

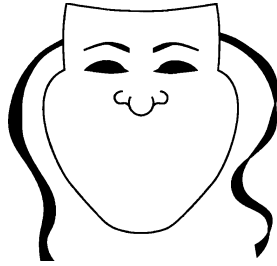


Rituals of the Hunt: PAEAN

By

Paul Wunder

Put a message in a bottle.



PAEAN

By

PAUL WUNDER

"And God bless all the people that are losing their faith."

A boy walks to school and is set upon by bullies. They pull his hair and toss his books into the air. Knocking him to the ground and sitting upon his chest, they merrily place dried leaves and dog droppings in his mouth. Choking and sobbing the boy runs home.

Sitting across the kitchen table, the boy's father reveals his own pain and inquires, *"Why didn't you beat them up?"*

A door opens. A revelation makes itself known. And the pairs of opposites begin their long parade through a life. The whole universe has turned. Cromwell said, *"Lord, only Thou knowest the mighty deeds that we must do today. Let us put fire into the bellies of thine enemies."*

~~~

God, I love that kind of talk. Though I suppose Jesus was right, there is only one way to break the chain. But that is his Christianity. I prefer the image of a Christian knight, who lends his arm only to the just. Righteous indignation ignites this terrible fury that I brought into the world with me. Behind it I have performed many heroic deeds both sacred and profane.

It is at the heart of the male romance. It is the death wish. Let us all go down in flames together. A good samurai, like a good ascetic, is always ready to die at a moment's notice. Back to the sweet oblivion from which we came. Back, into that bubbling pot.

My wife tries, but she cannot help me. She has her own love affair with death. A life in opposition to itself. Her wisdom is keen, but it is the wisdom of one who can see but does not know. She finds all this foolishness to be foolish, yet she remains a child herself.

To act when you are afraid to act is courage. If you are not afraid, it means nothing. There is something so pure and redeeming about that. It brings tears to my eyes. It may be the one quality that all fanatics have in common; still a life without courage is no life at all.

Now, late in my days, I have an infant son. And I am afraid. Afraid for him and myself. Afraid of what I will teach him. Afraid of what he may learn from me. And afraid of what I will *not* say.

What a temper he has. What a fine fury.

When the empirical wisdom of hard experience clashes with the beliefs we aspire to in our hearts, we become conflicted. Before we can learn to harmonize to the rhythms of life, we must keep quiet and listen. Then the words we speak must bind us, must obligate us. If they do not, then they mean nothing. One must be careful what he gives away every time he makes a promise, every time he utters a single word.

What do I have to say? Not much. Just let me spit all this dirt out of my mouth.

*1995*

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## CHAPTER I

Dark, dark island princess  
Welcomes the milk-skinned, scurvy,  
Ocean sailor to her cot.  
Buries his drunken head in her breast,  
And washes him clean in her inland waters.

Peaceful, gentle, vibrant woman  
Can heal all sickness of the heart,  
Even the bruised and calloused one  
Of a long time sailing man.

Baptizing the heathen,  
She returns him to his ship.  
To stride the decks once more.  
Whole again.

But now to watch her sail away.  
Anchored. Windless. And watching.

Beauty can do no harm  
It is complete unto itself.  
Self-sustaining and everlasting beauty,  
Sail on.

**1976**

Oh love, how I ache for you.  
Mysterious and unexpected  
Fragrance of my life.

I am sad and sore tonight,

But this is your birthday.  
Joy to the world,  
Salvation's come.

Burnished bright.  
With eyes that sparkle brown.  
Full of the promise.

Of love,  
And laughter,  
And happiness  
As yet, unknown.

With all the hidden love.  
The dark and secret love.  
Lurking, standing on tiptoe.

Waiting for the moment of release.  
Then spring skyward,  
Blazing a trail,  
Stars swirling in your wake.

And me, so small.  
So pitiful, insignificant.  
Watch the path you cut across the heavens.

Launch my tiny wings.  
Lifting me up.  
Over the sands.  
To the beating core of your heart.

Hear me, my love.  
Think not of sorrow.

As nectar to the bee  
To pollinate the flower,  
So everything must be  
At each appointed hour.

**1976**

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Calling out your name  
Like a magic incantation.  
Over and over again.

~~~

The medicine man stoops over the fire
And moans low,
*"Come, Spirit.
Lift us up. Fill us.
Make us one with thee.
One with the mystery."*

Put up an idol in the forest.
Sink it deep into the ground,
So that nothing can topple it.

Cast it in fire,
So that the storms of time and weather
May not change it.

Rust may cover the walls,
But a thousand years will pass
Before the center is pierced.

Inside, it will continue to grow.
Bleeding into its own wounds.
Nourishing itself.

While what every lonely heart yearns for
And every tortured soul seeks,
Is ours already.

We are the guardians.
Soldiers of the spirit.
Here is where we will make our stand.

When that day comes,
We will be ready.

~~~

Calling out your name  
Like a magic incantation.  
Over and over again.

And then I am with you.  
In your arms again.  
Sliding down to rest my cheek  
Against your naked thigh.  
To kiss you there briefly,  
Before you start to smile.

Like a child.  
Discovering delight,  
Then I will be welcome,  
Home to my place.  
And I will be at peace once more.

There's power in a name.  
Try it and see.  
Believe in my magic,  
And I'll believe in yours.

*1977*

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## CHAPTER II

Evil creature from the night  
Slithers up the bed post  
And into the dream.  
Turning slumber into nightmare.

Cold sweat drenches the sheets.  
A mechanical scream muffled by  
Claws upon the throat.  
The horror is now.

The horror is real.  
Matted red hair wrapped in decay.  
Corpulent clay white flesh  
That falls away in clumps.

The stench penetrates,  
Filling up the nostrils  
As the body recoils.  
This is not death.

Medusa's daughter is here.  
Come to sup its nightly feed  
At the liver and the soul.  
Bile oozing from its scaly pores.

One blue eye flushed red  
With sin, disease, and lust  
Requires a glowing stake to pierce  
The wriggling brain behind it.

*Back, monster.*  
*Back from whence you came.*  
*Unholy thing, go into the ground.*  
*Ye shall not have me tonight.*



*1983*

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Stillness.  
On the ground.  
In the air.  
Around me.

No stillness in the heart.  
It races.  
It pounds.  
A message, a call.

Calling me.  
Where I do not know.  
Shall I follow  
My treacherous heart?

There is no other calling.  
Whose heart will guide me?  
I have no other drum.  
I must march or die.

There is stillness all around,  
But no stillness in the heart.  
I can strangle my heart,  
And listen to my mind.

But I can never kill the sound.  
The beating organ lives.  
It will not die.  
It calls me still,  
Though still I cannot be.

*1983*

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Valentine

The wind comes across the fields  
Carrying the holy odor of battle.  
So many comrades fallen.  
How shall we count their saddles.

The bodies, the souls, the blood.  
Could we have spared a drop.  
When the frenzy is upon us,  
Our nature's not to stop

Who opened the box  
And loosed the spark.  
Who freed the hounds  
That tore our hearts.

Survivors return from the front.  
No prisoners to un-roped.  
Reasons give us little warmth  
To fire our ragged hopes.

The soil is enriched,  
Paid for with our home.  
Springs any blade of grass to life  
Above the ashes sown.

Curses for the enemy.  
Our mouths too weak to howl.  
Pin medals on the heroes,  
Who stand behind the plough.

*1985*

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### CHAPTER III

I am light that comes as darkness,  
Spirit made of flesh,  
Risen from the body,  
I am here and I am next.

It is now I am about.  
It is not where I have been.  
I come trailing sparks behind me,  
From a shadow I begin.

~~~

Pour out the love,
Cool and measured.
Not as a miser,
But as a wise man can.

Standing in the tower
The Vizier surveys his land.
The long drought is over.
His people look to him.

*"Open the gates a trifle.
Let nothing wash away.
Clear the ditches and soak the fields,
Only a little on the first day."*

~~~

The soldiers beach their boats.  
They swagger before the alien queen.  
She poses magnificent and austere.  
They demand, hands on their swords.

*"Wade in the pools," she smiles.  
"Drink, wash, and heal.  
Take all that you need,  
And more will be revealed."*

~~~

In the workings of a moment,
In the clutching of your hand.
More than you expected,
Better than you planned.

I am light that comes as darkness.
I am all around you now.
Making bright the path before us,
I know when, and I know how.

In the blackest hour of nothing,
From the bottom of the soul,
I come streaming up like morning.
I am joined, and I am whole.

~~~

The dream leads where  
The dream leads.  
Surrendering as an innocent  
To the possibility of more.

Childlike we seek the good.  
Eager for service, with no regard  
To the gravity of consequence we incur  
When we invoke the irrevocable.

Guileless and unafraid,  
Once taken can never be returned.  
For we dream the dream,  
Then the dream dreams us.

We breathe our lives into it.  
It expands,  
Rising up and over  
Every obstacle of man and god.

Until we discover it breathing  
Our lives back into us.  
Choking for more,  
Crying out for more.

Prisoners of the dream.  
Chained to the good.  
Precious dream,  
What harm can beauty do?

Tempest blows,  
Fire burns,  
Eyes sink,  
And hair goes white.

Locked in a furnace of flesh,  
Until the spirit is forged.  
Condemned and abandoned  
In the white rage of despair.

Tempered only by the notion  
That every lock has its key,  
We need only to discover  
And emerge polished and unbound.

The dream lives on,  
Altered and unchanging.  
Filling every space  
It occupies.

To endure and endure  
In service to the dream.  
It is folly, and  
It is redemption.

~~~

We are light that comes as darkness,
Spirit made of flesh,
Risen from the body,
We are here, and we are next.

It is now we are about.
It is not where we have been.
We come trailing sparks behind us,
From a shadow we begin.

1986

Approach the village at twilight
and see what our ancestors saw.
Since there have been villages,
There has been smoke.

A silken gray veil
And the odor of cooked food.
The archetypal incense of home.
Every home in every time.

Walk along the narrow path
Worn smooth by travelers.
Cross the footbridge carefully,
And find the vantage of the ridge.

Light and smoke.
The valets of imagination.
I am not the one who lingers long,
I am the one who disappears.

~~~

Recalling affluent lives  
Inscribed in stone.  
Opulent palaces,  
Monuments to our pleasure.

Of power, of love,  
Of willfulness,  
And dreams of power  
Never held but discerned  
Through smoky passage  
From the great hall to

the king's chamber,  
And I disappear.

~~~

Helmeted men at arms
Line the highroad to this triumph.
Valorous comes the conqueror,
His victory complete.
Submission to his will
Enlivens the existence of those
He consents to rule.
And I disappear.

~~~

Rock bound the cloister  
Barricades the sea.  
Holding back the incursion.  
The sinister, the fluid.  
Purity so bright it tarnishes  
The shields of the unworthy.  
Austerity so severe  
The warriors shrivel and decamp.

In the sanctum burn three candles.  
The swiftness of his words of praise  
Wafts higher than the woodsman's skill  
With wand and willow.  
Instructing the multitude,  
*Et nunc, et semper,*  
And I disappear.

~~~

Summer's first breeze whistles
Down the damp corridor.
Behind an oaken door
The innocence of love is suffocating
In a quicksand of dissolving flesh.
The satin robes once parted continue
To separate from the pillars of wisdom.
Pulling down the veil,

The curtain of the holy.
Unseating their icon.
Overturning their gods.
Under centuries of ash,
The seeker sifts and digs
And speculates a thousand squeamish questions.
About why and, *"Did they....."*
And I disappear.

~~~

A child's dream of power  
And history unfolded.  
Himself a witness and a player.  
Unsafe in either role.  
No security awaits,  
None is to be had.  
None can foretell the future.  
A world where all is precise  
And fiercely clean  
With no vagaries or doubts.  
The childlike sense of fairness  
Topples under the crash  
And thunder of awareness greater  
Than my place,  
My body,  
Or my own invisibility.

~~~

A slender elegant woman
Slips across a marble floor.
Bare shoulders and a cocktail glass.
An eager cavalier lights her cigarette.
Our eyes meet.
Emotion wells up in me.
Intoxicating.
Not in love with love,
In love with intoxication.
To be other than it is.

Anything other than it is.
Amplified, altered,

Intensified, controlled.
I know these feelings,
I used to cultivate them.
Now we are strangers to each other.

~~~

Two sweethearts quarrel.  
Their life together expires.  
Treachery so widespread.

So much villainy  
Never conceived of,  
It collapses from within.

The prisoner is brought before the court.  
His chains are forged.  
The punishment prescribed,  
His confession abstracted.  
The warrant is read,  
And the executioner summoned.

~~~

I have always been smoke
Chasing after light.
Now the fire has gone out,
And I remain.
Now and forever,
I remain.

Seekers of magic
Require extraordinary miracles.
The wise man knows
The real magic
Is the ordinary miracle
That we are here at all.

1987



CHAPTER IV

If water can wash away a stone,
Let me stand in a river.

Poised by the water,
Light penetrating every sound,
While all living things
Move through me.

I separate and fracture,
I hesitate and dissolve.
Then reassemble,
Faster than the blinking of an eye.

And begin again.
Effortless,
Unceasing,
And impossible.

I step out,
And drop down
Into the deep
Without fear.

Step out now.
Drop
With me.
No harm can befall you.

Drop below the surface.
Drop free,
Clear.
But we always step back.

The answer is not in being taken,

But to drop once more
Like an anchor who has let
Go of her rope.

Not to drop and be reeled in again,
But to drop once and finally.
Down into the deep.
All the way down.

And while you journey south,
Consider
How languorous and sweet
Every wounded moment has been.

Pain and pleasure
Two faces of the same idol.
Ferocious is our god.
Benevolent his will.

Dancing as we worship joy.
Bowing down before our fears.
Dancing in the face of death.
Bowing to the golden moment.

The visage turned away
Always beckons.
The visage turned toward me
Is not the one I seek.

~~~

If water can wash away a stone,  
Let us stand in the river.

Let us go down to the bank  
While light is piercing sound,  
Where every moving thing  
Goes through us and around.

Our lives have grown brittle  
Incrusted and solid.  
Crack them open, my love,  
And begin again with me.

Flow through my heart  
Rubbing it smooth.  
Gentle my eyes  
And smile at our virtue.

If water can wash a stone,  
I will soften your troubles.  
Pour out my life  
And soothe all your pain.

If water can wash away a stone,  
Let me stand in a river.  
Take me in pieces  
Down to the sea.

*1988*

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### Independence Day

Inside the heart is a circus.  
Clowns and acrobats  
Born to entertain,  
Amuse and mystify.

No master can be found  
To rule or impose  
Any measure of control  
On these unruly children.

Fathered in confusion,  
Their motives are oblique.  
Obscuring the mind  
And interrupting sleep.

Where the desert meets the forest stands an abandoned city. Fit for habitation, though no one resides there. Gardens flourish and fountains flow. Its towers unguarded, its gates thrown open. Inviting. But no one answers.

What happened here? What enchantment has been wrought that leaves behind such an unspeakable emptiness? Two crows circle silently above, telling nothing to anyone.

~~~

Long ago a traveling carnival came to town.
Children lined the streets.
They did not see the shabby costumes
Or the pitiful toothless animals,
Nor hear the tooting of their sour instruments.
The children saw only wonder.

“If it is magic this band of gypsies bring,
Welcome them, ” their elders allowed.
“Let the young have magic.
Wherever they find it.”

For it is the ruler of the heart.
It counts the time, it pipes the tune.
And when it sounds,
All must dance.

A violet angel descends upon the city. Emerging in the body of a woman. She stands before a golden throne. Built for a queen, but never occupied.

Seating herself, she summons the tumblers. The jugglers and the minstrels. The poet and the fool. Awaken and be glad. The kingdom has begun. Let sorrow be no more. Lift up your face and fear not.

~~~

Inside the heart is a circus.  
A circus of many players.  
Nimble and dexterous.  
Impossible to tame.

They await the sound of their master-s voice.  
At her command they dance as one.  
Charmed by her beauty, eager to please.  
To no one else can they bow down.

Planets collide into stars and become planets again. Light returns to its source and remains in shadow.

Still, my heart is unknown to me. A foreign country, into which I dare not go. Uncharted

and forbidding. Someone must take me. Someone to lead.

And I had found her, but knew her not. Blinded by my own hand, but now I see. I long to look upon her brown eyes, shining in the faces of our children.

~~~

Fireworks erupt across the sky.
Our liberation has been won.
We have made a bargain with our posterity.
To what has been given this day,
Let us stand fast.
Unmoved and unshaken by the troubles to come.

Convicted in our resolve.
Generations to come
Will celebrate this day,
And call it blessed

Hold back nothing .
Set all the captives free.

1991

Parallel lines converge at infinity,
But crossroads rise up to meet us.
So many possibilities.
So many turns in the road.

Opportunities to harm or to heal.
And what is known, and what is real?
What uncovered and what displayed,
If we should choose the loving way.

You've decided, that is clear.
You are pure and without fear.
Beauty is in you arrayed,
For you did choose the loving way.

I am darkness. I am fire.
I come eaten with desire.

Cool my head with what you say,
And I shall choose the loving way.

Toss a pebble in the lake.
You and I a wave will make.
Starting here, begin today,
That all may choose the loving way.

1992



CHAPTER V

Oh child, that never was.
And child, that will never be.
Another child is coming.

With him will all the generations be.
Ancestors past, present, and future,
All harmonized in him for good.

But you the gentle one
And you the lost one
Know him not.

Take comfort in his coming,
For he lives for you.
He wakes and breathes your air.

He receives your tenderness.
Delayed but not denied,
Your day is yet to come.

So many choices
Made and regretted
And not made.

They disappear into a bottomless pit.
A well of sadness
From which we draw and drink
And wash our wounds.
Then turn away and lower our eyes,
Until the unslaked thirst cries, "*Water.*"
And we return to take the bitter draft
Of our own legacy.

Let this child rise to his own destiny,
Unfettered by the bonds of his paternity.
And for you who waits,
While all the saints in heaven
Look down and find favor in him.
Think not that time has passed you by.

Be at peace,
And give him your benediction.
For he lives,
And you live as well.

1994



CHAPTER VI

July 19th

The goddess of the moon rules over the night.
While hunters close round the fire,
Spinning tales to keep their courage up,

She springs fully formed from the head of her father.
Armored only in her purity and nothing else.
She fears not. She resists not. She knows.

Everything that is or will be.
She is destined to reign
In the kingdom of the half-seen.

Creatures come out of the night.
Terrifying the denizens of the day,
But not those accustomed to the dark.

They are illumined and
Allowed to see their demons
As phantoms of their own making.

Like any warrior
She carries the marks of battle,
But she is without shame.

Luminous. Her skin is like milk.
Those, who serve her, drink from her
And fall into those eyes without bottom.

Diving deeper and farther,
Until they come up swimming
Into the midnight of her flowing hair.

2000

Chameleon

My love is a chameleon.
The goddess of the moon,
The patron saint of all whores.
She is the Madonna and the child.

My love is a chameleon.
A movable feast, a changeling.
She cannot be caged.
She is a marvel of nature.

She is the Magdalene
And the Sisters of Mercy.
She dances naked in a striptease bar.
And heals a leper with a kiss.

She has ways of knowing
That surpass any wisdom
I will ever have
Or hope to possess.

My love runs naked in the rain
And knows the name of every flower
She treads upon and every leaf
That clings to her salty flesh.

My love grows large and voluptuous,
A sailor's wet dream,
Then small and waif-like.
An orphan, a bar of soap
Disappearing down the drain.
She makes love when it is
Her time of the month.
She is Kali, smeared with blood,
A voodoo princess, a human sacrifice,

The Paschal Lamb.

My love is a woman.
She bears children without a cry,
But retains the body of a girl.
Fragile like the scent of magnolia blossoms,
Wafting on the breeze of a summer night down south.
She enters the bedroom window of a small boy,
Frames his dreams in moonlight,
And fills them with wonder and delight.

2000

I have your scent on me.
It permeates my nostrils
And fills up my lungs.
It burns my veins.

I have your scent on me.
I can't get it out of my head.
I run my hand over my own throat,
And I feel you in my flesh.

Sometimes I fear if I touch you,
I will die.
Sometimes I fear if I don't touch you,
I will die.

I have your scent on me.
My body trembles,
And I am pierced by this
Terrible sweet longing.

I have your scent on me,
And it robs me of my sleep
Then keeps me at the window,
Searching for the moon.

I have your scent on me.
I have it on my skin,

In my eyes, and inside my mouth.
I wear it like a badge of honor.

I have your scent on me,
And it never comes off.

2000



CHAPTER VII

Wayfarer

The pilgrim treads his weary road.
Shuffling along, a column of dust
Rises up behind him in the sun.

A path grown familiar with time.
He makes his way to the place
Where the holy one resides.

As the years have passed,
He has grieved the grief that comes to all.
Dreams of love and fortune won and lost.

His world rolls and splits and divides itself
To rip the ground beneath his feet.
While she remains tranquil and ageless.

Arriving, he falls to kiss the dirt.
Grateful to be once again
At the beating core of her heart.

He comes troubled and worn down.
What does he want from her?
What would he have her do?

He draws near then departs,
Holding a glimpse of what can be,
And the possibility of more.

In the temple he prays to be returned.
He feels himself a part of every living thing.

Dyed one shade truer
In the blazing color of her love.

2003

