

VI

Phoebus turned blue in the face and his cold breath created a thick layer of mist against the mirror. In opposition the hot bath ran over and the steamy air rose into a mystifying dreamscape. Phoebus couldn't even dream of waking into a waking dream, so he snapped out of his slow stifling fall into akinesis and lay down in the bath to break the ice. Sheets of ice melted like the deepest of memories. Every moment in time seemed to stretch on forever and Phoebus felt thousands of years old, but a child in the face of eternity.

His twenty-one-year-old reflection in the water was a mere tadpole. As if the memories absorbed into his body, he grew conscious of a heavier weight leaning against the side of a boat on a lake. The sound of the wind built through the woods, like the wheels of a train spinning in forward momentum. From beneath, a slow but beautiful tune gradually flowed as an undercurrent in the water. The setting sun sparkled star-shaped patterns about the silvery surface of the lake, creating the illusion of a shooting star. In the blink of an eye the silvery form of the little girl's reflection passed by.

'The wooden dancer,' Phoebus uttered beneath his breath. Tilting his head so as to catch the source of the reflection, his lower body fell out of balance, toppling him overboard. The birds surfed overhead in the wind while a ringing musical tone urged him forward toward the shore. He followed a dry path behind the trees, which led over a little bridge across a pond and to a three-way fork in the road. Phoebus followed the song of the wind and stuck to one of the dusty roads until he reached an old wishing well. He even hoped he had lost her because it would mean she was not a figment of his imagination.

There was a new melancholy air to the rhythm of the wind, blowing the fallen yellow and red leaves around his feet. The colourful leaves perfectly blended into the fading red evening light between the trees, sweetening Phoebus' mood so that he looked down into the well. Perhaps his fortune would change...

Phoebus took a deep breath and focused within himself as if he was making a wish, then threw a coin which splashed into

the water below. Without waiting for an answer he instinctively threw a second coin but this time his meditative poise was interrupted by silence. He didn't hear the coin drop in the darkness. Phoebus peered into the shallow water. The strings of the well's bucket swayed in tune with the strings of the wind. He bent his neck so that with the newly born moonlight he might spot a few coins, but suddenly the music stopped and something pulled him down. Phoebus swung into the well, but was instantly slung right back up again. He desperately stretched his arms to catch the top of the well but swung back and forth inside, then nearly out again, until he eventually found himself standing still on a heap of coins at the bottom of the well. He neither counted nor looked down at the hundreds of coins against his feet.

While Phoebus pondered the significance of never having wished for a pile of money, he realized why he wasn't hurled back up again. Something was holding him at the bottom while the music was switched - to drown his screams into the cesspit of the well. Despite his anxiety, on came a rather shy romantic wind of change. Phoebus nervously shifted his fingers toward his waist and felt five fingers on his five fingers. He shrieked as if he had discovered a dead finger in his soup.

'Do not be afraid,' said a sweet little voice, as the moonlight illuminated two gentle hands placed on his waist in a rather romantic dance position.

The moonlight waxed and for the first time her unmasked face shimmered in full view. Now she was exactly the same size as him: a beautiful fair-skinned girl wearing a white wedding dress muddied by the well and other rough and tumble activities. The bottom of her dress flowed underwater as did her long light brown hair. Tension grew upon the string of the well so she placed one foot against his for balance as he looked into her silver eyes. The string swayed them to and fro, in and out of a moonlight sonata. The closer he drew into her light the further into the darkness she swayed. She drew back into moonlight, but at the bottom of the well there was only room for one to fall into the shadow. And so they stepped back and forth like a dance upon the light waves, pulled by the gravity of the moon.

He realized she reminded him of a drawing in an old story-book his mother had read to him. From their first encounter, he

still viewed her as a little girl in the silver light, and projected his own seven-year-old persona into being. She smiled at him and Phoebus blinked shyly, before gathering his strength.

'What are you doing down...?' asked Phoebus, but she placed her little finger on his mouth before he could finish the sentence. With only one hand attached to him, her grip loosened and the strings pulled heavily against him. But, to Phoebus the strings were invisible among the shadows and his emotions came into light. 'What? Why?' Phoebus responded with a bemused smile behind her finger; before she playfully placed a commanding index finger from her other hand onto her mouth.

'Shoosh,' she hissed before the tension broke.

The strings sprang up and Phoebus launched out of the well amidst the majestic triumphant marching beat of the wind in the thick atmosphere of the surrounding forests. Phoebus landed on two wet feet walking like the steady wheels of a train only to find her walking beside him like a shadow matching his every movement.