

The Blue Donkey

It was not a physical characteristic he could hide from. He was utterly blue. Bluer than the sky on a brilliant, sunny day. So blue he stood out against that sky like a chiseled dollop of sapphire, gleaming from lines that danced unpredictably across his torso, down his statuesque legs. He was the heavens crystallized.

So odd for him then to be also a beast of burden. The contradiction made his head spin, his poor skull becoming heavier with each puzzled thought, the earth getting closer and closer to his face as his neck sagged under the weight, until at last, as always happened, the donkey was suddenly grazing, eating comforting reminders of peace in each mouthful of delicious bluegrass.

He was happiest when eating—or not happiest, but most free. At those times his great nostrils flared immensely like tunnels, permitting a steady flow of fragrant traffic that traveled along his spine to his soul. The donkey chewed almost religiously, savoring each spongy bite for its absolute uniqueness.

He could not play with the other donkeys, for the other donkeys could not see him, did not have the proper eyes to discern his silhouette against the horizon. Only when it rained did he appear in their vision, a strange spot of sky that somehow did not get wet, did not permit storms, did not allow night.

The blue donkey swatted a fly from his hindquarters with his tail, which was a thick, snake-like cord that branched into a bracket of radiant icicles. Wounded birds often lived there, regaining their strength to fly by nestling in the perfect camouflage that made them invisible to predators. The blue donkey rejoiced in their restored song, humming along with it gleefully, but also bittersweetly because it signaled each bird's full recovery and imminent departure.

Thus, the blue donkey's only companions were with him for only the shortest durations, never returning—the evidence of the relationship's success. On this day, the tail was empty, the birds in the trees, the blue donkey's head

bent so low by destiny that even with perked ears, he could not hear the chorus of calls in the treetops above him, a sound like the voice of the wind, he imagined.

The blue donkey swatted again and caught the fly unaware, pinned it against his flank of blue shorthairs with a deft snap. He could feel the insect buzz and rebound within the thick mop of tail bristles, roaming their length in utter confusion, illogically, but the donkey did not release it. He swallowed his load of masticated grass and smiled to himself uneasily. "Don't worry," he told the fly, "when you give up fighting, you too will turn into a bird," he promised.

The fly drained its whole life force against that notion. It brought tears to the donkey's eyes to outlast that heroic struggle. A steady stream of shimmering blue water ran down his hanging snout, like glacial runoff, the sky reflecting in it, the puddle it formed reflecting in the sky, a hall of infinitely regressive images. Looking into it, the donkey succumbed to a great burst of sadness, which reverberated in his ribcage like a cannon blast, his heart in rebellious conspiracy.

When the fly was certainly dead, the blue donkey raised his hunched shoulders and sighed. As if with a cumbersome hand, he gripped the tiny carcass in the end of his tail and plodded three forlorn paces forward, across the small puddle of tears. Once beyond it, he lowered the tail to mop up the puddle, never once looking back to examine his work; the action was rote.

The earth beneath the puddle was quickly dry again, even dusty, the small shards of moisture absorbed back into the donkey, into the fly. Where once the puddle caught the sky, a large cloud, like a smudge, had come to rest. The blue donkey tried to muster the right thought of closure after the horrible murder, something to make sense of its necessity, but thinking was oppressive, and his head slowly sank. As his nose neared the ground, the inviting smell of grass filled his nostrils and reminded him of happier things. He resumed grazing, and chewed with total absorption.