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Women Who Run with the Wolves



Clarissa Pinkola Estés



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the Wolves

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Rider, an imprint of Ebury Publishing,
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA

Rider is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Penguin
Random House
UK

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First published in Great Britain by Rider in 1992

Published in paperback in 1993 by Rider

Reprinted 1993 (four times), 1994 (five times), 1995 (twice), 1996

Reissued in 1998

This edition published by Rider in 2022

www.penguin.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781846046940

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

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*A kedves szüleimnek
Mária és József,
Mary and Joseph,
Szeretlek benneteket.*

*y
Para todos los que yo amo
que continúan desaparecidos.*

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Foreword

We are all filled with a longing for the wild. There are few culturally sanctioned antidotes for this yearning. We were taught to feel shame for such a desire. We grew our hair long and used it to hide our feelings. But the shadow of Wild Woman still lurks behind us during our days and in our nights. No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four-footed.

CLARISSA PINKOLA ESTÉS
Cheyenne, Wyoming

Introduction: Singing Over the Bones

WILDLIFE AND THE Wild Woman are both endangered species.

Over time, we have seen the feminine instinctive nature looted, driven back, and overbuilt. For long periods it has been mismanaged like the wildlife and the wildlands. For several thousand years, as soon and as often as we turn our backs, it is relegated to the poorest land in the psyche. The spiritual lands of Wild Woman have, throughout history, been plundered or burnt, dens bulldozed, and natural cycles forced into unnatural rhythms to please others.

It's not by accident that the pristine wilderness of our planet disappears as the understanding of our own inner wild natures fades. It is not so difficult to comprehend why old forests and old women are viewed as not very important resources. It is not such a mystery. It is not so coincidental that wolves and coyotes, bears and wildish women have similar reputations. They all share related instinctual archetypes, and as such, both are erroneously reputed to be ingracious, wholly and innately dangerous, and ravenous.

My life and work as a Jungian psychoanalyst, poet, and *cantadora*, keeper of the old stories, have taught me that women's flagging vitality can be restored by extensive "psychic-archeological" digs into the ruins of the female underworld. By these methods we are able to recover the ways of the natural instinctive psyche, and through its personification in the Wild Woman archetype we are able to discern the ways and means of woman's deepest nature. The modern woman is a blur of activity. She is pressured to be all things to all people. The old knowing is long overdue.

The title of this book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, came from my study of wildlife biology, wolves in particular. The studies of the wolves *Canis lupus* and *Canis rufus* are like the history of women, regarding both their spiritedness and their travails.

Healthy wolves and healthy women share certain psychic

characteristics: keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion. Wolves and women are relational by nature, inquiring, possessed of great endurance and strength. They are deeply intuitive, intensely concerned with their young, their mates and their pack. They are experienced in adapting to constantly changing circumstances; they are fiercely stalwart and very brave.

Yet both have been hounded, harassed, and falsely imputed to be devouring and devious, overly aggressive, of less value than those who are their detractors. They have been the targets of those who would clean up the wilds as well as the wildish environs of the psyche, extinguishing the instinctual, and leaving no trace of it behind. The predation of wolves and women by those who misunderstand them is strikingly similar.

So that is where the concept of the Wild Woman archetype first crystallized for me, in the study of wolves. I've studied other creatures as well, such as bear, elephant, and the soul-birds—butterflies. The characteristics of each species give abundant metaphoric hints into what is knowable about the feminine instinctual psyche.

The wild nature passed through my spirit twice, once by my birth to a passionate Mexican-Spanish bloodline, and later, through adoption by a family of fiery Hungarians. I was raised up near the Michigan state line, surrounded by woodlands, orchards, and farmland and near the Great Lakes. There, thunder and lightning were my main nutrition. Cornfields creaked and spoke aloud at night. Far up in the north, wolves came to the clearings in moonlight, prancing and praying. We could all drink from the same streams without fear.

Although I did not call her by that name then, my love for Wild Woman began when I was a little child. I was an aesthete rather than an athlete, and my only wish was to be an ecstatic wanderer. Rather than chairs and tables, I preferred the ground, trees, and caves, for in those places I felt I could lean against the cheek of God.

The river *always* called to be visited after dark, the fields *needed* to be walked in so they could make their rustle-talk. Fires *needed* to be built in the forest at night, and stories *needed* to be told outside the hearing of grown-ups.

I was lucky to be brought up in Nature. There, lightning strikes taught me about sudden death and the evanescence of life. Mice litters showed that death was softened by new life. When I unearthed

“Indian beads,” fossils from the loam, I understood that humans have been here a long, long time. I learned about the sacred art of self-decoration with monarch butterflies perched atop my head, lightning bugs as my night jewelry, and emerald-green frogs as bracelets.

A wolf mother killed one of her mortally injured pups; this taught a hard compassion and the necessity of allowing death to come to the dying. The fuzzy caterpillars which fell from their branches and crawled back up again taught single-mindedness. Their tickle-walking on my arm taught how skin can come alive. Climbing to the tops of trees taught what sex would someday feel like.

My own post-World War II generation grew up in a time when women were infantilized and treated as property. They were kept as fallow gardens . . . but thankfully there was always wild seed which arrived on the wind. Though what they wrote was unauthorized, women blazed away anyway. Though what they painted went unrecognized, it fed the soul anyway. Women had to beg for the instruments and the spaces needed for their arts, and if none were forthcoming, they made space in trees, caves, woods, and closets.

Dancing was barely tolerated, if at all, so they danced in the forest where no one could see them, or in the basement, or on the way out to empty the trash. Self-decoration caused suspicion. Joyful body or dress increased the danger of being harmed or sexually assaulted. The very clothes on one’s shoulders could not be called one’s own.

It was a time when parents who abused their children were simply called “strict,” when the spiritual lacerations of profoundly exploited women were referred to as “nervous breakdowns,” when girls and women who were tightly girdled, tightly reined, and tightly muzzled were called “nice,” and those other females who managed to slip the collar for a moment or two of life were branded “bad.”

So like many women before and after me, I lived my life as a disguised *criatura*, creature. Like my kith and kin before me, I swagger-staggered in high heels, and I wore a dress and hat to church. But my fabulous tail often fell below my hemline, and my ears twitched until my hat pitched, at the very least, down over both my eyes, and sometimes clear across the room.

I’ve not forgotten the song of those dark years, *hambre del alma*, the song of the starved soul. But neither have I forgotten the joyous

canto hondo, the deep song, the words of which come back to us when we do the work of soulful reclamation.

Like a trail through a forest which becomes more and more faint and finally seems to diminish to a nothing, traditional psychological theory too soon runs out for the creative, the gifted, the deep woman. Traditional psychology is often spare or entirely silent about deeper issues important to women: the archetypal, the intuitive, the sexual and cyclical, the ages of women, a woman's way, a woman's knowing, her creative fire. This is what has driven my work on the Wild Woman archetype for over two decades.

A woman's issues of soul cannot be treated by carving her into a more acceptable form as defined by an unconscious culture, nor can she be bent into a more intellectually acceptable shape by those who claim to be the sole bearers of consciousness. No, that is what has already caused millions of women who began as strong and natural powers to become outsiders in their own cultures. Instead, the goal must be the retrieval and succor of women's beautiful and natural psychic forms.

Fairy tales, myths, and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still, into their own knowing. The tracks we all are following are those of the wild and innate instinctual Self.

I call her Wild Woman, for those very words, *wild* and *woman*, create *llamar o tocar a la puerta*, the fairy-tale knock at the door of the deep female psyche. *Llamar o tocar a la puerta* means literally to play upon the instrument of the name in order to open a door. It means using words that summon up the opening of a passageway. No matter by which culture a woman is influenced, she understands the words *wild* and *woman*, intuitively.

When women hear those words, an old, old memory is stirred and brought back to life. The memory is of our absolute, undeniable, and irrevocable kinship with the wild feminine, a relationship which may have become ghostly from neglect, buried by over-domestication, outlawed by the surrounding culture, or no longer understood anymore. We may have forgotten her names, we may not answer when

she calls ours, but in our bones we know her, we yearn toward her; we know she belongs to us and we to her.

It is into this fundamental, elemental, and essential relationship that we were born and that in our essence we are also derived from. The Wild Woman archetype sheaths the alpha matrilineal being. There are times when we experience her, even if only fleetingly, and it makes us mad with wanting to continue. For some women, this vitalizing “taste of the wild” comes during pregnancy, during nursing their young, during the miracle of change in oneself as one raises a child, during attending to a love relationship as one would attend to a beloved garden.

A sense of her also comes through the vision; through sights of great beauty. I have felt her when I see what we call in the woodlands a Jesus-God sunset. I have felt her move in me from seeing the fishermen come up from the lake at dusk with lanterns lit, and also from seeing my newborn baby’s toes all lined up like a row of sweet corn. We see her where we see her, which is everywhere.

She comes to us through sound as well; through music which vibrates the sternum, excites the heart; it comes through the drum, the whistle, the call, and the cry. It comes through the written and the spoken word; sometimes a word, a sentence or a poem or a story, is so resonant, so right, it causes us to remember, at least for an instant, what substance we are really made from, and where is our true home.

These transient “tastes of the wild” come during the mystique of inspiration—ah, there it is; oh, now it has gone. The longing for her comes when one happens across someone who has secured this wildish relationship. The longing comes when one realizes one has given scant time to the mystic cookfire or to the dreamtime, too little time to one’s own creative life, one’s life work or one’s true loves.

Yet it is these fleeting tastes which come both through beauty as well as loss, that cause us to become so bereft, so agitated, so longing that we eventually must pursue the wildish nature. Then we leap into the forest or into the desert or into the snow and run hard, our eyes scanning the ground, our hearing sharply tuned, searching under, searching over, searching for a clue, a remnant, a sign that she still lives, that we have not lost our chance. And when we pick up her trail, it is typical of women to ride hard to catch up, to clear off the desk, clear off the relationship, clear out one’s mind, turn to a new

page, insist on a break, break the rules, stop the world, for we are not going on without her any longer.

Once women have lost her and then found her again, they will contend to keep her for good. Once they have regained her, they will fight and fight hard to keep her, for with her their creative lives blossom; their relationships gain meaning and depth and health; their cycles of sexuality, creativity, work, and play are re-established; they are no longer marks for the predations of others; they are entitled equally under the laws of nature to grow and to thrive. Now their end-of-the-day fatigue comes from satisfying work and endeavors, not from being shut up in too small a mind-set, job, or relationship. They know instinctively when things must die and when things must live; they know how to walk away, they know how to stay.

When women reassert their relationship with the wildish nature, they are gifted with a permanent and internal watcher, a knower, a visionary, an oracle, an inspiratrice, an intuitive, a maker, a creator, an inventor, and a listener who guide, suggest, and urge vibrant life in the inner and outer worlds. When women are close to this nature, the fact of that relationship glows through them. This wild teacher, wild mother, wild mentor supports their inner and outer lives, no matter what.

So, the word *wild* here is not used in its modern pejorative sense, meaning out of control, but in its original sense, which means to live a natural life, one in which the *criatura*, creature, has innate integrity and healthy boundaries. These words, *wild* and *woman*, cause women to remember who they are and what they are about. They create a metaphor to describe the force which funds all females. They personify a force that women cannot live without.

The Wild Woman archetype can be expressed in other terms which are equally apt. You can call this powerful psychological nature the instinctive nature, but Wild Woman is the force which lies behind that. You can call it the natural psyche, but the archetype of the Wild Woman stands behind that as well. You can call it the innate, the basic nature of women. You can call it the indigenous, the intrinsic nature of women. In poetry it might be called the "Other," or the "seven oceans of the universe," or "the far woods," or "The Friend."¹ In various psychologies and from various perspectives it would

perhaps be called the id, the Self, the medial nature. In biology it would be called the typical or fundamental nature.

But because it is tacit, prescient, and visceral, among *cantadoras* it is called the wise or knowing nature. It is sometimes called the “woman who lives at the end of time,” or the “woman who lives at the edge of the world.” And this *criatura* is always a creator-hag, or a death Goddess, or a maiden in descent, or any number of other personifications. She is both friend and mother to all those who have lost their way, all those who need a learning, all those who have a riddle to solve, all those out in the forest or the desert wandering and searching.

In actuality, in the psychoid unconscious—an ineffable layer of psyche from which this phenomenon emanates—Wild Woman has no name, for she is so vast. But, since this force engenders every important facet of womanliness, here on earth she is named many names, not only in order to peer into the myriad aspects of her nature but also to hold on to her. Because in the beginning of retrieving our relationship with her she can turn to smoke in an instant, by naming her we create for her a territory of thought and feeling within us. Then she will come, and if valued, she will stay.

So, in Spanish I call her *Río Abajo Río*, the river beneath the river; *La Mujer Grande*, the Great Woman; *Luz del abismo*, the light from the abyss; *La Loba*, the wolf woman, or *La Huesera*, the bone woman.

She is called in Hungarian, Ö, *Erdöben*, She of the Woods, and *Rozsomák*, The Wolverine. In Navajo, she is *Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá*, The Spider Woman, who weaves the fate of humans and animals and plants and rocks. In Guatemala, among many other names, she is *Humana del Niebla*, The Mist Being, the woman who has lived forever. In Japanese, she is *Amaterasu Omikami*, The Numina, who brings all light, all consciousness. In Tibet she is called *Dakini*, the dancing force which produces clear-seeing within women. And it goes on. She goes on.

The comprehension of this Wild Woman nature is not a religion but a practice. It is a psychology in its truest sense: *psukhē/psych*, soul; *ology* or *logos*, a knowing of the soul. Without her, women are without ears to hear her soultalk or to register the chiming of their own inner rhythms. Without her, women's inner eyes are closed by some shadowy hand, and large parts of their days are spent in a

semi-paralyzing ennui or else wishful thinking. Without her, women lose the sureness of their soulfooting. Without her, they forget why they're here, they hold on when they would best hold out. Without her they take too much or too little or nothing at all. Without her they are silent when they are in fact on fire. She is their regulator, she is their soulful heart, the same as the human heart that regulates the physical body.

When we lose touch with the instinctive psyche, we live in a semi-destroyed state and images and powers that are natural to the feminine are not allowed full development. When a woman is cut away from her basic source, she is sanitized, and her instincts and natural life cycles are lost, subsumed by the culture, or by the intellect or the ego—one's own or those belonging to others.

Wild Woman is the health of all women. Without her, women's psychology makes no sense. This wilderwoman is the prototypical woman . . . no matter what culture, no matter what era, no matter what politic, she does not change. Her cycles change, her symbolic representations change, but in essence, *she* does not change. She is what she is and she is whole.

She canalizes through women. If they are suppressed, she struggles upward. If women are free, she is free. Fortunately, no matter how many times she is pushed down, she bounds up again. No matter how many times she is forbidden, quelled, cut back, diluted, tortured, touted as unsafe, dangerous, mad, and other derogations, she emanates upward in women, so that even the most quiet, even the most restrained woman keeps a secret place for her. Even the most repressed woman has a secret life, with secret thoughts and secret feelings which are lush and wild, that is, natural. Even the most captured woman guards the place of the wildish self, for she knows intuitively that someday there will be a loophole, an aperture, a chance, and she will hightail it to escape.

I believe that all women and men are born gifted. However, and truly, there has been little to describe the psychological lives and ways of gifted women, talented women, creative women. There is, on the other hand, much writ about the weakness and foibles of humans in general and women in particular. But in the case of the Wild Woman archetype, in order to fathom her, apprehend her, utilize her offerings, we must be more interested in the thoughts, feelings, and

endeavors which strengthen women, and adequately count the interior *and* cultural factors which weaken women.

In general, when we understand the wildish nature as a being in its own right, one which animates and informs a woman's deepest life, then we can begin to develop in ways never thought possible. A psychology which fails to address this innate spiritual being at the center of feminine psychology fails women, and fails their daughters and their daughters' daughters far into all future matrilineal lines.

So, in order to apply a good medicine to the hurt parts of the wildish psyche, in order to aright relationship to the archetype of the Wild Woman, one has to name the disarrays of the psyche accurately. While in my clinical profession we do have a good diagnostic statistical manual and a goodly amount of differential diagnoses, as well as psychoanalytic parameters which define psychopathy through the organization (or lack of it) in the objective psyche and the ego-Self axis,² there are yet other defining behaviors and feelings which, from a woman's frame of reference, powerfully describe what is the matter.

What are some of the feeling-toned symptoms of a disrupted relationship with the wildish force in the psyche? To chronically feel, think, or act in any of the following ways is to have partially severed or lost entirely the relationship with the deep instinctual psyche. Using women's language exclusively, these are: feeling extraordinarily dry, fatigued, frail, depressed, confused, gagged, muzzled, unaroused. Feeling frightened, halt or weak, without inspiration, without animation, without soulfulness, without meaning, shame-bearing, chronically fuming, volatile, stuck, uncreative, compressed, crazed.

Feeling powerless, chronically doubtful, shaky, blocked, unable to follow through, giving one's creative life over to others, life-sapping choices in mates, work or friendships, suffering to live outside one's own cycles, overprotective of self, inert, uncertain, faltering, inability to pace oneself or set limits.

Not insistent on one's own tempo, to be self-conscious, to be away from one's God or Gods, to be separated from one's revivification, drawn far into domesticity, intellectualism, work, or inertia because that is the safest place for one who has lost her instincts.

To fear to venture by oneself or to reveal oneself, fear to seek mentor, mother, father, fear to set out one's imperfect work before it

is an opus, fear to set out on a journey, fear of caring for another or others, fear one will run on, run out, run down, cringing before authority, loss of energy before creative projects, wincing, humiliation, angst, numbness, anxiety.

Afraid to bite back when there is nothing else left to do, afraid to try the new, fear to stand up to, afraid to speak up, speak against, sick stomach, butterflies, sour stomach, cut in the middle, strangled, becoming conciliatory or nice too easily, revenge.

Afraid to stop, afraid to act, repeatedly counting to three and not beginning, superiority complex, ambivalence, and yet otherwise fully capable, fully functioning. These severances are a disease not of an era or a century, but become an epidemic anywhere and anytime women are captured, anytime the wildish nature has become entrapped.

A healthy woman is much like a wolf: robust, chock-full, strong life force, life-giving, territorially aware, inventive, loyal, roving. Yet, separation from the wildish nature causes a woman's personality to become meager, thin, ghostly, spectral. We are not meant to be puny with frail hair and inability to leap up, inability to chase, to birth, to create a life. When women's lives are in stasis, or filled with ennui, it is always time for the wildish woman to emerge; it is time for the creating function of the psyche to flood the delta.

How does Wild Woman affect women? With her as ally, as leader, model, teacher, we see, not through two eyes, but through the eyes of intuition which is many-eyed. When we assert intuition, we are therefore like the starry night: we gaze at the world through a thousand eyes.

The wild nature carries the bundles for healing; she carries everything a woman needs to be and know. She carries the medicine for all things. She carries stories and dreams and words and songs and signs and symbols. She is both vehicle and destination.

To adjoin the instinctual nature does not mean to come undone, change everything from left to right, from black to white, to move the east to west, to act crazy or out of control. It does not mean to lose one's primary socializations, or to become less human. It means quite the opposite. The wild nature has a vast integrity to it.

It means to establish territory, to find one's pack, to be in one's body with certainty and pride regardless of the body's gifts and

limitations, to speak and act in one's behalf, to be aware, alert, to draw on the innate feminine powers of intuition and sensing, to come into one's cycles, to find what one belongs to, to rise with dignity, to retain as much consciousness as possible.

The archetype of the Wild Woman and all that stands behind her is patroness to all painters, writers, sculptors, dancers, thinkers, prayermakers, seekers, finders—for they are all busy with the work of invention, and that is the instinctive nature's main occupation. As in all art, she resides in the guts, not in the head. She can track and run and summon and repel. She can sense, camouflage, and love deeply. She is intuitive, typical, and normative. She is utterly essential to women's mental and soul health.

So what compromises the Wild Woman? From the viewpoint of archetypal psychology as well as in ancient traditions, she is the female soul. Yet she is more; she is the source of the feminine. She is all that is of instinct, of the worlds both seen and hidden—she is the basis. We each receive from her a glowing cell which contains all the instincts and knowings needed for our lives.

“. . . She is the Life/Death/Life force, she is the incubator. She is intuition, she is far-seer, she is deep listener, she is loyal heart. She encourages humans to remain multi-lingual; fluent in the languages of dreams, passion, and poetry. She whispers from night dreams, she leaves behind on the terrain of a woman's soul a coarse hair and muddy footprints. These fill women with longing to find her, free her, and love her.

“She is ideas, feelings, urges, and memory. She has been lost and half forgotten for a long, long time. She is the source, the light, the night, the dark, and daybreak. She is the smell of good mud and the back leg of the fox. The birds which tell us secrets belong to her. She is the voice that says, ‘This way, this way.’

“She is the one who thunders after injustice. She is the one who turns like a great wheel. She is the maker of cycles. She is the one we leave home to look for. She is the one we come home to. She is the mucky root of all women. She is the things that keep us going when we think we're done for. She is the incubator of raw little ideas and deals. She is the mind which thinks us, we are the thoughts that she thinks.

“Where is she present? Where can you feel her, where can you

find her? She walks the deserts, woods, oceans, cities, in the barrios, and in castles. She lives among queens, among *campesinas*, in the boardroom, in the factory, in the prison, in the mountain of solitude. She lives in the ghetto, at the university, and in the streets. She leaves footprints for us to try for size. She leaves footprints wherever there is one woman who is fertile soil.

“Where does she live? At the bottom of the well, in the headwaters, in the ether before time. She lives in the tear and in the ocean. She lives in the cambia of trees, which pings as it grows. She is from the future and from the beginning of time. She lives in the past and is summoned by us. She is in the present and keeps a chair at our table, stands behind us in line, and drives ahead of us on the road. She is in the future and walks backward in time to find us now.

“She lives in the green poking through snow, she lives in the rustling stalks of dying autumn corn, she lives where the dead come to be kissed and the living send their prayers. She lives in the place where language is made. She lives on poetry and percussion and singing. She lives on quarter notes and grace notes, and in a cantata, in a sestina, and in the blues. She is the moment just before inspiration bursts upon us. She lives in a faraway place that breaks through to our world.

“People may ask for evidence, for proof of her existence. They are essentially asking for proof of the psyche. Since we are the psyche, we are also the evidence. Each and every one of us is the evidence of not only Wild Woman’s existence, but of her condition in the collective. We are the proof of this ineffable female numen. Our existence parallels hers.

“Our experiences of her within and without are the proofs. Our thousands and millions of encounters with her intra-psychically through our night dreams and our day thoughts, through our yearnings and inspirations, these are the verifications. The fact that we are bereft in her absence, that we long and yearn when we are separated from her; these are the manifestations that she has passed this way . . . ”³

My doctorate is in ethno-clinical psychology, which is the study of both clinical psychology and ethnology, the latter emphasizing the study of the psychology of groups, and tribes in particular. My

postdoctoral diploma is in analytical psychology, which is what certifies me as a Jungian psychoanalyst. My life experience as *cantadora/mesemondó*, poet, and artist, informs my work with analysands equally.

Sometimes I am asked to tell what I do in my consulting room to help women return to their wildish natures. I place substantial emphasis on clinical and developmental psychology, and I use the simplest and most accessible ingredient for healing—stories. We follow the patient's dream material, which contains many plots and stories. The analysand's physical sensations and body memories are also stories which can be read and rendered into consciousness.

Additionally, I teach a form of powerful interactive trancing that is proximate to Jung's active imagination—and this also produces stories which further elucidate the client's psychic journey. We elicit the wildish Self through specific questions, and through examining tales, legends, and mythos. Most times we are able, over time, to find the guiding myth or fairy tale that contains all the instruction a woman needs for her current psychic development. These stories comprise a woman's soul drama. It is like a play with stage instructions, characterization, and props.

The "craft of making" is an important part of the work I do. I seek to empower my clients by teaching them the age-old crafts of the hands . . . among them the symbolic arts of talisman making, *las ofrendas* and *retablos*—these being anything from simple ribbon sticks to elaborate sculpture. Art is important for it commemorates the seasons of the soul, or a special or tragic event in the soul's journey. Art is not just for oneself, not just a marker of one's own understanding. It is also a map for those who follow after us.

As you might imagine, work with each person is customized in the extreme, for it is true that people are made one to a kind. But these factors remain constant in my work with people, and these are the fundament for all humans' work before them today, my own work as well as yours. The craft of questions, the craft of stories, the craft of the hands—all these are the making of something, and that something is soul. Anytime we feed soul, it guarantees increase.

I hope you will see that these are tangible ways to soften old scar tissue, balm old wounds, and envision anew, thereby restoring the old skills that make the soul visible in down-to-earth ways.

The tales I bring here to elucidate the instinctual nature of women are in some cases, original stories, and in other cases, are distinct literary renderings that I have written based on those peculiar ones given into my keeping by my *tias y tios*, *abuelitas y abuelos*, *omahs and opahs*, the old ones of my families—those whose oral traditions have been unbroken for as far back as we can remember. A few are written documents of my own firsthand encounters, some from long time passing, and all from the heart. They are presented in all faithful detail and archetypal integrity. It is with the permission and blessing of three living generations of familial healer-tellers who understand the subtleties and requirements of story as healing phenomena that I carry these forward.⁴

Additionally, here are some of the questions I pose to my analysts and others to whom I offer counsel in order for them to remember themselves. I also detail for you some of the craft—the experiential and artful play that assists women in retaining the numen of their work in conscious memory. All these help to bring about convergence with the precious wildish Self.

Stories are medicine. I have been taken with stories since I heard my first. They have such power; they do not require that we do, be, act anything—we need only listen. The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories. Stories engender the excitement, sadness, questions, longings, and understandings that spontaneously bring the archetype, in this case Wild Woman, back to the surface.

Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life. Stories enable us to understand the need for and the ways to raise a submerged archetype. The stories on the following pages are the ones, out of hundreds that I've worked with and pored over for decades, and that I believe most clearly express the bounty of the Wild Woman archetype.

Sometimes various cultural overlays disarray the bones of stories. For instance, in the case of the brothers Grimm (among other fairytale collectors of the past few centuries), there is strong suspicion that the informants (storytellers) of that time sometimes “purified” their stories for the religious brothers’ sakes. Over the course of time, old pagan symbols were overlaid with Christian ones,

so that an old healer in a tale became an evil witch, a spirit became an angel, an initiation veil or caul became a handkerchief, or a child named Beautiful (the customary name for a child born during Solstice festival) was renamed *Schmerzenreich*, Sorrowful. Sexual elements were omitted. Helping creatures and animals were often changed into demons and boogeys.

This is how many women's teaching tales about sex, love, money, marriage, birthing, death, and transformation were lost. It is how fairy tales and myths that explicate ancient women's mysteries have been covered over too. Most old collections of fairy tales and mythos existent today have been scoured clean of the scatological, the sexual, the perverse (as in warnings against), the pre-Christian, the feminine, the Goddesses, the initiatory, the medicines for various psychological malaises, and the directions for spiritual raptures.

But they are not lost forever. I was given as a child many of what I know to be unvarnished and uncorrupted themes of the stories of eld, many of which I bring to this work. But even story fragments, as they exist today, can foreshadow the shape of the entire story. I've poked about in what I playfully call fairy-tale forensics and paleomythology, even though, as its heart, reconstruction is a long, intricate, and contemplative endeavor. When such would be effective, I use various forms of exegesis, comparing leitmotifs, taking anthropological and historical inferences into account, and forms both new and old. This method, in part, reconstructs from ancient archetypal patternings learned through my years of training in analytical and archetypal psychology, which preserve and study all the motifs and plots in fairy tales, legends, and mythos in order to apprehend the instinctual lives of humans. I gain an assist from templates that lie in the imaginal worlds, the collective images of the unconscious, and those drawn up through dreams and non-ordinary states of consciousness. A final polish might be gained by comparing the story matrices with archeological evidence from the ancient cultures themselves, such as ritual pottery, masks, and figurines. Simply put, in fairy-tale locution, I spend much time raking the ashes with my nose.

I have been studying archetypal patterns for some twenty-five years, and myths, fairy tales, and folklore from my familial cultures for twice as long. I have learnt a vast body of knowledge about the bones of stories, and know when and where the bones are missing in

a story. Through the centuries, various conquests of nations by other nations, and both peaceful and forced religious conversions, have covered over or altered the original core of the old stories.

But there is good news. For all the structural tumble-down in existing versions of tales, there is a strong pattern that still shines forth. From the form and shape of the pieces and parts, it can be determined with good accuracy what has been lost from the story and those missing pieces can be redrawn accurately—often revealing amazing understructures which begin to heal women's sadness that so much of the old mysteries has been destroyed. It is not quite so. They have not been destroyed. All one might need, all that we might ever need, is still whispering from the bones of story.

Collecting the essence of stories is a constant paleontologic endeavor. The more story bones, the more likely the integral structure can be found. The more whole the stories, the more subtle twists and turns of the psyche are presented to us and the better opportunity we have to apprehend and evoke our soulwork. When we work the soul, she, the Wild Woman, creates more of herself.

As a child, I was lucky to be surrounded by people from many of the old European countries and Mexico. Many members of my family, my neighbors, and friends had recently arrived from Hungary, Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Serbo-Croatia, Russia, Lithuania, and Bohemia as well as Jalisco, Michoacán, Juárez, and many of the *aldeas fronterizas* villages at the Mexico/Texas/Arizona borders. They, and many others—Native Americans, people from Appalachia, Asian immigrants, and many African-American families from the South—came to farm, to pick, to work in the ash pits and steel mills, the breweries, and in domestic jobs. Most were not educated in the academic sense, yet they were intensely wise. They were the bearers of a valuable and almost pure oral tradition.

Many of my family and neighboring people who surrounded me had survived forced labor camps, displaced person camps, deportation camps, and concentration camps where the storytellers among them had lived a nightmare version of Scheherazade. Many had had their family lands taken, had lived in immigration jails, had been repatriated against their wills. From these rustic storytellers I first learned the tales people tell when life may turn to death and death may turn to life at any moment. Because their transmissions to me

were so filled with suffering and with hope, when I later grew old enough to read fairy stories printed in books, the latter seemed curiously starched and ironed flat in comparison.

As a young adult I migrated west toward the Continental Divide. I lived amidst loving Jewish, Irish, Greek, Italian, Afro-American, and Alsatian strangers who became kindred spirits and friends. I've been blessed to know some of the rare and old Latino communities from the southwestern U.S.A., such as Trampas, and Truchas, New Mexico. I was fortunate to spend time with Native American friends and relatives, from the Inuit in the North, through the Pueblo and Plains peoples in the West, to the Nahuas, Lacandonese, Tehuanas, Huicho-les, Seris, Maya-Quichés, Maya-Caqchiqueles, Mesquitos, Cunas, Nasca/Quechuas, and Jivaros in Central and South America.

I've traded stories with sister and brother healers at kitchen tables and under grape arbors, in henhouses and dairy barns, and while patting tortillas, tracking wildlife, and sewing the millionth cross-stitch. I've been lucky to share the last bowl of chili, to sing with gospel women so as to raise the dead, and sleep under stars in houses without roofs. I've sat down to the fire or dinner, or both, in Little Italy, Polish Town, the Hill Country, Los Barrios, and other ethnic communities throughout the urban Midwest and Far West, and most recently traded stories about *sparats*, bad ghosts, with *mangriot* friends in the Bahamas.

I have been double-lucky that wherever I've gone the children, the matrons, the men in their prime, and the old coots and crones—the soul-artists—have crept out of the woods, jungles, meadows, and sandhills to regale me with caws and kavel. And I too, to them.

There are many ways to approach stories. The professional folklorist, the Jungian, Freudian, or other sort of analyst, the ethnologist, anthropologist, theologian, archeologist, each has a different method, both in collecting tales and the use to which they are put. Intellectually the way I developed my work with stories was through my training in analytical and archetypal psychology. For more than half a decade during my psychoanalytic education I studied amplification of leitmotifs, archetypal symbology, world mythology, ancient and popular iconology, ethnology, world religions, and interpretation.

Viscerally, however, I come to stories as a *cantadora*, keeper of

the old stories. I come from a long line of tellers: *mesemondók*, old Hungarian women who might as easily tell while sitting on wooden chairs with their plastic pocketbooks on their laps, their knees apart, their skirts touching the ground, or while wringing the neck of a chicken . . . and *cuentistas*, old Latina women who stand, robust of breast, hips wide, and cry out the story *ranchera* style. Both clans storytell in the plain voice of women who have lived blood and babies, bread and bones. For us, story is a medicine which strengthens and arights the individual and the community.

Those who have taken on the responsibilities of this craft, and are committed to the numen behind the craft, are direct descendants of an immense and ancient community of holy people, troubadours, bards, griots, cantadoras, cantors, traveling poets, bums, hags, and crazy people.

I once dreamt I was telling stories and felt someone patting my foot in encouragement. I looked down and saw that I was standing on the shoulders of an old woman who was steadying my ankles and smiling up at me.

I said to her, “No, no, come stand on *my* shoulders for you are old and I am young.”

“No, no,” she insisted, “this is the way it is supposed to be.”

I saw that she stood on the shoulders of a woman far older than she, who stood on the shoulders of a woman even older, who stood on the shoulders of a woman in robes, who stood on the shoulders of another soul, who stood on the shoulders . . .

I believed the old dream-woman about the way it was supposed to be. The nurture for telling stories comes from the might and endowments of my people who have gone before me. In my experience, the telling moment of the story draws its power from a towering column of humanity joined one to the other across time and space, elaborately dressed in the rags and robes or nakedness of their time, and filled to the bursting with life still being lived. If there is a single source of story and the numen of story, this long chain of humans is it.

Story is far older than the art and science of psychology, and will always be the elder in the equation no matter how much time passes. One of the oldest ways of telling, which intrigues me greatly, is the passionate trance state, wherein the teller “senses” the audience—be it an audience of one or of many—and then enters a

state in the “world between worlds,” where a story is “attracted” to the trance-teller and told through her.

The trance-teller calls on *El duende*,⁵ the wind that blows soul into the faces of listeners. A trance-teller learns to be psychically double-jointed through the meditative practice of story, that is, training oneself to undo certain psychic gates and ego apertures in order to let the voice speak, the voice that is older than the stones. When this is done, the story may take any trail, be turned upside down, be filled with porridge and dumped out for a poor person’s feast, be filled with gold for the taking, or chase the listener into the next world. The teller never knows how it will all come out, and that is at least half of the moist magic of story.

This is a book of tellings about the ways of the Wild Woman archetype. To try to diagram her, to draw boxes around her psychic life, would be contrary to her spirit. To know her is an ongoing process, a lifelong process, and that is why this work is an ongoing work, a lifelong work.

So here are some stories to apply to yourself as soul vitamins, some observations, some map fragments, some little pieces of pine pitch for fastening feathers to trees to show the way, and some flattened underbrush to guide the way back to *el mundo subterráneo*, the underground world, our psychic home.

Stories set the inner life into motion, and this is particularly important where the inner life is frightened, wedged, or cornered. Story greases the hoists and pulleys, it causes adrenaline to surge, shows us the way out, down, or up, and for our trouble, cuts for us fine wide doors in previously blank walls, openings that lead to the dreamland, that lead to love and learning, that lead us back to our own real lives as knowing wildish women.

Stories like “Bluebeard” bring us news of just what to do about the women’s wound that will not cease its bleeding. Stories like “Skeleton Woman” demonstrate the mystical power of relationship and how deadened feeling can return to life and deep loving once again. The gifts of Old Mother Death are to be found in the character of Baba Yaga, the old Wild Hag. The little doll who shows the way when all seems lost raises one of the lost womanly and instinctual arts to the surface again in “Vasalisa the Wise.”⁶ Stories like “La Loba,” a bone woman in the desert, teach about the transformative

function of the psyche. “The Handless Maiden” recovers the lost stages of the old initiation rites from ancient times, and as such offers a timeless and lifelong guidance for all the years of a woman’s life.

It is our brush with the wild nature that drives us not to limit our conversations to humans, not to limit our most splendid movements to dance floors, nor our ears only to music made by human-made instruments, nor our eyes to “taught” beauty, nor our bodies to approved sensations, nor our minds to those things we all agree upon already. All these stories present the knife of insight, the flame of the passionate life, the breath to speak what one knows, the courage to stand what one sees without looking away, the fragrance of the wild soul.

This is a book of women’s stories, held out as markers along the path. They are for you to read and contemplate in order to assist you toward your own natural-won freedom, your caring for self, animals, earth, children, sisters, lovers, and men. I’ll tell you right now, the doors to the world of the wild Self are few but precious. If you have a deep scar, that is a door, if you have an old, old story, that is a door. If you love the sky and the water so much you almost cannot bear it, that is a door. If you yearn for a deeper life, a full life, a sane life, that is a door.

The material in this book was chosen to embolden you. The work is offered as a fortification for those on their way, including those who toil in difficult inner landscapes, as well as those who toil in and for the world. We must strive to allow our souls to grow in their natural ways and to their natural depths. The wildish nature does not require a woman to be a certain color, a certain education, a certain lifestyle or economic class . . . in fact, it cannot thrive in an atmosphere of enforced political correctness, or by being bent into old burnt-out paradigms. It thrives on fresh sight and self-integrity. It thrives on its own nature.

So, whether you are an introvert or extrovert, a woman-loving woman, a man-loving woman, or a God-loving woman, or all of the above: Whether you are possessed of a simple heart or the ambitions of an Amazon, whether you are trying to make it to the top or just make it through tomorrow, whether you be spicy or somber, regal or roughshod—the Wild Woman belongs to you. She belongs to all women.

To find her, it is necessary for women to return to their instinctive lives, their deepest knowing.⁷ So, let us push on now, and remember ourselves back to the wild soul. Let us sing her flesh back onto our bones. Shed any false coats we have been given. Don the true coat of powerful instinct and knowing. Infiltrate the psychic lands that once belonged to us. Unfurl the bandages, ready the medicine. Let us return now, wild women howling, laughing, singing up The One who loves us so.

For us the issue is simple. Without us, Wild Woman dies. Without Wild Woman, we die. *Para Vida*, for true life, both must live.

1 The Howl: Resurrection of the Wild Woman

La Loba, The Wolf Woman

I MUST REVEAL TO YOU THAT I am not one of the Divine who march into the desert and return gravid with wisdom. I've traveled many cookfires and spread angel bait round every sleeping place. But more often than the getting of wisdom, I've gotten indelicate episodes of *Giardiasis*, *E. coli*,¹ and amebic dysentery. Ai! Such is the fate of a middle-class mystic with delicate intestines.

Whatever wisdom or notion I espied on my travels to odd places and unusual people, I learned to shelter, for sometimes old father Academe, like Kronos, still has an inclination to eat the children before they can become either curative or astonishing. Over-intellectualization can obscure the patterns of the instinctual nature of women.

So, to further our kinship relationship with the instinctual nature, it assists greatly if we understand stories as though we are inside them, rather than as though they are outside of us. We enter into a story through the door of inner hearing. The spoken story touches the auditory nerve, which runs across the floor of the skull into the brainstem just below the pons. There, auditory impulses are relayed upward to consciousness or else, it is said, to the soul . . . depending on the attitude with which one listens.

Ancient dissectionists spoke of the auditory nerve being divided into three or more pathways deep in the brain. They surmised that the ear was meant, therefore, to hear at three different levels. One pathway was said to hear the mundane conversations of the world. A second pathway apprehended learning and art. And the third pathway existed so the soul itself might hear guidance and gain knowledge while here on earth.

Listen then with soul-hearing now, for that is the mission of story.

*

Bone by bone, hair by hair, Wild Woman comes back. Through night dreams, through events half understood and half remembered, Wild Woman comes back. She comes back through story.

I began my own migration across the United States in the 1960s, looking for a settling place that was dense with trees, fragrant with water, and populated by the creatures I loved: bear, fox, snake, eagle, wolf. The wolves were being systematically exterminated from the upper Great Lakes region; no matter where I went, the wolves were being hounded in one way or another. Although many spoke of them as menaces, I always felt safer when there were wolves in the woods. Out West and in the North in those times, you could camp and hear the mountains and forest sing, sing, sing at night.

But, even there, the age of scope rifles, Jeep-mounted klieg lights, and arsenic “treats” caused an age of silence to creep over the land. Soon, the Rockies were almost empty of wolves too. That is how I came to the great desert which lies half in Mexico, half in the United States. And the further south I traveled, the more stories I heard about wolves.

You see, it is told that there is a place in the desert where the spirit of women and the spirit of wolves meet across time. I felt I was onto something when in the Texas borderlands I heard a story called “*Loba Girl*” about a woman who was a wolf who was a woman. Next I found the ancient Aztec story of orphaned twins being breastfed by a she-wolf till the children were old enough to stand on their own.²

And finally, from the old Spanish land-grant farmers and Pueblo people of the Southwest, I heard one-line reports about the bone people, the old ones who bring the dead back to life; they were said to re-store both humans and animals. Then, on one of my own ethnographic expeditions, I met a bone woman and have never been quite the same since. Allow me to present a firsthand account and introduction.



La Loba

THERE IS AN OLD WOMAN who lives in a hidden place that everyone knows in their souls but few have ever seen. As

in the fairy tales of Eastern Europe, she seems to wait for lost or wandering people and seekers to come to her place.

She is circumspect, often hairy, always fat, and especially wishes to evade most company. She is both a crower and a cackler, generally having more animal sounds than human ones.

I might say she lives among the rotten granite slopes in Tarahumara Indian territory. Or that she is buried outside Phoenix near a well. Perhaps she will be seen traveling south to Monte Albán⁸ in a burnt-out car with the back window shot out. Or maybe she will be spotted standing by the highway near El Paso, or riding shotgun with truckers to Morelia, Mexico, or walking to market above Oaxaca with strangely formed boughs of firewood on her back. She calls herself by many names: *La Huesera*, Bone Woman; *La Trapera*, The Gatherer; and *La Loba*, Wolf Woman.

The sole work of *La Loba* is the collecting of bones. She collects and preserves especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world. Her cave is filled with the bones of all manner of desert creatures: the deer, the rattlesnake, the crow. But her specialty is wolves.

She creeps and crawls and sifts through the *montañas*, mountains, and *arroyos*, dry riverbeds, looking for wolf bones, and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, when the last bone is in place and the beautiful white sculpture of the creature is laid out before her, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing.

And when she is sure, she stands over the *criatura*, raises her arms over it, and sings out. That is when the rib bones and leg bones of the wolf begin to flesh out and the creature becomes furred. *La Loba* sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being; its tail curls upward, shaggy and strong.

And *La Loba* sings more and the wolf creature begins to breathe.

And still *La Loba* sings so deeply that the floor of the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon.

Somewhere in its running, whether by the speed of its running, or by splashing its way into a river, or by way of a ray of sunlight or moonlight hitting it right in the side, the wolf is suddenly transformed into a laughing woman who runs free toward the horizon.

So remember, if you wander the desert, and it is near sundown, and you are perhaps a little bit lost, and certainly tired, that you are lucky, for *La Loba* may take a liking to you and show you something—something of the soul.



We all begin as a bundle of bones lost somewhere in a desert, a dismantled skeleton that lies under the sand. It is our work to recover the parts. It is a painstaking process best done when the shadows are just right, for it takes much looking. *La Loba* indicates what we are to look for—the indestructible life force, the bones.

The work of *La Loba* can be thought of as representing *uncuento milagro*, a miracle story. It shows us what can go right for the soul. It is a resurrection story about the underworld connection to Wild Woman. It promises that if we will sing the song, we can call up the psychic remains of the wild soul and sing her into a vital shape again.

La Loba sings over the bones she has gathered. To sing means to use the soul-voice. It means to say on the breath the truth of one's power and one's need, to breathe soul over the thing that is ailing or in need of restoration. This is done by descending into the deepest mood of great love and feeling, till one's desire for relationship with the wildish Self overflows, then to speak one's soul from that frame of mind. That is singing over the bones. We cannot make the mistake of attempting to elicit this great feeling of love from a lover, for this womens' labor of finding and singing the creation hymn is a solitary work, a work carried out in the desert of the psyche.

Let us consider *La Loba* herself. In the symbolic lexicon of the psyche, the symbol of the Old Woman is one of the most widespread archetypal personifications in the world. Others are the Great Mother and Father, the Divine Child, the Trickster, the Sorceress(er),

the Maiden and Youth, the Heroine-Warrior, and the Fool(ess). Yet, a figure like *La Loba* can be considered vastly different in essence and effect, for she is symbolic of the feeder root to an entire instinctual system.

In the Southwest the archetype of the old woman can also be apprehended as old *La Que Sabe*, The One Who Knows. I first came to understand *La Que Sabe* when I lived in the Sangre de Cristo mountains in New Mexico, under the heart of Lobo Peak. An old witch from Ranchos told me that *La Que Sabe* knew everything about women, that *La Que Sabe* had created women from a wrinkle on the sole of her divine foot: This is why women are knowing creatures; they are made, in essence, of the skin of the sole, which feels everything. This idea that the skin of the foot is sentient had the ring of a truth, for an acculturated Kiché tribeswoman once told me that she'd worn her first pair of shoes when she was twenty years old and was still not used to walking *con los ojos vendados*, with blindfolds on her feet.

The wild essence that inhabits nature has been called by many names and crisscrosses all nations down through the centuries. These are some of the old names for her: *The Mother of Days* is the Mother-Creator-God of all beings and doings, including the sky and earth; *Mother Nyx* has dominion over all things from the mud and dark; *Durga* controls the skies and winds and the thoughts of humans from which all reality spreads; *Coatlicue* gives birth to the infant universe which is rascally and hard to control, but like a wolf mother, she bites her child's ear to contain it; *Hekate*, the old seer who "knows her people" and has about her the smell of humus and the breath of God. And there are many, many more. These are the images of what and who lives under the hill, far off in the desert, out in the deep.

By whatever name, the force personified by *La Loba* records the personal past and the ancient past for she has survived generation after generation, and is old beyond time. She is an archivist of feminine intention. She preserves female tradition. Her whiskers sense the future; she has the far-seeing milky eye of the old crone; she lives backward and forward in time simultaneously, correcting for one side by dancing with the other.

The old one, The One Who Knows, is within us. She thrives in the deepest soul-psyche of women, the ancient and vital wild Self. Her home is that place in time where the spirit of women and the

spirit of wolf meet—the place where mind and instincts mingle, where a woman's deep life funds her mundane life. It is the point where the I and the Thou kiss, the place where, in all spirit, women run with the wolves.

This old woman stands between the worlds of rationality and my-thos. She is the knucklebone on which these two worlds turn. This land between the worlds is that inexplicable place we all recognize once we experience it, but its nuances slip away and shape-change if one tries to pin them down, except when we use poetry, music, dance, or story.

There is speculation that the immune system of the body is rooted in this mysterious psychic land, and also the mystical, as well as all archetypal images and urges including our God-hunger, our yearning for the mysteries, and all the sacred instincts as well as those which are mundane. Some would say the records of humankind, the root of light, the coil of dark are also here. It is not a void, but rather the place of the Mist Beings where things are and also are not yet, where shadows have substance and substance is sheer.

One thing about this land is certain, it is old . . . older than the oceans. It has no age; it is ageless. The Wild Woman archetype funds this layer, emanating from the instinctual psyche. Although she can take on many guises in our dreams and creative experiences, she is not from the layer of the mother, the maiden, the medial woman, and she is not the inner child. She is not the queen, the amazon, the lover, the seer. She is just what she is. Call her *La Que Sabe*, The One Who Knows, call her Wild Woman, call her *La Loba*, call her by her high names or by her low names, call her by her newer names or her ancient ones, she remains just what she is.

Wild Woman as an archetype is an inimitable and ineffable force which carries a bounty of ideas, images, and particularities for humankind. Archetype exists everywhere and yet is not seeable in the usual sense. What can be seen of it in the dark cannot necessarily be seen in daylight.

We find lingering evidence of archetype in the images and symbols found in stories, literature, poetry, painting, and religion. It would appear that its glow, its voice, and its fragrance are meant to cause us to be raised up from contemplating the shit on our tails to occasionally traveling in the company of the stars.

At *La Loba's* place, the physical body is, as poet Tony Moffeit writes, "a luminous animal,"⁴ and the body's immune system seems, via anecdotal reports, to be strengthened or weakened by conscious thought. At *La Loba's* place, the spirits manifest as personages and *La voz mitológica*, The Mythological Voice of the deep psyche, speaks as poet and oracle. Things of psychic value, once dead, can be revived. Also, the basic material of all stories existent in the world ever, began with someone's experience here in this inexplicable psychic land, and someone's attempt to relate what occurred to them here.

There are various names for this locus betwixt the worlds. Jung called it variously the collective unconscious, the objective psyche, and the psychoid unconscious—referring to a more ineffable layer of the former. He thought of the latter as a place where the biological and psychological worlds share headwaters, where biology and psychology might mingle with and influence one another. Throughout human memory this place—call it Nod, call it the home of the Mist Beings, the crack between the worlds—is the place where visitations, miracles, imaginations, inspirations, and healings of all natures occur.

Though this site transmits great psychic wealth, it must be approached with preparation, for one may be tempted to joyously drown in the rapture of one's time there. Consensual reality may seem less exciting by comparison. In this sense, these deeper layers of psyche can become a rapture-trap from which people return unsteady, with wobbly ideas and airy presentments. That is not how it is meant to be. How one is meant to return is wholly washed or dipped in a revivifying and informing water, something which impresses upon our flesh the odor of the sacred.

Each woman has potential access to *Río Abajo Río*, this river beneath the river. She arrives there through deep meditation, dance, writing, painting, prayermaking, singing, drumming, active imagination, or any activity which requires an intense altered consciousness. A woman arrives in this world-between-worlds through yearning and by seeking something she can see just out of the corner of her eye. She arrives there by deeply creative acts, through intentional solitude, and by practice of any of the arts. And even with these well-crafted practices, much of what occurs in this ineffable world remains forever mysterious to us, for it breaks physical laws and rational laws as we know them.

The care with which this psychic state must be entered is recorded in a small but powerful story of four rabbis who yearned to see the most sacred Wheel of Ezekiel.



The Four Rabbinim

ONE NIGHT four rabbinim were visited by an angel who awakened them and carried them to the Seventh Vault of the Seventh Heaven. There they beheld the sacred Wheel of Ezekiel.

Somewhere in the descent from *Pardes*, Paradise, to Earth, one Rabbi, having seen such splendor, lost his mind and wandered frothing and foaming until the end of his days. The second Rabbi was extremely cynical: "Oh I just dreamed Ezekiel's Wheel, that was all. Nothing *really* happened." The third Rabbi carried on and on about what he had seen, for he was totally obsessed. He lectured and would not stop with how it was all constructed and what it all meant . . . and in this way he went astray and betrayed his faith. The fourth Rabbi, who was a poet, took a paper in hand and a reed and sat near the window writing song after song praising the evening dove, his daughter in her cradle, and all the stars in the sky. And he lived his life better than before.⁵



Who saw what in the Seventh Vault of the Seventh Heaven, we do not know. But we do know that contact with the world wherein the Essences reside causes us to know something beyond the usual hearing of humans, and fills us with a feeling of expansion and grandeur as well. When we touch the authentic fundament of The One Who Knows, it causes us to react and act from our deepest integral nature.

The story recommends that the optimal attitude for experiencing the deep unconscious is one of neither too much fascination nor too little, one of not too much awe but neither too much cynicism, bravery yes, but not recklessness.

Jung cautions in his magnificent essay “The Transcendent Function”⁶ that some persons, in their pursuit of the Self, will over-aestheticize the God or Self experience, some will undervalue it, some will overvalue it, and some who are not ready for it will be injured by it. But still others will find their way to what Jung called “the moral obligation” to live out and to express what one has learned in the descent or ascent to the wild Self.

This moral obligation he speaks of means to live what we perceive, be it found in the psychic Elysian fields, the isles of the dead, the bone deserts of the psyche, the face of the mountain, the rock of the sea, the lush underworld—anyplace where *La Que Sabe* breathes upon us, changing us. Our work is to show we have been breathed upon—to show it, give it out, sing it out, to live out in the topside world what we have received through our sudden knowings, from body, from dreams and journeys of all sorts.

La Loba parallels world myths in which the dead are brought back to life. In Egyptian mythos, Isis accomplishes this service for her dead brother Osiris, who is dismembered by his evil brother, Set, every night. Isis works from dusk to dawn each night to piece her brother back together again before morning, else the sun will not rise. The Christ raised Lazarus, who had been dead so long he “stinketh.” Demeter calls forth her pale daughter Persephone from the Land of the Dead once a year. And *La Loba* sings over the bones.

This is our meditation practice as women, calling back the dead and dismembered aspects of ourselves, calling back the dead and dismembered aspects of life itself. The one who re-creates from that which has died is always a double-sided archetype. The Creation Mother is always also the Death Mother and vice versa. Because of this dual nature, or double-tasking, the great work before us is to learn to understand what around and about us and what within us must live, and what must die. Our work is to apprehend the timing of both; to allow what must die to die, and what must live to live.

For women, “*El río abajo río*, the river-beneath-the-river world,” the Bone Woman home place, contains direct knowing about seedlings, root stock, the seed corn of the world. In Mexico, women are said to carry *la luz de la vida*, the light of life. This light is located, not in a woman’s heart, not behind her eyes, but *en los ovarios*, in her ovaries, where all the seed stock is laid down before she is even born.

(For men, exploring the deeper ideas of fertility and the nature of seed, the cross-gender image is the furry bag, *los cojones*, the scrotum.)

This is the knowing to be gained in being close to Wild Woman. When *La Loba* sings, she sings from the knowing of *los ovarios*, a knowing from deep within the body, deep within the mind, deep within the soul. The symbols of seed and bone are very similar. If one has the root stock, the basis, the original part, if one has the seed corn, any havoc can be repaired, devastations can be reseeded, fields can be rested, hard seed can be soaked to soften it, to help it break open and thrive.

To have the seed means to have the key to life. To be with the cycles of the seed means to dance with life, dance with death, dance into life again. This embodies the Life and Death Mother in her most ancient and principled form. Because she turns in these constant cycles, I call her the Life/Death/Life Mother.

If something is lost, it is she to whom one must appeal, speak with, and listen to. Her psychic advice is sometimes harsh or difficult to put into practice, but always transformative and restorative. So when something is lost, we must go to the old woman who always lives in the out-of-the-way-pelvis. She lives out there, half in and half out of the creative fire. This is a perfect place for women to live, right next to the fertile *huevos*, their eggs, their female seeds. There the tiniest ideas and the largest ones are waiting for our minds and actions to make them manifest.

Imagine the old woman as the quintessential two-million-year-old woman.⁷ She is the original Wild Woman who lives beneath and yet on the topside of the earth. She lives in and through us and we are surrounded by her. The deserts, the woodlands, and the earth under our houses are two million years old, and then some.

I'm always taken by how deeply women like to dig in the earth. They plant bulbs for the spring. They poke blackened fingers into mucky soil, transplanting sharp-smelling tomato plants. I think they are digging down to the two-million-year-old woman. They are looking for her toes and her paws. They want her for a present to themselves, for with her they feel of a piece and at peace.

Without her, they feel restless. Many women I've worked with over the years began their first session with some variation of: "Well,

I don't feel bad, but I don't feel good either." I think that condition is not a great mystery. We know it comes from not enough muck. The cure? *La Loba*. Find the two-million-year-old woman. She is caretaker of the dead and dying of woman-things. She is the road between the living and the dead. She sings the creation hymns over the bones.

The old woman, Wild Woman, is *La voz mitológica*. She is the mythical voice who knows the past and our ancient history and keeps it recorded for us in stories. Sometimes we dream her as a disembodied but beautiful voice.

As the hag-maiden, she shows us what it means to be, not withered, but wizened. Babies are born wizened with instinct. They know in their bones what is right and what to do about it. It is innate. If a woman holds on to this gift of being old while she is young and young while she is old, she will always know what comes next. If she has lost it, she can yet reclaim it with some purposeful psychic work.

La Loba, the old one in the desert, is a collector of bones. In archetypal symbology, bones represent the indestructible force. They do not lend themselves to easy reduction. They are by their structure hard to burn, nearly impossible to pulverize. In myth and story, they represent the indestructible soul-spirit. We know the soul-spirit can be injured, even maimed, but it is very nearly impossible to kill.

You can dent the soul and bend it. You can hurt it and scar it. You can leave the marks of illness upon it, and the scorch marks of fear. But it does not die, for it is protected by *La Loba* in the underworld. She is both the finder and the incubator of the bones.

Bones are heavy enough to hurt with, sharp enough to cut through flesh, and when old and if strung, tinkle like glass. The bones of the living are alive and creatural in themselves; they constantly renew themselves. A living bone has a curiously soft "skin" to it. It appears to have certain powers to regenerate itself. Even as a dry bone, it becomes home for small living creatures.

The wolf bones in this story represent the indestructible aspect of the wild Self, the instinctual nature, the *criatura* dedicated to freedom and the unspoiled, that which will never accept the rigors and requirements of a dead or overly civilizing culture.

The metaphors in this story typify the entire process for bringing a woman to her full instinctual wildish senses. Within us is the old one who collects bones. Within us there are the soul-bones of this

wild Self. Within us is the potential to be fleshed out again as the creature we once were. Within us are the bones to change ourselves and our world. Within us is the breath and our truths and our longings—together they are the song, the creation hymn we have been yearning to sing.

This does not mean we should walk about with our hair hanging in our eyes or with black-ringed claws for fingernails. Yes, we remain human, but also within the human woman is the animal instinctual Self. This is not some romantic cartoon character. It has real teeth, a true snarl, huge generosity, unequalled hearing, sharp claws, generous and furry breasts.

This Self must have freedom to move, to speak, to be angry, and to create. This Self is durable, resilient, and possesses high intuition. It is a Self which is knowledgeable in the spiritual dealings of death and birth.

Today the old one inside you is collecting bones. What is she remaking? She is the soul Self, the builder of the soul-home. *Ella lo hace a mano*, she makes and re-makes the soul by hand. What is she making for you?

Even in the best of worlds the soul needs refurbishing from time to time. Just like the adobes here in the Southwest, a little peels, a little falls down, a little washes away. There is always an old round woman with bedroom-slipper feet who is patting mud slurry on the adobe walls. She mixes straw and water and earth, and pats it back on the walls, making them fine again. Without her, the house will lose its shape. Without her, it will wash down into a lump after a hard rain.

She is the keeper of the soul. Without her, we lose our shape. Without an open supply line to her, humans are said to be soulless or damned souls. She gives shape to the soul-house and makes more house by hand. She is the one in the old apron. She is the one whose dress is longer in the front than in the back. She is the one who patta-pat-pats. She is the soul-maker, the wolf-raiser, the keeper of things wild.

So, I say to you with affection, imagistically—be you a Black wolf, a Northern Gray, a Southern Red, or an Arctic White—you are the quintessential instinctual *criatura*. Although some might really prefer you behave yourself and not climb all over the furniture in joy or all over people in welcome, do it anyway. Some will draw back from you in

fear or disgust. Your lover, however, will cherish this new aspect of you—if he or she be the right lover for you.

Some people will not like it if you take a sniff at everything to see what it is. And for heaven's sakes, no lying on your back with your feet up in the air. Bad girl. Bad wolf. Bad dog. Right? Wrong. Go ahead. Enjoy yourself.

People do meditation to find psychic alignment. That's why people do psychotherapy and analysis. That's why people analyze their dreams and make art. That is why some contemplate tarot cards, cast I Ching, dance, drum, make theater, pry out the poem, and fire up their prayers. That's why we do all the things we do. It is the work of gathering all the bones together. Then we must sit at the fire and think about which song we will use to sing over the bones, which creation hymn, which re-creation hymn. And the truths we tell will make the song.

These are some good questions to ask till one decides on the song, one's true song: What has happened to my soul-voice? What are the buried bones of my life? In what condition is my relationship to the instinctual Self? When was the last time I ran free? How do I make life come alive again? Where has *La Loba* gone to?

The old woman sings over the bones, and as she sings, the bones flesh out. We too "become" as we pour soul over the bones we have found. As we pour our yearning and our heartbreaks over the bones of what we used to be when we were young, of what we used to know in the centuries past, and over the quickening we sense in the future, we stand on all fours, four-square. As we pour soul, we are revived. We are no longer a thin solution, a dissolving frail thing. No, we are in the "becoming" stage of transformation.

Like the dry bones, we so often start out in a desert. We feel disenfranchised, alienated, not connected to even a cactus clump. The ancients called the desert the place of divine revelation. But for women, there is much more to it than that.

A desert is a place where life is very condensed. The roots of living things hold on to that last tear of water and the flower hoards its moisture by only appearing in early morning and late afternoon. Life in the desert is small but brilliant and most of what occurs goes on underground. This is like the lives of many women.

The desert is not lush like a forest or a jungle. It is very intense

and mysterious in its life forms. Many of us have lived desert lives: very small on the surface, and enormous under the ground. *La Loba* shows us the precious things that can come from that sort of psychic distribution.

A woman's psyche may have found its way to the desert out of resonance, or because of past cruelties or because she was not allowed a larger life above ground. So often a woman feels then that she lives in an empty place where there is maybe just one cactus with one brilliant red flower on it, and then in every direction, 500 miles of nothing. But for the woman who will go 501 miles, there is something more. A small brave house. An old one. She has been waiting for you.

Some women don't want to be in the psychic desert. They hate the frailty, the spareness of it. They keep trying to crank a rusty jalopy and bump their way down the road to a fantasized shining city of the psyche. But they are disappointed, for the lush and the wild is not there. It is in the spirit world, that world between worlds, *Río Abajo Río*, that river beneath the river.

Don't be a fool. Go back and stand under that one red flower and walk straight ahead for that last hard mile. Go up and knock on the old weathered door. Climb up to the cave. Crawl through the window of a dream. Sift the desert and see what you find. It is the only work we *have* to do.

You wish psychoanalytic advice?

Go gather bones.

2 Stalking the Intruder: The Beginning Initiation

Bluebeard

IN A SINGLE HUMAN BEING there are many other beings, all with their own values, motives, and devices. Some psychological technologies suggest we arrest these beings, count them, name them, force them into harness till they shuffle along like vanquished slaves. But to do this would halt the dance of wildish lights in a woman's eyes; it would halt her heat lightning and arrest all throwing of sparks. Rather than corrupt her natural beauty, our work is to build for all these beings a wildish countryside wherein the artists among them can make, the lovers love, the healers heal.

But what shall we do with those inner beings who are quite mad and those who carry out destruction without thought? Even these must be given a place, though one in which they can be contained. One entity in particular, the most deceitful and most powerful fugitive in the psyche, requires our immediate consciousness and containment—and that one is the natural predator.

While the cause of much human suffering can be traced to negligent fostering, there is also within the psyche naturally an innate *contra naturam* aspect, an “against nature” force. The *contra naturam* aspect opposes the positive: it is against development, against harmony, and against the wild. It is a derisive and murderous antagonist that is born into us, and even with the best parental nurture the intruder's sole assignment is to attempt to turn all crossroads into closed roads.

This predatory potentate¹ shows up time after time in women's dreams. It erupts in the midst of their most soulful and meaningful plans. It severs the woman from her intuitive nature. When its cutting work is done, it leaves the woman deadened in feeling, feeling frail to advance her life; her ideas and dreams lay at her feet drained of animation.

Bluebeard is a story of such a matter. In North America, the best known Bluebeard versions are the French and the German.² But I prefer my literary version in which the French and the Slavic are mingled, like the one given to me by my Aunt Kathé (pronounced “Katie”), who lived in Csibrak near Dombovar in Hungary. Among our cadre of farmwomen tellers, the Bluebeard tale is begun with an anecdote about someone who knew someone who knew someone who had seen the grisly proof of Bluebeard’s demise. And so we begin.



THERE IS A HANK OF BEARD which is kept at the convent of the white nuns in the far mountains. How it came to the convent no one knows. Some say it was the nuns who buried what was left of his body, for no one else would touch it. Why the nuns would keep such a relic is unknown, but it is true. My friend’s friend has seen it with her own eyes. She says the beard is blue, indigo-colored to be exact. It is as blue as the dark ice in the lake, as blue as the shadow of a hole at night. This beard was once worn by one who they say was a failed magician, a giant man with an eye for women, a man known by the name of Bluebeard.

’Twas said he courted three sisters at the same time. But they were frightened of his beard with its odd blue cast, and so they hid when he called. In an effort to convince them of his geniality he invited them on an outing in the forest. He arrived leading horses arrayed in bells and crimson ribbons. He set the sisters and their mother upon the horses and off they cantered into the forest. There they had a most wonderful day riding, and their dogs ran beside and ahead. Later they stopped beneath a giant tree and Bluebeard regaled them with stories and fed them dainty treats.

The sisters began to think, “Well, perhaps this man Bluebeard is not so bad after all.”

They returned home all a-chatter about how interesting the day had been, and did they not have a good time? Yet, the two older sisters’ suspicions and fears returned and

they vowed not to see Blue-beard again. But the youngest sister thought if a man could be that charming, then perhaps he was not so bad. The more she talked to herself, the less awful he seemed, and also the less blue his beard.

So when Bluebeard asked for her hand in marriage, she accepted. She had given his proposal great thought and felt she was to marry a very elegant man. Marry they did, and after, rode off to his castle in the woods.

One day he came to her and said, "I must go away for a time. Invite your family here if you like. You may ride in the woods, charge the cooks to set a feast, you may do anything you like, anything your heart desires. In fact, here is my ring of keys. You may open any and every door to the storerooms, the money rooms, any door in the castle; but this little tiny key, the one with the scrollwork on top, do not use."

His bride replied, "Yes, I will do as you ask. It all sounds very fine. So, go, my dear husband, and do not have a worry and come back soon." And so off he rode and she stayed.

Her sisters came to visit and they were, as all souls are, very curious about what the Master had said was to be done while he was away. The young wife gaily told them.

"He said we may do anything we desire and enter any room we wish, except one. But I don't know which one it is. I just have a key and I don't know which door it fits."

The sisters decided to make a game of finding which key fit which door. The castle was three stories high, with a hundred doors in each wing, and as there were many keys on the ring, they crept from door to door having an immensely good time throwing open each door. Behind one door were the kitchen stores, behind another the money stores. All manner of holdings were behind the doors and everything seemed more wonderful all the time. At last, having seen all these marvels, they came finally to the cellar and, at the end of the corridor, a blank wall.

They puzzled over the last key, the one with the little scrollwork on top. "Maybe this key doesn't fit anything

at all." As they said this, they heard an odd sound—"errrrrrrrrrrr." They peeked around the corner, and—lo and behold!—there was a small door just closing. When they tried to open it again, it was firmly locked. One cried, "Sister, sister, bring your key. Surely this is the door for that mysterious little key."

Without a thought one of the sisters put the key in the door and turned it. The lock scolded, the door swung open, but it was so dark inside they could not see.

"Sister, sister, bring a candle." So a candle was lit and held into the room and all three women screamed at once, for in the room was a mire of blood and the blackened bones of corpses were flung about and skulls were stacked in corners like pyramids of apples.

They slammed the door shut, shook the key out of the lock, and leaned against one another gasping, breasts heaving. My God! My God!

The wife looked down at the key and saw it was stained with blood. Horrified, she used the skirt of her gown to wipe it clean, but the blood prevailed. "Oh, no!" she cried. Each sister took the tiny key in her hands and tried to make it as it once was, but the blood remained.

The wife hid the tiny key in her pocket and ran to the cook's kitchen. When she arrived, her white dress was stained red from pocket to hem, for the key was slowly weeping drops of dark red blood. She ordered the cook, "Quick, give me some horsehair." She scoured the key, but it would not stop bleeding. Drop after drop of pure red blood issued from the tiny key.

She took the key outdoors, and from the oven she pressed ashes onto it, and scrubbed some more. She held it to the heat to sear it. She laid cobweb over it to staunch the flow, but nothing could make the weeping blood subside.

"Oh, what am I to do?" she cried. "I know, I'll put the little key away. I'll put it in the wardrobe. I'll close the door. This is a bad dream. All will be aright." And this she did do.

Her husband came home the very next morning and he strode into the castle calling for his wife. "Well? How was it while I was away?"

"It was very fine, sir."

"And how are my storerooms?" he rumbled.

"Very fine, sir."

"How are my money rooms?" he growled.

"The money rooms are very fine also, sir."

"So everything is good, wife?"

"Yes, everything is good."

"Well," he whispered, "then you'd best return my keys."

Within a glance he saw a key was missing. "Where is the smallest key?"

"I . . . I lost it. Yes, I lost it. I was out riding and the key ring fell down and I must have lost a key."

"What have you done with it, woman?"

"I . . . I . . . don't remember."

"Don't lie to me! Tell me what you did with that key!"

He put his hand to her face as if to caress her cheek, but instead seized her hair. "You infidel!" he snarled, and threw her to the floor. "You've been into the room, haven't you?"

He threw open her wardrobe and the little key on the top shelf had bled blood red down all the beautiful silks of her gowns hanging there.

"Now it's your turn, my lady," he screamed, and dragged her down the hall and into the cellar till they were before the terrible door. Bluebeard merely looked at the door with his fiery eyes and the door opened for him. There lay the skeletons of all his previous wives.

"And now!!!" he roared, but she caught hold of the door frame and would not let go. She pleaded for her life, "Please! Please, allow me to compose myself and prepare for my death. Give me but a quarter hour before you take my life so I can make my peace with God."

"All right," he snarled, "you have but a quarter of an hour, but be ready."

The wife raced up the stairs to her chamber and posted her sisters on the castle ramparts. She knelt to pray, but instead called out to her sisters.

“Sisters, sisters! Do you see our brothers coming?”

“We see nothing, nothing on the open plains.”

Every few moments she cried up to the ramparts, “Sisters, sisters! Do you see our brothers coming?”

“We see a whirlwind, perhaps a dust devil in the distance.”

Meanwhile Bluebeard roared for his wife to come to the cellar so he could behead her.

Again she called out, “Sisters, sisters! Do you see our brothers coming?”

Bluebeard shouted for his wife again and began to clomp up the stone steps.

Her sisters cried out, “Yes! We see them! Our brothers are here and they have just entered the castle.”

Bluebeard strode down the hall toward his wife’s chamber. “I am coming to get you,” he bellowed. His footfalls were dense; the rocks in the hallway came loose, the sand from the mortar poured onto the floor.

As Bluebeard lumbered into her chamber with his hands outstretched to seize her, her brothers on horseback galloped down the castle hallway and charged into her room as well. There they routed Bluebeard out onto the parapet. There and then, with swords, they advanced upon him, striking and slashing, cutting and whipping, beating Bluebeard down to the ground, killing him at last and leaving for the buzzards his blood and gristle.



The Natural Predator of the Psyche

Developing a relationship with the wildish nature is an essential part of women’s individuation. In order to accomplish this, a woman must go into the dark, but at the same time she must not be irreparably trapped, captured, or killed on her way there or back.