will be fossilized gems. Coded memories of another language. But note the words she keeps, those she sings sweetly from newly paved clouds.



Do not call her down to answer these riddles just yet. Above us she is safe. These thoughts fall like rain on parched lips that wait, eager pupils, to repeat the sound. Ecosonic geotonic communication. The thought is voiced in its reflex realized somewhere in the verberations that rebound off the solid ground.

The danger waits for feet to touch the ground. With nowhere to wait between to be heard, how shall we arrange the sounds? How will we make sense of the silence left on either side of consequence?



How will we explain the logic in the cry of the fall?

Give her more ferocity...

Ground her with lightning in the sand. Fill in the abstract with the concrete — glass — hardened grace. The earth her body, a vessel for the charge that ignites her spirit at last. See her curve so seamlessly to catch the stars of light that fall. She is an endless night, lit like day. Wet her lips

and she will sing. She is hard now but she knows what it is to be an empty vessel, to be an aesthetic in the corner, a weight on wheels, earthy and green, a blossom blooming; she knows what it is to shatter and take wing.

She is hard now but do not be deceived. She is strong and has a voice but he will make her soft one day. Soon she will grow flesh over this glass. Soon she will be limber. Soon she will dance. And the poetry that dances in scraps and throwaways within the transparent vessel of a girl in progress will become the genetic code that directs every function of the finished product.

She will be a muse, and her smile will be the secret we seek.



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