

Water: Decision Making Through a Dream

One dives into water in order to be reborn and changed. (144)

-Gaston Bachelard

Water is the sad element-Why?

Because it weeps for everyone. (91)

-Lamartine

On my worst winter days I'd look at the dishrag sky, the anorexic trees and feel my life was crippled along with the landscape. Years ago I had agreed to joint custody with my ex-husband; I knew I didn't want my son to grow up without a father, but our system wasn't laid out in print and my son went back and forth with some confusion over the years. There was always a case of forgotten books or lunchboxes and to make things worse, his father moved further away and he began to spend time at his grandmother's as well, going between the three homes dragging his paraphernalia behind him. It occurred to me that he was now in high school, pulling away from the ministrations of a mother and the two years he had left to finish would be another eon for me to put my life on hold. I wanted desperately to leave, to get to a bigger city, to be anonymous, start fresh. I was spending more and more time in Boston, attending classes at the Jung Institute. The memories in my small Maine town were heavy with associations to either my ex-husband or to C., the man who broke my heart and the group of friends I had made when we were a couple. But several of my best friends lived in Boston including one of the women from my college group and one of my oldest friends in Maine, where I was living, who had left to get an advanced degree at Boston University.

My son was an athlete and as much as I enjoyed watching him play, as much as I had screamed my head off when his team won a regional championship, I had put in my time. His father was a coach and I was constantly in communication with him over details. I often felt manipulated and then I inadvertently discovered some information about my marriage that infuriated me. What could I do? I was already divorced. This frustrating situation only fueled my desire to move. My son seemed to understand my need to move on and though he was upset at losing his mother, he was often on his own, at school, with friends, playing sports, dating girls and staying with his Dad. The truth is he was not losing his mother. I was always available and could continue to be there when needed as I would be only two hours away. He also knew my interests and trusted me and realized I had been commuting continually for a number of years. I couldn't get a full time teaching job locally and the opportunities increased enormously just two hours south in Boston.

Even though I had made the decision to leave, it was 1990 and the bottom had fallen out of the real estate boom of the early eighties. Despite the fact that it was small and affordable and less than a block from the beach, I could not sell my condo. The Gulf War was on and I felt more emotional than ever, in particular, sick about the fact that once again young American men would be sent to die by old political hacks. In general, sick about the fact that a supposedly civilized society could find no alternative to conflict resolution other than war. I was an undying sixties person and as pacifistic in my position on war as I was in fighting for myself in a divorce.

Weekly I had my session with my analyst RB, continuing to fall under the spell of his charismatic personality, his brown eyes and his amazing work. One week we discussed a dream about which I was clueless. But the work on this dream proved to be so synchronistically resonant, I realized my unconscious not only had given me permission to leave my son in the care of his father but reassured me as well that all would be fine were I to relocate without him.

The dream revisited the first home that my ex-husband and I had found in moving to Maine from Boston back in the mid seventies. We rented a small place on a lake in the woods, thoroughly rural and peaceful. It was also during the time that we were living there that I began to take my writing seriously. In addition I became pregnant in that house before we bought a home in town.

In the dream the house belonged to my college friend Maryanne and her husband William. They had a baby, under a year old, whom they kept in a wicker basket floating on the lake. It was tied to the dock and I was surprised when they suggested we walk the quarter mile back to the house and leave the baby floating on the water. When we got to the house I was becoming more and more upset at the fact that the baby was alone. "Oh he'll be fine, they said nonchalantly and went about their business. At the end of the dream I was pleading with them to go get the baby or to allow me to go. I was afraid that the baby was wet and cold and at the mercy of insects, bees and god forbid, snakes. "No, no, they insisted, "he's okay, we'll get him later. I woke feeling furious and fearful for the child.

RB squinted in his usual manner, rubbing his hand to his forehead. He had me enter the dream and feel the panic of my ego identity. I was unwilling to even try and feel the casual attitude of my child-abusing friends, resistances were steaming out my ears. Eventually he took the dream into an active imagination and asked me if I could leave the house and go down and check on the child.

Behind my closed eyes I could clearly see the old path that we followed to the lake when I had lived there with my ex so many years ago. I left the old paneled house and trotted down to the dock. He slowed me down just before I approached the basket and asked me if I could see the baby. I said No, that the basket was afloat at the end of a rope about six feet long. RB asked me to pull very slowly on the rope until I could peer into the basket. I imagined myself pulling hand over hand, evenly drawing the rope in so as not to wake the baby were it asleep. When I finally had a view, I was surprised to see the baby surrounded by snakes, standing snakes, so-to-speak, as if they'd been charmed by a turban-clad dervish. RB asked me if the snakes were attacking the baby. Immediately frightened, I was almost afraid to look, but as I did, I was totally surprised to see that they were dancing in a circle around the child and he was awake, cooing and gooing at them as if they comprised an entertaining mobile poised above his crib. This image knocked me out. It was nothing I could have conjured or expected.

RB then asked me to put my hand in the basket and feel if the baby was cold. I saw that he was lying in a small pool of shallow water. RB suggested I put my hand in the water. I did. I touched the baby's knee and then plunged my hand into the water in the basket. The water was warm. The baby's skin was warm. I was utterly surprised to see the baby having a grand time, both amused and protected by the snakes who danced in a magic circle around him. I sat there quietly with my eyes closed and finally had to smile at the pretty picture.

"Looks like the baby's going to be fine," RB spoke quietly. I opened my eyes. "Yeah," I said finally. "But what does the dream have to do with me?"

Usually babies referred to projects, ideas, in my case, sometimes new poems. The Divine Child Archetype showed up universally in a positive way if a baby appeared healthy and happy. "Maybe it's your idea to move to Boston, RB commented, though in retrospect I'm sure he was purposely misleading me. And then his simple observation unlocked the puzzle. Again I was astounded at how clever the unconscious can be, and at how blind we are to the obvious when we are so literally involved in our images.

"Isn't your ex named Bill" he was pondering. "And what's his woman's name? Is it Maryanne?"

Anne-Marie I said. Then quickly went on, "but this is Maryanne, my friend from college Maryanne, and her husband William. I was stuck in the visual images and couldn't see the way the dream was punning on the names.

"Maryanne, Ann-Marie. William, Bill. Pretty close he added. The dream had actually taken the faces of my college friend Mary Anne and her husband William, but played on the names of my son's father and step-mother. Furthermore, I had listed my condo for sale exactly six months ago, the approximate age of the baby boy in the dream.

RB certainly knew about the guilt I felt at my decision to leave my son during his last two years of high school in the care of my ex-husband. He repeated, "Looks like *your* baby's going to be fine. When I had my *Ah Ha* moment of revelation, I was, of course, overjoyed that I had been given the ticket to move. He brought me back to the scene at the lake. We looked at the snakes again. I knew they were sacred guardians, ancient symbols of transformation and change. I left RB's office that day with another idea come from the blue-I would rent out my condo and move as soon as I lined up some adjunct teaching in Boston. It would be another several months before I pulled the move together-and both my son and I needed time to get used to the idea. But the question had been settled and I trusted the unconscious which knows no past or future to assure me I could leave without damaging my son. Yet theory and reality can be quite divergent in actual experience. It was a harder parting than I ever imagined.

The movers came earlier than I had anticipated that hot August Monday. And they immediately began hauling one piece after another out of our tiny living room into the deep recesses of the truck, while my son J. and I stood gaping at each other. I had planned for him to drive down to Boston with me for my first night in my new home. I was pushing my budget but decided on a two bedroom apartment, hoping he might want to spend more time there after he got used to it and I wanted him to feel from day one that it was his home too. Yet at the moment I felt the huge moving truck was more of a threatening whale, too rapidly swallowing us both into its black belly.

Over the past year or so my son had made a collage on his bedroom wall, meticulously cutting up old issues of his *Sports Illustrated* magazines. He and his best friend, another J., whom I also adored, spent hours on the floor of his room arranging and rearranging the placement of the pieces before they went up on the wall. The collage was webbed across one wall, then climbed higher, sprawling over his closet and around the corner above his bed. It would be the last piece of our life there to be dismantled.

My J. and his buddy, J-Two, were fourteen, the age of giggling and discovery. They had first met in Little League in fourth grade but it wasn't until they attended the same middle school when they discovered they had the same birthday, that they became pals *separated-at-birth*. At eleven, twelve, thirteen, they had been delightful to observe. They lip-synched rap songs all done up in hip hop costumes, made movies with J-Two's father's video camera, and I don't know how many times during their sleepovers they watched the video of the original *Airplane* (and laughed till they cried over and over.) In the past two years I must have made a hundred pans of brownies for them, driven them to the mall and baseball practice another hundred. Though the quality time was brief and briefer, I relished all these moments and argued with myself about giving them up: *does he really still need me? After all he isn't a grown man yet...* (J's room was never off limits to me but I knew a few of my *Victoria's Secrets* catalogues with Cindy Crawford and company in their gossamer underwear had been, now and again, stashed under the bed.)

The sports collage was an expression of artistry as much as idolatry. Reaching over and under each other were the various shapes of Bo Jackson, Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Mario Lemieux, all of the 1986 Pennant-winning Red Sox and so many other sports heroes running, leaping, dribbling and skating across the teal blue walls. The collage was still hanging when the last stick of furniture had been carried out to the moving van.

I found J. slumped on the floor crying as I quietly entered the room. I had asked him to take the collage down, casually instructing him to fold it, assuring him we could reassemble it in the new apartment in Boston. When I saw him stricken with grief in the empty room, collapsed on the carpet, his elbows on his knees, his fists in his eyes, I realized my mistake and stood as if smacked by a plank knowing if I apologized for the move one more time I could not hold back my own tears. I slumped to the floor next to him and he threw himself in my arms, holding his breath until we were both openly sobbing. I couldn't believe I was hurting him this way. It had been bad enough that his father and I split up when he was only five, but now ten years later, he was losing his mother. He had been supportive of the idea when we had discussed it many times before I started taking real steps to relocate. But in my self-preserving denial, my persevering determination to move on in my life, I couldn't afford to notice the brave front he put up. J.'s astrological chart was flooded with water energy. He was a Scorpio with Pisces rising, and a Pisces moon. He had no earth at all in his chart, but a few oceans of water. He was here to experience emotion and to release attachments. Astrologers had told me he was extremely sensitive and would develop psychic abilities later on in his life. But none of that crossed my mind as I held onto him there on the floor of his bedroom in the empty condo.

We cried together, looking up at the collage and I tried to point out how easily it could be reassembled. He kept shaking his head through his tears. "No, Mom, it's over. I don't want to see it in Boston. I knew there was a certain wisdom in his words. The collage exemplified a chapter in his life that was closing, had perhaps already closed. He was an older teenager now, looking back nostalgically at his adolescent self. We were both weeping as I held him close and ran my hand through his wavy blonde hair, kissing his freckled nose and forehead. Instead of telling him he'd be alright, *it would be alright, everything would be alright*, he told me as he pulled away, suddenly aware of my babying embrace. "I'll be okay, Mom, I'm just sad. I know you have to go." he said, sniffing bravely. "But you're gonna have to take the collage down by yourself.

One of the movers stepped into the room and then pulled himself back at the sight of both of us crying and clinging to each other. I told the mover I would meet them down in Boston in a few hours. It occurred to me that by the time we got to Boston and unloaded the truck, it would be at least evening before J. and I would find some pizza. He would be bored unpacking, not to mention, emotional. It was going to be a very long day. As much as I hated to, I suggested a change of plans-that he spend the night at his Dad's. I promised I would come back for the weekend and assured him either of my two women friends had invited us both any time for as long as we wanted-that staying with them would be fun. Then we called his Dad to come pick him up.

A half hour later as the two of them drove away, I could scarcely speak. My ex hadn't thought I'd really go through with the move and he tried not to disapprove overtly but I could read his scolding thoughts from the expression on his face. J. was hanging on me despite his new chauvinism. And he only began to smile when his father joked about something private between them. Then the horrendous moment passed. I stood there looking down the driveway, following the station wagon around the corner until it became a tiny dot on Beach street, erasing for a moment the aperture between houses where I could view the water.

I went back inside and walked through the empty condo. A tenant was moving in next week and I needed to leave the place clean and tidy. I worked on automatic pilot, unable to block the memory of the day we'd moved in six years earlier. Still crying, I unplugged the refrigerator, opened the door and wiped down the shelves. For ten minutes straight I stabbed with a dull knife at a clot of frozen chocolate ice cream grafted onto the freezer wall. As hopeless as Lady Macbeth, I scrubbed at the stain of my guilt as hard as I could. Finally I rinsed the sponge and placed it in the plastic dish. Then I dragged myself upstairs to J.'s room and stood facing the wall where his bed had been.

I thought for only a brief moment of one of many stories I had read him under the lamplight next to his bed, Madelaine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. I felt fluid myself, fluid enough to pass through the walls into my next life. In a half-assed ritual I prayed to the Great Mother for forgiveness and strength. Then hardly discerning which figure was which, through a veil of new tears, I undid the collage myself, folding each fragile figure into the one remaining box.

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J. is lying unconscious at the bottom of a boat. It's a small dingy and he is small, four or five years old. I am frantically reaching down to lift him out but each time I bend into the boat another huge wave washes over us both and it takes several interminable moments before I can lift my own head above the water and try again to reach him. I notice that the water has slowly accumulated in the dingy and that if I do not get him out, he will sink with the boat. I am fighting against invisible pressures which render me inept, uncoordinated and clumsy. I reach and reach but each time a wave comes, the boat rocks away from me. Finally I see that I cannot get to him, that if he is not dead already, he will surely drown. I am beside myself, thinking this can't be happening, this can't be happening, this can't be happening . . .and yet there is no one else there, no one to hear my screams, no one to help.

My third night in the apartment I awoke with this dream. I had worked all alone for three days unpacking, hanging pictures and curtains, placing plants, filling drawers, moving furniture, vacuuming, cleaning, greeting the men from the phone company, the gas and cable company, unpling my thirty-two boxes of books. I was so relieved to wake that morning and see that I had "only been dreaming. But I wondered about the unconscious advice I had received that "the baby would be fine in the basket on the lake. If that was so, why was J. now sinking into the sea?

I had such a difficult time trying to shake off the image of the swamped dingy, I couldn't get up. I put the pillow over my head and let all my emotions drop. I sobbed and sobbed. I hadn't realized how much energy it took to suppress my own horror at leaving my son. Although I'd spoken to him several times a day since I'd left, I was plagued by a terrible, superstitious anxiety. I tried to think rationally. I supposed it was good that the dream had finally found a scenario in which I could feel my sorrow. If I had had the dream a week earlier I never could have moved at all. I lay in my bed without even the strength to make coffee. I spent the whole day there weeping in a kind of penitence, sleeping and praying alternately. I never felt so lonely. In my reptilian brain, terror and guilt hissed and snarled. Yet there was a center in my chest to the right of my ragged heart that held itself calmly. A little yogi sat there in lotus posture. He understood the passage for what it was- another sea journey, a necessary crossing. J. and I were two separate souls in separate vessels.

I had been in the grip of the many-tentacled monster of the deep already several times in my life. My destiny was to weather a series of dramatic changes. I knew that. I knew the element of water. In this incarnation I was leaving the land where emotion ruled. I must have done water over and over in other lives. I had no water in my chart but many planets in water houses which showed I had both experience and interest in emotional depths. My life lessons suggested I find the right balance within my own emotional attachments and that I meet others at their crossings.

Later that evening, another synchronicity reassured me. I finally roused myself to wander the rooms of my new home and floated toward a box on one of the bookcases marked *Jungian books*. I reached through the piles on the floor, choosing randomly among them, my eye catching on one title. I lay in bed that whole day with Gaston Bachelard's book *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. "Matter . . . Mother . . . Water . . . I thought as I read.

Death is a journey, and a journey is a death. To leave is to die a little. To die is truly to leave, and no one leaves well, courageously, cleanly, except by following the current, the flow of the wide river. All rivers join the River of the Dead. This is the only mythical death, the only departure that is an adventure (74).

Bachelard's wisdom wrapped my body like the quilt I had wrapped around my shoulders as I curled back beneath the sheets.

One entire facet of our nocturnal soul can be explained by the myth of death conceived as a departure over water. For the dreamer, there is a continuing transposition between this departure and death. For some dreamers, water is the new movement that beckons us toward a journey never made (75).

My journey-never-made was ongoing, each new phase, a deeper penetration into self-actualization. *Matter, Mother, Water*. If I stayed I would have made my son more and more my whole life. And when he left me, *not if*, when-only a matter of a few years down the road - *when* he left me, I may not have had the energy of the anger I utilized then to find myself a new life. It wasn't just that I had chosen the journey. I had chosen the journey because it was the one that came to meet me, one that I was ready to undertake. If I didn't move forward, I felt I would back up on myself, embitter and die. An unhappy mother, perhaps more dangerous than one who visits from a distance. I won't ever know how it might have been otherwise. I consoled myself with the knowledge that J.'s soul had chosen me as his mother and this experience was mutually part of our growth.

And both J. and I did survive emotionally intact. "The call of water demands, as it were, a total offering, an inner offering. Water needs an inhabitant (164). I felt for my lost voice, cleared my throat and called J. to find him safe on dry land, watching television and *Sports Illustrated*. Jung used the word "animus to define a woman's internalized masculine energy. My own young animus in J.'s image, the one who lay in the sinking boat, was the newest representation for my latest psychic death. On the third day I was entombed in the womb of *mother*, (*mere/mer*), immersed in her own element, surrendering my most treasured attachment.