

Wading

The Tale of the Shepherd

The shepherd loved his sheep.

ACT ONE

i.

He sat on a round blue chair.

The wind blew through the open walls.

His head hurt. He felt like a turtle because he did not move.

If he was dead.

The heat radiated from his skin and his nose.

Breathing dried his dry eyes.

He saw his own eyelids, reminding him of carpets.

It became morning. It was silent. His ears were either deaf or not. Then there were black shoots or veins all over the place. He almost fell asleep. He was sleepy. He searched for epigraphs, all he could with his body which did not move. The luckiest man in the world.

He looked so peaceful especially within the bow-like figure of the lights. The lights were a glistening black but he did not know. There was a dull heaviness in his inner ear. His whole face illuminated some things.

He wanted gills.

The chair was blue like eggs.

ii.

He started to realize that he did not need to drink. He could not feel his throat. His left arm hung from his side. He was sleeping. He had not slept in the dark.

The book had a name on its cover. The wind opened it, showing blankness. He could see the book even though it was under the blue chair. It disappeared from view.

He could hear the pages struggling — but only barely through the silent static. He wished the sun stayed under.

A child entered the room whom he did not recognize. The child held a bowl of water.

He did not need the water. The child approached him but he waited. The child held his throat firmly and poured the water onto his face. The water was forced into his mouth and nostrils. While drowning he was no longer made of saltwater. The child disappeared. The chair was blue like eggs.

He was a leaf.

In the evening his glasses slid off and hit the ground. They did not break but they made a noise. A piece of hair also fell, silently. He could not see it because it was too thin and because he did not have his glasses.

iii.

He woke up and the air was humid. It was also cold and the humidity touched his bare eyes.

It was very quiet. Sometimes a high chirp rang far away. His thinning hair was wet.

The light started to turn pink. It was a vast kind of pink. His eyes were starting to drift out of focus.

Not one bead of sweat was formed. It was only the droplets of water.

He could not see far away no matter how much his eyes blurred. It was the same as sleeping.

The child was there again. The water washed the dust off of his face and then he could see. The bowl of water was made of wood, which looked very withered in some places. There were already holes in the bottom. They looked burnt. The child did not seem to notice.

He still drowned but this time it was easier. Still no pain. He was mellow.

The child did not walk away for a while. Maybe it was frozen in place too.

It was a little loud. The air made his teeth sting.

Through the wall he could see a small pond with blue leaves.

The blue leaves were from somewhere which was not there. Waves were also in the pond. The waves did not stop. He looked at the waves.

The pond was just a hole in the ground with rainwater. As soon as he stopped looking, the pond was gone.

iv.

During the night he listened.

There might not have been much to listen to.

He heard his own blinking.

His eyelashes were like feathers. None of them had ever fallen. He only felt pain when it was right.

So he still sat on his blue chair. Snow started falling. It was the summer.

ACT TWO

v.

The next thing he saw was a tree. There were sour plums on the tree. He could taste them. They were bitter.

The tree had a deep color. It was surprising. Considering that there was flowing sand underneath it. It still had grown and had leaves.

The sand was the color of the unripe plums.

When they dropped from the tree, they disappeared. The sand also disappeared, but some more always came down flowing.

He felt like sleeping when his eyes were open.

He felt awake when he closed his eyes.

He could see the tree and its sour plums falling always.

The child brought water again. Its shadow was like coal. For the first time he could taste the water. It was the scent of sour plums. The water was transparent, not green or rosy. He drowned. He slept.

vi.

He woke up to the popping sound of a worm crawling.

The white wall was in front of him. It was made of stone. It reflected the light. He felt blank. Slowly a faint beige curtain floated over his vision.

Snow fell. He almost blinked. The worm was the bleach. It was no use trying to find it.

The blood in his face cooled. Sometimes his hair folded as if a breeze. Cornfields.

The worm reached the foot of his blue chair.

It made a blunt noise when it touched the blue paint. He let the worm climb. It disappeared on the blue.

He was still tired. The blandness of dew glistened around his nose. His eyes were wet.

He looked at his pale fingers and his nails. The nails were very short and like marble. He felt the ankle on his foot. His legs were bony. His feet were cold from the dew. His nose had been running for a long time.

He did not breathe. He chose to stay still. Regardless the oxygen kept tinting his sinus. Probably blue, like the chair that worm had touched.

The dust sank like snow. More dust always settled. Never on him because he was electricity. The blue concrete powdering the worm.

His wrists were cold. They were wrapped around like ice. Perhaps they were cold because of the water every day.

He suddenly wanted whiskey but the child did not come that day.

vii.

The skin on his shoulders became dry as the dewy morning turned into a cold noon.

It fell off. His joints were freezing as well.

The skin was slowly grazed off by the harsh winds. It did not hurt. He sat in the wind.

Through his inebriated eyes the air looked pink and the wind was a hole in the air. He felt the nerves burning behind his eyes a little.

The dust took small particles of his dry skin. They disappeared slowly.

Some snow and dust settled onto his shoulders and stayed there.

viii.

The child finally returned.

It brought a woman with a biwa. The woman had a wounded face with long eyelashes.

She seemed to be playing her biwa. The sound only came in fragments. Maybe she was too far away from him. He could not tell neither between her low voice and the buzzing from the biwa, nor between the white powder on her face and her shadowy burn marks.

Everything was washed away by waves of water.

The water went down his throat and into his lungs. His lungs were not used because he did not need air.

The child was gone. It was done. The biwa player looked at his eyes. Her eyelashes were frozen. She stood in place. He slept and then she was gone too.

He heard the fluttering of cicadas. His fingerprints kept becoming shallower, the cold moon.

ACT THREE

ix.

He still had a dull headache.

The smell of sour plums stung his pores.

Like a vegetable he could only absorb. He was turning into a fruit.

His fingers were stuck together.

He could not move his hands from his side.

He looked nowhere like a fish would. The color of his breathing was pale. But he was not dried out. He was not that tiny worm. He was not being evaporated in the large sun.

If there was a sun it was red because of the pink shining air.

He felt something cold diffuse through the small holes in his nails and the coldness got rid of his headache.

The sounds around him were all like holes, as were the silences.

x.

The child brought water in a new container. It was a metal pail.

He could taste the rust. The water poured out of the side of the metal pail because there was a crack.

He made sure not to point it out but he would not speak anyways.

He felt an eyelash growing slowly. Then the sensation mixed with the heat from his cheeks.

The child was behind the chair and staring through the back of his head. The metal pail was not put down.

It looked very heavy.

The sawdust from his elbows trickled out from his nails. It was very festive. The child looked at his fingers, melancholy.

He slept then he saw the child sleeping when he woke. They stayed there. His vacant eyes reflected the blue child.

The blue child was very fast asleep and that was why it was blue. He was only transparent.

xi.

His lips drooped lifelessly. The child was gone, and in its place was a white floor discolored by part of the pail's shadow.

The shadow was foamy because it reflected the white walls dully, circular.

His eyes were half open. The film over them made the misty air mistier.

His back was straight but his knees were limp. They were dry and cracking and the teal layer of flesh between his wounds showed themselves as his body was pulled downwards.

As the paint came off the stool some parts of it became darker like his knees.

One would be afraid that then the skin would all burn and the bones would be left to be blown away by the wind.

xii.

The child brought scissors and cut all of his hair, but it did not change.

The child found the metal pail and walked away. It returned with water. It was more water than before because the child almost could not carry the pail now. Or the metal was heavy.

This time the pail followed through and hit his ear after the water. He got some tinnitus. The metal clanging brought the pain back for a little because tinnitus is painful.

xiii.

His hair, of which there was almost none, grew back immediately. While he was unconscious the snow and dust in the sky had turned to hair. That hair was grey. The hair also moved but could not make anything else move. Some of it knotted itself onto his head. Out of the knotted holes came the water and fragments of the metal pail. Then the metal pail helped the precipitation go back to dust.

ACT FOUR

xiv.

He could now close his eyes without sleeping. He did not need sleep anymore.

He did not open his eyes when the bowl of goldfish was brought on a separate stool and placed in front of him.

There was only one goldfish. The goldfish was translucent. He found it tiresome to decide whether the blotches on its orange body were the result of the refractions in the water.

The goldfish was lively. A spray of water hit him on the arm. He could not see the water but it felt warm on his frozen body.

When it swam towards one side of the bowl, its shadow landed on his toes. He did not feel the shadow on his toes. He could see it but it was like touching the numbing mist.

More strands of hair fell. Then the sour plum tree kicked up the sand and the wind picked up the hair. It fell slowly into the bowl. The goldfish and the hair did not touch each other.

Aside from the occasional sound of the water the room was very, very empty.

xv.

The goldfish woke up and saw him sleeping. Then it swam in another direction and it could not see him.

The goldfish's oil bled out, shading the water pink. It darted backwards. The water was not really moving. Some of the pinks changed.

When it drifted low in the bowl, the glass whistled beautifully.

The goldfish turned towards him again and he was awake.

xvi.

He gazed towards the bowl. He watched the goldfish rotate many times. The strings inside his head swung along with the goldfish.

The backs of his hands were splitting. The mist in the air had all turned to dust.

He thought about the biwa musician. He was not able to sing along to her music, like a dried-up lime.

Nobody let him know what those sounds in his head were either.

He ignored the goldfish and its bowl swaying. The smell of sour plums stung his hands. It bubbled in the blood under his nails. They could be endlessly seen through. The bubbling was powdery and upside down. It was like the goldfish breathing.

The goldfish moved less. It floated, dallied sometimes with the daydreaming water.

Watching the water ripple made him seasick. His headache was worse. The pinkness washed away the depths of his eyes.

xvii.

Then the rain started, slow and processional.

The floor was slightly porous and most of its holes were inhabited by dust.

There was an arboreal sweet smell.

Another puddle formed but he did not see a tree next to it. His neck was bent forward.

Later the goldfish bowl was taken by the child. The water was disposed into the puddle. The goldfish, now tumored, was thrown in the sand. It tried to swim at first but could not.

The bowl was shattered and some of the glass cut him up. His blood flowed and ended quickly.

xviii.

His elbows felt hollow. They might be broken.

Another layer of paint peeled off the stool.

He was warm. His eyes were hazy, a picture.

The illusion of moisture rose from the floor.

Condensation dripped from the glass on the ground.

The light pierced the cold mist.

The blue stool was splitting. The wood scraped his skin.

Black dots were on his skin.

A bruise was on his ankle. He did not know.

It was merely a shadow of the goldfish.

The goldfish had been long gone.

He could not wipe the saliva down his neck.

Water was still lingering in his stale throat.

He still had some oil on his swollen forehead.

It entered his eye. They did not make it wet.

He overheard a cough.

Maybe it did not happen. It was too short.

Suddenly lots of goldfish began watching.

He woke up. The child, alone and silent, stood there.

He slept. The child went away just like that pond.

The plum tree swayed, vengeful.

He opened his eyelids.

A pink haze still was there, soaked into his tears.

He could not drop the stained tears beneath himself.

The child could drown him with those same neon tears.

They could be frozen, scratched with hard fake charcoal.

Everything was laden with soot. The worm's spit.

The worm burst in its spit.

ACT FIVE

xix.

Something buzzed for a long time. He could not even see the scab forming on his ankle. He was sitting in a white lack of light.

He blinked only whenever there was too much mist. The mist was fibrous. It was a fuzz.

He kept gazing into the mist. Maybe the mist carried him words but he could not respond.

The fuzz spread across his bare body. It did not warm him at all, regressing into thin, untouchable film.

The child often came to play with the mist on his skin, which melted every time it was scooped. The fuzz became dark when it melted. Then it detached from the surface in very small seedlings and floated off into the dust.

He almost started sleeping. But then he saw himself being taken into the air by one of the seedlings. He was a piece of dust. When he looked down at the stool, it was covered by only a sober layer of pollution.

He descended slowly back onto the stool. He opened his eyes and mist and dust came into them so he slowly thought about blinking.

xx.

The child was finally able to collect the fuzz. He threw it into the bucket, which had only a few droplets of water remaining. The bottom of the bucket turned cloudy for a moment but became clear again.

Its eyes were like film, airy and not transparent. The middles of them were black.

The child cast a small shadow on the floor. The shadow was light like it was dissolved. It seemed to him like the child's feet did not touch its shadow.

The child's shadow never crossed the stool's unless he was being drowned.

He could not remember the child's face. There was no need.

When the child walked away, its shadow stayed a bit longer. Then it was quickly muffled.

xxi.

He breathed out.

He felt blue.

The sand under the sour plum tree was now too viscous. Wrapping around the roots while it settled there.

More sand ran from above and stopped as it tried to flow past the tree, filling up. Soon the sand reached the trunk.

Some bits lodged in the lenticels, making the tree look smooth.

Parts of the sand branched off. A feeble stream passed near his feet, wicking the water and glass away. The floor became more white. It was less alive. The marred odor of sour plums dissipated. Some of the sand joined the dust in the air. It glided into his mouth and he could not cough it out.

The vapor from the sand crawled on his skin. He was the sand. He was replaced by different sand each moment.

He could see past the walls. He followed the pebbly river. He might be the room, watching peacefully. The room is also moving though. It is the inside of a hollow and splintered grain of sand.

Then he listened to the river brooding. They pattered. They were tiny bells.

Along swam a shear of bark.

ACT SIX

xxii.

He sat on the stool, whose flatness weighed down on his spine.

His arms still hung from his side. They made the shoulders wilt.

The child brought water in the burnt metal bucket. A popping noise happened. Sharp crystals fell. They were ice. He saw one try to sting the ground.

He wanted to vomit every time after drowning. But now the water swimming inside him coated the blue plaster inside his stomach. It was softer.

He needed to cough. The water hit his face and neck. He drowned again. He thought that he no longer was going to cough but the dullness came back. A lingering droplet choked him.

The child also carried the other bucket. Another lump was stuck to his face. This ended the drowning. He did not cry.

It was the morning. His bent hair just breathed as birds would. The child should bring a bird someday.

He followed that bird. The carpets within his eyes folded. Many times another wave of water seemed to crash over his vision. The bird was lost. Its legs were caught by the drenched carpet. He heard the water deep inside his head. There were children like that one in his inner ear, thrusting buckets upon open chairs that immediately fell and broke.

A murmurant pulp was washed onto his feet.

His ears frolicked. He would be sick if he had become a goldfish.

The air was too bitter.

Something like ink touched his eyes. The child limped. He might limp himself: or his legs will not move. He will limp.

The ink came again and the child did not limp. The child was the wall. The wall limped while staying there.

Opaque dust floated in the corners of his vision. It tasted bitter.

Perhaps that was the air.

The Tale of the Sheep

The sheep are grazing.