

IV

Phoebus lay on a bed of yellow flowers like a flute without breath in the still air. The string in his leg snapped and his body turned to jelly. Once he formed into a statue in the dark, but now he felt he was freezing in the sunlight. Phoebus wanted to melt into dew and settle into the grass. His arms wrapped around his cold body, holding himself back from himself. Even though he shivered, he wasn't numb to the call of nature. He quivered from within and just before the jelly could settle, the ground trembled beneath him as if overcome by its own tension. Phoebus' intestines shifted like the parting of continents. His mind rose up into the air, looking down upon his body anchored to the ground. He caught himself looking up at himself, and then realized he was in fact staring at a silvery mirage reflecting his own image. The mirage faded, leaving the sun behind.

A gentle breeze moved a sunflower to cast a shadow. Phoebus became aware of himself nestled down on the grass. His head tilted upward to the sun. As he blinked, the flower bud opened like an eyelid and a little girl the size of his index finger walked out. She rubbed her eyes with her own index finger. Phoebus blinked again, rubbed his eyes and caught a falling beam play a trick of light. There she sat on a petal, tying the strings on shoes that appeared to be made out of green leaves. Her legs were as slender as the stem of a flower, her arms like the branches of a bonsai tree, her body, neck and head all in the proper proportion, like a regular-sized person. Was it possible for a girl as tiny as an insect to actually exist? Or was she an apparition in humanoid form? Her yellow clothing appeared to be made from the very essence of the plant. Was she a part of the flower? Did she live there? Was she just visiting? Did she come here often?

Suddenly the animals of the forest shrieked in horror: darkness crept over the land. Phoebus looked up and saw the moon walking into the path of the sun. The little girl stood up, staring into the horizon like a giant silhouette against the pale moon. The circumference of the sun sparked as if the edges of the moon were on flame. Phoebus feared the surface had caught fire, but it was the little girl's belly which switched on like a light bulb.

The Flight of the Wooden Dancer

No, she glowed like a firefly. Her entire being gradually illuminated and her face shone like a star against the dark sky, until all Phoebus could see was a silvery light flickering in the dusk of a solar eclipse. She shot across the garden like a comet, and Phoebus followed as if he was her icy tail.

She broke the ice and he glided after her, skating downhill. He rushed with wild abandon as though the trees would move out of his way. Phoebus wasn't walking on thin ice, but as far as he knew he could have been walking on water. The dust of the road choked his lungs, filled his ears and blinded his sight, but Phoebus could have followed her even with his eyes wide shut. Actually he didn't follow her at all: he was pulled by the radiance of her light. Then, abruptly he was covered in pitch dark.

His feet felt steps leading up a blind staircase, climbing toward the sound of violins wailing over a veiled summit. Phoebus supposed the weary little girl was out of breath with which to pump light into her heart. There was no enlightenment as to how she had become masked by the darkness. The drums rolled as he reached the top. In the distance below a wooden box rotated on a stage, the shape of which was gradually revealed in the growing light. The box stopped still. Trumpets soared and its lid shot open with a crack of silver light. He could smell the fireworks that fused into the dark like fading sparkles. The box descended below the varnished platform, while a marionette dressed like a white bride, synchronously ascended between the falling silver stars. Held by supports, blood red cords were tied to every joint in the wooden marionette's bronze painted body. It trembled onward like a seal on an ice bed before hanging standstill in a thoughtful melancholy poise as if it waited for someone to cut the cords loose. The music drifted deep inside the hall of Phoebus' mind as the marionette's hand searched the spaces between as if to feel its own strings. A hopeful chord was born from within, picking up the marionette's chin, carrying its arms, stretching out slowly while the little feet stepped in beautiful harmony. The uplifting strings filled the space and the marionette's arms rose like a white bird hailing the back of its majestic wings.

As the marionette leapt forward she broke anchor and the cords came crashing down from the ceiling. Phoebus surged forward onto the gloomy podium. Restlessly seeking a fallen puppeteer

The Voice of the Wind

amongst the wreckage, he raised his head toward the hole on the rooftop that led toward a dark portal. Phoebus could hear the wind rushing into him again. He lifted both his vocal chords like a thunderous roar spiralling into the air. His voice lingered around a cloud of dust high above the stage and a faint light emitted from the belly of the marionette.

There was no puppeteer to be found because there was no puppeteer. Up close, Phoebus noticed that behind the marionette's wooden apparel there was the very same little girl. Her skin was plastered with bronze paint, peeling at the edges and glowing within like crackling firewood. The circumference of her face behind the mask shone like a moon in a solar eclipse. The tremble dance was over. Now, in tune with his breath she held together a string of placid little pointed steps, like a flamingo promenading upon a row of petals floating on a stream. The wind passed through her like the music of a reed flute tip toeing on the surface of water. She skipped on a beat into the air, while her arms balanced about in cheerful melody. She wagged her legs into twin circles of light and lifted her arms toward an imaginary sun. And before his eyes she began to shrink from a grown girl into a little girl spinning into light, light enough to light its own path and rise into the air, leaving Phoebus in the dark.

The moon had passed through, and the world had turned away from the sun. Although Phoebus felt he had only been away for a short while, night had fallen a long time ago. Perhaps his false sense of time was due to having been transfixed by the whirling wooden dancer. Does the world turn faster when one stands still? Through a projection of light, the time within the floating stardust settles into an elongated loop much longer than the spinning of the outer world. On the other hand, time travels faster when one enjoys oneself. So fast that Phoebus' day was spent and in her rush, Mother Nature managed to blow the candles out with her last breath.

Back at the very same spot in the beetroot garden, only one of the flower buds was closed, and it exhibited an inner radiance which left no doubt. Phoebus carefully lifted a petal. There was the little girl, fast asleep inside the flower. Her body emitted a faint glow in rhythm to her breathing pattern. Afraid of waking her, he gently replaced the petal and ran away in complete

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satisfaction. He felt a connection of inner comfort so deep that he imagined tonight he would at last fall off to sleep. He wished that if he was to dream that it would be of her. Failing that, he would rather remain awake to think of her. Caught between fear and desire, Phoebus worried that he might never fall asleep. So he closed his eyes to convince himself he was making an effort. He tried his utmost to place her out of his mind; he thought up several reasons not to think of her. Either way he thought about this matter, he was still thinking of her by default.

If he shut his ears he could still hear her breathing inside the flower. His mind was capable of picking up the call of every plant in the garden, but he was subconsciously in tune to just one wavelength. Believing this music might lull him into slumber, Phoebus analysed the frequency of the sound, searching for the inner mathematical pattern. Before he knew it he was comparing her frequency of sound to the frequency of sunlight. And it was only later that he became aware of this very same daylight upon him. He only felt the warmth of the sun after hearing a change in her breathing pattern: his alarm call.