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A WOUNDED DAUGHTER

When I was a little girl I loved my father very much. He was warm and loving and was my favorite playmate. He taught me to play baseball, and he taught me mathematics. When I was seven, every Saturday he took me to the library and charmed the librarian into allowing me to check out fourteen books a week, twice their usual allotment. Because my father hadn't had a chance to finish high school, and because he valued learning so much, he communicated that value to me, and along with my grandmother, he spent hours and hours with me, helping me study and learn and improve my vocabulary, playing quiz games with me, and so on. In winter he took me sledding, and I discovered the magical brilliance of snow in the night and the excitement of the fast ride to the bottom of the hill. He also took me to the horse races where I experienced the thrills of racing and gambling. My father loved animals and so they became my friends too. And when we went on walks together, we always met new people because my father was so friendly and outgoing. I was my father's daughter, and he was so proud of me that I always had a sparkling, glowing smile. My mother was very special to him, too. Every weekend he took us out to dinner at different ethnic restaurants in the city where we lived, and then my father would often take my mother dancing until late in the night. Though we didn't have much money, life

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seemed to be a great adventure; there were always so many new and interesting things to see and do.

But then, somewhere, somehow, all of this started to change. My father began staying out late at night, and when he returned, I'd often be awakened by his angry shouting. At first this happened only occasionally, but soon it became once a week, then twice, and finally almost every night. In the beginning I was confused and wondered why my mother was nagging my father so much on Sunday mornings. I felt so sorry for him. But by the time I was nine years old, it became quite clear. My father was the neighborhood drunk! He couldn't hold a job, and I was now terribly ashamed of him. A photo was taken of me at the time, and the contrast between that picture and my former glowing self was remarkable. Now I looked like a forlorn waif. No longer smile and sparkling eyes, now only downcast eyes and drooping mouth. For the next several years my feelings about my father were very confused. I loved him. I suffered for him. I was ashamed of him. I wasn't able to understand how he could be so wonderful one moment and so terrible the next.

One evening stands out vividly in my memory. My father often came home late at night when he was drunk and threatened to hurt my grandmother (his mother-in-law). My mother and I often had to call the police to get him out of the house. Usually I was the one to make the call. Sometimes if my father was so violent that I couldn't get to the phone, in my fright I would run out on the porch screaming for help. On one of these especially violent nights the police arrived to find me sobbing and huddled in the corner. One policeman turned to my father and said, "How can you do this to your daughter?" The memory of this stranger's concern and his question to my father echoed in my mind for many years. It may even be that at that very moment, somewhere deep in my psyche, the seed to write this book was planted.

As I approached adolescence, my confused feelings towards my father congealed into hatred. No longer did I love him, or even pity him. Repulsed by his behavior, I hated him intensely. I lied about him to my teachers and friends, and it

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was impossible to invite anyone to my house. No one except our immediate neighbors knew my father was a drunk. And no one else, I pledged, would ever know—if I could help it. I disidentified with him completely, trying to become his opposite in every way I could conceive.

To protect myself, I led a double life. At school I was a hard-working, serious, straight-A student. Though I was the “teacher’s pet,” I also got along well with my fellow students by being pleasing and cheery, shy and adaptive. On the outside I was sweet and serious; but inside was the terrible confusion—the angry hatred of my father, the infinite shame that I was his daughter, and the fear that someone would find out who I really was. The only clues that something might be wrong were a nervous facial tic I developed at age fourteen and the fact that, unlike other girls, I didn’t date. But since I had skipped a year in school and was smaller and younger than the rest, this was accepted. At school my hard work and pleasing personality brought me some comfort and meaning. But at home, life was a waking nightmare. I never knew when I’d be awakened from a deep sleep by that crazy man who was my father. I always feared the night he might come home with a gun and shoot us all.

As I grew older, I determined to escape. To stay at home, I knew, would be my demise. To protect myself from the frightening chaos of my home—from the violent and parasitic dependency of my father, and from the emotional demands my mother made on me to fill that gap her husband couldn’t—I resorted to the worlds of intellect and logical thinking as a defense. This gave me the much needed distance from my mother as well, for I realized that to fulfill her desire to keep me with her in that situation would keep me forever in the prison of the past. I was trying to break my identity with both mother and father and, ultimately, from the realm of all that I could not control.

For many years, my retreat into a distant intellectual attitude served me well. I left home and worked as a newspaper reporter on a small daily newspaper in Colorado. Then I studied philosophy to develop my mind and to delve

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more deeply into the questions about the meaning of life. About this time I also married a man of the intellect, someone as different from my father as I could find. My husband encouraged me to continue my studies toward a Ph.D., and so my life became one of the intellect, too.

During this period my father's drinking grew progressively worse. But for my twenty-first birthday he decided to give me an opal ring, my birthstone. Somehow, although he did not work and drank up every bit of money he could get, he managed to save twenty-five dollars for that ring. The first present he had given me in many years, the ring was beautiful, sparkling with magical lights as opals do. But I couldn't wear it. The few times I came home to visit during the rest of my father's lifetime, he always asked about the ring, and I gave evasive replies. Though I felt very guilty, I simply could not bear to put on that ring. Only many years later, after his death and about the time I started writing this book, could I wear the opal birth ring. And now I wear it constantly, hoping to bridge that terrible void between my father and myself.

During my marriage, my own repressed unconscious side broke out—mysteriously and uncontrollably in the form of anxiety attacks and depression. To understand these experiences, I turned to the existentialist philosophers, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, to novelists like Dostoyevsky, Hesse, Kafka, and Kazantzakis, to poets like Rilke and Hölderlin, and finally to the psychology of C.G. Jung. Still in my professional defense system, and under the guise of deciding to become a psychotherapist myself, I went to Zürich and began a Jungian analysis. Suddenly my repressed Dionysian side emerged. My initial dream, the first dream I had after beginning analysis, was a terrible nightmare that woke me up in the middle of the night. In it, Zorba the Greek was hanging by his neck from the rafter of a ship that was on land. But he was not dead! He shouted for me to get him down, and while I fumbled about, he freed himself with tremendous effort. Then he embraced me.

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Though this dream was deeply disturbing, Zorba also symbolized for me a zest for life—a carefree and playful Dionysian relationship to the world. But his world was also associated with my father, and I had seen how destructive and degenerate the journey into the irrational had been for him. Since I had consciously denied this irrational side of myself by disassociating from my father, Zorba's realm at first appeared to be chaotic, frightening, and primitive. Jung has described the way into the unconscious as a "night sea journey," a voyage of death and dismemberment, a time of terror and trembling before the awesome unknown. And this was my experience. To enter my father's world took courage, though I cannot take credit for this leap into the abyss. It forced itself on me as surely as though a silent figure had stepped behind me and pushed me over the edge of a precipice where I had been standing. There in the depths I was confronted with my own irrationality, with my own drunkenness and anger. I was just like my father after all! And many times I behaved just as he had. I became drunk at parties and a wild, seductive side of me emerged.

Face to face with the irrational realm, feeling torn to pieces like the mythical Dionysius, I began to live out my torturous dark side. My appearance changed, too, as I let my professional pixie short hair grow into a long-haired hippie style. On the walls of my apartment hung the colorful but grotesque and frightening pictures of the German expressionists. When I travelled, I sought out cheap hotel rooms in the dangerous quarters of foreign cities. Just as I had previously avoided my father's world, now I plunged headlong into it. And now I also experienced the guilt and shame that before had seemed to belong only to my father. Crazy and compulsive as all this seemed, somehow I knew there was a treasure to be found in this behavior. At one point during this chaotic period I had the following dream:

The entry to my father's house was a small shabby cellar door. Inside, I shivered as I saw the paper hang in greying clumps

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from the wall. Black shiny cockroaches scurried along the cracked floor and up the legs of a chipped brown table, the only piece of furniture in the bare room. The place was no bigger than a cubicle, and I wondered how anyone, even my father, could live here. Suddenly fear flooded my heart, and I sought desperately for an escape. But the door through which I had entered seemed to have disappeared in the dim light. Scarcely able to breathe, my eyes frantically roamed the room and finally caught sight of a narrow passageway, opposite to where I had entered. Eager to leave this distasteful and frightening room, I hurried through the dark passage. As I came to the end my eyes were at first blinded by the light. But then I entered into the most magnificent courtyard I had ever seen. Flowers, fountains, and marble statues of marvelous forms shone out before my eyes. Square in shape, the courtyard was really the center of an Oriental palatial temple, with four Tibetan turrets towering above each corner. Only then did I realize that all this belonged to my father too. In fear and trembling, awe and wonder, in bewilderment, I awoke from the dream.

There was indeed a passageway from the dirty, roach-infested cellar of my father's house to the shining, magnificent Tibetan temple—if only I could find it.

Although many times during this crazy and compulsive period I fell into chaos, luckily I managed somehow to function in the everyday world. But, the awareness of another, more powerful, reality was gradually entering my consciousness. Along with the devastating times were some mystical and wonderful experiences of nature. The realms of art, music, poetry, and fairy tales, the world of imagination and creativity, gradually opened up for me. From shy intellectual introvert, I became more spontaneous and able to express more warmth and feeling. Gradually I became more assertive, too, not needing to hide who I really was.

In the midst of this time two traumatic events happened to my family. My father fell asleep while drinking and smoking, and a fire began, which burned the whole house down to a blackened shell. My grandmother, trapped in an upstairs

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bedroom, was killed in the fire. Though my father had tried to save her, it was too late, and he was hospitalized with serious burns. How he must have suffered the guilt of this and a lifetime of self-destructive experiences! Yet, he would not or could not talk about it. Perhaps the deterioration from a lifetime of drinking was too great. Finally, two years later, he died.

My father's death was a great shock, affecting me deeply. Now it was too late to talk to him, too late ever to tell him how awful I felt for having rejected him, and how, finally, I felt some compassion for his life of suffering. Our unresolved relationship was an open wound in my psyche.

Shortly after his death, on my thirty-eighth birthday, I put on the opal ring. And then I began writing this book. Whether it might actually be published was not an issue for me. I knew then that for me to write about the father-daughter wound was imperative. Perhaps the act of writing could bring my father and me closer together. Closeness had been impossible on the outer level, but perhaps on the inner level, through this writing, I could redeem my "inner father."

Writing has been a long and difficult process for me. When I write I have no idea beforehand what I will say. I have no planned outline and I simply must wait and trust that something will come. Writing has required a commitment and an act of faith that something will appear from the depths of my psyche that I can name, that I can express, however momentarily, in words. At the same time I know that whatever I write, although it may illumine the father-daughter wound, it will also cast its shadow. There will always be a darkened spot, a side which my limited finitude cannot capture. I have had to accept this mixture of limitation and possibility, this paradox which was my father's nemesis. In the process, I have often become angry; I have often cried as well. My rage and my tears are behind every page, no matter how serene the final result may seem.

When I started writing this book, at first I saw mainly the negative patterns. I was aware of my father's legacy—his self-destruction through alcohol and how that had affected

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me. Although I knew there was a positive side—both to my father and his effect on me—in the early stages of writing this book I could not find it. The last chapter of my book, “Redeeming the Father,” remained unwritten. Beginning with a theoretical point of view helped me gain some perspective on my conflicts. Through describing the various patterns and the underlying archetypal bases, I could better understand how these patterns worked in my life and the lives of my female clients. It was only when I started writing my personal story that my positive feelings about my father fully emerged. I realized the promise of magic he had given me when I was a little girl, the promise that later appeared in my dream of Zorba, of the Tibetan temple, and in the opal ring. My father had the promise of magical flight. But he was like the mythical Icarus who, not knowing his limits, flew so close to the sun that its heat melted the wax which held his wings and thus he plunged to his death in the sea. Similarly, my father drowned his magic in alcohol. He gave me his magic, and this was the positive part of his legacy. But as I saw him change, I saw the magic melt into degeneration. In reaction I had first denied that magical promise by trying to control everything. And then, when the controls cracked, I identified with my father’s self-destructive side. My alternatives seemed to be either sterile control or Dionysian dissolution. Recognizing these two opposing extremes in myself led me to analyze the psychological patterns that I call the eternal girl (the *puella aeterna*) and the armored Amazon. Yet the resolution, the redemption, lay in the images of Zorba, the Tibetan temple, and the opal ring my father gave me. My way back to the magic of my father was to allow these images to live in myself.

This is my personal tale of a daughter’s wound. But in my work as a therapist, I have discovered that many other women suffer from a wounded relationship with their fathers, although the details may differ and the wound may hurt in myriad ways. From many of my female clients I heard my own story—the alcoholic father, the resulting mistrust of men, the problems of shame, guilt, and lack of

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confidence. From others I learned that fathers who were strict and authoritarian might give their daughters stability, structure, and discipline, but often gave them little in the way of love, emotional support, and valuation of the feminine. Still others had fathers who wished for boys and made their daughters (usually the first-born) into sons by expecting them to accomplish what the fathers had failed to realize in their own lives. And then there were daughters whose fathers loved them too much, so that the daughters became a substitute for the lover that was missing. These women were usually so bound by their father's love that they did not feel free to love other men and thus were not able to grow up into mature womanhood. I have heard the stories of women whose fathers have committed suicide and how they themselves then had to struggle with the legacy of the death-wish and self-destruction. Women whose fathers died early have their wounds of loss and abandonment. And women whose fathers were sick often were made to feel guilty for their sickness. There are daughters whose fathers brutalized them with beatings or via sexual advances. And there are daughters whose fathers did not stand up to powerful mothers, thus allowing the mother to dominate the daughters' lives.

The list of injuries could go on and on. But there is a danger here—to blame the father for these wounds. And this would be to overlook another factor—these fathers themselves have been wounded, both in relation to their own feminine side and their own masculinity. The healing for women is not to be found in the quicksand of blame. The attitude of blame might lock us forever into the roles of passive prisoners, victims who have not assumed responsibility for our own lives. I believe it is important for such a wounded woman to understand her father's failed promise and how his lack of fatherhood has affected her life. Daughters need rapprochement with their fathers in order to develop a positive father image within themselves—one a woman can draw upon for strength and guidance and which enables her to appreciate the positive side of masculinity in both the inner and outer worlds. They need to find the hidden pearl, the treasure the father can

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offer. If the relationship with the father has been impaired, it is important for the woman to understand the wound, to appreciate what has been lacking so that it can be developed within. But once the injury is understood, that very wound needs to be accepted, for through acceptance of the wound comes healing and compassion—for the daughter, for the father, and for their relationship.