

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

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

Bluebeard is a story of such a matter. In North America, the best known Bluebeard versions are the French and the German.² But I prefer this old version in which the French and the Slavic have been mingled. It is close to the one given to me by my Aunt Kathé (pronounced "Katie"), who lived in Csíbrak near Dombóvár in Hungary. Among that cadre of farmwomen tellers, the Bluebeard tale is begun with an anecdote about someone who knew someone who knew someone who had seen the grisly proof of Bluebeard's demise. And so we begin.

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

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

Later they stopped beneath a giant tree and Bluebeard regaled them with stories and fed them dainty treats.

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

They returned home all a-chatter about how interesting the day had been, and did they not have a good time? Yet, the two older sisters' suspicions and fears returned and they vowed not to see Bluebeard again. But the youngest sister thought if a man could be that charming, then perhaps he was not so bad. The more she talked to herself, the less awful he seemed, and also the less blue his beard.

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

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

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

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

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

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

They puzzled over the last key, the one with the little scrollwork

on top. "Maybe this key doesn't fit anything at all." As they said this, they heard an odd sound—"errrrrrrrrrrr." They peeked around the corner, and—lo and behold!—there was a small door just closing. When they tried to open it again, it was firmly locked. One cried, "Sister, sister, bring your key. Surely this is the door for that mysterious little key."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It was very fine, sir."

"And how are my storerooms?" he rumbled.

"Very fine, sir."

"How are my money rooms?" he growled

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

"So everything is good, wife?"

"Yes, everything is good."

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

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

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

"What have you done with it, woman?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sisters, sisters! Do you see our brothers coming?"

"We see nothing, nothing on the open plains."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Natural Predator of the Psyche

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

The Bluebeard story is about that captor, the dark man who inhabits all women's psyches, the innate predator. He is a specific and incontrovertible force which must be memorized and restrained. To restrain the natural predator³ of the psyche it is necessary for women to remain in possession of all their instinctual powers. Some of these are insight, intuition, endurance, tenacious loving, keen sensing, far vision, acute hearing, singing over the dead, intuitive healing, and tending to their own creative fires.

In psychological interpretation we call on all aspects of the fairy tale to help us represent the drama within a single woman's psyche. Bluebeard represents a deeply reclusive complex which lurks at the edge of all women's lives, watching, waiting for an opportunity to oppose her. Although it may symbolize itself similarly or differently in men's psyches, it is the ancient and contemporary foe of both genders.

It is difficult to completely comprehend the Bluebeardian force, for it is innate, meaning indigenous to all humans from birth forward, and in that sense is without conscious origin. Yet I believe we have a hint of how its nature developed in the preconscious of humans, for in the story, Bluebeard is called "a failed magician." In this occupation he is related to other fairy tales which also portray the malignant predator of the psyche as a rather normative-looking but immeasurably destructive mage.

Using this description as an archetypal shard, we compare it to what we know of failed sorcery or failed spiritual power in mytho-history. The Greek Icarus flew too close to the sun and his waxen wings melted, catapulting him to earth. The Zuni myth "The Boy and the Eagle" tells of a boy who would have become a member of the eagle kingdom but for thinking he could break the rules of Death. As he soared through the sky his borrowed eagle coat was torn from him and he fell to his doom. In Christian myth, Lucifer claimed equality with Yahweh and was driven down to the underworld. In folklore there are any number of sorcerers' apprentices who foolishly dared to venture beyond their actual skill levels, or attempted to contravene Nature. They were punished by injury and cataclysm.

As we examine these leitmotifs, we see the predators in them desire superiority and power over others. They carry a kind of psychological inflation wherein the entity wishes to be loftier than, as big as, and equal to The Ineffable, which traditionally distributes and controls the mysterious forces of Nature, including the systems of Life and Death and the rules of human nature, and so forth.

In myth and story we find that the consequence for an entity attempting to break, bend, or alter the operating mode of The Ineffable is to be chastened, either by having to endure diminished ability in the world of mystery and magic—such as apprentices who are no longer allowed to practice—or lonely exile from the land of the Gods, or a similar loss of grace and power through stumbling, crippling, or death.

If we can understand the Bluebeard as being the internal representative of the entire myth of such an outcast, we then may also be able to comprehend the deep and inexplicable loneliness which sometimes washes over him (us) because he experiences a continuous exile from redemption.

The problem with Bluebeard in the fairy tale is that rather than empowering the light of the young feminine forces of the psyche, he

is instead filled with hatred and desires to kill the lights of the psyche. It is not hard to imagine that in such a malignant formation there is trapped one who once wished for surpassing light and fell from Grace because of it. We can understand why thereafter the exiled one maintains a heartless pursuit of the light of others. We can imagine that it hopes that if it could gather enough soul(s) to itself, it could make a blaze of light that would finally rescind its darkness and repair its loneliness.

In this sense we have at the beginning of the tale a formidable being in its unredeemed aspect. Yet this fact is one of the central truths the youngest sister in the tale must acknowledge, that all women must acknowledge—that both within and without, there is a force which will act in opposition to the instincts of the natural Self, and that that malignant force is *what it is*. Though we might have mercy upon it, our first actions must be to recognize it, to protect ourselves from its devastations, and ultimately to deprive it of its murderous energy.

All creatures must learn that there exist predators. Without this knowing, a woman will be unable to negotiate safely within her own forest without being devoured. To understand the predator is to become a mature animal who is not vulnerable out of naïveté, inexperience, or foolishness.

Like a shrewd tracker, Bluebeard senses the youngest daughter is interested in him, that is, willing to be prey. He asks for her in marriage and in a moment of youthful exuberance, which is often a combination of folly, pleasure, happiness, and sexual intrigue, she says yes. What woman does not recognize this scenario?

Naive Women as Prey

The youngest sister, the most undeveloped sister, plays out the very human story of the naive woman. She will be captured temporarily by her own inner stalker. Yet, she will out in the end, wiser, stronger, and recognizing the wily predator of her own psyche on sight.

The psychological story underlying the tale also applies to the older woman who has not yet completely learned to recognize the innate predator. Perhaps she has begun the process over and over again but, lacking guidance and support, has not yet finished with it.

This is why teaching stories are so nourishing; they provide initiatory maps so even work which has hit a snag can be completed. The

Bluebeard story is usable by all women, regardless of whether they are very young and just learning about the predator, or whether they have been hounded and harassed by it for decades and are at last readying for a final and decisive battle with it.

The youngest sister represents a creative potential within the psyche. A something that is going toward exuberant and fissioning life. But there is a detour as she agrees to become the prize of a vicious man because her instincts to notice and do otherwise are not intact.

Psychologically, young girls and young boys are as though asleep about the fact that they themselves are prey. Although sometimes it seems life would be much easier and much less painful if all humans were born totally awake, they are not. We are all born *anlagen*, like the potential at the center of a cell: in biology the *anlage* is the part of a cell characterized as “that which will become.” Within the *anlage* is the primal substance which in time will develop, causing us to become a complete someone.

So our lives as women are ones of quickening the *anlage*. The Bluebeard tale speaks to the awakening and education of this psychic center, this glowing cell. In service of this education, the youngest sister agrees to marry a force which she believes to be very elegant. The fairy-tale marriage represents a new status being sought, a new layer of the psyche about to be unfurled.

However, the young wife has fooled herself. Initially she felt fearful of Bluebeard. She was wary. However, a little pleasure out in the woods causes her to overrule her intuition. Almost all women have had this experience at least once. As a result she persuades herself that Bluebeard is not dangerous, but only idiosyncratic and eccentric. Oh, how silly. Why am I so put off by that little old blue beard? Her wildish nature, however, has already sniffed out the situation and knows the blue-bearded man is lethal, but the naive psyche disallows this inner knowing.

This error of judgment is almost routine in a woman so young that her alarm systems are not yet developed. She is like an orphan wolf pup who rolls and plays in the clearing, heedless of the ninety-pound bobcat approaching from the shadows. In the case of the older woman who is so cut away from the wild that she can barely hear the inner warnings, she too proceeds, smiling naively.

You might well wonder if all this could be avoided. As in the animal world, a young girl learns to see the predator via her mother's

and father's teachings. Without parents' loving guidance she will certainly be prey early on. In hindsight, almost all of us have, at least once, experienced a compelling idea or semi-dazzling person crawling in through our windows at night and catching us off guard. Even though they're wearing a ski mask, have a knife between their teeth, and a sack of money slung over their shoulder, we believe them when they tell us they're in the banking business.

However, even with wise mothering and fathering, the young female may, especially beginning about age twelve, be seduced away from her own truth by peer groups, cultural forces, or psychic pressures, and so begins a rather reckless risk-taking in order to find out for herself. When I work with older teenage girls who are convinced that the world is good if they only work it right, it always makes me feel like an old gray-haired dog. I want to put my paws over my eyes and groan, for I see what they do not see, and I know, especially if they're willful and feisty, that they're going to insist on becoming involved with the predator at least once before they are shocked awake.

At the beginning of our lives our feminine viewpoint is very naive, meaning that emotional understanding of the covert is very faint. But this is where we all begin as females. We are naive and we talk ourselves into some very confusing situations. To be uninitiated in the ways of these matters means that we are in a time of our life when we are vulnerable to seeing only the overt.

Among wolves, when the bitch leaves her pups to go hunting, the young ones try to follow her out of the den and down the path. She snarls at them, lunges at them, and scares the bejeezus out of them till they run slipping and sliding back to the den. Their mother knows her pups don't yet know how to weigh and assess other creatures. They don't know who is a predator and who is not. But in time she will teach them, both harshly and well.

Like wolf pups, women need a similar initiation, one which teaches that the inner and outer worlds are not always happy-go-lucky places. Many women do not even have the basic teaching about predators that a wolf mother gives her pups, such as: if it's threatening and bigger than you, flee; if it's weaker, see what you want to do; if it's sick, leave it alone; if it has quills, poison, fangs, or razor claws, back up and go in the other direction; if it smells nice but is wrapped around metal jaws, walk on by.

The youngest sister in the story is not only naive about her own mental processes, and totally ignorant about the murdering aspect of

her own psyche, but is also able to be lured by pleasures of the ego. And why not? We all want everything to be wonderful. Every woman wants to sit upon a horse dressed in bells and go riding off through the boundless green and sensual forest. All humans want to attain early Paradise here on earth. The problem is that ego desires to feel wonderful but a yen for the paradisaical, when combined with naïveté, makes us not fulfilled, but food for the predator.

This acquiescence to marrying the monster is actually decided when girls are very young, usually before five years of age. They are taught to not see, and instead to "make pretty" all manner of grotesqueries whether they are lovely or not. This training is why the youngest sister can say, "Hmmm, his beard isn't really *that* blue." This early training to "be nice" causes women to override their intuitions. In that sense, they are actually purposefully taught to submit to the predator. Imagine a wolf mother teaching her young to "be nice" in the face of an angry ferret or a wily diamondback rattler.

In the tale, even the mother colludes. She goes on the picnic, "goes along for the ride." She doesn't say a word of caution to any of her daughters. One might say the biological mother or the internal mother is asleep or naive herself, as is often the case in very young girls, or in unmothered women.

Interestingly, in the tale, the older sisters demonstrate some consciousness when they say they do not like Bluebeard even though he has just entertained and regaled them in a very romantic and Paradisaical manner. There is a sense in the story that some aspects of the psyche, represented by the older sisters, are a little more developed in insight, that they have "knowing" which warns against romanticizing the predator. The initiated woman pays attention to the older sisters' voices in the psyche; they warn her away from danger. The uninitiated woman does not pay attention; she is as yet too identified with naïveté.

Say, for instance, a naive woman keeps making poor choices in a mate. Somewhere in her mind she knows this pattern is fruitless, that she should stop and follow a different value. She often even knows how to proceed. But there is something compelling, a sort of Bluebeardian mesmerization, about continuing the destructive pattern. In most cases, the woman feels if she just holds on to the old pattern a little longer, why surely the paradisaical feeling she seeks will appear in the next heartbeat.

At another extreme, a woman involved in a chemical addiction

most definitely has at the back of her mind a set of older sisters who are saying, "No! No way! This is bad for the mind and bad for the body. We refuse to continue." But the desire to find Paradise draws the woman into the marriage to Bluebeard, the drug dealer of psychic highs.

Whatever dilemma a woman finds herself in, the voices of the older sisters in her psyche continue to urge her to consciousness and to be wise in her choices. They represent those voices in the back of the mind that whisper the truths that a woman may wish to avoid for they end her fantasy of Paradise Found.

So the fateful marriage occurs, the mingling of the sweetly naive and the dastardly unlit. When Bluebeard leaves on his journey, the young woman does not realize that even though she is exhorted to do anything she wishes—except that one thing—she is living less, rather than living more. Many women have literally lived the Bluebeard tale. They marry while they are yet naive about predators, and they choose someone who is destructive to their lives. They are determined to "cure" that person with love. They are in some way "playing house." One could say they have spent much time saying, "His beard isn't really so blue."

Eventually a woman thus captured will see her hopes for a decent life for herself and her children diminish more and more. It is to be hoped that she will finally open the door to the room where all the destruction of her life lies. While it may be the woman's actual mate who denigrates and dismantles her life, the innate predator within her own psyche concurs. As long as a woman is forced into believing she is powerless and/or is trained to not consciously register what she knows to be true, the feminine impulses and gifts of her psyche continue to be killed off.

When the youthful spirit marries the predator, she is captured or restrained during a time in her life that was meant to be an unfolding. Instead of living freely, she begins to live falsely. The deceitful promise of the predator is that the woman will become a queen in some way, when in fact her murder is being planned. There is a way out of all of this, but one must have a key.

The Key to Knowing: The Importance of Snuffling

Ah, now this tiny key; it is the entry to the secret all women know and yet do not know. The key is both permission and endorsement to know the deepest, darkest secrets of the psyche, in this case the something that mindlessly degrades and destroys a woman's potential.

Bluebeard continues his destructive plan by instructing his wife to compromise herself psychically; "Do what ever you like," he says. He prompts the woman to feel a false sense of freedom. He implies she is free to nourish herself and to revel in bucolic landscapes, at least within the confines of his territory. But in reality, she is not free, for she is constrained from registering the sinister knowledge about the predator, even though deep in the psyche she already truly comprehends the issue.

The naive woman agrees to remain "not knowing." Women who are gullible or those with injured instincts still, like flowers, turn in the direction of whatever sun is offered. The naive or injured woman is then too easily lured with promises of ease, of lilting enjoyment, of various pleasures, be they promises of elevated status in the eyes of her family, her peers, or promises of increased security, eternal love, or hot sex.

Bluebeard forbids the young woman to use the one key that would bring her to consciousness. To forbid a woman to use the key to consciousness strips away Wild Woman, her natural instinct for curiosity and her discovery of "what lies underneath." Without the wild knowing, the woman is without proper protection. If she attempts to obey Bluebeard's command not to use the key, she chooses death for her spirit. By choosing to open the door to the ghastly secret room, she chooses life.

In the tale her sisters come to visit and "they were, as all souls are, very curious." The wife gaily tells them, "We can do anything, except for one thing." The sisters decide to make a game out of finding which door the little key fits. They again have the proper impulse toward consciousness.

Psychological thinkers, from Freud to Bettelheim, have interpreted episodes such as those found in the Bluebeard tale as a psychological punishment for women's sexual curiosity.⁴ Women's curiosity was given