



THE MISTAKEN ZYGOTE

Extract from Chapter 6: Finding One's Pack:
Belonging as Blessing
Women Who Run With the Wolves
by Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Have you ever wondered how you managed to end up in such an odd family as yours? If you have lived your life as an outsider, as a slightly odd or different person, if you are a loner, one who lives at the edge of the mainstream, you have suffered. Yet there also comes a time to row away from all that, to experience a different vantage point, to emigrate back to the land of one's own kind.

Let there be no more suffering, no more attempting to figure where you went wrong. The mystery of why you were born to whomever you were born to is over, *finis, terminado*, finished. Rest for a moment at the bow and refresh yourself in the wind coming from your homeland. For years, women who carry the mystic life of the Wild Woman archetype have silently cried, '*Why am I so different? Why was I born into such a strange (or unresponsive) family?*' Wherever their lives wanted to burst forth, someone was there to salt the ground so nothing could grow. They felt tortured by all the proscriptions against their natural desires. If they were nature children, they were kept under roofs. If they were scientists, they were told to be mothers. If they wanted to be mothers, they were told they'd better fit the mold entirely. If they wanted to invent

something they were told to be practical. If they wanted to create, they were told a woman's domestic work is never done.

Sometimes they tried to be good according to whichever standards were most popular, and didn't realize till later what they really wanted, how they needed to live. Then, in order to have a life, they experienced the painful amputations of leaving their families, the marriages they had promised under oath would be till death, the jobs that were to be the springboards to something more stultifying but better paying. They left dreams scattered all over the road.

Often the women were artists who were trying to be sensible by spending eighty percent of their time doing labor that aborted their creative lives on a daily basis. Although the scenarios are endless, one thing remains constant: they were pointed out very early on as 'different' with a negative connotation. In actual fact, they were passionate, individual, inquiring, and in their right instinctive minds.

So the answer to Why me, Why this family, Why am I so different is, of course, that there are no answers to these questions. Still, the ego needs

something to chew on before it will let go, so I propose three answers regardless. (The analysand may pick whichever one she likes, but she must pick at least one. Most pick the last one, but any are sufficient.) Prepare yourself. Here they are.

We are born the way we are, and into the odd families we came through 1) just because (almost no one will believe this), 2) the Self has a plan, and our pea-brains are too tiny to parse it (many find this is a hopeful idea), or 3) because of the Mistaken Zygote Syndrome (well... yes, maybe... but what is that?)

Your family thinks you're an alien. You have feathers, they have scales. Your idea of a good time is the forest, the wilds, the inner life, the outer majesty. Their idea of a good time is folding towels. If this is so for you in your family, then you are a victim of the Mistaken Zygote Syndrome.

Your family moves slowly through time, you move like the wind; they are loud, you are soft, or they are silent and you sing. You know because you just know. They want proof and a three-hundred-page dissertation.

Sure enough, it's the Mistaken Zygote Syndrome. You've never heard of that? Well see, the Zygote Fairy was flying over your hometown one night, and all the little zygotes in her basket were hopping and jumping with excitement.

You were indeed destined for parents who would have understood you, but the Zygote Fairy hit turbulence and, oops, you fell out of the basket over the wrong house. You fell head over heels, head over heels, right into a family that was not meant for you. Your 'real' family was three miles farther on.

That is why you fell in love with a family that wasn't yours, and that lived three miles over. You always wished Mrs and Mr So-and-So were your real parents. Chances are they were meant to be. This is why you tap-dance down the hallways even though you come from a family of television spores. This is why your parents are alarmed every time you come home or call. They worry, 'What will she do next? She embarrassed us last time, God only knows what she will do now. Ai!' They cover their eyes when they see you coming and it is not because your light dazzles them.

All you want is love. All they want is peace. The members of your family, for their own reasons (because of their preferences, innocence, injury, constitution, mental illness, or cultivated ignorance), are not so good at being spontaneous with the unconscious, and of course your visit home conjures the trickster archetype, the one who stirs things up. So before you've even broken bread together, the trickster madly dances by just dying to drop one of her hairs into the family stew.

Even though you don't mean to upset the family, they will be upset no matter what. When you show up, everyone and everything seems to go quite mad.

It is a sure sign of wild zygotes in the family if the parents are offended all the time and the children feel as though they can never do anything right. The unwild family wants only one thing, but the Mistaken Zygote is never able to figure out what that is, and if she could, it would make her hair stand up in exclamation points.

Prepare yourself, I will tell you this big secret. This is what they really want from you, that mysterious, momentous thing.

The unwild want consistency.

They want you to be exactly the same today as you were yesterday. They wish you not to change with the days, but to remain as at the beginning of Steaming Time.

Ask the family if they want consistency and they will answer affirmatively. In all things? No, they will say, only in the things that matter. Whatever these things are that count in their value systems, they are too often anathema to the wild nature of women. Unfortunately, 'the things that matter' to them are not cohesive with 'the things that matter' to the wild child.

Consistency in manner is an impossible sentence for Wild Woman, for her strength is her adaptation to change, her innovation, her dancing, her howling, her growling, her deep instinctual life, her creative fire. She does not show consistency through uniformity, but rather through her creative life, through her consistent perceptions, quick-sightedness, flexibility and deftness.

If we were to name only one thing that makes the Wild Woman what she is, it would be her

responsiveness. The word *response* comes from the Latin 'to pledge, to promise' - and that is her strong suit. Her perceptive and deft responses are a consistent promise and pledge to the creative forces, be it *Duende*, the goblin-spirit behind passion, or Beauty, or the Dance, or Life. Her promise to us, if we will not thwart it, is that she will cause us to live. She will cause us to live fully alive, responsively and consistently so. In this way, the Mistaken Zygote gives her fealty, not to her family but to her interior Self. This is why she feels torn. You might say her wolf mother has hold of her tail, her worldly family has hold of her arms. It is not long before she is crying in pain, snarling and biting herself and others, and finally, the deathly quiet. You look in her eyes and you see *ojos del cielo*, sky eyes, the eyes of a person who is no longer here. While socialization for children is an important thing, to kill the interior *criatura* is to kill the child. The West Africans recognize that to be harsh with a child is to cause its soul to retreat from its body, sometimes just a few feet away, other times many days' walk away.

While the needs of the child's soul must be balanced with her need for safety and physical care and with carefully examined notions about 'civilized behavior,' I always worry for those who are too well behaved; they often have that 'faint soul' look in their eyes. Something is not right. A healthy soul shines through the persona on most days and blazes through on others. Where there is gross injury, the soul flees.

Sometimes it drifts or bolts so far away that it takes masterful propitiation to coax it back. A long time must pass before such a soul will trust enough to return, but it can be accomplished.

The retrieval requires several ingredients: naked honesty, stamina, tenderness, sweetness, ventilation of rage and humor. Combined, these make a song that calls the soul back home.

What are soul needs? They lie in two realms: nature and creativity. In these realms lives *Na'asje'ii Asdzaa*, Spider Woman, the great creation spirit of the Dineh. She gifts her people with protection. Her purview, among others is teaching the love of beauty.

The soul's needs are found in the hovel of those three old (or young, depending on what day it is)

sisters - Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos - who make the red thread, meaning the passion, of a woman's life. They weave the ages of a woman's life, tying them off as each is completed and the next is begun. They are found in the woods of the huntress spirits, Diana and Artemis, both of whom are wolf women who represent the ability to hunt, track, and recover various aspects of the psyche.

The soul's needs are governed by *Coatlicue*, the Aztec Goddess of female self-sufficiency, who gives birth squatting and square on her feet. She teaches about the lone woman's life. She is a maker of babies, meaning new potential for life, but she is also a death mother who wears skulls on her skirt, and when she walks they sound like the rattles of a snake, for they are skull rattles, and because skull rattles sound like rain, through sympathetic resonance, they draw down rain for the earth. She is the protectoress of all lone women and those so *magia*, so filled with powerful thoughts and ideas, they must live out at the edge of who-knows-where in order not to daze the village too much. *Coatlicue* is the especial protectoress of the female outsider.

What is the basic nutrition for the soul? Well, it differs from creature to creature, but here are some combinations. Consider them psychic macrobiotics. For some women air, night, sunlight, and trees are necessities. For others, words, paper, and books are the only things that satiate. For others, color, form, shadow and clay are the absolutes. Some women must leap, bow, and run, for their souls crave dance. Yet others crave only a tree-leaning peace.

There is yet another issue to be dealt with.

Mistaken Zygotes learn to be survivors. It is tough to spend years among those who cannot help you to flourish. Being able to say that one is a survivor is an accomplishment. For many, the power is in the name itself. And yet comes a time in the individuation process when the threat or trauma is significantly past. Then is the time to go to the next stage after survivorship, to healing and *thriving*.

If we stay as survivors only without moving to thriving, we limit ourselves and cut our energy to ourselves and our power in the world to less than half. One can take so much pride in being a survivor that it becomes a hazard to further

creative development. Sometimes people are afraid to continue beyond survivor status, for it is just that - a status, a distinguishing mark, a 'damn-straight, bet your buttons, better believe it' accomplishment.

Instead of making survivorship the centerpiece of one's life, it is better to use it as one of many badges, but not the only one. Humans deserve to be dripping in beautiful remembrances, medals, and decorations for having lived, truly lived and triumphed. Once the threat is past, there is a potential trap in calling ourselves by names taken on during the most terrible time of our lives. It creates a mind-set that is potentially limiting. It is not good to base the soul identity solely on the feats and losses and victories of the bad times. While survivorship can make a woman tough as beef jerky, at some point, allying with it exclusively begins to inhibit new development. When a woman insists 'I am a survivor' over and over again once the time for its usefulness is past, the work ahead is clear. We must loosen the person's clutch on the survivor archetype. Otherwise nothing else can grow. I liken it to a tough little plant that managed - without water,

sunlight, nutrients - to send out a brave and ornery little leaf anyway. In spite of it all. But thriving means, now that the bad times are behind, to put ourselves into occasions of the lush, the nutritive, the light, and there to flourish, to thrive with bushy, shaggy, heavy blossoms and leaves. It is better to name ourselves names that challenge us to grow as free creatures. That is thriving. That is what was meant for us.

Ritual is one of the ways in which humans put their lives in perspective, whether it be Purim, Advent, or drawing down the moon. Ritual calls together the shades and specters in people's lives, sorts them out, puts them to rest. There is a particular image from *El Dia de los Muertos*, Day of the Dead, celebrations that can be applied to help women in the transition from surviving to thriving. It is based on the ritual of *ofrendas*, which are altars to those who have passed from this life. *Ofrendas* are tributes, memorials, and expressions of deepest regard for the loved ones no longer on this earth. I find it helps many women to make an *ofrenda* to the child they once were, rather like a testament to the heroic child. Some women choose objects, writings, clothing,

toys, mementos from events, and other symbols from childhood that will be portrayed. They arrange the *ofrenda* in their own way, tell the story that goes with it or not, and then leave it up for as long as they wish. It is the evidence of their past hardship, valor, and triumph over adversity. This way of looking at the past accomplishes several things: it gives perspective, a compassionate rendering of times past, by laying out what one experienced, what one has made of it, what is admirable. It is the admiring of it, rather than the being of it, that releases the person. To be the child survivor beyond its times is too over-identified with an injured archetype. To realize the injury, and yet memorialize it, allows thriving to come forth. Thriving is what was meant for us on this earth. Thriving, not just surviving, is our birthright as women.

Do not cringe and make yourself small if you are called the black sheep, the maverick, the lone wolf. Those with slow seeing say a non-conformist is a blight on society. But it has been proven over the centuries, that being different means standing on the edge, means one is practically guaranteed to make an original

contribution, a useful and stunning contribution to her culture.

When seeking guidance, don't ever listen to the tiny-hearted. Be kind to them, heap them with blessings, cajole them, but do not follow their advice.

If you have ever been called defiant, incorrigible, forward, cunning, insurgent, unruly, or rebellious, you're on the right track. Wild Woman is close by. If you have never been called these things, there is yet time. Practice your Wild Woman. *Andele!* And again.