

The Skeleton Woman:
Healing Through Relating

By

Françoise Aline Cloutier
Jungian Psychoanalyst
October 2011

Table of content

Table of content.....	2
1. Introduction	3
2. The tale	5
3. Interpretation : The context.....	8
4. Being dragged upward.....	11
5. Attachment and fears	12
6. Safe in his house with Raven and Sedna	13
7. Instincts are back	15
8. To untangle her from the fishing line	17
9. How can she trust again?.....	19
10. Renewing Trust through compassion	20
11. Creating anew.....	22
12. Conclusion.....	24
Bibliography.....	26

1. INTRODUCTION

The Skeleton Woman is an Inuit tale of healing, made more public by Clarissa Pinkola Estés's famous book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. In brief the tale describes a harrowing journey in which the heroine is left for dead under the sea but is caught by a fisherman whose initial horror turns to compassion. Her life is thus restored and she returns with renewed vigour and a great capacity to enrich life itself. This tale is rich in meaning and very important to many women in their journeys.

Why did I choose this particular tale of Pinkola Estés's book? Prior to a number of events that happened last winter, I had not paid particular attention to the symbolism of bones and skeletons. The events began with a series of seminars I conducted on *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, seminars in which I noticed how powerfully this fairy tale touched the participants. Their reactions and questions exposed many basic themes addressed by this tale, such as trust, relationship to and expectations around the masculine, ups and downs in relationship and personal responsibility in one's healing.

During that same period, as a second event, a client of mine, in analysis for about a year, had images of bones in her dream material, and a skeleton in her art work.

A third event was the exhibition titled "*Memento Mori/Bone Again*" presented at the Art Mûr gallery in March and April 2011. Since this exhibition is relevant to my lecture's topic, I extracted the following material from their brochure found on internet.

Memento Mori ... this Latin phrase has its roots in ancient Rome and means, "Remember that you must die." During victory celebrations a servant had the task of whispering into the triumphant general's ear, *memento mori*, so as to remind him that he remained but a mere man, and that conquest did not entail immortality. [...]

In the twenty-first century we know about the existence of dinosaurs primarily because their bones have survived down through the ages. By the same token, we can date the dawn of human history thanks to bones which archaeologists have unearthed. One could therefore say that of all our body parts, bones come closest to a kind of immortality. Should we consequently view them apt emblems of life? [...] Freed from our fear of death, will we become "bone-again humans"?

This was it : I had to give The Skeleton Woman a chance to be heard once more.

In my work with fairy tales, I look at their archetypal patterns as illustrating either a personal life story or a collective one.

In this lecture, I will use the tale to highlight deep insights on healing the abused feminine psyche , both individual, and collective, and to explore the essential role of relating (to oneself, to the body, to the other) in the process of healing.

While the author of *Women Who Run With the Wolves* gives an interpretation from the masculine-feminine relationship stand point “as a series of seven tasks that teach one soul to love another deeply and well”, I will provide an interpretation from the feminine point of view, following the journey of the heroine. This tale could also be interpreted from the masculine point of view.

2. THE TALE

Video of Skeleton Woman Ref. you tube, 7 minutes.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKgh4y4v8HU

She had done something of which her father disapproved, although no one any longer remembered what it was. But her father had dragged her to the cliffs and thrown her over and into the sea. There, the fish ate her flesh away and plucked out her eyes. As she lay under the sea, her skeleton turned over and over in the currents.

One day a fisherman came fishing, well, in truth many came to this bay once. But this fisherman had drifted far from his home place and did not know that the local fisherman stayed away, saying this inlet was haunted.

The fisherman's hook drifted down through the water, and caught of all places, in the bones of Skeleton Woman's rib cage. The fisherman thought, "Oh, now I've really got a big one! Now I really have one!" In his mind he was thinking of how many people this great fish would feed, how long it would last, how long he might be free from the chore of hunting. And as he struggled with this great weight on the end of the hook, the sea was stirred to a thrashing froth, and his kayak bucked and shook, for she who was beneath struggled to disentangle herself. And the more she struggled, the more she tangled in the line. No matter what she did, she was inexorably dragged upward, tugged up by the bones of her own ribs.

The hunter had turned to scoop up his net, so he did not see her bald head rise above the waves, he did not see the little coral creatures glinting in the orbs of her skull, he did not see the crustaceans on her old ivory teeth. When he turned back with his net, her entire body, such as it was, had come to the surface and was hanging from the tip of his kayak by her long front teeth.

"Agh!" cried the man, and his heart fell into his knees, his eyes hid in terror on the back of his head, and his ears blazed bright red. "Agh!" he screamed, and knocked her off the prow with his oar and began paddling like a demon toward shoreline. And not realizing she was tangled in his line, he was frightened all the more for she appeared to stand upon her toes while chasing him all the way to shore. No matter which way he zigged his kayak, she stayed right behind, and her breath rolled over the water in clouds of steam, and her arms flailed out as though to snatch him down into the depths.

"Agh!" he wailed as he ran aground. In one leap he was out of his kayak, clutching his fishing stick and running, and the coral white corpse of skeleton woman, still snagged in the fishing line, bumpety-bumped behind right after him. Over the rocks he ran, and she followed. Over the frozen tundra he ran, and she kept right up. Over the meat laid out to dry he ran, cracking it to pieces as his mukluks bore down.

Throughout it all she kept right up, in fact, she grabbed some of the frozen fish as she was dragged behind. This she began to eat, for she had not gorged in a long, long time.

Finally, the man reached his snowhouse and dove right into the tunnel and on hands and knees scabbled his way into the interior. Panting and sobbing he lay there in the dark, his heart a drum, a mighty drum. Safe at last, oh so safe, yes, safe thank the Gods, Raven, yes, thank Raven, yes, and all bountiful Sedna, safe... at...last.

Imagine when he lit his whale oil lamp, there she - it - lay in a tumble upon his snow floor, one heel over her shoulder, one knee inside her rib cage, one foot over her elbow. He could not say later what it was, perhaps the firelight softened her features, or the fact that he was a lonely man... but a feeling of some kindness came into his breathing, and slowly he reached out his grimy hands and using words softly like a mother to child, began to untangle her from the fishing line.

"Oh, na, na, na." First he untangled the toes, then the ankles. "Oh, na, na, na." On and on he worked into the night, until dressing her in furs to keep her warm, Skeleton Woman's bones were all in the order a human's should be.

He felt into his leather cuffs for his flint and used some of his hair to light a little more fire. He gazed at her from time to time as he oiled the precious wood of his fishing stick and rewound the gut line. And she in the furs uttered not a word - she did not dare - lest this hunter take her out and throw her down to the rocks and break her bones to pieces utterly.

The man became drowsy, slid under his sleeping skins, and soon was dreaming. And sometimes as humans sleep, you know, a tear escapes from the dreamer's eye; we never know what sort of dream causes this, but we know it is either a dream of sadness or longing. And this is what happened to the man.

Skeleton Woman saw the tear glisten in the firelight and she became suddenly soooo thirsty. She tinkled and clanked and crawled over to the sleeping man and put her mouth to his tear. The single tear was like a river and she drank and drank and drank until her many-years-long thirst was slaked.

While lying beside him, she reached inside the sleeping man and took out his heart, the mighty drum. She sat up and banged on both sides of it: Bom Bomm!.....Bom Bomm!

As she drummed, she began to sing out "Flesh, flesh, flesh! Flesh, Flesh, Flesh!" And the more she sang, the more her body filled out with flesh. She sang for hair and good eyes and nice fat hands. She sang the divide between her legs, and breasts long enough to wrap for warmth, and all the things a woman needs.

And when she was all done, she also sang the sleeping man's clothes off and crept into his bed with him, skin against skin. She returned the great drum, his heart, to his body, and that is how they awakened, wrapped one around the other, tangled from their night, in another way now, a good and lasting way.

The people who cannot remember how she came to her first ill fortune say she and the fisherman went away and were consistently well fed by the creatures she had known in her life under water. The people say that it is true and that is all they know.

3. INTERPRETATION : THE CONTEXT

She has done something of which her father disapproved, although no one any longer remembered what it was. But her father had dragged her to the cliffs and thrown her over and into the sea.

The beginning of a tale gives us the context where it started. Here we have a father and her daughter, and nothing is said of the mother, as if she does not exist, or if she does, she has no power over her daughter's treatment. The mother is absent or un-potentiated.

What caused the father to throw her daughter into the sea? The tale says "she had done something of which her father disapproved, although no one any longer remembered what it was."

If she had done something terrible like a crime, people would remember what it was. They don't remember, suggesting it was a detail, something of no great importance. That implies that her father lost his temper over a detail, and could not allow her daughter to think or do differently than what he wants. It also shows her father's rigid authority, and the abusive use of his power to throw his daughter into the sea.

On a personal level, this situation taken symbolically portrays the experience of a negative father complex, and an absent mother.

On a collective level, it depicts a period where Fathers display their authority in rigid ways, misuse their power, and act in abusive ways over the feminine. The fact that the mother (or a replacement) is absent from the tale, suggests that Mothers have no place and do not participate in important decisions regarding their daughters. They are absent, weak, unheard. The feminine was just there, to obey, to comply to Fathers' way, or to be disposed of.

The daughter is thrown away into the sea. The SEA is a symbol of the archetypal Mother, of the beginning of all life, and is also a symbol of the unconscious.

The DAUGHTER is a symbol of the new feminine energy to come.

At a collective level, the opening situation represents a time period where the possibility for renewing the feminine energy is devalued, discarded and sent into the deep unconscious. It suggests that when the time will be right for it, this feminine renewing potential will need to be retrieved from the collective unconscious.

There, the fish ate her flesh away and plucked out her eyes. As she lay under the sea, her skeleton turned over and over in the currents.

The first stage, in the deep sea, is one of **disintegration**: “the fish ate her flesh away”, being completed uprooted and at the mercy of currents, “her skeleton turned over and over in the currents”. The only thing left is her skeleton.

At a personal level, this suggests that after being abused and rejected, the daughter is gone and lost. She finds herself alone in a harsh environment, being devoured and carried away by unconscious patterns within herself and outside of herself. Her flesh is being eaten may suggest some sort of illness or self destructive patterns; she becomes a skeleton. A skeleton is a package of bones, something rather cold, hard and dry. Sadly, the daughter has become similar to her father’s traits. What is hopeful, it’s that it is dead, suggesting that the destructive effect of the negative father has reached an end! Her body is completely decayed. It cannot go deeper: it can only stay still or renew itself.

On a collective level, in the fairy tale, some aspects of the feminine, whose body and flesh have been too easily abused, sacrificed and misused , have been “killed” and are now disintegrating, until nothing is left, except the basis structure.

For the rest of this tale interpretation, I will present the interpretation at an individual level, keeping the collective level at the end.

As the SKELETON is the most important symbol of this tale, it is important to look at its different meanings.

- A. It is a **symbol of death**, since bones last beyond the decay of the flesh of a living being. So this tale has something to teach us about the life and death cycle. Estés sees it as an excellent image for Life/Death/Life nature: “a cycle of animation, development, decline, and death that is always followed by re-animation”.
- B. It is a symbol of **what endures**, what remains after death, what is eternal. **It is also the seat of the soul or what is considered as someone’s essence**. This is a good news for our tale’s interpretation: the soul of the renewing feminine energy has been kept alive.
- C. Skeleton is an assemblage of bones, which have some **connections to resurrection**. In the Greek mythology, we read:

... Deucalion built an ark to survive the coming Bronze Age-ending flood that Zeus was sending to punish mankind for its wickedness. Deucalion and his wife, Pyrrha , survived for 9 days of flooding before landing at Mt. Parnassus. All alone in the world they wanted company. In answer to this need, the goddess of prophecy Themis cryptically told them to throw the bones of their mother behind them. They interpreted this as meaning "throw stones over their shoulders onto Mother Earth," and did so. The stones Deucalion threw became men and those Pyrrha threw became women.

<http://ancienthistory.about.com/>

We also remember that Eve was created from Adam's rib. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." (Genesis 2:23)

The possibility of resurrection, or regaining life, is thus introduced from the onset of the tale by the Skeleton symbol.

4. BEING DRAGGED UPWARD

The fisherman's hook drifter down through the water, and caught, of all places, in the bones of Skeleton Woman's rib cage. (...) In his mind he was thinking of how many people this great fish would feed, how long it would last, how long he might be free from the chore of hunting.

A fisherman, different from the others, as he ventures to go where others don't go, is the one who accidentally "catches" the Skeleton Woman. Symbolically, a fisherman means someone who strives to nourish self through going down into his deep instinctual nature. But when we send the line deep into the unconscious, we never know what it will provide!

You see, using the unconscious to serve mere ego desires may be subject to disappointment. For the unconscious more often provides what the self needs, the meaningful substance for someone's journey, rather than just what the ego wants.

So the fisherman, living his ordinary life, sends a hook into the sea, the great waters of the unconscious. His first impression is that of a great catch, a lucky day, that will ease his living.

Many relationships start this way: a feeling of a good catch! The sense of a game! At first glance, the other is easily idealized. All of this may be a trickery to make things start.

And the more she struggled, the more she tangled in the line. No matter what she did, she was inexorably dragged upward, tugged up by the bones of her own ribs.

This shows very well that Skeleton Woman does not want to be removed from her place, that it had become a safe haven for her.

IN REAL LIFE, this may look like women, who after being traumatised in childhood, have created their own world: a world with strong protective mechanisms, filled with imaginary fantasy. They don't allow anyone to get too close; when they engage in intimacy, it remains a game. They may also distance themselves from their wounds, because they are too painful, and from all other sides of themselves associated with vulnerability (like feelings, emotions, sensations). They often cut themselves off from their bodies, its cycles and wisdom, because they have only learned to see their bodies as objects.

5. ATTACHMENT AND FEARS

[When he saw her] “Agh!” cried the man, and his heart fell into his knees, his eyes hid in terror on the back of his head, and his ears blazed bright red. (...) he was frightened all the more for she appeared to stand upon her toes while chasing him all the way to shore.

What is caught to his fishing-line is not the imagined treasure but Skeleton Woman. He was expecting a big fish, what he gets is nothing like it.

In terms of relationships, we are generally attracted to the bright side of the other, but we may be getting the opposite, as it happens here. This is an allusion to shadow work. Soon or later, partners in a relationship are facing Skeleton Woman. Shadow works means meeting the not-beautiful, the devalued, and discarded aspects of ourselves and of the other.

Skeleton Woman represents more than shadow work, she personifies Lady Death.

In all love relationships Death must have her share. [...] What dies? Illusion dies, expectations die, greed for having it all, for wanting to have all be beautiful only, all this dies. (Estés, page 137)

Upon seeing Skeleton Woman, the fisherman’s first reaction is to run away, running to his house. He does not want to face her but Life has decided otherwise. Skeleton Woman is “attached” to his fishing-line, suggesting that “Attachment” had happened.

By sending his line to the sea, the fisherman is actively trying to get something out there, suggesting that he is trying to get involved in a relationship. Skeleton Woman on her side, has not done anything to get into that position.

While both, fisherman and Skeleton Woman, displayed reactions towards attachment, Skeleton Woman story suggests that she has become a fearful-avoidant adult in her attachment style (reference to Attachment theory).

IN REAL LIFE, women who have been rejected, who have not been supported and protected properly, suffer from attachment wounds. They tend to avoid any attachment by keeping away from a true relationship. But, in a situation of day to day activity, such a woman may become unwillingly attached to someone she sees regularly and with whom she has to share (task, decision, responsibility). She can’t escape easily when the other is part of her daily activity (like a colleague at work, a client, a manager, etc.) She soon realizes that something outside of her control has taken over her, making her feel irrational attraction and attachment to this other. She finds, like Skeleton Woman, that life in fact affords no havens from involvement.

6. SAFE IN HIS HOUSE WITH RAVEN AND SEDNA

Finally, the man reached his snow house and dove right into the tunnel and on hands and knees scabbled his way into the interior. (...) Safe at last, oh so safe, yes safe, thank the Gods, Raven, and all-bountiful Sedna ...

The fisherman feels safe now that he is back into his house, which means back to his own introverted space. He thanks his Gods Raven and Sedna. But his Gods are providing more than what he wants: they have set up a situation for important inner growth, consciousness, and far more.

The RAVEN is an important and rich symbol in the North. It is often portrayed as a famous **trickster**, using his tricks and wit to get and steal food, always more food. His appetite and libido are huge and insatiable. This side of Raven is a symbol of adolescence, self-centeredness, and greediness.

In terms of relationship: when the fisherman is in an attitude of wanting to get an easy catch, with no consequence, he is like Raven. He runs away from anything that is not easy.

But Raven is more than that, far more. We find myths where Raven, like Prometheus, **steals the Light** and brings it to humans. He therefore contributes to the rise of consciousness. He is also a **messenger**, being able to carry messages from the Gods to humans, traveling from different levels of consciousness. We find him in **creation** myths, as an actor of the creation of the world.

(Look at this picture :

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rdmegr/5941448562/in/photostream>)

In other myths, he plays roles of **medicine man and of shaman**, both roles associated to healing.

The trickster side of Raven comes into play in getting Skeleton Woman caught in the fisherman's line. The other sides of Raven symbol, such as creation of the world and healer, will be displayed later in the heroine's journey.

The fisherman not only thanks the Raven but he also thanks SEDNA. Here is very briefly the Inuit myth that talks of Sedna.

At its simplest version, it tells of an unwanted woman thrown overboard, who clutches desperately to the gunwale as the man inside the boat chops off her fingers. These bob in the water and change into seals and walrus. Meanwhile the woman herself sinks to the bottom of the sea, where she becomes the ruler of the seals and the walrus and, according to some versions, of all other game as well.

Inuit storytellers occasionally explained that the woman was an orphan or a widow, whom no one would support. In other versions, she is a young woman seduced by an animal lover in the form of an exceptionally handsome man. The lover is a fulmar or a stormy petrel, who feeds his bride raw fish.

When the disappointed girl's father comes to fetch her home in his boat, the bird raises such a storm by beating its wings that the father, to save himself, throws his daughter overboard. She then clutches at the gunwale, and so forth, becoming the mistress of animals.

The story itself, in all versions, has come to be called the Sedna myth. Sedna is seen as the mistress of sea animals. The release of animals is accomplished through rituals.

Bierhorst, *The Mythology of North America*, p. 63-64

So, when the fisherman turns to Sedna to thank her for her protection, he does not know that this gesture could be upsetting to the goddess. Why? Her role is not to protect fishermen from coward behaviours, who does not want to be involved with Skeleton Woman, but as the mistress of animals, she has the power to release game to feed people. Also, she herself has not been rescued by any brave men nor gods, something that she might have hoped for. In a situation where one of her "sister" who had endured a similar ordeal, is about to be released by a man, she might be carefully watching how this situation will evolve. What the goddess wants is surely a better treatment of Skeleton Women.

Fisherman will have, in his mankind condition, to resolve a problem at a personal level (to face Skeleton Woman) that also belongs to the collective level (to rescue Sedna).

7. INSTINCTS ARE BACK

Throughout it all she kept right up, in fact grabbed some of the frozen fish as she was dragged behind. This she began to eat, for she had not gorged in a long, long time.

Skeleton Woman resisted. She did not want to get out of her world, get caught, become attached. But it is all for the good, even if at first glance, it looks bad.

It is good, because she has emerged out of the world that she had created for herself, out of her protective walls.

It is good, because she is caught. If not, she would have run back to her safety undersea! And out of life.

Being and running in this new environment trigger her instincts back: she eats. Symbolically, it means that she is hungry for life, and she starts eating it!

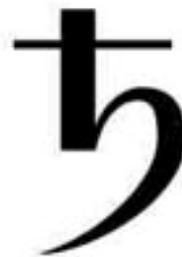
TIMING

Even if neither the fisherman, nor Skeleton Woman wanted this situation, it happened! Things outside of the ego control are happening. Why now? The best answer is : because it is the right time.

There is a connection between skeleton, bones and time. The skeleton is sometimes represented holding an hourglass. The hourglass is an emblem of time, although hidden within is the promise of life - because the hourglass is reversible, it held within a promise of resurrection. Skeletons are also represented with the grim reaper and a scythe.

In ancient times, the emblem of the God Saturn (Chronos to the Greeks) was the **scythe**, which represented the nature of the cycles of time. The scythe symbolized not only impermanence (all things living will be cut down), but the nature of the life cycle - plants must die to feed animals, and the tool of the harvest depicts the necessity of death for the renewal of life. Thus, death was depicted as a natural part of the passage of time.

In astrology, this glyph represents the planet Saturn (Cronos), and its corresponding alchemical metal, lead. The image mimics the scythe of Saturn, the god of the harvest and time.



This short amplification illustrates the role of time and timing associated with the skeleton archetype. The right amount of time was required for the disintegration process

of the daughter to a skeleton. In real life, it means that everything that has died in someone's life takes time to decay before new life can grow.

The idea of the right timing for things to happen calls for the presence and the unfolding of a bigger plan orchestrated by the self.

The cycle of Life/Death/Life is endowed with “a powerful knowing about Fate and Time, time for all things, all things in their own time, rolling with the rough, gliding on the smooth.” Estés, page 148.

8. TO UNTANGLE HER FROM THE FISHING LINE

But a feeling of some kindness came into his breathing, and slowly he reached out his grimy hands and, using words like a mother to a child, began to untangle her from the fishing line.

He could not say what it was that made him do what he did. Something else than his fears guided him to do the right things. Being peacefully in the presence of Skeleton Woman triggers a knowing deeper than his ego, at a soul level: like a wise inner voice. And what is he doing? He ...

Uses words softly like a mother to a child,
Untangles her, touching her gently
Says / sings some rime “Oh, na, na, na “
Dresses her in furs to keep her warm
Gazes at her.

POSITIVE MOTHERING

All of his actions are done in a positive mothering way. Skeleton Woman is receiving and tasting many good aspects of the positive mother archetype, something new to her, that can counter her negative and absent mother experience.

POSITIVE ANIMUS

He is putting her bones back in order, in the order a human's should be. He creates order in what was chaotic, misplaced, and ugly.

Archetypally, to untangle something requires a descent, the following of a labyrinth down into the underworld or to the place where matters are revealed in entirely new ways. (Estés, p. 145)

I also see the action of untangling as manifestation of a good thinking function. The fisherman uses his analytical skills to create order. Taken symbolically, it means clarifying misunderstandings and devious interpretations, putting order in someone's feelings, thoughts, and emotions.

What is happening here is the beginning of the healing and transformation process.

The fisherman is the second masculine personage of the tale. Unlike Skeleton Woman's father, he is able to face what is different and not-beautiful; he is kind and patient in his work; he makes use of masculine and feminine aspects. For Skeleton Woman, these interactions and closeness with a positive masculine figure provide her a healthy experience of the masculine; this could have the effect of reducing the power of her negative father complex.

IN REAL LIFE, women who had a negative father complex will need to consciously take note and see that all men are not equal. If she is expecting someone special to show up, save and heal her, like a star, a hero, a great healer, and so on, she may remain waiting and waiting. The positive animus that will make a big difference in her life is a simple and ordinary human being suggests this tale.

9. HOW CAN SHE TRUST AGAIN?

And she in the furs uttered not a word – she did not dare – lest this hunter take her out and throw her down to the rocks and break her bones to pieces utterly.

She does not dare say a word because the fear of being rejected and abused again is still very active, despite the new positive experience with the fisherman. The abusive and painful experience of the father had destroyed her trust. It will take something else, something more, to rebuild her trust in the masculine.

When a trauma happened in early life, it creates a complex in the psyche - a kind of ever-open sore. Here, it is a negative father complex. The complex will be triggered in any situation of closeness with a man, making Skeleton Woman perceive, interpret, think and react in a manner dictated by the complex.

This moment is crucial: will her fear take over and make her run away? If she does, nothing will change in her.

IN REAL LIFE, complexes remain often in command and prevent any new behaviour to occur. The wounded woman gets scared at any sign resembling her father's traits and behaviours. She often can't stand any situation where she is exposed and loses her protective walls. She may destroy any possibility and go back to her world.

In the tale, Skeleton Woman is able to stay still and wait...which is the right thing to do.

IN REAL LIFE, a woman need to become conscious of her negative father complex, and gain some insights to know when her complex is active, and how to deal with it. She has to work on her fears and perceptions, in order to differentiate negative from positive masculine's actions, behaviours, and intentions. She needs to recognize any actions that fall into the category of positive: healthy, good, quieting, gentle, warm, clarifying, honest.

10. RENEWING TRUST THROUGH COMPASSION

The man became drowsy, ..., and soon was dreaming.

The fisherman is able to fall asleep and get some rest in the presence of Skeleton Woman. By doing so, he sends her a message : “I trust you”.

It’s a strong and powerful message. He trusts that he is safe with her. This is loaded with meaning as it says...

You can be there; your presence is welcome.

You can exist as you are, a Skeleton Woman.

You can do whatever you want: there is no watching, no control, no interdiction.

You can relax, find yourself, be yourself.

The fisherman is providing a rich and healthy experience of trust into the other. Skeleton Woman receives it and bathes in it, washing out the old negative experience with a new one. The material is in place for rebuilding her own trust into the other.

[...] a tear escapes from the dreamer’s eye; [...] it is either a dream of sadness or longing.

This tear is the tear of compassion. The fisherman is touching his own wounds, his own solitude. Him too is hurting. Estés writes: “Tears carry creative power. In mythos, the giving of tears causes immense creation and heartfelt reunion.” (p. 152)

By going into his depth and touching his own vulnerability, it shows Skeleton Woman that she is not alone, carrying a painful past. It makes it easier for her to accept who she is, without judgment and defeatism.

The single tear was like a river and she drank and drank and drank until her many-years-long thirst was slaked.

Skeleton Woman drinks his tear, as she is so thirsty for true and deep communication, understanding, humanity, compassion, feelings. She drinks this tear as if it was a river, as she needs to vivify her bones, to fertilize what was arid, to regain and express her emotions, to get back into life again.

IN REAL LIFE, a woman will have to renew her trust in order to become an integrated woman. To be in a relationship with another who trusts her, is providing a positive experience and a model for her, showing her how to do the same thing towards herself and the man. Her trust will grow bigger and stronger when he is touching and showing

his own vulnerability. By so doing, he is removing his projections and judgments upon her. She can be who she is, and still be loved!

Who will provide this to the wounded woman: a good companion, a friend, a colleague, a spiritual guide, a teacher, a boss, an analyst? In all cases, it will need to be integrated and become an inner positive animus figure within her.

11. CREATING ANEW

... she reached inside the sleeping man and took out his heart, the mighty drum. She sat up and banged on both sides of it: Bom, Bomm!... Bom, Bomm!

She uses the fisherman's heart to start her song. It will mean that the fisherman's heart, his love, is true, that the creation ritual starts and unfolds. Love is what make it possible to re-create herself. She felts the fisherman's love, his throbbing heart, and Bom, Boom, she wants to become a full and real woman. She wants to love, to live.

As she drummed, she began to sing out "Flesh, flesh, flesh! And the more she sang, the more her body filled out with flesh. [...]she sang for all the things a woman needs.

The drumming and singing are often used in rituals, as they have an effect on the ego and the whole body. They help the ego to move from the profane world to a sacred one; they help the body to free itself from its rigidity and protection to connect to something more spontaneous, and eventually connect to the body wisdom.

Rituals create a momentary world, a sacred space, for turning towards a greater power (the divine, the spirits) and asking it for protection, food, help, healing, and so on, and sometimes for giving back to the gods, to give thanks, etc.

Here Skeleton Woman is asking for flesh and all she needs to make her a complete woman. She participates in her own healing and transformation by performing that ritual: drumming, singing, asking. In that altered state, she is connecting to something far deeper inner and outer: to the deep potential for healing and transformation.

And when she was done, she also sang the sleeping man's clothes off and crept into his bed with him, skin against skin.

When she is done, she is ready and able to have a true intimate relationship to the fisherman, as she has become a complete woman :

- a woman who has integrated her different parts
- who has faced and dealt with her complexes
- who has connected with her emotions and instincts
- who has entered a sacred space and surrendered to the forces and healing within herself.

[...] she and the fisherman went away and were consistently well fed by the creatures she had known in her life underwater.

The meeting of Skeleton Woman and the fisherman has developed into a true relationship, that is fed by creatures of the unconscious (the learning and the meaning extracted from the unconscious).

IN REAL LIFE, after a woman has received positive animus attention and love, she also has to participate in her healing process, by doing what is required. An important part of her healing depends on her!

Receiving love from the other is not enough; she has to learn to love herself too: to accept fully who she is, to make peace with her life story.

She must reconnect to her body, at the instinctual level, being in touch with all of her instincts , her emotions, her intuitions, and her cycles.

She also needs to heal her body: to give back its full value, to treat it with a respectful attitude.

The complete healing involves the spiritual aspect, surrendering to something bigger and deeper than herself, for inspiration, healing and wisdom.

12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to express my feeling of awe provided by the study of this tale and its main symbols: Skeleton and Raven. I have seen deep knowing and wisdom embedded in them; this is an experience renewed every time I work on a tale. These gifts are given to anyone who takes the time to work deeper with them. For anyone involved in a journey, finding a tale that touches you is like finding a soul companion; it is telling you: “you are not alone” and “your journey has meaning”.

This tale teaches us that healing the wounded feminine energy has happened given the participation of a masculine figure, of a feminine heroine and with the help of the spiritual.

The masculine figure contributed by:

- Acting differently than the father

- Untangling and creating a new order that makes a good basic structure for new life to grow

- Showing patience, gentleness and warmth and trust

- Facing shadow material

- Contacting his own wound and feeling empathy and compassion.

The feminine heroine contributed by:

- Contacting her instincts back (eating, running, drinking)

- Staying still and waiting in the presence of the other

- Learning to trust again

- Surrendering to the divine to rebuilt herself anew.

It is worth noting that the feminine heroine is contacting the sacred world, the divine, **through her body**, by drumming, singing and dancing.

AT A COLLECTIVE LEVEL, it suggests that the healing of the rejected feminine energy endowed with renewal potential requires a shift in the way the masculine energy is used and lived in people (men and women), in groups and in systems (economic, educational, politic, etc.)

It requires a masculine that displays the fisherman’s qualities. It is not a heroic, a superstar, a warrior, or a priest’s model that is called for but an ordinary type of man who is able to do the right thing, as a human being.

It requires a masculine attitude able to create a new order, withdraw projections, show patience, get in touch with his own feelings and wounding. It requires a feminine that gets in touch with instincts, intuition, life cycle and spiritual wisdom through the body.

Healing the collective feminine will mean symbolically healing Sedna. Sedna had been used by her father as a sacrifice to save himself.

Too often women have sacrificed themselves, not for the right motive, as it was done in the victim's position or out of despair or a sense of being of no value. There is something out of order in that gesture since sacrifice, meaning to *make sacred*, requires a willing attitude of giving something we see as valuable to the Gods. These ways of sacrificing the feminine have to be untangled too.

I say that Sedna will be saved and healed when the time will be right for a Fisher King to be in authority in the collective.

I suggest that this shift in the collective masculine energy is happening, as more and more men and women are preoccupied and working on feminine issues like the environment, healthy food, spiritual quest, revaluing bodies and its wisdom, looking at other way of healing the body, etc.

We all remember the navigator Jean Lemire, on board of Sedna IV conducting an expedition to the South Pole in 2005-2006.

Antarctic Mission, one of the grandest expeditions of modern times, will be taking up the challenge ... of becoming the most important awareness-raising campaign on climate change – one of the greatest environmental challenges now facing our planet. Our goal is to sail to the edge of the South Pole's ice pack to document the effect of climate change on the Antarctic Peninsula - the most rapidly warming place on the planet.

<http://www.radio-canada.ca/sedna/>

Many other researches and actions of this nature are happening. In so doing we are collectively slowly moving from a Patriarchal paradigm to a new one.

***Sedna is rising up and
we are patiently untangling her.***

Are we not ?

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