

The Return of the Runaway Bunny

In the children's story *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown, the little bunny threatens to leave his loving mother. It is not clear why the bunny needs to run away. But he hurls his ultimatums at her, not cruelly, but as a dare, as if this is what children must do.

As if there is nothing more fulfilling and necessary than breaking a mother's heart.

The bunny threatens to turn into a fish and swim away. The mother replies that if he does that, she will turn into a fisherman, and she will snatch the baby up in her net. No matter what the baby does, the mother will follow after and do what she needs to do. She will not permit the bunny to escape.

Grown-ups fall in love with the story even as it touches something in the hearts of children. Because it describes a feeling parents can scarcely express, a craziness in us that we will do anything, go anywhere, because of the fathomless love that drives us on. It is not something the bunny can understand, but it can appreciate -- that love will protect it from the world.

It is a love that is unnegotiable and inescapable and absolute. It pours out like an overflowing faucet, that fills the sink and continues to flow until all the furniture is floating in the room.

This love is so limitless as to be spooky, like the uncanny posse that followed Butch and Sundance over every mountain and every stream, and after a week of their nonstop running was only a half day's ride behind. And you want to say with them, just like in the movie, *Who are these guys?*

How can they keep their promise, or the mother bunny keep her promise, to follow us everywhere, anywhere, and do what needs to be done? It is eerie and unreasonable. It makes no sense, to deploy such skills for the likes of us.

And it is humiliating that no matter what the bunny does -- whether it is testing the mother's love or whether it really and truly does hope to hide from her light, and find

refuge for itself in this world -- it will fail, because its toylike desires are up against something immeasurably more intense.

It is the realization that I as bunny can swim to the outer reaches of space but it is futile because you, my loving mother, will always find me, you will always be there, and I will never be alone, never be free, you will always trump me, you will always fetch me back.

What I want doesn't matter. I remain your slave whether I flee from you, or whether I stay. To that part that seeks only to be alone, to be away from you, this is an awful truth, because there is no way around it.

The mother understands that the bunny is genuinely fearful of this love. For anything that loving and that fervent must be frightening. It is of an order that no child's mind can comprehend or set limits to.

How can you be this way to me? you want to ask. How can you make this idiotic guarantee? Adolescence, or the terrible twos, is already making sparks in us. We want to deny love and admit only to ugliness.

Don't you know how the world really works, driven not by affection but by virulence and fear?

That little bunnies are shaken every day by dogs ... that the innocent and unwary are struck by cars ... that predators make off with the sweet and the snuggly by the moment?

Don't you pay attention to this world? Don't you know that little bunnies break out in sores, that parasites chew through us, that we die in pain, bawling and whimpering and alone?

And that the mothers we cry out for never come forward, cannot take us in their arms ... that real mothers suffer the same fates as their babies.

Then how can this be -- how in the face of this obvious truth about the world, that the slightest glance at a newspaper proves true, can the mother make this promise?

What fairy tale mind believes this boast?

But the mother bunny rocks and rocks, the baby bunny asleep in her arms.

It's all allegory. The real love is the love of the cosmos, which you can never escape, that will find you no matter where you hide. You deny it. You insult it. You refuse. But there it is, it will never desert you.

And the world is full of such terrible things, but believe in this, believe in this love, and in some way we will live in one another's arms.