

## *Her Ways Are in My Bones*

*Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round  
in another form. The child weaned from mother's milk  
now drinks wine and honey mixed.*<sup>1</sup>

--Rumi

Some of the trees on the pasture below the house have sprouted from the rot of old growth fir and hemlock. Their thick roots, like thighs, straddle the decay of ancient nurse logs; the dead tree and the living, always connected. In summer these dense groves are cool and dark, the light diffuse; during the winter months they are even darker, a cloistered womb, a place to sit and ponder what stubborn milt pushes its way to consciousness. On some days in these Cimmerian groves I can sense the whole drama of the women, known and unknown, in my family tree. I have sprouted out of their flesh, grown like a pup beside them, edged my way into life. I am at home under this covering of green and mist and coastal fog; the smell of pitch and rot and must and the manure of last year's pasture is delicious and familiar. My mother, a centuries old hemlock, lies at my feet. I sit down on the wet ground and finger the seasoned reddish-brown bark that was once her fine coat. I breathe in her scent and give thanks for what she gave me, for better or for worse. We lie on the ground in the light rain and watch the big trees move in the wind.

My mother, when she was younger, still optimistic, undaunted by relationship failures and unhampered by arthritis or fears of losing her youth, had shining eyes and a contagious passion for life. On a good day, she was playful, easy-going, and played the piano like Victor Borge. On a bad day she was as moody as a Texas storm. When we saw the dark clouds forming, we busied ourselves with our own games, or the inevitable pile of silver waiting to be polished, or escaped into the coveted world of Nancy Drew.

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman Barks and John Moyne, *The Essential Rumi*, (Harper San Francisco, 1995), p. 272

Whether it was the series of dreams I had after my mother's death, or the long gray days of mist and rain, I began looking more closely at my mother and her life. I wanted to get the facts straight, to ask what fate had shaped the woman in her, where her passion had been wounded, and never quite recovered. I needed to see how her eros roots and mine were still bound together; what unconscious wanting I'd inherited from her then acted out in relationships. What was the still live connection between us, her soul and mine? How a mother's unconscious and ours are connected is a big question; but a mother's unconscious and her passion, lived and unlived, outlasts her. Her soul house, spacious and magnificent, or spindly-legged and cramped, has a voice.

### *The Three Mothers*

The mother archetype that we're looking at here is a blend of three characters. There is our own mother with her blessed and shadow side. There's an inner mother (her unconscious imprint, both negative and positive) we often internalize and don't always see. There's also a crone mother; whether a real or archetypal presence, she appears as a mentor, friend, or wisdom figure that helps us navigate the deeper stuff of transformation. Since each plays a significant role in shaping our passion and purpose, it's important to know how they work.

As for our own mother, we have begun to open the door to her room, and to see what shape her house is in. We've begun to look in more detail at what place she occupies consciously and unconsciously in our thoughts. The next task is to take a closer look at her history, and to revisit and reflect on *her* story. When we can see who she was--as a child and young woman growing up, how she saw and related to herself, to the men in her life, what her hopes were--we see with a little more objectivity, the wound and the passion she's laid at our feet.

The inner mother is the mother we carry unconsciously, a remnant or pattern of impressions that seem to have a life of their own. The inner mother can be a fantastic strength or

a stumbling block in a woman's psyche. She is the presence in the back of the mind that still frowns when we pick up the wrong fork, or do, in a rash moment something shocking; or the one who smiles through the clouds when we do some good or loving thing. If we still carry her internalized messages, you might say we're walking around with a kind of maternal spirit under the navel. We may have loved or hated her, fought with or adored her, but her voice still resounds somewhere inside. Learning how to relate to the inner mother and her influence is key to understanding the nature of our own passion.

The crone mother is a mentor or guide, and in a sense, the best of archetypal energies. Vital, sovereign, grounded, sagacious, passionate, playful, stern yet loving, she has a profound effect on a woman's soul. Whether an actual woman or an inner knowing--she appears when we need a hand, sound advice, a moment of truth, a measure of tough love. What she mentors is our healing. She understands our brush with the miller and his wife, and the rough metaphors of the past we still carry. She knows the losses we've endured, the shadow that chases alongside, and no matter what--the bright glory of the soul.

The crone will have some thoughts about the mother's house, its hidden places, the cost of the remodel, the new rooms and skylights. Naturally, she will have all the cleaning supplies, brooms, buckets, carpenter's belt, sledge hammer, plumb lines, levels. Crossing the threshold with us, one foot in the door, she will ask us to see the shadow we have judged in our mother, and where it might have caught hold. She'll ask us to look at our mother's love wounds carefully, as though we were handling a newborn child. She'll ask that we revisit the connections between us--physical, emotional, psychic, and spiritual. She'll ask us to ponder the whole picture as though we were old and wise, or close to it, able to feel some compassion. Whether she comes to us via a women's circle, counselor, friend, spiritual director, teacher, bartender, guru, her age doesn't matter. It's the sparkle in her eye, the *feel* of her years that can take us to the deep inside.

To begin working with the Inner Mother, we take time to ponder her strengths, weaknesses, her best and worst sides; what she did well, or failed to do. We look at how she lived her backwoods wisdom, or abandoned it. If our mother's passion for life was stuck in some way, if she was a good mother but a powerless woman, no queen in sight, we must reckon with that. As in our earlier dialogue with the hag, we pause, come into forest time, and see what happens--whether sitting with our journal, sketchbook, or in meditation, thoughts come and go, images rise. We try to see the whole picture of who she was, both as a mother and a woman in her own right.

### *The Natural Mother*

Browsing through the boxes of photos and memorabilia I've had since my mother's death, I meet another side of her. I finger through the layers of old letters, wedding invitations from people I've never heard of, hand-made Easter cards from my sister and me. I pause and leaf through a yellowed prom note from her high school sweetheart, a pressed brown gardenia inside with a scent I can still smell, and a tiny card that reads, "Wear this for me tonight, Russ." I sort and try to categorize loose stacks of photographs.

At the bottom of the heap I excavate a family album I barely recognize, full of early photos of my mother's childhood and adolescence. The young girl-woman in the photos has a radiant look on her face, a look of excitement, a big dream. There are dreams our mothers dreamed. C.G Jung observed a life myth in each of us, something that, if we catch hold of it, shapes our destiny. In our childhood we do have a big dream. We get glimpses of something fantastic and numinous; we talk with animals and angels, keep company with the spirits of the wild. Rumi, a master of metaphors for the spirit life, says there is a spring-box in the heart, an astounding intelligence that's deep and essential and already complete. "A freshness in the center of the chest,"<sup>2</sup> that all our life tries to catch our attention. I love this dream on my mother's face.

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<sup>2</sup> Coleman Barks and John Moyne, *The Essential Rumi*, (Harper San Francisco, 1995), p. 178

My mother's spirit when I was a child was strong. She made an impression on people and they were drawn to her. When I look at some of these early black and whites, a winsome high-spirited woman looks back at me. She wore pedal pushers and shorts, large finely woven straw picture hats, full colorful gypsy skirts, and peasant blouses, which she wore well off the shoulder--things women wore after World War II, when feminist thoughts, new roles, and new freedoms were stirring.

Women pitched in during the war and shattered some long-standing myths. They found they could rivet, weld, operate heavy equipment, collect garbage, truck supplies, run lathes and drill presses, and administrate as well as they could care-take. Some of our mothers and grandmothers tell stories about these times. My mother didn't work full time or join the war effort, but she did have a fiery resolve, and a love of adventure. After the war, she did strike off alone with my sister and me every summer across a thousand miles of desert between Texas and California. I think she meant to escape from a marriage that bored her, to come home to her mother in Santa Monica, home to the rolling ocean and summers with old friends. She drove doggedly through sandstorms, flash floods, pelting rain, and searing heat; nothing discouraged her.

Once while driving through the Mojave Desert with the temperature hot enough to boil an owl, she stopped at a filling station, soaked our underwear in water, and pulled them over our heads (a habit I never outgrew). She played road games with my sister and me, recited rhymes and poems inspired by the Burma Shave ads, sang and joked, skinny-dipped with us, and prayed with us at night in sweltering motel rooms. When we couldn't afford restaurants, we picnicked by the side of the road on crackers and cheese, sardines and coke, and feasted for dessert on the wild plum sunsets that appeared night after night in the desert. Once when a black tornado loomed up ominously on the Oklahoma-Texas border, she sniffed the wind, pulled over, and put the three of us down in a ditch. She was courageous in those days and her face in these photos is unapologetic and full of life.

Sorting through the box of small treasures, I realized that my mother, in spite of her independent streak, had left her deeper feminine unexplored. She didn't read Simone de Beauvoir or Isak Dinesen, she read fashion magazines and romance. Not long after we moved from Texas to Nevada, she divorced my father and married a wealthy southern doctor, a handsome man who showered her with presents and security. That love affair was the end of the wild streak in my mother. When she became his woman her independence faded into the background; overnight her pedal pushers and gypsy-skirts gave way to more elegant things, and she surrendered her wild side to polite southern ways. In the pictures taken of her during those later years, she seems a wholly different person--aloof, pretentious, and, as her youth faded, decidedly restless and melancholy. I would not see the spirited side of her I had known as a child or talk to her woman to woman until years later, during the last few years of her life, when we began speaking the truth to one another.

In many photos I catch glimpses of the woman my mother must have wanted to be, before the passing of years, before her charmed life and her dreams narrowed and gradually faded. In her old age, with the onset of illness, and after the death of her third husband, she became increasingly petulant and demanding. She took to her bed, prematurely I thought, and gave up on life. I demanded that she get out of bed and do things. She demanded attention and the right to be angry. I scolded her for sleeping in her clothes, she nagged me for not wearing my hair up. We argued, spat out our differences, locked horns, and loved and relented as best we could.

Women working to heal a mother wound often sense in their own mother story a similar conflict. One side of the mother profile reflects a mother's strength and potential, her creativity, humor, and resolve, her best intentions, the wild streak; the other side holds the dark piece, the shadow of her own hurts, something lost and unlived, a dream forgotten. The container for some of our mothers, the great tree, can break and fall. The thing to hold and ponder here is what happened that shaped her life: how do these two souls, hers and ours, touch?

*Mothers and Myths: The Inner Mother*

Mothers must be re-mythologized in some way. They can't be blamed for everything, and they can't be idealized. Neither can we continue to look at them through the dark glass of our own projections, or the demons of memory (who love to recycle the past). In the work of inventory, we need to look into the cracks that we *both* fell into in that relationship. To begin with, we review, recall, write what we can of her story. We try to feel what was missing or unfinished in that relationship; we acknowledge what was gift. We acknowledge any part of it that was sad, or infuriating, any little filings that may have stuck to us we can't shake. We try to feel what her dreams were, or are, and how she lived or is living them. We take her hand, if we still can, and practice talking to her from the spring-box in the chest. If we can't, we work inwardly, we reflect, write, imagine a conversation, we unwrap the images and symbols in our own dreams. We image the rooms we've begun looking into, we make the repairs, lay the plans; build the ad-ons.

People who have experienced a painful relationship with their mother may ask "Why would I want to bring a painful or sad thing back into my life. Why not let it rest?" Others who feel they've moved on from their past, or say they've taken their life in the opposite direction of their mother's, ask the same. But if an unhealed, unconscious relationship with your mother stays that way, you can be sure that there is some ghost of her wounded love in you. This is the unseen piece, the unconscious trait we're usually falling over, or that our friends or children invariably notice before we do.

The mother story we're about to revisit is both an accounting of her life, and an inner imprint or voice that we tend to carry long after we have parted company. In this inventory, it is important to separate what we see as her life (as we piece it together)--and ours. What is different about the two of us? How are we similar? What was her life when she was a girl, a young woman, a wife, someone's partner? What unconscious patterns in her relationships might have come our way?

*It is true, Martin Heidegger, as you have written,  
I fear to cease, even knowing that at the hour  
of my death my daughter will absorb me, even  
knowing they will carry me about forever  
inside them, an arrested fetus, even as I carry  
the ghost of my mother under my navel, a nervy  
little androgynous person, a miracle  
folded in lotus position.*<sup>3</sup>

--Maxine Kumin

### *The Four Archetypes of the Inner Mother*

Among the many archetypes of the inner mother there are four that play a major role in the way a woman relates to her feminine, and to a healthy relationship to eros. Each of the archetypes manifests in powerful yet often hidden ways, and can set the tone for in every relationship we have. The four types illustrate the *unconscious* voice of the Inner Mother and how it manifests in us. They are; *the Virgin, the Gypsy, the Puella (Latin for girl), and the Wounded Mother.*

Understanding how these energies in the back of the mind govern what we think and do, how we feel--is essential to our backwoods nature. It brings light into the dark rooms of our house--both our own and our mothers--and breaks ground for the remodel.

*The Virgin and the Gypsy* archetype, we know, embodies the holy and the wild in a woman. If either of these archetypes remain unconscious in our mother--and her voice stays in our head, our passion and its expression is compromised. We might have a sense of power and purpose, we might feel passion, but without conscious intention--either we sit on or act it out.

*The Puella* is the archetype of the eternally youthful girl, the woman who never quite grows up. As a mother the Puella can be lively, entertaining, creative and often has big dreams, but her dependence on others for meaning and direction hobbles her spirit. Her voice in us does the same, we don't trust our own voice.

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<sup>3</sup> Maxine Kumin, *Our Ground Time Here Will Be Brief*, (Viking Penguin, NY, 1986), p. 65

*The Wounded Mother* (often addictive and/or abusive) is the woman whose own childhood trauma has eclipsed and distorted her passion, creativity, and her depth of soul. Her anger and hurt can go deep and destructive as a voice; in its wake we feel disempowered, adrift; we don't trust easily. It is this archetype that can be most challenging to work with. Some women find that their mothers may be a combination of these archetypes, and that may often be the case. I offer them here simply as an example of what patterns may come down the family tree, and how we might identify and work with them. The important thing is to be open to the images and voices in the unconscious, and to see how they can be both obstacle, and at times, a gift.

*The Unconscious Virgin Mother*

In Albuquerque, behind the mission in Old Town, there's an ancient cottonwood tree I like to visit. In the hollow of the tree is a painted, folk-style carving of the Virgin Mary. Whenever I go to the mission I bring her roses from the courtyard of the church (which she can't see being in the parking lot) and my list of things to solve. Gazing down on me and countless other pilgrims, she seems, in spite of the cement around her, a Tree of Life.

The Virgin in the tree and I, we've talked over the years. I've gone there during good times and bad and made my offering. I've stood in the rain, sung her songs, and stroked her rough bark cloak, grateful for life. I've gone there in years past exasperated with my mother and her drowsy eros. Frustrated with my own mothering at times, certain I've overlooked something. I've gone there at odds with the institutional church and its failure to mother us in authentic ways, to mother a passion for creation, nothing missing. All the while, no matter what I bring, the figure in the belly of the cottonwood with the gold crown and painted blue eyes smiles down at me. Once, a few summers ago on a windless day, in the thick of some self-recrimination, there was a little rustle in her leaves. I swear I saw her vacant eyes open, take in the blue of the sky. Just like a Jewish mother, she looked at me tenderly, amused: *What, you still want perfection? Who told you mothering had anything to do with perfection?*

Mothers who are like the Tree of Life are loving, sheltering, and protective, and to the best of their ability they aim to be good mothers. But even with the best of mothers things can go wrong. Even with a woman's good intentions, mothering is a painful and uncertain road, a vale of tears, a comedy of errors, an endless work for which one is never quite, if at all, prepared. As good and loving a mother as a woman tries to be, she will make mistakes. She will have old love wounds herself that need tending. She'll have conflicts about how sex and spirit can grow together in healthy ways. And if she doesn't tend those old hurts, or fails to honor her passion, or to deal consciously with her sexuality, the loving mother abandons herself.

Without their instincts or the old animal to guide them, a lot of our mothers did just that. Whether they conformed to a man, devoted themselves to causes, or to us, led a professional life, or a saintly life, they may still have been unconscious of their own worth, out of touch with their deepest passion. If they attached to the ideal woman, wife, or mother, or identified with a religious ideal (rather than relating to it) then we must sort through these cultural icons carefully. If the mother in our life lacked the power of the well, if she never went near the forest, or knew the Old Mother, chances are she will not have deeply loved herself either.

If we have a virgin type for a mother, and there were too many ideals she tried to live up to, there was likely much self-sacrifice. A mother will have her dreams, but if she relinquishes her passion her world narrows. A woman I had been working with brought some photos to our session. "I recently came across a picture of my mom in her wedding dress. She looked happy in a way, but she had a raised brow, slightly furrowed, maybe unsure of what she was in for. My mother was a good homemaker, a musician, and a bright woman, but there were some pieces missing. Looking back on it, she seemed distracted a lot, only partly there for us. I think it was because she'd never had much of a childhood herself. She had to take over the household and many of the farm chores after her mom died, and I know she had a hard time. She never had a life, and I think she just got tired and gave up. I don't like to admit it, but I think I turn that same deaf ear to myself. I don't listen to myself, or what I want. I give in and let other people take over."

A mother's Unconscious Virgin is not always weak or childlike. Some mothers are strong, pillars of their community, they do fantastic works, hang out on limbs, take risks, stand up for what they believe. They offer us words of wisdom, laps of refuge, and we are grateful for that offering. But if, in their goodness and strengths, they don't look under their shining persona, and ask what the shadow there might look like—that's where virtue goes unconscious.

The more inflated a woman's ideal of virtue, the bigger her capacity for the split. And what splits off, of course, varies. It can be eros that's neatly hidden away in the pantry of the mother's house; it can be anger, power, sexuality, real feelings, the naked truth; it can be her voice, talent, her playfulness, even the soul can be down there (wringing its hands.) It can be whatever is dark, instinctive, earthy, creative. Some mothers, you know, would love us to death, do anything for us; they might serve God, country, and the corporation with real devotion—but never would they venture too far into the woods. If our search for our own identity is (or ever was) a reaction to our mother's corseted eros, unconscious as it was, it might be time to square with how we carry her shadow, some aspect of her wounded feminine.

Some women, though they don't serve a religious ideal, and don't have any qualms about being assertive, or sexual, do serve the power-principle. Some take up masculine values because they are wary of the feminine. To some virgin types, the feminine principle of eros is unfamiliar and threatening. If eros is about relatedness, if it's about passion, earthiness, spontaneity, wildness, love of color and intensity, and an ecstatic love of life—that's it for them; they run in the opposite direction.

### *The Unconscious Gypsy Mother*

A colleague and I were talking of our mothers' blend of Virgin and Gypsy, musing over how the two archetypes so often squared off. She told me, "Some of the first pictures I ever saw of my mother's eros were snapshots of her in my grandma's yard at about fifteen. She was standing under a lilac bush in full bloom, wearing a svelte black bathing suit and black pumps. In those days women wore knitted or rubber suits that came way down to the middle of the

thigh, but there she was with her long legs in full view, her raven hair catching the sun, and a certain fiery intention in her look, tentative but delighted with herself. I saw the wild charm in her eye, just waiting to catch hold of some poor boy's attention. And she did. In her time she caught the attention of plenty of men, but I don't think she was ever really at peace with herself."

For some mothers the *femme fatale* was an identity in itself. Attractiveness, beauty, and charm, whether innocently or seductively played out, might secure and define the future, but it was the kiss of death to autonomy because it aimed women eternally in the direction of men.

One of my friends said of her flamboyant mother, "My mother wasn't religious especially. She was an artist and into drama. She was colorful, outrageous, on the wild side, and exceptionally gifted--except when it came to men. Then the Aphrodite in her went wrong. She always chose colorful men who couldn't make commitments, or weren't there for her. My father wasn't there for her, but even after they divorced she kept loving him and obsessing over him. She had talent and was resourceful and creative, but she kept sabotaging herself in one way or the other with a string of disastrous affairs. I've been wild in my day too. The difference is that I've worked hard to get clear about what my sexuality means, and how to hold it reverently. I'm past acting out my mother's unrequited love. I'm experimenting with being my own woman."

Jan, a young woman I used to work with, delightful, soulful, on the wild side, had also grown up with a wounded Aphrodite. Her mother's life had been one long melodrama of love disasters, and the chaos, alcohol, and anger in that house had taken its toll. The inner mother for this young woman was a voice that repeatedly said, "Men are everything; without them, you are nothing. And you will always be without them."

For years, Jan carried a similar unconscious attraction to men, and at the same time--the chaos, fear, and mistrust that went along with it. The inner mother's voice was hungry, desperate, and terrified of abandonment; for Jan relationship was chaotic. Fortunately, though, this young woman rolled up her sleeves and worked long and hard to spot her mother's

unconscious gypsy. It took some doing, the work was immense and heroic, not an over-night venture, but she did it. Jan, facing squarely into the victim in her mother, stayed with the forest work, held her fear as lovingly as she could, and came out the other side. At present, she works in a drug and alcohol treatment center, and brings from her own struggle, a tremendous love and creativity to her work. She is her own woman, raises two children on her own, writes poetry, and is wild in a grounded way, in a way that brings life to what she does.

The Gypsy archetype in a woman, when conscious, is a powerful mentoring force. A woman whose wild nature and passion is conscious is a life raft. The creative passion of Isadora Duncan, Georgia O'Keefe, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Judy Collins, Susan Griffin, the many poets, writers, and artists that have challenged convention and its flattened eros—know how vital eros is. Some wildness is essential, wholly sacred. Without it, life is flat. The disembodied spirit is flat. And this is where the conscious Gypsy comes in. She is, above all, a tremendous creative force.

Women's poetry, art, dance, any creative work essentially, begins with the body. The sacred in so much of women's art, and in conscious mothering, has to do with mending the brokenness between body and soul. Women who have stood against convention, though, have suffered mightily; there have been casualties, some historic, some close to us. But there are many voices now, and there is a renewed consciousness arising among women, a clear call to heal the alienation and violence of modern life.

Some of our mothers who struggled the hardest with eros (acted it out or buried it) instinctively knew something was crying out. Some wilderness in our mothers was trying to remember itself. In dealing with the lost wild in our mothers, or how that conflict has landed, even in subtle ways, at our door, it's important to remember that what we're doing is redeeming eros. We're calling the body, calling love and passion home, making a place for it. In *Cries of the Spirit*, Marilyn Sewell writes,

*The Sacred is fueled by eros, by desire. It is about passion. And compassion. And love.*

*Always love. Love over and over and over again, love.*<sup>4</sup>

### *The Puella Mother*

The Puella describes a woman who tends to remain childlike in terms of her take on the world, especially in the arena of relationships. Like the *puer aeternus*, the eternally youthful boy we meet in some men (charming but not too grounded), she is the *puella aeternus*, the eternally youthful girl (colorful, but stuck in the center of her own world). A puella mother, because she is unconscious about her sexuality, is always in conflict. Partially Gypsy, partially Virgin, the Puella may or may not act out her passions, but they will always mystify her.

Puella women love to be in relationship, they are fascinated by it, but seldom go deep. Honesty, vulnerability, and transparency, are seldom on the agenda. Some go through the motions of relationship or friendship, but their fear of intimacy is immense. Women in this role often find themselves split where men are concerned; either they please and care-take men, especially men in power, or they placate, please, then sabotage or leave them. In some cases they love the man (or men, or women) in their life, but being genuinely honest in relationship is daunting. In terms of relationship the Puella hears a double message: Hope for praise and attention, but don't expect anything from anybody. She is both engaged with the world, and dis-engaged. She is there and not there, intimate one moment, and aloof the next. She is fascinated, but not committed.

The eternally youthful woman (if she tends toward the gypsy type) can be outgoing, fun-loving, the life of the party; her passions are aimed at what she can do in the world, who she can attract, what she can accomplish, the people she can gather under her roof, the men or women she engages and befriends. She thrives in the constantly changing scenery she walks through, the plans she makes, the future she imagines. If she identifies with the gypsy type, she can't shake her need to be the person that others want her to be because she imagines she will find herself in them. Her need to create drama, and to be the center of attention is in some ways

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<sup>4</sup> Sewell, *Cries of the Spirit*, edited by Marilyn Sewell (Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1991), p. 3

a defensive cover, a way of coping with the world. Like the Gypsy, she tends to live passionately and in the moment, whatever it brings, but with all her color and intention, her feet seldom hit the ground. If we have a Puella for a mother, we won't be exactly bored, but we may not feel much connection to our feminine either. We may in fact reject it.

If the puella type identifies with the Virgin, she can be philosophical, creative, spiritually sensitive, reclusive, and never mind the party. Emily Dickenson's retreat deep into her red-bricked house gave birth to an astounding inner life, and profound poetry. The creativity the Puella woman longs for needs lodging, focus, and quiet; in that environment, a woman has space to grow. But the growth involves transparency, honesty, a certain boldness to be real, and to find one's voice. Yet if the Puella in a mother remains aloof, and unavailable to her feelings, she may isolate from the world, and to some degree, from her daughter(s).

Generally speaking, a Puella, if she doesn't outgrow the princess stage (and some do), stays unconscious about her sexuality, her autonomy, and her power as a woman. She may have been over-protected as a child, never challenged out of her dependence. She may have been her father's daughter in a way that may have felt supportive and nurturing; yet a man's relationship to his daughter can also be seductive and condescending. Loss of a father or parent, on the other hand, or any childhood trauma, is also a reason some women remain adolescent. And culture is slow to change. Any talk of assertiveness or autonomy, passion, or intimacy wasn't lady-like, some of our mothers only flirted with the idea.

Like most women, my mother wanted intimacy, trifled with the possibility, but didn't know what to do with it. Passion for her was a delicious intrigue, but it was also frightening. She read her Danielle Steele books; that would have to do. A year before she died she had a little bout of illness that looked like it might take her out. Alone and frightened, she called me. By the time I got there, some three hours later, she had a little smile on her face; we both knew, she and I, this was only a rehearsal. I had gone in the kitchen and was busy cooking dinner when I heard her say, half to herself, half to me, "I can't die yet!" I walked in a moment later with her tray and a little glass of sherry. "Why not, mom?" "Because I haven't lived yet." My mother wanted to

live, and she did in some ways. Earlier that year she had jokingly told me that she had had thirteen lovers, and maybe she wasn't joking. But in her everyday life she couldn't bring that passionate Gypsy out in healthy, consistent ways. Her backwoods girl, spontaneous, playful, gutsy, honest, made only spurious appearances.

When I heard her say, at eighty-two, with death just around the corner, that she hadn't lived, I laughed. We both did. We drank our sherry and settled back into the smaller questions of life, but my heart felt stung and sad. Sitting there on the edge of her bed, looking at her frail body wrapped up in an old robe, her baldish hair tucked under a red stocking cap, her nails a little ragged, all her youth vanished, I felt as if I were seeing her for the first time. Now that she was old, now that she had no one to impress anymore, and no desire to do so, no more pretends, she could finally be vulnerable, finally be herself.

The death of our mothers is a hard thing when it comes, yet whether we were close to them or not, it can be a sacred time. This is when we see our mother, the woman who is still an adolescent, with painful clarity. A friend of mine was discussing her mother's death and some of the loose ends of that relationship. Although her mother had let down some of her guard, and had let her daughter come closer to her just before she died, there was still a place inside her mother that my friend had never been able to penetrate. Eternally young and eternally fearful of intimacy, the puella often retreats or withdraws from herself and others as she ages. "She let me touch her when she was dying, although she never liked to be touched, and she never let me get that close before. It was the first time she had let down like that in years. She had such a longing for soul, but why she couldn't bust through that barrier I don't know. That's the pain I carry for my mother. When she was dying, I caught glimpses of her, where she was trying to let go. You could read it on her face, like a film on fast forward, or fast backward. She did try to find herself in some ways. She did some outrageous things like being a little wild, running off to Europe. She tried reaching out, connecting with men. She lived life with her good looks and her bright red lipstick, but she buried herself in alcohol and she never broke out of the rut or really got to be herself.

“ Just before she died, before she went into a coma, I was aware of her face. She had no teeth, and on the day she died she just stuck her lips out and she said, 'I just can't get up this mountain.' 'Yes you can, mom,' I said: 'you can get up that mountain.' Then she said, 'I don't know what they're doing over there but it's pretty weird.' That's where she was trying to go, up that mountain. That's when she let me touch her.”

One task for women trying to integrate the inner mother is that we have to gather up the whole picture. We have to be willing to see her goodness, her struggles, her fears, what she did or failed to do, as a part of who we are. If she was suppressed, we have to ask, where am I suppressed, sitting on my passion? How do I live *my* eros? What is the mountain in my life? When I am old and have no teeth, am I going to have regrets, or am I going to be looking down from the top when I start that journey home? Will I have sacrificed my inner woman, or given her the crown of life? When a mother doesn't “bust through that barrier,” or fails to live her passion in healthy ways, we must ask how that “barrier” in her life might still affect us in some way.

Sad or angry mothers all have one thing in common: they know they have been duped. Their shining hopes dashed, their heroes gone, their beauty vanished, their goals un-met, they feel betrayed. The Puella, or the Unconscious Gypsy mother who identified with eros superficially, or the Unconscious Virgin who sublimated it chasing her ideals, have missed the divine wilderness inside themselves. The blessing of an authentic eros, the sense of God in everything.

We know, some of us, that our mothers tried to be there when the chips were down. We know, thanks to their care, attention and the security of the apron or pant leg we hung onto when we needed to, that we have at least some ego strengths. When we were clothed, fed, and taken to soccer and violin, when we were read to at night and listened to, certainly some of our emotional needs were met. Whether they were great mothers, only occasionally great mothers, or awful mothers, the fact remains—their hopes and dreams, failures and ambitions, their habits and thoughts, have found a home in us.

Where the heart and its passion, where creativity, sexuality, or spirit, let's say, did not find expression in our mothers, where did the energy go? Many of these lively energies, split off as they were, went into denial and disembodiment; they went into projection and into shadow. They went into moods and compulsions and symptoms. They sailed our way on a clear day and we didn't always see the landing party.

As we ponder our mother—with her own combination of Unconscious Virgin, Gypsy, or Puella traits—we must look at those aspects of the archetype we have internalized ourselves. It might have been easy to miss as a child, for instance, just where our mother's passion might have slipped into shadow. We might not have noticed then her ambivalence around relationship, or her fear of intimacy, or her confusion about it; or the child-like naivete towards sexuality, or in the reverse, its acting out. The important thing is how we recognize these unconscious traits in ourselves, and become aware of how they work.

*The Wounded Mother: Addictive and Abusive Mothers*

*She was my alarm system on Saturday mornings  
banging pots and pans in the kitchen  
emptying out the entire dishwasher  
with a single blow, cutlery landing in steel drawers  
with a horrific crash, slippers cutting across the linoleum floor  
like a shark gliding over smooth waters  
hoisting the Jolly Roger smile under dark wisps of hair flying  
she came into my room in a ferocious mood  
"How many times do I have to ask you to take out the garbage?"<sup>5</sup>*

The remnant of our past with an addictive or abusive mother can range anywhere from a mild abandonment to a deep emotional scarring. If the imprint of the wounded mother is internalized, that voice threatens our basic trust in life, not to mention love.

Although many addictive mothers are not overtly abusive or hostile, most women I know who have had one feel betrayed at a very basic level. One of my friends said of her alcoholic

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<sup>5</sup> Djohariah Toor, unpublished

mother, "She loved me, but I could never count on her. Once she started drinking, which was every few weeks on a binge, everything changed. My safe world vanished. At age three, by the time I could climb on a chair and get food out of the fridge, I knew no one was going to be there for me. To this day I'm convinced that if I don't do something myself, it won't get done. I know better, but when it comes to life I feel like I'm on my own."

The instincts, when we yell at them and drive them away, will turn around in their rage and drive us to do things that are crazy. I hear people say at times that they feel out of control, that something like a demon just gets under their skin. Something makes them want to binge, rage, drive or live too fast, or, at times, stop living altogether. That kind of compulsion to self-destruct comes from the deepest wounds to our instinctive nature. Sometimes when we feel out of control, it's because we may carry the same kind of crazy-making hurts our mothers did. Maybe we don't live or act like they did, but the point is, we unconsciously carry that self-destructive remnant. Not surprisingly, our instinct for self-preservation heads in the opposite direction.

When our relationship to our mother has been painful, most of us will dissociate from it. Whole sections of our childhood are often a blank page. Some of us have no albums to look at, no family to talk to. Maybe we still have our mothers, but the relationship is strained, impossible to open up. For some women the pain of the past is too deep and raw to involve the actual mother at all. Yet the unconscious, when we consult it, will help us fill in the blanks. The archetypal and shadow figures in our dreams will often help us to find the lost fragments we are looking for.

A client of mine, a successful professional and a loving person with ten years of sobriety, had been experiencing a depression. A nagging voice had surfaced that repeatedly told her that she wasn't going to amount to anything. "In my dream I was wandering through the house of my childhood. The rooms were torn and tattered, charred as though a fire had passed through. I remember wandering through the house with a woman I used to go drinking with before my recovery began. She was abusive to me, sort of like my mother had been. To her I was just somebody she could party with. Later, when I quit drinking, she wanted nothing more to do

with me. I stayed in that abuse for a long time. I just figured this was the way it was; that's all I knew." Women who experienced a mother who was critical, distant, abusive, or alcoholic often experience the same patterns of self-rejection that their mothers carried. They don't want to, but they do. People coming to grips with this pain tell me they feel like there is a hole inside, and there is.

"I think the dream had to do with the way my mother related to me as a child. She was critical and mean after she started drinking. I was always too fat, too big, never fit in anything but oversized bulky clothes, and she was always ashamed of me. She was like an evil witch, because no matter what I did, I never got her approval. Now I feel for the first time that I'm starting to heal by surrounding myself with people who really care." The negative mother is a critical presence in the back of a woman's mind. This archetype becomes the voice of discouragement, judgment, self-hatred, the kind of talk that can get a good woman down.

At this stage of working with our wounded instincts, women often report that a child appears to them in dreams, one that is painful and often frightening to reckon with. She is the disheveled, huge-eyed child in our dreams who is lost, wounded or shut away; the orphan without food, the baby that suddenly appears from nowhere with a gaping hole in its side, crippled or deformed. This is the child filled with rage and sorrow at being pulled out of the body of the mother and never given enough. "My mother never saw me. She never heard me. I didn't exist to her. I always thought, 'I'll make it better for you. I'll get it right. Then you'll love me.' But it never worked." Although some women make a valiant effort to overcome a negative mother, dealing with an inner critic is difficult. When someone has an inner critical mother she has an urgency to do life right, to have it figured out down to the letter. She has all the answers and loves to tell you what she thinks whether you want to know it or not. A mother wound has to go somewhere. The woman who carries it may not even know it until a symptom or crisis shows up. And she may not even know it then.

The strict or rigid ways some parents demand certain behaviors of their children don't always end in disaster, yet when power and coercion are used to force certain behaviors, the

heavy-handedness backfires. People who have experienced the misfortune of eccentric or controlling parents can exhibit an even more debilitating kind of eccentricity. Self-isolating, self-critical, and enraged, some women don't come out of their secret garden until a shadow problem leaps up as big as a house.

*Have you not wounded yourself  
And battered those you love  
By sudden motions of evil  
Black rage in the blood  
When the soul, premier danseur,  
Spins toward a murderous fall?  
The furies possess you.*

*Have you not surprised yourself  
Sometimes by sudden motions  
Of intimations of goodness,  
When the soul, premier danseur,  
Perfectly poised,  
Could shower blessings  
With a graceful turn of the head?  
The angels are there.*

*It is the light that matters,  
The light of understanding.  
Who has ever reached it,  
Who has not met the furies again and again?  
Who has reached it without  
Those sudden acts of grace? <sup>6</sup>  
---- May Sarton*

*Crones and Old Mothers*

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<sup>6</sup> May Sarton, *Collected Poems*, (WW Norton and Co., NY and London, 1993), p. 385

The most crucial component of the mother archetype is the crone. We're talking at one level about the woman who mentors us. Who, if we're open to it, takes our feminine in hand, when she can find it, and brings us through the fire. Her message and her model are the same: Be who you are. She is not a personal mother, but the archetypal presence of a Divine Mother. Love and compassion flow through her, a certain strict clarity, and Kali like sword work.

The crone embodies the hag in our story, brings her to life. What does she represent for us in our healing work? If we can find such a one and sit at her feet and listen to her, and take-in her truth, and her insights, that is a start. If we can take her steely gaze, and humble ourselves, if we can bow before what we don't know, before mystery, and the god of flowers, and ask for help, all the better. We can begin to feel her essential wisdom in us.

Marion Woodman, in a wonderful lecture on conscious aging, *The Crown of Old Age*, tells us that the word hag originates from the Greek Hagia, as in Hagia Sophia, or Divine Wisdom. Hagia literally means holy. The hag in our story, is an old holy mother. And here again is the simple beauty of the feminine; when the old woman's wounds are embraced, she becomes the Queen, and takes the crown. Every woman (and every man) has a wound, and every woman and man has a way to heal it. The power lies in one's conscious choice.

*The Crone has gone through one crossroads after another. She has reached a place of surrender where her personal demands are no longer relevant. She is a surrendered instrument and therefore detached.*<sup>7</sup>

---Marion Woodman

In the twenties my mother-in-law, Evelyn, studied art and theology at the Sorbonne in Paris, smoked a pipe, and, on some occasions dressed in a tweed coat, knickers, vest, a gray felt Tyrolian hat, and Spanish leather boots. She was a minister's daughter, a minister herself; an art connoisseur; a new-age thinker even back in the twenties; a follower of Krishnamurti; a devotee

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<sup>7</sup> Marion Woodman, As cited in *Coming Home to Myself*, Marion Woodman and Jill Mellick, (Conari Press, Berkeley, CA, 1998) p. 248

of space science, holistic medicine, and the great outdoors. We have an old black-and-white photo of her climbing Mont Blanc in her early thirties, decked out in her mountain gear, a wide grin on her face. She encouraged me to honor my feelings, hold my ground, and be myself. She loved art, soul, and the early women's liberation movement, and had little tolerance for passivity. She was a radical heart and my first female mentor.

I told her one day, when I felt like whining, that I knew her son was married, but I wasn't sure it was to me. The honeymoon was over, and I had the impression that science had taken my place. Her comment: "Relationship is a testy thing, pure paradox. He loves you and you know it, but you won't always see eye to eye on things. There are times when you're going to feel that he's not paying enough attention to you, or when you want to do something he doesn't. Maybe sometimes you think that if you are willing to wait, he'll come around. Maybe you think that he is what holds you back, and he *will* hold you back if you wait for him. So don't wait, and don't look for his approval. Women are always waiting around for something. When you want to go someplace, or pursue something he doesn't, just go and do it. In your life, don't wait for anyone. Be the artist you are. You'll separate again and again, you'll go your own ways, but when you come back and meet you'll have stories to tell."

I knew Evelyn meant what she said because she lived her good advice. When my husband was a senior in high school and his brother was in college, she announced that she was taking a sabbatical for the year. Trusting that her husband and son could fend for themselves, she took off for Europe for a year of travel and study. That experience was a gift not only to herself, but to the rest of her family. My father-in-law Nishan, a sculptor, worked content in his studio, and my husband learned how to cook. This is what crone mothers do. When the time is right, they leave you to make your own experience. When they come back, there are stories to tell.

Crone mothers are the strong positive female figures who have shaped our sense of autonomy. They tell us to be careful about the commitments and promises we make. Before we spend our lives being dependent on someone else, memorizing their list of expectations, we need to make a vow to be true to ourselves. Crones model for us the integrity of a feminist spirit

that will not solely be identified with the traditional role women have played. They don't listen with too much patience to our whining, but tell us instead that we deserve to make a life for ourselves. They encourage us to challenge convention, break old rules, and cheer when we are sometimes unpredictable and unruly. They laugh knowingly when we are at our wits' end. They stare boldly into our eyes, clasp our clammy palms in theirs, and demand we ask ourselves what we really want. These are the women who encourage us to paint, write, spin pots, throw fits, go for the treasure. When we are down, hopeless and scared, they insist that we accept our failures and move on. Crone mothers model the kind of self-empowerment that heals the wounds in the soul of women who have lost touch with themselves. I love the seasoned wisdom of this poem by Denise Levertov, its invitation to the Holy to dwell in our every moment.

*Marvelous Truth, confront us  
at every turn,  
in every guise, iron ball,  
egg, dark horse, shadow,  
cloud  
of breath on the air,*

*dwell  
in our crowded hearts,  
our steaming bathrooms, kitchens full of  
things to be done, the ordinary streets.  
Thrust close your smile  
that we know you, terrible joy.<sup>8</sup>*

---- Denise Levertov

A friend of mine from Scotland told me once that her grandmother had been the source of her confidence. When she had come of age, her grandma took her into the country with some

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<sup>8</sup> Denise Levertov, *Poems 1960–1967*, (New Directions Publishing Corporation, NY, 1966), excerpt from *Matins*, p. 62

older women friends. In an old ritual that marked a girl's first menses, they worked all morning gathering a huge pile of stones. The older women formed the stones into three consecutive circles, each representing a period of the girl's life. The first circle symbolized infancy and childhood; the second circle, menses, womanhood and the child-bearing years; the third, the crone, the wisdom time, the grandmother years. The elder women stood around the outer rim of each circle clapping stones and drums and singing the young girl out of her first circle into womanhood. As she crossed over from the circle of childhood, they showered her with rose petals, songs, and cheering. Her blood and her feminine identity had been honored in a powerful ritual that welcomed her body and its new seed. She walked into the next phase of her life knowing that she was a part of a women's circle, and that she belonged to an ancestry that stretched far back into time.

The women in our family of origin, our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, our great-grandmothers, those who stayed close to the soil, the hearth, the forest, to the work of their hands, to the soul inside--were women who intuitively understood the creative process. Although sometimes oppressed by their culture, or by husbands who tended to be biased about women's roles, many of our mothers and grandmothers were not only survivors, they were strong, determined to make the best out of life, and to find it wherever they could. The seeds of imagination they planted in us were potent.

In the summer my grandma Ann used to roll up her dark gabardine pants, fold them in a thick ring just under her knees, and submit her bare feet to the stony shore of a beach near her home. She had a passion for the sea and a fascination for combing its shores. My sister Loni and I would tag along for the hunt, filling our pockets with flotsam, shards of colored glass, and the occasional treasure of a perfect seashell. Grandma picked up everything. The things she found, the sea stones and polished bits of turquoise, cobalt, and amber-colored glass she held aloft for us to see. "Look at what the sea does to broken bits of glass," she would say. "Turns them into gems." And lifting dark-shelled crustaceans from their briny homes, she held their tiny shapes against her firm wide palms, examining each one. "Look at these little fellows. They look alike

on the outside, but on the inside they're all different." My first lesson about the mysteries of the human psyche.

The crone mother is any woman who has been real enough to be herself. In any healing process it is important to touch base with seasoned women; to go and sit near them when possible, to recall and contemplate their ways; to dream them up again in our mind's eye; to ask them to tell us their story.

Almost everyone has had at least one encounter with someone who has lived the creative fire. Some of us have had healthy models of the feminine from childhood-- acquaintances, aunts, friends, grandmothers, mothers, older sisters, teachers. But at times our meeting with the crone mother can be a surprise encounter with a total stranger. It may be brief, but can be powerful and prophetic.

I met a woman on a flight to Montana a few summers back. We were soon talking like old friends, the way total strangers do thirty-six thousand feet in the air. She was researching grants for a drug and alcohol program up around Kalispel, and I was on my way to visit some friends at Rocky Boy Reservation. We were talking about what drew her to Native American people and their way of life, when she said, "I met this woman once I'll never forget. I think she saved my life. I was in my second year of law school and I was really miserable. I had failed some classes, underachieved, overslept, and overeaten. A huge void was happening inside. I couldn't think straight for the life of me. Every day I ate more and more sweets, and got more depressed. I was at my wits' end. One day a janitor in the dorm passed me in the hall, saw my stress and took me aside. We stood out under an attic roof and had a smoke. Her hands were red from the cleaning agents and the hard work she did, but her eyes were just incredible. They were coal black and fired with a light I hadn't seen in any of the halls of academia. When I told her how miserable and depressed I was, she got really quiet. She looked at me, maybe right through me, and said,

'Don't let them get to you. What do they know? No matter what you do or don't do in your life, inside you got something they can't teach. You got heart and soul, I can see it in your eyes. And you got your whole life to live.'

"We used to meet and talk every now and then. That summer I quit that place and took a job in a cannery up in Alaska. Funny, but I used to stand there cleaning fish and I'd think of her. Sometimes I'd dream of her. I really missed her, but just having her in the back of my mind was reassuring. Maybe she was the mother I never had. It's hard to explain it, but just those few meetings with her kept me going. When I finally went back to school, I dropped law and went into social work. I think she was somehow behind that. I had a dream of her once when the program I was in got really demanding. Maybe it was just before the orals. She came to me dressed in full costume, tiny white shells across her chest, beautiful beaded stars on her shoes, and she smiled at me. 'You gonna do all right in that test,' she said. 'What do they know?'"

The longing for a mothering presence is something women seldom outgrow. I remember once working for two days with victims of ritual abuse. Their stories of survival were heroic and inspiring; what happened to them was not. Our work was intense and painstaking, and there were shaky moments both for them and for me. I had fasted and stayed in prayer the day before the work was to begin, and by the end of the weekend, I knew some divine grace had come over us as we worked. I also felt drained. The next day, it was a Sunday morning, and the woman I had been staying with, who had worked side by side with me during the workshop, asked what I wanted to do. "Go to church, someplace where they sing Gospel, raise the roof," I said. I had pain inside that was immense. We searched through the phone book, found a church, and were on our way.

Standing at the back of the church, a huge gymnasium, my friend asked me where I wanted to sit. "By the biggest black woman in here," I said, "by the warmest body and the biggest lap I can find." The look on her face was, as it usually is when I do these things, unbelieving. We walked down the aisle until somewhere near the middle of the church I found her. The seats next to her were already taken, but the two directly behind her were not. The moment we sat

down, she and her enormous hat turned around, stared right into my eyes, and gave me the longest, most loving look of compassion I'd ever seen coming from anyone. I burst into tears. She smiled, her mission accomplished, and turned her attention to the choir which was beginning to sing.

For the whole service, while we stood and sang, clapped and jived, and roared in tongues, I felt her as a rock. Under the shadow of her wings, I wept, howled, released my pain, and the pain of the women I had worked with, and made my feeble offerings to the Creator. I will never forget those dark eyes filled with such immense love, big enough to take me and all my pain and just wipe it out. We never spoke a word but in that moment, she was a refuge, an immense, soul-filled, sheltering tree.

To have an encounter with the crone, the woman with the crown, is like being in an emotional and spiritual updraft. Even if the meeting is a brief one, brushing up against her energy is like a dip in the healing waters of the womb. Her presence is life-giving and fertile because it gives us a place to rest and heal, a place to sit with our hurts and painful questions. When we encounter the crone, something in the soul is deeply validated.

Women exploring their deep feminine, and trying to keep these archetypes in balance need someone to embody the wisdom of the crone. We need the words of our elders when things go wrong to gently remind us that no matter what happens, life is just an experiment. If we make a mistake, it's not the end; it's something we learn from. Last summer my husband Arthur and I attended a pow-wow at the Siletz reservation near our home. One of the events was a fancy shawl dance performed by girls seventeen and older. As the dance began I noticed four older women, all beautifully dressed in buckskin, beads, and shawls, had formed a wide circle around the girls.

During the dance one of the young girls dropped a sacred eagle feather from her hairpiece. One of the elder women saw the feather fall and immediately came over and stood by it. Another elder came and stood across from her forming a protective circle over the ground where the feather lay. A third woman walked up to the girl, leaned close, and told her what

had just happened. The young girl, knowing that it was a grave thing to drop an eagle feather, froze in her tracks and began to cry. The dance stopped abruptly and the elder stood there with the girl holding her securely in her arms. An old man who was the master of ceremonies came over and lifted the feather reverently onto his paho (a wing of eagle feathers used for sacred ceremony). He ushered the girl off the dance ground and spoke gently to her while her family stood around her. He told her that he knew that she was a beautiful dancer and a beautiful young woman. But for now she would have to ask her Creator the meaning of what had happened. He told her that she would have to pray, be still, and listen to the teaching. Then we all stood in silence while some of the men came onto the grounds and did a ritual-cleansing dance designed for such an occasion. There was another prayer, and the dances resumed.

Toward late afternoon a circle dance began, and everybody was invited to participate-- young and old, all the visiting tribes, the spectators, everybody. I sometimes dance in those ceremonies but this time I didn't. Something kept me quietly sitting and watching. The old women in their exquisitely beaded dresses, fancy shawls and plaited hair in long braids, their graceful old bodies swaying to the songs, caught my eye again. Then I remembered a dream I'd had the night before. I am in a circle of women facilitating a workshop. As the women tell their stories I experience a deep ache in my heart. Finally, I stand up and say, "I think what we need here are some older women, some 'gray hairs' to come and sit around us and pray. I'm going out to find some old women to come back and help us. We'll work here in the center of the circle, and they'll pray. I'll be back." And I leave to go.

I had forgotten about that dream until I saw that girl weeping in the elder's arms, and the beauty of the old women circle dancing. What touched me so profoundly was the prayerful manner of these women, the way they stood around those girls like guardians. That was a beautiful thing. I sat there choking back tears, wondering what it might have been like if we had had these elders standing quietly around us when we made mistakes, or dropped something sacred on the ground.

The crone mother energy can appear as a sacred figure in dreams. Her appearance, whether as a mentor, shaman, grandma, holy figure, or guide, has a message for our soul. A woman who had been working for some time to heal her sexuality and mend her feminine self-esteem told of such a dream. "I've never experienced any big trauma in my life, but the effect of being a woman in this culture--especially being raised in the church, reared by a mother who was terrified of her flesh, then attending a male-dominant medical school--didn't do much for my feminine." She said that eventually she found a good mentor to talk to who began to get her out of her head and back into her body. At first she thought she might be getting into unknown territory, or going off the deep end, but her dreams keep telling her she was on the right track.

"In one dream I was walking down a path in the country and it was early morning, just as the sun was coming up. I was a child of about six, and an old woman was walking with me. She took my hand and led me into a meadow and then she stopped and motioned for me to look ahead. I saw the path widen and at the end of it there was a huge tree, in full bloom. 'Go see,' she said. I walked on for a ways, and once I turned around to see her but she had gone. The next thing I knew I was the tree. I could actually feel myself in the ground. I could feel the sensation of living out of the earth, totally connected to it. Then I saw the whole thing from above and I could see the tree was at the center of the earth. It was immense and its branches stretched very far, and it was full of flowers. Then it became a woman's body, deep rooted in the soil, utterly radiant with light. It was as though I was in the presence of the Great Mother. I could feel when I woke up a pulsing inside, as though there were still fragments of light from the tree in the cells of my body. I lay there, tears running down my face, feeling very alive, thinking. 'So this is it. This is the divine wild the mystics talk about. And it's in my body.'"

Whether we experience the crone mother through women who have walked a ways further, a mentor, a women's group, a dream, or through our life experience as we continue to live it, the gift of her transforming energy is healing. The crone represents in human form that energy that leads us to the feminine side of God, the Divine Mother.

*On Reconciling*

When our inventory has opened its doors, brought its insights, we have choices to make. Some of us choose to work with the inner mother, listening to her voice, sorting through how we are still connected; taking the best of what she gave, forgiving what we can. Some of us may choose to work directly or indirectly with our mother, opening dusty rooms, airing them out, bringing honesty, bringing light and compassion where its needed, making our offerings.

Whether we loved, adored, or fought with our mothers, or both, the remodel of the mother's house has a life of its own, and there are other phases to it. The retreats into the belly of the house have been both blessed and difficult. The rooms we have visited there and begun to ponder or talk about or journal, and to imagine how we might reconstruct, are more open. A little more light has come in. We see what rooms seem blessed or cast in shadow.

I did this work for some time, however, before I actually felt anything, before the grief and longing sank in. I saw those rooms in my mind's eye, dreamed of my mother in them, wrote about them, and I understood who she was finally. But it wasn't the understanding that brought me to my knees, it was the feeling of loss that burst out of my chest one day when I wasn't expecting it.

The truth is these images want more than just recognition, they want to be felt, honestly, and then reconciled. It is the spirit in them that wants something. In working with the inner mother, we usually want to understand and come to terms with the problem; it's the feeling part we'd like to avoid. But it's the feeling part that heals. To lose the wilderness child, after all, to misplace or refuse her crown, to lose love, or abandon passion--is sad. To carry our mother's unconscious wanting is sad. To lose the way to the divine in us; to miss the earthy road to Heaven that Chardin insists is our salvation--is sadder yet. So there are things we can do.

The first is to feel what we must about the mother who raised us. The woman who went to the seacoast to grieve her mother's death (in the previous chapter) was certainly experiencing grief, and to some degree, reconciliation. We do grieve when a mother leaves her body, or us; or her life unfinished. Yet there is something else we must feel, and that is our own grief when

something is *us* has fallen over or died or let go of life. Deep rooted in us is an instinctive need for growth and renewal, and the psyche will be calling on us to do it.

There are times a woman may not want reconciliation. The psyche has its seasons. There is a time of breaking down, and there is a time of building up. Yet if the hurt drags on too long, the unconscious won't like it. If it is time to dismantle the old inner mother and the wound there, some people prefer to explore the thing with the imagination, with a wad of clay, or paint, or chalks. If someone is working in my office, or say, in group, we don't always know what's going to come of it; but whatever does will be some attempt of our unconscious to deal with the thing. A woman took a wad of clay in my office one day, sat down on the floor, and formed a rough little toilet with a child on it who was very small. Then she formed a very large mother standing over her with a switch, with an awful scowl on her face and two large lips dangling into a frown. Sitting back and looking at it, taking a deep breath, she grabbed the figure of the mother and pounded it into the carpet. The release was tremendous. I am sure it pleased her unconscious. For years, I remembered her fantastic, single-minded thrashing of that red clay.

There are women whose mothers have been so terrifying, negligent, abusive, that one feels a dark witch has possessed the mother's psyche. But unless we come to terms with that element of dark shadow in the inner mother, the toxic hurt of those memories--will find their way in to us.

If the mother standing over her child on the toilet could have seen, in advance, what would happen to her own wild soul in the end--her life's passion suppressed and scorned, turned to toxic rage--she might have, if she could have, chosen differently. As for us, if we are the adult daughter of a raging mother, we must clean those rooms. And that means giving ourselves permission to go deep, and if need be, to take someone with us who knows the way down. Negative mother energy, since it doesn't want to be contained, will push hard on us from inside. We'll feel it under the ribs, or in our dreams, or a rage, in melancholy, addiction, or a crazy spell. And that energy must find its way out, because if left inside and not dealt with, it

can and often does manifest as depression, and later, chronic or acute illness. When we are willing to do that deeper work, however, something shifts. The energy trapped in the unconscious, in the hurt, begins to stir and lift; with any luck a good crone shows up at the door.

Reconciling grief and loss, women write poems or letters in their journal, letting the child's heart or the adult-daughter have their say. A friend of mine wrote this letter in her journal well after her mother died:

*"When I was little and you were drinking, I never knew what to expect when I came home. Were you sober, was dinner on the stove, were you drunk, passed out on the couch? Would you recognize me, did you know my hurts? I always thought I could change you, make it all better. Maybe if I cleaned the house or fixed things up, maybe you'd notice me. If I could be perfect, maybe you'd see me. Here I am, fifty-seven years old, and I still think I can fix you. I still try to fix everyone, and I keep looking for approval. When I impress people and they support me and agree with me, when they see me, I won't feel empty. But I do feel empty. Lately I am trying to look within more often. I tell myself that pain is healing, and that everything is going to be okay. I tell myself my inner woman is growing. I try to trust my instincts, and I write my poems."*

Dreams, especially, can open a dialogue with the inner mother. A woman whose mother did not protect her from her father's rage encountered her mother in a dream. Dealing with her own passive tendencies, and a fear of violence, the timing of this visitation was perfect.

"I dreamed of an old shed that used to be in my backyard as a child in Ohio. For some reason, I feel rage looking at this old shed, and I start tearing it down. Then I see a figure huddled in the corner, terrified. 'Is that you, mother?' I ask. She doesn't say anything, just looks at me with these big frightened eyes. I take her out of there and we go to a river and swim (which we used to do when I was a child), and after a while we are crying, then laughing together. Her fear leaves, and there's a joy between us. I woke up and journaled the dream, and

then I just started talking to her. I closed my eyes and imaged us on the side of the river. I told her she didn't have to be a child anymore, or a victim, waiting for the next blow, or the next shoe to drop. I poured water over her head, and made a wrap of grasses for her. I held her next to me, we were both naked and dripping with water, glistening in the sun. In real life, my mother, her name was Edna, was always worried. Her brow was always wrinkled with some care. She'd had a hard life, no mother when she was young, then an abusive relationship with her father. In the dream, she was smiling. In my image, she took my face in her hands, and her hands felt firm and strong, and just looked at me."

Breaking the inner voice of fear and its hold over our passion takes time. The tremendous energy of eros will take its wrong turns; it did in our mothers and it will in us. There are many women who have experienced a fairly loving mother, but when the body and sexuality are left out of that loving, it is our body that holds the distrust. It is the body that cannot love, will not feel, will not trust itself; that will not allow sexuality and divinity into the same room. In *Conscious Femininity*, Marion Woodman writes,

*We are terrified of trust,  
terrified of making ourselves vulnerable.  
The leap into forgiveness is immense.  
And after the leap, again the waiting.  
And again another opening into love,  
And again the terror.  
It's the body that's terrified.*<sup>9</sup>

Coming to terms with the inner mother's message about the body and sexuality, and how sex is not divine, is arduous work. The rift here between mothers and daughters can be huge, yet time and conscious work can heal this rift, sometimes in our mothers as well.

So we turn now, take the winding, crooked path, the one with our name on it, and walk toward the well. Everything we have pondered of our mother's story and her life in these pages

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<sup>9</sup> Marion Woodman, Jill Mellick, *Coming Home to Myself*, (Conari Press, Berkeley, CA, 1998), p. 38

is twofold; its aim is to understand who she was, what her dreams were, lived and unlived, and perhaps even to stand in her shoes for a time. And also to see how we carry her, her best and her worst, at conscious and unconscious levels.

Work with the inner mother is a hands-on process. It is a story with a beginning, a middle, and no end. If there is an end to the mother-daughter story, it is within the mythic realm. And in this realm, we can accept this soul relationship. We can heal and forgive if we need to, we can enrich and deepen it. We can dream and reflect on it, round off its hard edges if they're there. We can work through its rooms one by one, and sweep them out, we can enlarge and bless them. We can walk away and leave them. But there will be visits between the two of us, and there will be room, I imagine, for the inevitable work of letting go and of compassion, and for certain sudden acts of grace.