

The Cardboard Kingdom  
An Adeltan Myth by Maximus Thaler

Far far away, but not too long ago, in a land where the mountains were still green and the city lights had not yet grown bold enough to block out the stars, there lived a people who learned to dance with the gods. Here is how it happened.

There once was an ancient Art, so ancient that even the fact that it had been forgotten had been forgotten. The people found this Art, shivering and forlorn, in an alley under a pile of cardboard carelessly abandoned by the bold lights of the city. And so the people took this art, as well as the cardboard it had made into its clothing, and traveled, for a year and a day, until they reached the far north. And there they built themselves a kingdom, in a land where the mountains were still green and the city lights had not yet grown bold enough to block out the stars.

And there, the Art spoke to them. It said, *“Listen! Listen! I will show you how to live!”* And the people huddled together as the Art spoke. She whispered gently, *“Listen! You can build an entire world out of cardboard. You can build an entire world out of cardboard.”*

And so the people began to transform their kingdom into an entire world. They started simple, cardboard sheep, cardboard carrots, cardboard flowers. Soon they became more courageous. Cardboard lions, cardboard mountains, cardboard forests. They built cardboard wings so that they could fly like cardboard eagles through the cardboard clouds, around the cardboard sun. But, the peoples greatest creation of all, their most shining achievement, was their cardboard gods. Cardboard faces emerged from the hills, Blue, and Green, and Black, and bigger than the trees that surrounded them. Cardboard hands and cardboard feet soon came after, Red and Silver and Gold. And the people’s eyes were wide with joy at the wonder of their creation.

But, although the mountains were still green, and the city lights had not yet grown bold enough to block out the stars, all was not well in the kingdom. Even as cardboard hands emerged from the earth, a thick black darkness descended upon the fields. It fell, heavy. All was silent, and the people were afraid. For although the cardboard gods had bright faces, they could not speak. And as much as the people danced, as much as the sun shone and the fields grew, all remained quiet.

And the people turned to their Art with dismay, and asked her what to do. She was stronger now, her cardboard clothing now decorated with pink and orange. And she said to them just one word, so softly the people could barely hear. *“Music”* The people looked at each other with confusion. And for a long time, the cardboard gods watched solemnly, and all was silent. But then a tiny girl stood up, and began to walk. She did not know what to do, but she had an idea of where to go. She walked far, down from the mountains, for a year and a day, until she reached the city, where the lights had grown bold and blocked out the stars. And there, in a small alleyway,

where not too long ago the Art had been found, the girl, not so little anymore, saw a glimmer of polished brass. She reached out and grabbed it, and, smiling to herself, began the long walk home.

After a year and a day a young woman arrived at the cardboard kingdom. She climbed atop the greenest mountain, and standing under the stars, she began to play. Loud, piercing trumpet. Warbling trombone. Liling flute and thundering sousaphone. And that was only the beginning of the cacophony. In her travels the woman had found these treasures from all over the country, and she brought them home with her, to the cardboard kingdom. And with those first few notes, the darkness began to thin and separate. And the people came out of their houses and listened with awe. They too climbed atop the mountain underneath the stars and began to take part in the music. And the cardboard gods listened and their hearts rejoiced. And the people began to sing.

And yet still, all was not well. The darkness was lifting, but it had not yet fully disappeared. But the people were no longer afraid, and they knew what to do. When they turned back to their Art, and she said, "*Bread*" the woman smiled. She lifted up her trumpet, and once again began the long walk down into the city. But this time, the people followed, and they brought with them their instruments, and their cardboard gods.

After a year and a day, the people arrived in a land where the mountains were not green and the city lights had grown so bold that they blocked out the stars. But the people were no longer afraid, and they returned to the city, loud, dancing, and full of joy. They returned to that small alleyway, where the woman had found her trumpet and the Art had once been shivering and forlorn, and there, in a far corner, hidden amongst the trash, was Bread. Rich, hearty, soft, brown, Bread. And they lifted it onto their backs, and began to dance through the city streets.

Trumpets blared. Cardboard eagles flew through the cardboard clouds around the cardboard sun. Accordion and violin sang to each other underneath the lampposts and tall buildings. And the cardboard gods danced. From skyscraper to skyscraper they shook the ground. Graceful cardboard goddesses, spirits of trees. Cardboard Fire daemons from the furnaces of the earth. They all danced with the people of the city, and they all ate bread, together. And as the cardboard gods danced and the people ate their fill, the lampposts watching them slowly began to go out, one by one. And the cardboard gods looked to the heavens, as if they had somehow come from there, long ago. And the skyscrapers leaned back, creaking under their own weight, so that they too could see what the gods saw. And the sky opened up, and the people of the city, some for the very first time, saw the stars. And the people of the cardboard kingdom looked to each other, and they smiled. They lifted their voices - and their sticks carrying their cardboard companions - and once again began to sing and dance with the people of the city. And they danced through the night, in a place where the mountains were getting greener and the city lights had just learned to not be so bold as to block out the stars. And the light from the stars shown, until all the darkness lifted, and sunlight shined down, upon the people of the city, and upon the people of the cardboard kingdom.