

The Telling of a

Love Story

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A Paper written in Part to fulfill the requirements of Masters In Conflict Facilitation and Organizational Change through the Process Work Institute, 2011.

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*As we write, we are both describing and
deciding the direction that our life is taking.*

—Julia Cameron

Abstract/ Prelude

“Each psychology is a confession, and the worth of a psychology for another person lies not in the places where he can identify with it because it satisfies his psychic needs, but where it provokes him to work out his own psychology in response”¹.

It is my hope that this paper in some way provokes, and in that provocation brings to light something of use to the reader. What I seek to prod are the ideas we have about change, in relation to the love stories we tell about ourselves, and that tell us. To do this I make use of the method and theory of Process Work, which is a psychological perspective and tool kit that at essence seeks to follow awareness, uncovering what is marginal as a way to support the nature of the process.

This narrative is personal, it is my love story as I have lived it so far, and it is an attempt to go beyond the personal and perhaps find a gem or two that could be useful for whomever may read this, in the love story they are living.

¹ James Hillman, *Kinds of Power: A guide to its intelligent uses* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), xiii

Acknowledgements

Penelope Stutterheim, for being a mother to me in every way possible and beyond.

Daniel Bernberg, my closest ally and friend. The love we share endures through everything. Our letter writing has kept me breathing.

Ayako Fujisaki, Stephen Schuitevoeder, Emetchi, Salome Schwartz and Gary Reiss, for guiding my awareness and helping me walk my edges with compassion in my learning process.

My lovers, the men and women I have loved and who have loved me, without whom these words would have no meaning.

Jeffery Clason, for giving me the space to fly, for embracing my realness; in your arms my body rests and my heart finds a home.

Chapter 1

In the beginning: love comes to me

“The arrow falls where it will; we can only follow”².

There is a beautiful Elle Fitzgerald song that contains lines that sing “the greatest thing you will ever learn, is just to love and be loved in return”³. Love, the word itself, despite its use again and again, it still when said in a certain way can shift a moment like little else can. Love is mythological. Love is real. Falling in love is like being touched by the gods; it is superhuman⁴, and it can bring us to our knees, assaulted by pain. When love comes it beckons without reserve. When love leaves it crushes without reticence. Love colors all experience, every story and myth we tell. It is the foundation of what it is to be alive.

Defined it points to an experience of something deep, ineffable, tender, affectionate and passionate. All the definitions of love lead to words that describe an experience that is impossible to quantify. How do you measure depth or intensity of feeling? There are signals to indicate a quality of feeling, but no instrument that could do justice to what it was measuring. Love is its own measure. To study it is to step into the wild world of the intangible.

² James Hillman, *A Blue Fire* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989), 271.

³ Fitzgerald, Elle, *Natures Boy*

⁴ Robert Johnson, *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989).

When love comes to me I fall. For instance, I got married after knowing the person I fell in love with for five weeks. I leapt heart full, into marriage. If not for that total falling into relationship I would have never stayed, since I didn't consider myself a marriage type. But he swept me off my feet. The early time of that relationship was full of intensity, risk, diving in with rapidity, full on and without letting up. We fell into each other and it was passion, a clash of spirits. We collided and it was instant togetherness. There is nothing quite like the sweetness of love collision.

He had a dream one night in the first weeks of us being together, and told me in it there was this window, the window was open with the breeze flowing in, and it had this atmosphere of a place that was content, a home. That was his proposal to me – though I didn't see it at its essence in that moment – but he saw in me someone who he could take back to his land with him and make a home. And that is what we did, I left South Africa, where the windows are always barred and alarmed, and we flew to America where the winds seemed free.

We had met a year before this sudden marriage. The meeting was brief and intense – already you can see the theme emerging. It was in a club, late at night, and we spoke for a while. I remember him leaning over me at the pool table with elegant confidence. I left just as we were sidling up to each other. At the time I was recovering from some heart ache, and I didn't know where it was going. He remembered me and when we met again a year later, this memory was clear as day for him. I took some convincing. A bluegrass song came on and he pulled me into his arms, dancing me in his stride and singing in my ear. He had a beautiful voice and would often sing. His charm won

through and by the end of the night we were in each other's embrace. In three days we were living together.

In those first few weeks and months we hit the ground running, dealing with the overbearing pressure of immigration. I sold everything and got down to two suitcases; we piled our things together and went up to Johannesburg - immigration head quarters - to see if we could make the process of relocation more rapid. We managed to push through our papers in three months, a very unusual occurrence. We pit our wills together and we got results. By the time I arrived in America I had let go of everything I owned and knew. I had stripped myself of my resources and support systems, and the identity I knew myself to be.

It was also in those first few months that I began to cut myself, taking blade to skin until blood was visible. My self-destruction was a sore point for us. He felt punished by it, and I felt compelled towards the act. It was my way of expressing my hurt, pain, anger, fear. It was a release. It was also a way to show him I needed more love. He tried to give me that love. In those first few months, we loved with all we could. Such is often the early ripening of relationship, where the barriers are down and the person before you is living not only their being but the being you imagine them to be. And the cutting laid testimony to the pair already inherent in the relationship. The harm I brought to bear on my skin was the hurt I felt in his piercing criticism of me, his emotional distance and the angry tirades behind closed doors. Overtly he was all charm, in private his shadow came out to dance with mine.

We both brought to bear our stories, brought them into the story we were telling, but that is getting ahead of things.

Another love story is the relationship that followed. On the day I got my official divorce decree I met my neighbor. He was standing outside and without thinking I walked up and said hello. The hello turned into an invitation into his home, that turned into a conversation, which within an hour was submerged into a dialog so honest and real, after I left I could not shake the feeling that I had met someone who could meet my depth without hesitation. My impulsive heart alive, we connected a few days later, and the shared drink in the bar turned into an invitation into my home this time, and whilst sitting on my couch I said I wanted to kiss him. The kiss turned into waking up together, and so a relationship began. It had a spirit of seamlessly to it, and romance. He had soft eyes and a scent that made me want to sink into him, dreadlocks and an untamed spirit. His emotional transparency blew me away. It was like stepping into a totally different story of heart.

The seamless quality of this story was made real in our proximity, the few steps between our homes, a love walk path that was tread daily.

We both had a passion for yoga and the sharing of mat time became an exploration into the world of Acroyoga delight. In Acroyoga one partner bases and the other flies. The base has to be incredibly strong and stable to enable the flyer to risk a new posture in the air. The flyer has to have core strength, trust and a willingness to fall. My lover became a base to me with his body and heart, and in his foundation I began to learn to

let my vulnerability shine. With the ending of one relationship, another began, the gift of loving coming to me again.

This early time of relationship, like the early time of life, holds a myth⁵, a life myth or relationship myth, and in it is the map of symbols yet to unfurl. If we can track this early myth, we return to a time before time, a place where time is sacred and beyond temporal⁶. We return in myth to a place that reaches past what seems possible in consensus reality. It is in this place that the core narrative sits, the bedrock of the story we tell.

This symbolic realm - the place of the imaginal - refers to something that reaches beyond the borders of policed ideas. The symbol contains ambivalence, paradox; it contains multiple and layered meanings. Like love, this symbolic realm causes us to 'fall', not a fall from grace, but a falling into the emotional depths where real life and fairy tales pollinate.

⁵ When I speak of myth in this paper it is from a Process Work perspective which sees myth as something that is imbued in our every day experience, a foundation to reality, and therefore of value and use to 'real' life.

⁶ Mircea, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2005).

The flirt before the happening

Everything can be told in the first seconds of the story⁷. The first sentence, the first moment, the moment before the first moment, that is where the myth is held. The patterns that play out have their roots in the beginning, how things start. It is like a first impression of a person, the early years of life, the first aroma of a meal, the gesture before the full movement. When we want to get a sense of a love story we ask the couple how they met, what struck them most about their first experience together. This story of meeting becomes a myth unto itself. Each person may have a different slant but the story, with each retelling, becomes a map of the love foundation.

My telling of the beginnings to two love stories reveals a myth in each. In the first the myth is one of taking risks, merging identity, defying the odds and moving into the unknown. The myth also contains hidden hurt, doors shut and doors open, and isolation. In the second the myth is one of building partnership, walking a dance of space and closeness. The balance of groundedness and flight, of risking heart yet taking time. Freedom and emotional intensity spin in this tale.

In both is a common thread of rapidity, unusual connection and bridging divides, be it country, culture or feeling spaces. This outlay of myth relates to what Process Work would define as the relationship myth. A relationship myth is the story told between the couple about the connection. Like any myth it is seeded in the first unfolding patterns. It

⁷ Arnold Mindell, *River's Way: The Process Science of the Dreambody* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

emerges out of the interplay of the two people's personal life myth, their individual story. This life myth from a Process Work view, is not defined by determinism, rather it is seen as holding essential patterns that are unfolded through out life, and reaches into a foundational awareness, an essential level, that cannot be simplified into facts. The life myth, like the relationship myth, from this viewpoint, is a story that is highly symbolic, full of dreaming and rich unexplored terrain, containing something that unifies the story, beyond the polarities that may emerge in its telling.

So, there is no such thing as telling a new love story without history. That is like saying the slate is clean, forgetting that the slate existed before anything was written on it. And in the same way each of us come into events in our lives, or life happens to us, but that happening has its roots in the moments just before anything could be seen. These 'flirts' usually don't get noticed, perhaps a good thing since life could get quite dull knowing it all, but it is in these moments that the myth of the story can be partially located. It is in these early moments that the foundation of the story that will unfold is built⁸.

In building our stories we use the mortar of experience, which is history. History tends to be made into myth when the story is passed on, as our need to make meaning and refer to something deeper overwhelms fact⁹. Given a little time history tends to get mythologized in our memory, as we reach into the archetypes of myth to bring our images into life. Telling stories is myth making, in these stories our superheroes come alive, as much as our mortality. From this perspective it is not important if the story is

⁸ Arnold, Mindell, *Dreaming While Awake: Techniques for 24-hour Lucid Dreaming* (Charlottesville: Hampton Books Publishing Company, INC, 2000)

⁹ Mircea, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2005).

factually true, since fact only gives one color to the tale. Truth has many angles and is always subjective, so suspending the rightness or wrongness of a story suspends the interpretation. When interpretation stops, the real reading can begin. So the approach I am suggesting, to a story or any life experience, is one of coming at things as if it is completely true. And with that acceptance of what is happening curiosity can emerge, since it isn't a question anymore of is this real, but what is this that I am seeing. Imagine how much energy could be freed up if we stopped trying to label a state of being and started entering the experience.

The flirt - a term used in Process Work - is the first signal of the experience, before it gets enmeshed in head talk. It tends to be the subtle almost not noticed experience. It is the feeling, atmosphere, unusual occurrence, overlooked signal, odd moment, the thing that doesn't make sense or fit in, the energy of attraction. Although the flirt is the initiation, it happens in context, it happens within a story already happening. Think about who you flirt with, who flirts with you - we tend to flirt with people that catch our attention, and with that usually goes a type we fall for. Something grabs awareness, and rationality is put aside; we feel magnetized. Like any attraction or repulsion there is a charge, and that charge is the flirt.

Although the flirt may seem to rise beyond reason, it has a logic. The image of the love mate we fall for tends to have a consistency – we go for kind of lover, even if the characteristics seem elusive, we follow tendencies. I tend to fall in love with fluidity, beauty, wildness, intensity and passion. I also tend to fall in love with addicts, rebels and

charmners. You could say I have a tendency to run after Dionysus. And Dionysus has a tendency not to be caught. Or maybe it is I who prefers to be uncaged.

Storytelling love

“Everything in this world and in the others depends on how we read it”¹⁰.

The stories we tell about ourselves tell us. Storytelling is therefore also a form of remembering as much as it is a form of visioning.

Of all the stories we tell the love story is the most telling of who we are. ‘I am because we are’ is an African idiom – ubuntu - my sense of who I am, the identity I hold, could never exist without someone else to be the other. Relationship defines us and the love story we tell keeps that definition in place. Without the mirror of the other I could never know I existed. There would be no ‘I’ to examine in the looking glass of experience.

What then is a love story? It is a story of connection, a narrative of relationship. And in between the story unfolds with a cast of ideas of what being in love is. Each relationship will have its own form and vision. We tend to examine our love stories according to templates of what love is – we reach back into the mythology of our culture – and generally this implies a fixed story line. But if we drop for a moment the consensus reality view on forms of love relationship, we can pause to consider the atmosphere between a couple, and begin to reach into what that specific relationship’s dream is.

¹⁰ Helene Cixous, *The day I wasn't there* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 8.

Some people come together to create a child or build a house, some travel or study together, some couples thrive on conflict, need the fight, some adventure together or build a business, for some the time is brief and for others time has length. Love has its own timing and relationships have their own form. The love story has its own purpose and direction.

So the stories we tell have a history, they have a hold on us, and they have their own rhythm. The stories we tell also tell us. We each have our own story, and like stories from old, the personal story is like a personal myth. To recreate the story you are telling, the first step is to work out what you are already saying, to look at your lines and remember why you told them in the first place. You have to get to grip with the plot you have got going. Without some map of where you already stand it is hard to see the horizon line, and imagine what could be beyond. We need to sniff out the plot line.

Some ideas on the plot

Transactional Analysis as a system of thought outlines our personal story as a script¹¹. As if we are in a play, on life's stage, we are seen to gravitate towards certain roles, and speak certain lines that are scripted – in essence we no longer speak to the moment, but to what we remember the moment to be like. An experiment: when next you find yourself in a group of people notice how you act, how you express yourself, then try to

¹¹ Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964).

sit on your hands and stop yourself from going into your usual mode. 'Sitting on ones hands' can make clearer the direction of a tendency by forcing a pause and moment of awareness, and with that the role you want to submerge yourself in becomes something not just about you, but beyond you. And you might notice that someone else will step in and fill it up for you. Kind of humbling to know that the character we identify with does not rely on us to be played. Said in another way, the roles within the story are bigger than me or you. And in reverse, I am more than the character I tend to express.

This script, or style of being, in TA terms, is founded on belief systems¹². This system of beliefs can be likened to decisions that we made early in our life about how to be in the world. At some point we consciously chose to navigate life in a certain way. At some point life happened enough times to cement an idea in us of how to be, how to relate, and how to exist in the world, and from this a belief structure is built.

The thing about our narratives is they often contain a fallacy¹³. In an effort to make sense of things we not only tend to skew events to some kind of logic, we also try to make things appear linear. We try to make sense of the story, and in that make the story make sense. What we miss tends to be the lines that didn't quite fit in, the aspect of the story that borders on the territory of what might seem extreme, and instead try to fit the plot line into a nice and neat bell curve. Whilst this allows us to make sense of who we are and eases the tension of things being unpredictable, it also cements in an idea of

¹² Thomas Harris, *I'm OK-You're OK* (New York :Quill, 2004).

¹³ Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2010).

how we need to be, how others are to us and what the world is like. The plot line becomes fixed.

With the fixing of the plot line so the roles also become entrenched. In Process Work roles are theorized as various nodes within a grid like field. The roles themselves belong to the field, not us, but we fill them and in that bring them to life as we portray ourselves through various modes of being. In long term relationships and families roles tend to become frozen, state like, rather than fluid. This freezing of the role happens in part because of the unconscious process of story telling. We start to tell a script, we get comfortable in a role, and with that as we take one role so the other person will align with that. In relationships this creates a polarization of roles. For instance, my tendency to step into the role of the one who seeks to resolve issues, to fix, problem solve and appease, often pulls in dynamics where I find myself in a dance with a lover who becomes a problem maker. The more I try to fix the more my partner may challenge, fight, expect more. When roles freeze they become very brittle, so there isn't much creative dynamism. Even if we want to reach out of the box it is difficult because our partners may continue to relate to us in a way that compels the fixity. Most of the time we are not aware of this dance, submerged as we are in the dynamic. It is as if roles possess us.

So to begin with, sniffing out the plot requires some insight into where we get stuck, where the record goes onto repeat, because at this moment we live a pattern, and the patterns become a score. The plot line has an intent towards a particular outcome. Having intent is useful, but it can also become a cage when the outcome is fixed.

Sniffing out the plot also requires some insight into the elements left out of the story, the unusual, disturbing or odd tidbits that lie on the periphery of awareness – remember the flirt. This Process Work concept puts forward the idea that by following a disturbance or side awareness, you follow a magic thread that tucks into something as yet unfolded. In the stories we tell, this mainlines into the myth we live but may not know we are living. This is the plot between the lines, the unsaid but suggested, the felt but not seen. This element of the plot has an intention too, but the outcome is not known. To track down this scent you have to stalk your awareness.

Life myth and relationship patterns

In the current of life, so rapid now and quick, there is not enough time and stasis to let myths develop. Everything is instant, and in that our sense of myth has to change. We are forced to create our own myths, without models to follow or guides. Our life myths provide a portal into something transcendent, a way through the loss of rites of passage – we become cemented into ‘reality’. Now days it is the life myth that seems to hold the most meaning, so that the personal becomes a way to transcend, becoming a window into imagination. The life myth is the core, the deep seated kernel of the story you tell about yourself. It is the base from which your story unfolds. It is deeply personal, though it interconnects with the universal themes we all tread – the archetypal energies that form the basis of all myth, the common thread that we hang together from. Relationship patterns emerge from this life myth, remembering that by life myth we are speaking of

something beyond the TA description of scripts - the scripted pattern is what we can map on the surface of the life myth, the life myth digs much deeper. Relationship in a way is a collision of life myth, an intersection of stories. In the space between life myths, a relationship is formed. So in essence the life myth and relationship myth have a thread, a union. Exploring one necessitates an exploration with the other. You can't tell a new love story without revamping your personal story in the process. For instance in the love story of yoga mats and love walks, my personal myth of being pulled to danger, and thus unruly men, is merged with a relationship myth of exploring edges on the mat in united dance.

Joseph Campbell suggests two guides to finding myth, one being your personal story, the other being a way of living that follows bliss¹⁴. For him the pathway to bliss has to be your own because any other path already trodden is someone else's – it is their story. So the way to live blissfully is to find your path, your route to bliss, and this has to be through the personal. But what does it mean to live for bliss? In Campbell's thought it is a sense of being completely present and congruent with who you must be in the moment to fully be yourself, in alignment with the stage of life you are in.

The life myth is personal. It is also alive, a living myth. Oral traditions of myth keep up with change because it is alive now, and so the life myth is a living mythology. "The term "life myth" describes a pattern for life long personal development, and brings meaning to otherwise incomprehensible or overwhelming experiences"¹⁵. Said another way, it is the

¹⁴ Joseph Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation* (California: New World Library, 2004).

¹⁵ Lone Norgaard, *Stepping in, Stepping out, Process Work Applications of pre-birth stories used as life myth* (Unpublished manuscript, 2009), 3.

story we tell about ourselves, which emerges organically out of messages and experiences we receive externally, from our parents, teachers, lovers and so on, and internally via our dreams and imagination. The external messaging we receive involves multiple signals that we ingest, which may be contradictory, and which we absorb and in early childhood try to decipher into a system of understanding around how to cope in the world. Less emphasis in psychological theories has generally been given to the imaginative world, the internal conversations we have with ourselves. These inner messages also shape our life myth, most abruptly in creating the system of ideas we hold – a value system: “Ideas we have, and do not know we have, have us”¹⁶. The value system is the foundation, it organizes the story. This brings in the Process Work perspective of a life myth founded in a dream land, which embeds into and shapes our every day reality.

In Process Work the life myth is seen to be an organizing principle¹⁷, which contains energies you work with throughout your life. As an organizing principle it is dynamic and can be excavated in moments of turbulence as it contains both the issues and their unfoldment.

At different times different aspects of those energies tend to be more dominant. The life myth in Process Work relates to dream like or peak experiences in early childhood, which come to represent the energies the person will tend to be working with in their life process and relationships. Childhood dreams and memories have always been a

¹⁶ James Hillman, *Kinds of Power: A guide to its intelligent uses* (New York: Doubleday, 1995),16

¹⁷ Julie Diamond and Lee Jones, *A Path made by Walking: Process Work in Practice* (Portland: Lao Tse Press, 2004)

psychologists haven and work place. In Process Work the childhood dream is looked at through the lens of the current moment, so how is the dream alive now. Interpretation is suspended so that the dream can be given space to speak, unfold in the moment. The relationship myth in Process Work refers to the myth shared by the unit, and relates to dream like experiences about how they met. In both instances the myth is derived from early experiences and in this points to myth making being a process of finding a point of beginning which is outside of time¹⁸. The myth contains something that travels across time and space and enters into each moment. This point is crucial since it implies that the myth is relevant in every moment. In being beyond time it can reach into any second, and by implication as we unfold the energies and dynamics inherent in the myth so we affect the total story - as we retell we also remember.

Sniffing out the pattern in the story

In exploring what links life and relationship myth I am choosing to look at the conflicts that emerge in a relationship, specifically the persistent conflicts that tend to continue to continue. My reasoning for going this route is in part due to my own belief system and life myth, which assumes that conflict is always present in relationship, even if not overtly, and that conflict is a natural and necessary aspect of relating. This assumption stems not only from experiencing the strife between my parents and within my birth land, but also my life experiences in the relationships I have formed. In making this

¹⁸ Conversation with Ayako Fujisaki

assumption transparent I hope to tread more cautiously knowing my tendency to become one sided. The link between life and relationship myth is not only through conflict, but it is in the field of conflict that I am choosing to investigate.

Beyond my personal reasoning, I have chosen the field of conflict as the terrain of exploration because it is within conflict that we meet our edges, and with that the parts of ourselves we may own less.

Any conflict, especially interpersonal and intimate – which goes way beyond the currency of reason – involves content that is symbolic and therefore mythical. The values we hold are also symbolic in nature, and the extent to which they have power relates not only to how concentrated they may be but also how much ambivalence the symbol evokes. It is in what we simultaneously love and hate that the most powerful symbols are evoked¹⁹. The focus on parental influence is in part due to the symbolic value parents hold – as Freud told, we both love and hate our parents, though society compels us to repress the hate and reveal our love. Dreams too are ambiguous, as are the stories we liked best to read as children and the characters we related most to. Tracking the thread of ambivalence takes us into myth, and it is on this ground that our patterns are mapped.

Sniffing out these patterns relies on finding what holds the most intensity. The more intense the emotions of love and hate, the higher the value the symbol or image will hold. When we listen to the stories people tell about themselves it is therefore in the most emotionally stirring moments that this thread of symbolic intensity will be found,

¹⁹ Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

and within these moments – though they may appear to take us to our edges – is the possibility for insight into what we value most. Thus, the thread of conflict is also a golden line leading us into our greatest possibilities.

However, what we hold most interest in – and ambivalence holds us in a quandary of interest – is also what we tend to feel sensitive about and therefore protective. Our views and value system determine in part what we let in and out – the kind of edits we allow in our story making. The stronger I hold to an image of how I need to be, how others are, and how the world is, the more defined my value system and set my story line. This script gives us our ground and allows us to perceive, because for any perception to occur there has to be some sense of a stable image. Approaching the script we hold as something we need to overturn forgets that we need a lens through which to see. Change then is most sustainable if integrated into the system, and so by metaphor it is all about editing the story we are telling, respecting what it already has and making this useful in moments where the plot line gets stuck.

If we think about role theory again and the idea of fixed unconscious roles, and then bring that into the conflicting energy that may be inherent in a life and relationship myth, we get something like this: in the story of my first marriage the relationship myth is wound through with impulsivity and the taking of freedom. It is filled with going beyond reason and challenging the limits. Crossing oceans, marrying after five weeks, starting a business together, renovating a home and constantly chasing after a dream beyond the normal way of being. This links into my life myth - my earliest memory of a dream is of me standing in a room ablaze with fire, there is a white bed and in it my mother's dead

body is laid, next to her a new born baby. The fire men are on the periphery. My early upbringing contained threads of having no rules set on me. I was raised by two fathers, both distant at times, both strongly supportive of my freedom. With no limits on me I was of course very unruly. I had no sense of boundary. So inherent in my dreaming and narrative is this fiery energy of freedom, boundlessness and intensity. The two relate. But this is a one sided picture. The ghost in the background is the limiting factor. What is missing is the sense of control, the controller, the protector. the one who says no.

If we think of my myth as containing these two energies, and see this played out in the relationship naturally the ghost comes out. As with unconscious forces this is often via conflict, since what is challenged is the identity I hold. In this particular love story this emerged in a dynamic of me feeling like my partner was highly controlling. I felt it was his way or the high way. When I sought to push towards my freedom he nailed us down into his ambition. What I did not do was say no, I don't want to start this business, it isn't my niche; no I don't want to buy the worst house on the block and spend years renovating. Instead I strived to support, to work towards his desire, to see the goodness in his wish to better out lives. The dynamic was set and began to escalate.

My habitual pattern of chasing freedom had to have some limit maker, and my inability to take up that voice consciously meant the polarity got transferred onto the lover I was with.

Habit is so ingrained. It is absolutely human to be set in a way of being. Resistance is built into nature. Something has to endure for it to exist. Growth has both limiting and encouraging factors, and to limit it is to encircle and cycle around one thing. It is

necessary to have habit, at the deepest core the act of motherhood is habit, as is the process of learning a language, both of which involve a practiced and scripted way of being. Stability is what gives nature a form, which in psychological terms entrenches a process of behaving in a pattern and without patterns there would be no map.

To learn something is to pick up a quality that becomes ingrained in your being, be it a fact, skill, craft or wisdom. It is to alter your original way of being and add something to who you are. Repetition “shows the soul’s pleasure in practice, in polishing, in precision”²⁰, and so it is that in our hard wiring is also our strength. To learn then is to change in some way. We learn how to be in the world through a mixture of what we see, experience and already have. Our genetic imprint gives us an already set in inclination towards being a kind of person, and then we meet our parents and into this imprint is etched another overlay of personhood, as we absorb the impact of relationship with another.

What mom and dad expected, did and needed, meet and entwine around a person forming a play of words and feelings that become ingrained in us. Like the scene at a family table, where each person takes a particular role, maybe quiet, or being a joker, or displaying heroics, we each become attuned to a certain identity: We get type case, as much as we type cast ourselves, and the role we end up getting close to becomes the mask we wear.

Except nothing in life seems to act on single terms. Polarity is core to our existence, and so if one then another; there must always be an opposite term. If I am to be a hero there

²⁰ James Hillman, *Kinds of Power: A guide to its intelligent uses* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 59.

must be something to overcome, and a healer needs a sickness as much as being quiet depends on there being something other than quietness. The unanimous rule that nothing is permanent means change and the unchangeable will always be in a dance. Beneath what we know and have learned lies another reality, submerged below the water line of what I am aware of right now. The idea that I hold something inside of me that I may only understand and relate to outside of me, means that we live in a field. We cannot but relate, and so we cannot but be both ourselves and all the parts outside the skin layer. This idea is amazing in implication. It means every opposite has within it the other. So the patterns we lay, the habits, the unchangeable, has the change inside of it. This view can be seen as the solution being already contained in the problem²¹. But more of that to come.

My way then of finding the pattern in the story is to begin with looking at what people see as unchanged in themselves, the way they are, what they do and how they believe the world works.

This is the story we believe in, the story that defines who we are and how we choose to engage with what life brings. I see myself as caring, sensitive, tender. I give to others often without reserve. I believe this is the right way for me to be. I also see myself as resilient, able to pick myself up when hit hard with life. I cope on my own, I don't tend to reach out. This is my primary identity - a Process Work term that describes the aspects of who we are that we feel closely aligned to and tend to consciously identify with - I will be strong and I seek to heal. Whilst this story lets me confront life with tenacity, allows

²¹ Arnold Mindell, *Working with The Dreaming Body* (Portland: Lao Tse Press, 2002).

me to sit alone with the swamplands of my soul, gives me the capacity to deeply feel into and care for others, it also is one sided. That is the difficulty with a rigid identity or story, it gets linear. It blots out the other colors possible. It is a bit like being color blind. I lose sight of the fact that I don't have to survive isolated and unsupported, and shut down my ability to receive love. I turn my anger inward and forget that I also have a lioness in me, that I have a right to stalk and protect my territory.

So my pattern of being strong and caring both helps me and hinders me. I know it well so I have got some talent out of it. And according to Gladwell 10,000 hours would give me the edge to being quite skillful at it²². What I have learned to become is my talent. To throw out the hardwiring would be to dismantle the already present strength inherent in the system. I suggest following the path of least resistance and work with what is already present, especially as the solution often lies in the presenting problem. It just requires a shift of perspective.

A shifting of viewpoint takes us to the underground, the subterranean bedrock of all that comes up and out of me that I can't quite relate to. These are the moments when the roles we identify with flip. Like when I suddenly am ablaze with anger and explode screaming, or I find myself in need of loving support unable to cope alone, I step into shoes I hardly know and walk awhile. This experience is not compassionate empathy, but rather a side step, unforeseen, into the waters of what is polarized. The idea is that roles shift, they are fluid, and sometimes we find ourselves occupying roles we don't usually – we step out of our normal script and start growing a different style; we explore

²² Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008)

a new tangent to the pattern. Often this flipping comes out destructively. It is as if we are infants in this way of being and step into shows that are too big to handle. We have to grow up these sides of us, lean into them and nourish them, integrate what is less known in the story. If I am to express my anger well and be able to stand firm with a boundary, I have to grow up my toddler, let it speak to the side of me that cares deeply and let a conversation emerge in which that caring could be extended to myself as much as to others.

So to start we sniff out the pattern in the story, since it contains not only the rut but also the already happening, wanting to unfold, change. The roles contain the other side, as much as the field contains all the parts possible.

The idea that childhood experiences inform life patterns is not new. In the lineage of Freud, Adler, Jung and onwards, psychology is immersed in an idea of historical causation. Norgaard's research into pre-birth stories engages this causation prior to birth, bringing to light how it is not only narratives within our life time that inform our life myth, but also the stories prior to birth. The life pattern can be located through childhood dreams, chronic body symptoms and chronic relationship issues²³. So ways to find your myth may be through observing your dreams, choices, the themes that resurface again and again in your journal, seeing what images and symbols resonate deeply with you. In relationships it is within the chronic conflicts that persist. The chronic is a pattern that has hardened, and sniffing this out requires some insight into pattern making.

²³ Arnold Mindell, *Dreambody: The Body's Role in Revealing the Self* (England: Arkana, 1990).

We are born incapable of looking after ourselves, sometimes for over a decade. It is a unique aspect of being human that we are so dependent for so long. And then as we age we become dependent again. From this state of dependency emerges a psychological reality of being under the authority of someone else, and their narrative. We don't just tell our version, we tell it with footnotes - referencing our mother, father, teachers and so on. This is useful if things don't change, but references age very quickly, more so in this period of time which seems to require public updates every five seconds. Conflict erupts in part when we meet change, when our stories come up against the present current of life, in the moment, and the story doesn't quite make sense - it lacks elasticity and whilst it might allow us to cope, it is like a voice over that seems to miss the beat. At the same time, like mythology, this story is a safe place to grow emotionally until you are ready to step out and declare yourself. If you get rid of the hard wiring the system will collapse, and so it is with an attitude of respect that one needs to approach the story being told. So a first idea is that conflict tests the underlying myth which we live by. And if this is the case then the functionality of the myth or narrative is determined by how well it carries us through these conflicts.

Chapter 2: And then I see a darkness

Cycling conflict

“Do not fear what has blown up. If you must fear the unexploded”²⁴

In my deepest moments of pain, I want to hurt myself. What I cannot express I expose instead through a cut, a destructive act, a night of drug taking, a state of depression. As we have seen, what my primary identity won't allow gets turned inward. “He will betray me, deceive me; I wanted to be useful and found myself being used instead; I do not have what it takes to sustain or keep another's affection” - this is part of my story line. In it my father, lover, seducer, husband; the ‘he’ or ‘other’ is always unreliable, or at least consistent on their terms not mine.

In our toughest times of change we can embrace it or we can fall into our old patterns. To tell a different story requires the ability to improvise something new. And we fall not because of failure, but because we forget that we are part of the telling. When we fall it is into something we know and therefore have learned a little about. We get a sense of our dynamics, the plot. The plot line can be edited. But to edit you have to start with something, so we stand on what we know and keep living, cope and survive.

²⁴ Suheir Hammad, TED talk, http://www.ted.com/talks/suheir_hammad_poems_of_war_peace_women_power.html, 2010

Conflict is what happens when what we know collides with something we don't know we know. It is inevitable in relationship. It varies in how it becomes revealed, but you can't have life without it. Without some tension life would be static and inanimate. The childhood dreams we sniff out to locate the myth contain "genes from both parents, and often a conflict of some sort"²⁵. The particular conflicts that make up our story line are ones that cycle and recycle: the fight you have with your lover so many times you know the words by heart; the strife you face in relationship that makes you think damn I have been here and done this, I know where this is going. It is the cyclical and persistent conflicts that mark the chronic edges we carry in ourselves and in our relationships. It is also the cyclical conflicts that push us to shift, as they escalate and become more chronic, so they speak louder and with more intensity.

Conflict can appear differently. It can be a competition "in which the parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions and in which each party wishes to occupy a position which is incompatible with the wishes of the other"²⁶. For conflict to exist there needs to be more than a competitiveness and struggle around the positions we hold, there has to be an awareness that the positions are incompatible, for a desire in each of us to be right, or said another way, to remain fixed in a position that doesn't sit easily with the position another takes. Our desires may not be fully conscious, but some aspect of our identity must be aware for conflict to exist. Conflict then is in part a pattern of positions, and each of our individual histories can be seen as a map of positioning within a space of relationship. This map can be likened to a story that has cycles of

²⁵ Arnold Mindell, *The Quantum Mind and Healing: How to Listen and Respond to Your Body's Symptoms* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc, 2004), 153.

²⁶ Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 5

chapters within it. Faced with challenges, from birth onwards, we find ways to cope and survive, and these strategies in part form the tendencies we have to step into certain roles. Each of us has our own equilibrium, and our tendencies form cycles that strive to maintain the balance we know. Conflict is what happens then when we meet another entities pattern and feel as if we could lose our balance. If we step into the field of conflict from this perspective, we walk with an assumption then that conflict catalyses a process that tests the stability of the positions we hold, and can be seen as a vehicle of change.

Conflict though is not just external but reflects internal tension. The inner and outer world are always aligned in a mirror play of movement. We are telling the story as an internal text as much as an outer narrative. Internally the relationship conflicts we experience would be experiences as conflict between different parts of ourself, an inner dialogue that starts to build momentum and reaches a point of feeling split inside. This idea of inner reflecting outer implies that the conflicts we experience are as much a part of us as they are of the other.

I am building on some assumptions. Firstly, that conflict has the capacity to evoke change in relationship - it brings us into a crisis of what may be less known. Secondly, that people and relationships can change, and that this change can be tracked - that our story is not fixed and can be edited. This second point challenges the notion that we are determined by our patterns, and puts forward that over time our way of relating shifts and evolves naturally, and that conflict is a driving agent in the process of transformation.

Like the rites cultures repeat to keep the myth alive, so we repeat patterns that keep our story alive. It is hard wired into our brain to create patterns, and more so negative patterns. Our brain has evolved to be more sensitive to fear, the need to avoid, attach or get away, and with that 'negative' experiences carry more weight and are more easily hard wired into our brain²⁷. This means that the core conflicts we experience are rapidly hard wired into our system, into our story. As the conflict emerges again in real time, we step into a play we know, the rules of which are determined from our history. We get stuck in a role, a frozen state, the dynamic gets set and starts to cycle.

When I speak about cycling it is useful to imagine an arc that comes close to the cusp of the horizon line, and as it touches on this edge something in the system resists and pulls inward. Cycling²⁸ happens at the edge, the pattern cycles because it has hit an edge that is guarded by our need to keep congruent with the identity we know. By edge I mean the boundary of awareness, marking a line between what we feel able to integrate and own and what we struggle to assimilate into our core identity.

So conflict cycles because what we identify with comes into contact with something we identify with less. With each cycle the momentum of the pattern grows, and things start to escalate. When we are caught in long standing conflict the escalation has a predictable trajectory – war, divorce, disconnection. There are markers to this escalation which reveal an increasing experience of conflict, starting with indirect and covert behavior, and building toward more direct and overt expression. Myrna Lewis speaks of

²⁷ Craig Hamilton, <http://beyondawakeningseries.com/blog/general/archive/>

²⁸ Cycling is a Process Work term to describe the escalation that happens when a person or group comes to an edge that is difficult to cross.

this as a 'terrorist line', a line we walk in which we terrorize the system²⁹. Terrorism is a strong word. It arises when a voice is not being listened to and specifically when that voice cannot express dissent without fear of being annihilated. So the voice finds other ways; the part of you that can't go along with what is happening finds a way to be heard. Over time this maneuvering can become very resourceful. We might start by slumping, showing up late at work, avoiding a discussion, procrastinating, but over time this may lead to communication breaking down, gossip that turns vicious, lying, lobbying, polarizing and attack. Essentially the terrorist line becomes a story of revenge.

Revenge

I renovated a house with my ex husband. We tore down and rebuilt it with our hands, on our own, with little resources and determination. We spent two and a half years renovating an old and quirky space. We toiled and sweated into that space. We overcame numerous floods, pipes bursting, toilets busting, walls falling. The house became the center of our dreams and our nightmare.

Some months after my divorce I noticed that with time my feelings had settled, but one particular memory kept returning to me: a particular weekend a few weeks before we broke up. By this time we were living in separate rooms. He had separated and I was locked firm in my pattern of trying to make things work, trying to find a way to resolution.

²⁹ Myrna Lewis, *Inside the No: Five Steps to Decisions that Last* (Self Published, 2008).

My pattern of trying to fix things up mirrored our pattern of trying to fix a house that never seemed to yield to our efforts. There always seemed to be something to do, something that we had to redo. The weekend in my memory was the one we had planned to build a fence and true to my word I got up, met him out front and worked for two days solid, pouring cement, digging holes and holding up fence poles until my body ached and my hands were etched red. The fence was built, the border to our home established. That was the last project we completed together.

I could not let this memory go, or more particularly the anger that I felt when I thought about how I had labored, and in my mind how I had been used. The memory sparked all my rage about how easily I was put to work, how easily my labor was taken, but most especially that it happened at a time when I believed he knew it was over, so his taking felt unfair. The revenge in me emerged as a bitterness that had been living in me for some years, the part of me that was fed up with it being his way or the highway. It was the voice I kept silent in my attempt to make things work. It was the part of me that would erupt weekly at some inopportune moment and result in a cycle of fighting and distance. Ironically my suppression of this side of me only perpetuated my pain – the more I tried to make the relationship work, the more resentful I became, which erupted in fighting that made the distance worse, that made me want to fix the relationship even more. You get the picture, the cycle cycled and fed on itself. Like revenge, we feed on our old cemented emotions, and the same story gets told.

Whatever is most despised in the relationship will haunt the break up or divorce. I walked away from the relationship still co-owning a home. I remained tied materially to

the man I broke with via a contract to a space that symbolized our love and despair. The material though is just a symbol of the ties that bind. History is always present.

The deeper the lack of resolution in a conflict, the deeper the edge, and the more likely the conflict will resurface in the next relationship. We are most at our edges when at the heart of a war we can never win, because it is never ending - the kind of fights that resound no matter who the opponent is. Our processes are tenacious, they find a way to manifest. So delaying conflict or not attending to the underbelly of the story does little in the long term for peace of heart. Ironically the way to more contentment is to attend to the conflict sooner rather than later, while the embers are manageable and not ablaze. The fire of conflict can also go underground, and in the case of revenge this is what happens. The flame goes cold and with that we internalize a state that is frozen. This state of revenge can emerge in different ways, through bitterness, attack, depression, suicide, but in all the forms that it may take, it contains the debris of an escalated conflict.

Like love, revenge also defines us³⁰. Those we want to avenge are our enemies and our connection to them is as strong as love. By avenging you are identified with being not the other. In love you identify with being the other, or at least a part of the other. And in our enemies and lovers we find parts of ourselves. Love like hate engages a pact, a connection that means you are interlocked.

Love beckons of us to sacrifice, and the desire to be sacrificial. The whole idea of unconditional love asks us to step beyond economics and give without expectation.

³⁰ Laura Blumenfeld, *Revenge: A story of Hope* (New York: Simon&Shuster, 2002).

There is something about the idea of love that has in it not only exchange but also exchange without the accountant. Except we do count, we do measure. Unconditional does not mean being indifferent.

So it could be said that to examine any love story is to examine a myth of a duality of love and hate. We have typical love stories, the kind that even if we don't admit to ourselves does ignite some love theme, and included in them is often the one who did not feel loved enough. The jealous wife, the forgotten soldier, the ignored spouse, the slighted one, the one who was betrayed, the one who betrayed, the person who regrets the eventual loss of something precious, the one who abandons. Endless lists of moments in which a person enters the simultaneity of being loved and abandoned. The roles are endless and we all inherit this mythology in our ideas of love, and the story of love, because it is always a drama – an evocation of emotion.

Revenge and love topple on each other. Because what is hate but a turned kinship. You can only avenge if you feel shamed and to be ashamed you have to value enough the person shaming you to feel their opinion matters. You have to care enough to give them the benefit of the doubt. It takes will to equal a score, not just principles because principles can always be bought into. We are after all incentive creatures, driven by our need to profit, and the ultimate profit is love because love is priceless.

You could say the last assumption is romantic. Romance is part of love. It is always a movement of feeling slightly overtaken by something, a push into the irrational. Love can never be weighed by the scales of reason. To really weigh love you have to enter a world of irrationality, and the closest we have to that in words is myth.

Revenge then can be seen as conflict gone cold, and in it lies a seed of the love story we want to tell. Because revenge leads us into the places where we did not do justice to our own hearts, the moments in which we did not feel ourselves respected or treated with integrity, and ultimately to the simmering edge of the enemies within.

Doubled up edge

“Between the image of one person and another lie the words by which the one tries to convey his image to the other”³¹

It is in the shared edges that the relationship happens. Without any sharing of an edge the relationship would not have enough tension to sustain, and it is in the sharing of the edges that the tension is created. In love edges unite, they collide, meet and usurp each other. Said in another way, edges in relationship create a ‘double edge dynamic’.

A ‘double edge dynamic’ happens when one person comes to their edge, bringing the person they are entangled with to their edge³². An edge needs something to border, and in relationship the space between one entities identified experience of themselves, and the person they are engaged with, is defined by the meeting of their edges. In resolution of conflicts if one party goes over an edge, unless the other can also traverse their edge

³¹ Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 294.

³² Joseph Goodbread, *Radical Intercourse: How Dreams Unite us in Love, Conflict and Other Inevitable Relationships* (Portland: Lao Tse Press, 1997)

the relationship may not sustain. Whatever your edge may be, when you get near it and risk stepping through it, your lover is challenged into the fray of their own being.

Double edges emerge when we unfold double signals. In this play of doubling up, the signal that evokes the edge is the one that was unintended. We all send unintended messages all the time. We also pick up on these messages, although we may not realize it. Much of the cycling in conflict happens because of a silent conversation between signals that are behind what is being communicated.

Some weeks into the love story following the divorce, I found myself brought to a deep edge. My lover sat before me crying, transparent in his vulnerability, utterly real about where he was at. The issue was money, and for a man this forces a confrontation with all our societal conventions about being a provider. He spoke of his pattern of self-destruction, throwing up issues and then having them fall down hard upon him. At a time in his life where the pressure to 'be something' is amplified, he said to me his fear was that I would run in the face of his insecurity.

I held him. And inside I shook with the reckoning of seeing a man, a person, sit so powerfully in genuine feeling, revealing it fully for me to see. It was the strength to be wholehearted, vulnerable and upfront without concealing weakness. In that moment I felt my edge, the border of my ability to really put up what I was afraid of, insecure about.

That fear rests in my body, a core edge inside of me of my physical inadequacy. I carry inside of me a shame of my flesh. Naturally this is where my lovers pride lay, his knowing of his body's beauty and capacity. He knew and had harnessed the talent in his

body – in a way he held the gold in my lead, his power reflected my insecurity. My challenge was to be as real about who I was, vulnerable, without falling into the shame. If I fall into the shame I cycle, paralyzing me in my pattern of inadequacy. If I can meet my lover in his realness and be as vulnerable, then the dynamic shifts.

In this instance the edge is a shared one - being transparent about perceived weaknesses, it is symmetrical. Edges can also be complimentary - they fit together as opposites, like when one person has an edge to being needy and the other has an edge to taking care of others. If the person starts to show their neediness, their partner has to reckon with their belief system around not being needy and explore their edge around taking care of someone. In both cases the edges reflect each other and hold the conflict dynamic in place.

Follow what is most disturbing

In a conflict energies oppose each other. One way to break it down is to think of one energy being that which is being identified with and the other to be the disturber. The disturbing energy can be the person, symptom, state or conflict that ruffles the attention of the other side. In Process Work these energies are spoken about as X and Y. X being the identified energy and Y being the disturber. As an equation the idea is that both energies are in a dance together, rooted in a deeper level of entanglement which at essence would equate to something beyond the opposition.

Crisis in interpersonal terms means conflict. Not that conflict requires an outside person, but rather conflict is a function of relationship in crisis. If the conflict gets hot enough, we get pushed to the edge of what we know and come into resistance with something else. We feel triggered and escalate, and whatever triggered us becomes the other, the thing that stands outside of us, the disturbing force. The disturbance escalates in conflict.

At its most extreme disturbance can lead to trauma. Experiences happen to us that overwhelm our ability to respond and we lose touch with the part of us that has a sense of what is really going on. The things that we keep cycling on, the ruts and long term edges, continue to haunt us as moments when memory becomes a reliving. Certain states get locked into place as the result of trauma, and with that the disturbance becomes an experience that creates an overwhelming feeling of losing control and power. Process Work's approach to trauma sees purpose behind the disturbance and seeks to enter into the energy through imagination. The person is seen as a whole and disturbance as something that is going on that is right, as opposed to pathological approaches which would see the trauma as something that needs to be fixed.

If trauma is life threatening why is it that animals in the wild don't get traumatized by violence? Why don't they manifest symptoms of PTSD? A somatic approach views the discharge of energy as a completion of the effect of trauma. Our body energy goes off the charts in a life threatening moment (in trauma this can be not only physical threat but emotional/psychological violation or loss of safety) and then a dissociation happens, a freezing, to protect ourselves - we can't escape and it is out of our control so we leave our bodies as a protective mechanism. Because of our cultural beliefs that natural

process is overridden and we don't release our energy, so we interrupt that process and don't allow it completion. The trauma energy is activated in the primitive part of the brain. The higher part of our mind says it is not okay to shake, to be angry, to be enraged, and the lower part says it is natural and this expresses itself as symptoms. The energy is in us and it keeps coming back as recurrent memory – the memory of trauma is the stuck energy in us³³.

By following a disturbance we seek to unstick the state, tell the story that wants to be told and in that way release the energy that may be frozen. We offer the tremble a chance to unfold, allowing ourselves to shake. When the rough waters swell in relationship it means there is a disturbance we need to stalk. It is a calling on our primary identity to wake to something beyond itself, to hear a message and pick up a signal, to expand experience.

When we get caught at the edges and the darkness descends we tend to get fixed in a role play. At the limit of our double edge dynamic stands a crisis of disturbance. Disturbances comes up in signals, at first slight and marginal, but with time they grow - as with any aspect of awareness not given a chance to unfold and express. If I look back on my first marriage the disturbing signal of my lover not being fully present was imminent from the start. Over time that disturbance grew and I did my best to avoid it. If I had followed it I may have told a different story.

The key is that the disturbance is an essential part of the narrative if we could let it sing. When I was nineteen I met and became entwined with a man over twenty years my

³³ I owe these ideas to Will Hall, based on a talk he gave in 2010.

senior. He taught Tantra and lived life dangerously. He was also a poet, an academic and a man who believed that love meant not being possessive – this translated into him having more than one primary lover. Young as I was I knew that his questioning of conventional values was something I related to. But I had to find my way of questioning, my bedrock. Though I stayed with him for over a year and shared his bed with others, the polygamy never sat well with me, it was deeply disturbing to my system. My nature needed something different.

With time I was able to distill and follow this disturbing energy beyond the image of my lover, beyond the societal conventions I knew and into a relationship with an energy in me that likes to live dangerously. As a beloved once said to me, ‘You are trouble Sarah Jade’. And my trouble likes to live at the edge, wants to be challenged, seeks to risk. But this energy is not without boundary, deep into the disturbance I felt was a message of loving for me; that my heart, however experimental, was a one lover roost. So I left the shared bed and made a bed of my own, and for me this meant taking the energy of risk, experimentalism and danger and using it to deepen a space of monogamy with another. This is not a dogma, it is my nature. In the end following something disturbing will lead you deeper into the forest of your nature, whatever that may be. The disturbance is there even when we don’t want to see it. Usually we avoid it. Usually this avoidance leads to some escalation. Eventually it will catch up. The process is like nature, it will just happen, but the level of crisis you have some control of.

If we think about my narrative of men being inconsistent and emotionally unreliable, or more exactly of me feeling unable to depend emotionally on another, this can be tracked

as an infinite disturbance in all my love stories. And remembering the role fluidity, this role of being the inconsistent lover would transfer to me too.

For instance, one of my edges is to express my needs, like my need for space. I am afraid of being left emotionally adrift without warning, so taking my own space is risky, as potentially it is going to sever the connection. Instead I orbit around the other's needs, or in moments of less consciousness I disappear and take my space in a way that hurts the other person – I don't check out I just leave. My brief love history holds tales of loving men who could not love me singularly, of loving men who could not stay present, of being loved by men who I could not be true to, of missed connections and affairs with no future. The disturbance in my story is the energy of how space is taken in relationship, of following ones own bliss yet finding the balance of partnership.

With my tantric lover he was upfront with his ways, the disturbance was clearly visible, yet if unpacked it looks a bit different. The thing is you have got to get to the heart of what is disturbing – it is only disturbing because the energy has not been fully unpacked, owned. You have to make friends with the disturbance, make it appetizing to absorb into you. Then it becomes a part of you and the charge moves onto other spaces. As the disturbing energy is unpacked it reveals something of use. You can't take it at face value and try to ingest the energy, it has to be distilled into an essence congruent with your nature.

So back to the marriage days, as a way to make this more clear – for you and me – memories that surface: being in Denver and the situation had escalated to a point of him taking off, there was a lot of 'blow' around so things were heightened, and I was left at a

n acquaintances house. I shook, I felt utterly alone. There is something about immigration that can really strip you down, and with no-one around to call, no place to go, no car or license, I got a taxi and went back to our one bedroom apartment. He wasn't there so I took to the streets, cocaine intoxicated and alienated. I walked for hours like a cat on speed, and in the early hours homebound I brought out my blade and cut so deep I wear those scars to this day. In the morning he returned and I tried to hold him – are you following, after so much pain and anguish my response was to try and get closer and find some emotional consistency, even though clearly his message was saying that he could not be emotionally relied upon. The disturbance of his distance went unfolded. He returned and we remained together for two more years. Of course this story had a repeat with the roles overturned, such is the fluidity of edges. Over time I began to distance myself too, I stopped sharing as much with him, holding back my deep emotionality. There were moments when he felt like I was not emotionally supportive enough, not reliable enough. The relationship disturbance, like the double edge, tends to speak to both sides.

The disturbance links into our patterns and edges. It is what wakes us up out of our ruts no matter how painful. To divorce from the pattern you have to follow what is disturbing. This may not be everyone's way. But the idea is that in the disturbance there is something trying to speak to you, and it is disturbing because the message brings you to an edge in yourself. If the message can be picked up, listened to and respected as having something to offer, then it can be integrated into the lines of our narrative.

Chapter Three: May these winds of change set you free

Divorcing from the pattern

My ex husband made the final break on the last night of Burning Man (2010)³⁴. Because I could, I howled. Burning Man is that kind of space. I had the grace of four beings to hold me while I cried. Then we walked into the desert and watched the temple burn. Thousands of people become completely silent and the huge structure that housed a weeks worth of accumulated notes to loved ones lost, is burned. As I watched that temple burn I knew that something in me was broken and I would never be the same. I knew that repair was not going to be the answer. I was going to have to transform.

The pain of breaking was complete and all I could think about is how much I loved him. Letting go felt like I was being ripped in a very precise and completely devastating way. He moved on with rapidness - the very rapidness I fell in love with. He moved on reinventing himself anew, with clarity of intent, piercing through. And in this ending a dynamic that was a one way highway to ever more suffering was broken. In choosing to break, the possibility of something else became real, the possibility for telling a new love story.

The first and one of the only love poems he wrote to me ended with the phrase “may these winds of change set you free”. It was those words I found again in the midst of

³⁴ <http://www.burningman.com/>

divorce and they rung with poignant truth. It was like I had come full circle and I realized that what I was really divorcing was not a man, but a pattern. To be set free I had to contract a dissolution with the story as I was telling it. It was time to meet my script writer.

The dissolution of the ideal lover is inevitable, and in this the attitude that will help solve the dilemma is compassion: “the principle of compassion is that which converts disillusionment into a participatory companionship”³⁵. This dissolution is inevitable because like any ideal, the ground it will eventually meet. What is not always inevitable is the dissolution of the patterns that are founded on the ideals we hold, including the belief system we have about relationships and love. For that you have to find a way to realize your shadow in your life, the person you could have become, the parts of you not yet lived. To divorce the pattern you first have to reckon with the contract you signed with yourself when you decided how to be in love.

In the time of divorce the curse of everything before will hang. I got two pieces of advice in my time of divorce that helped me. One was to navigate divorce from the perspective of looking back at yourself – to be able to look back on yourself ten years down the line and not regret your actions. To be able to look yourself in the mirror with integrity when it was all over. I knew it is not a question of coming through, it was all about how I come through the process that is essential. It is in the how, the doing part of the sentence, that things can be told differently. And if in looking back on myself I still hoarded toxic emotions and the same story retold, then it would be a looking back filled with bitterness

³⁵ Joseph Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation* (California: New World Library, 2004), 78.

and regret. The advice called on me to navigate the process as if I had the wisdom of future insight, with a perspective of having the power to write this the way I wanted to.

The second piece of advice was to resist the urge to take baggage with me – to stay light and discerning in my sentimentality. I ended up taking very little materially, but everything I did take was carefully chosen. The emotional baggage is the harder task. That would take months to burn, but it did burn, as I broke into my patterns so the charge that held the connection in place dismantled. The deeper essence in this piece of advice was don't become sentimental and if you do notice it and be discerning. We get sentimental about things we want to hold onto, though they no longer exist in real time. To divorce the pattern, and the man, sentimentality was less useful than ruthless honesty and a phoenix like attitude.

The dissolution of a relationship is also a resolution. It is a contracted ending. My experience of divorce was it came down to liabilities. What mattered in the paperwork was marital debt, children and spousal support. It came down to what do we owe each other. All that was invested into the partnership becomes a liability of who is responsible for what. I chose to take very little. I asked for nothing. It wasn't self-effacement it was the workings of my story. I wanted to be light. I wanted to dissolve the relationship rapidly. I wanted my freedom. What was interesting though about sighting a relationship through a lens of what is owed, is that one is forced to think strongly about everything you put in. Just like a dissolution of a marriage, so the divorcing of a pattern requires a reckoning with what is owed. You have to barter with your primary identity, meaning you have to come to an agreement with the part of you that has had front stage. And you

have to be cunning. If you fight hard you will invite all the figures that come up at the edge, including your internal judge.

In my experience the best port of call is a co-petition. This means both parties want dissolution into a new relationship status. In essence this is a dissolution in which no policing (serving papers to the other part of us) is required. What is required is some tact and respect. You have to approach yourself from the perspective of wanting to integrate the other. Your primary identity need to be brought on board with what the secondary aspect is calling for. In essence dissolution requires integration.

The ring comes off, the contract is abolished and the pattern comes to its edge. It is very easy to fall back into the story and replace the other character. The trick is to put the ring back on your own finger. To do this you have to divorce the internal pattern before any change can happen, allowing for a different dreaming in the story to emerge.

What does that mean in real terms? It means sitting with the discomfort of the grief and loss long enough to let the story unfold. If you resist the feelings they get stronger. If you lean into them they start to melt and speak.

Conflict resolution

If patterns are in part cyclical conflicts, a story on repeat, then to break the mould and reach for a different trajectory the pattern needs to find more completion. Completion

involves resolution, and conflict resolution brings us to the conversation at the double edge.

The resolution of conflict is not a static solution, it is more like an attitude that sweeps into future unfolding relationship. In other words it is a shift that shifts the field of relationship. It is dynamic.

Some conflicts never seem to get resolved. It seems to me that we privilege peace over war, but both have their place. And sometimes resolution of conflict is the resolution to not be in a relationship. So the term resolution needs to be seen not only as a description of peace and coming to agreement, but also more openly as a completion of the conflict into a space that for the moment has a new level of integration. More often than not the resolution will be temporary, since the flux of life will continue and new conflict will naturally emerge, but by holding down a resolution - honoring its presence and giving it some space to solidify - a new foundation can be formed that can impart wisdom to the next spiral of growth.

If conflict is the meeting with something less known, then resolution of conflict is the integration and owning of the unknown. It is the enfolding of what is disavowed into the text of the story we tell, in a way that is both useful and congruent with our nature. Integration takes patience and time. The process has to be distilled. If you try to just swallow something unfamiliar it may end up being indigestible to your primary identity. So the process is best facilitated with an attitude of 'going fishing' – stalk your awareness and cast a wide net, then wait and see what bites, what takes hook in your

attention³⁶. You have to make the disturbing factor palatable enough to eat and cook it up until the nourishment is released. To do this takes some fearlessness, since conflict is not something one generally invites into experience. With a bit of guest house attitude though we can open ourselves to the stranger and find a way to make the meeting hospitable.

When facilitating a conflict the first step is to invite the enemy in, to thank that part for being willing to relate to you, to bring to bear a feeling of appreciation and welcoming. This is not to manipulate the situation or play a folly, this is an act of deliberate engagement. Without doing this there is a high chance the other side will refuse to engage, which leaves you having to do the inner work. Working internally on a relationship conflict is effective and sometimes the only way. And even then the same attitude pervades, of pausing to consider the thing with which you are meeting in yourself. Making space for the conflict gives it some room to unfold, it lets the story speak and brings the voices out.

With space made the dialogue that is already happening can amplify. Then it is up to you to hear the voices, the disgruntled, the hurt, the loving, the wanting, the desire, the need, the longing, the fearful.

³⁶ Amy Mindell, *Metaskills: The Spiritual Art of Therapy* (Arizona: New Falcon Press, 1994).

What do you do with the pieces of a broken heart?

“Trust has within the seed of betrayal; the serpent was in the garden from the beginning, just as Eve was pre-formed in the structure around Adam’s heart.”³⁷

Heart break is enfolded in heart love. Any real love relationship has within it the imagining, the possibility of real betrayal. And to attempt to live in full security, safety, avoiding any chance for disillusionment, disappointment and hurt, is to step out of living life as much as it means stepping out of harms way. You cannot love and not risk, and with that the pieces of heart that may fall when betrayal happens, open us, break open the heart and give us a chance to reconfigure and transform.

And this one has to yield to living with soul - you cannot pick up the pieces of a broken heart without letting go - it takes an open hand to hold something again. And so forgiveness is possibly one of the only ways through betrayal, through heart ache. The experience of betrayal has in it the seed of possibility for forgiveness, as much as love holds the possibility of broken trust.

Forgiveness is a strange animal, it calls on us to remember with full reckoning, not forget. And to remember in such a way that we cast wide our net of awareness, so we can pull in an understanding of the experience that meta-communicates something beyond an identified feeling.

³⁷ James Hillman, *A Blue Fire* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989), 278.

The blindness of love is also a seeing into some part of who we are. And so in the fragmentation of love overturned, forgiveness may mean turning to the parts of us that we would not own, and befriending them. It is a hard question to ask oneself - how am I part of this, how am I telling this painful story too? To forgive oneself for that telling and then begin the process of opening up to telling something more.

My pattern in my relationship is one of seeking out danger and crisis. It is part of my mythical storyline – to be at the edge, in the crucible of something unknown and fiery. Letting go is not done without discernment. I want to have dangerous exchanges, and that need is powerful and useful. It is how I go about finding that danger that needs to shift. It is to let go of what doesn't serve me anymore in the pattern, the trauma vortex of hurt and pain, and reach for the danger of eye to eye intimacy, to sit in the fire of that and truly feel myself met in relationship.

Clearly without enough heat I get bored. Part of the forgiveness of letting go is remembering yourself, so to remember my need for danger means I let go without losing my nature, finding homeopathic doses of danger in other ways that serve my present story line better. Hold onto what is valuable and shed the rest. There are things we put away in a box, we stow away love letters. Some pieces of heart brokenness get carefully wrapped and stored. Some get buried. Some get cast to the wind.

Letting go requires grace and real acts of grace are free from the expectation of outcome – free from the effect of how the other will respond, what they will say and do. This kind of grace I have seen in a lover past. I was twenty two and intent on leaving my home land, passport ready with a ticket to India. So intent I chose to break from three

years of a good relationship and leave him. In my single fixation he stood by me, his love palpable and strong. On the morning I was to fly out he woke me to get ready, he prepared my favorite meal for brunch, he drove me to the airport and he stood at the separation line with tears running and kissed me goodbye. There was no maliciousness, no pulling at me, no threats or anger, just pure love and blessing and letting go of me. It was grace in action, grace shown to me and I will never forget it. It is a love letter memory I choose to stow away. He showed me what it may look like to love and let go. We remain close and loving friends to this day.

Chapter 4: Envisaging love stories not yet told

“The advantage of emotions is that they lead us astray”³⁸.

Every love story is a right story. Each has its own telling, its own beauty. Some are more painful than others, some evoke us more and some seem to slip away. The issue is not one of needing to tell a story that is right or better than. Rather, it is in participating with the love story you are telling. It is in recognizing that this process of your heart is unfolding in your hands, in your grasp and mouth. You are in the telling of it. To envisage love stories not yet told is to step up to your experience and to stand by it.

After my divorce came through I met someone. I wasn't looking but he was right on my doorstep, literally. He lived a few houses down on my street. At the time of meeting I was thinking love could not possibly emerge for a long time. But he had something, he was different to what I had experienced before. A new love story began to emerge.

As it did, the love stories I had within me made my heart pay more attention. They informed my experience, and not in the way of a dark cloud, but a history, a beautiful legacy of heart. My lover took me into his embrace with a candor, a total enfoldment that awed me. I was brought to my edges and gave me flight. I knew to be with this love I would need to tell this story with presence; to bring myself fully to bear on the page. It was not a question of changing myself as much as realizing that the change was already happening, already a love was unfolding that was different to what I had known

³⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The picture of Dorian Gray* (London, 1891), chapter 3.

before, and that I was part of it, I was a powerful force in the telling of this love. How did I want it to be told? How did I want to live the love that was happening to me? How did I want to love and be loved in return?

To begin examining the idea of envisaging love stories untold, we need to consider what change is, since envisaging is imagining something outside of what we know, being cautious of defining the term change too narrowly, especially since mere polarization puts the term up against the changeless, setting up a fight that will forever cycle. The word change is in part an abbreviation of the word exchange, which means to barter, and in financial terms, change is literally “the balance returned when something is paid for”³⁹. Change is the effect of a dynamic – it is alteration, a verb, something in action. And more so it is the residue, the balance left over from a process whereby something is given and something is received. To play with this idea a little longer, let's consider that change is something that happens in response to a process of substituting one thing for another. To change then calls upon us to give something, maybe give it up or out, to let go of something of worth and value, and alter the balance we have, in such a way as to rebalance anew. For this to work ideally, what is replaced would need to be of equal or more value, considering the natural motive of profit. If change is approached upon these economic terms, it seems wise to change what is necessary, not merely for change's sake, and to go about the business of change with discretion for the value already inherent in what came before.

³⁹ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term-change>

So to begin with what is it that would need to be changed, in other words what is the opposite of change. Although definitions in opposition can be limiting, “often times the thing that least seems like who we are most describes us”⁴⁰. So what we think may need to be changed, may be what we need to befriend more, unfold deeper.

A way through this chasm of meeting what we do not know in ourselves is through crisis. “Crisis enable you to unlearn what you have to let go of and stir up the energy you need to launch yourself into the next phase”⁴¹. It is interesting to look at what crisis means. A simple google search on answers.com gives us a few alternatives, including crisis being a turning point, an unstable condition, a sudden event, an emotionally stressful or traumatic event and “a point in a story or drama when a conflict reaches its highest tension and must be resolved”⁴². Crisis it seems advertises change with a form of marketing that is hard to dismiss. Especially since if you ignore crisis it tends to escalate and generally the escalation makes it worse.

The gem in crisis

I am not assuming that the only way to change is through crisis. But I am positing that real change, meaning transformative change necessarily requires crisis of some sorts.

⁴⁰ Anais Nin, Henry and June: From ‘A Journal of Love’-The Unexpurgated Diary of Anais Nin, http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7190.Anais_Nin

⁴¹ Barefoot Collective, 2009, p. 83

⁴² <http://www.answers.com/topic/crisis>

In organizational development circles change is framed as emergent or transformative, which essentially means that change can either be a step by step process of trial by error learning, or something that is far more chaotic by nature and shifts the foundation⁴³. My interest is clearly around transformative change, and I privilege this type of change because ultimately when change is sought on the level of chronic patterns, it is change of magnitude, and “unless the pattern of resistance itself has been altered, the change remains whitewash and wallpaper”⁴⁴. We don’t naturally tend to seek out change unless we have to. And so, when we are pushed to change it tends to come as a crisis of sorts.

I would like to expand the definition of crisis a little, beyond the hyperbole of negative, since change can come from an attraction as much as it can come from disturbance. Consider the experience of falling in love. There can be no doubt that falling in love changes a person, and that whilst the repercussions of this process may be painful, the initial ‘crisis’ is of intense bliss. Crisis can come in many forms, but what distinguishes it, if we sample some of our original definition, is that the already present status quo is challenged to deeply shift. As is often cited, crisis in Asian culture is another word for opportunity.

Crisis gives an experience weight, impact, intensity. It amplifies our experience and forces us to be a little more aware. This is the gift of being at a critical edge, you don’t need to effort to bring it forward, it is right there at you, all you need to do is find a way to surf the wave.

⁴³ W,Warner Burke, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice* (California: Sage Publications, 2008)

⁴⁴ James Hillman, *Kinds of Power: A guide to its intelligent uses* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 147

Paradoxically, one of the most useful ways to navigate crisis is to relax into it. Though it may ignite our instinct to stop breathing and freeze, to run, attack with heart pumping. Crisis carries momentum like a wave, it will happen regardless, it is happening, and the only choice you have is how to dance with it. So the idea of relaxing into it is choosing the path of least resistance, which isn't a path of least awareness. Least resistance means you have to lean into the discomfort, sit long enough for the process to unfold. In essence it is turning toward the experience and entering into it without efforting - that sumptuous moment when you raise your hands in defeat knowing the process is beyond you, you can't control it, and then still deciding to meet it with all you have. The choice of encountering, how you encounter such an experience is in my mind the freedom we have. Crisis will happen, but we have the choice as to how to respond. The pattern will re-emerge, the battle in our heart will revisit, the trauma will haunt, and yet the crisis can be like a tear in the fabric of being, a window through into something else. The only way I know how to do this is to cultivate the ability to pause, to find the gap, to let the tension be felt but not overtake, to relax enough to remember this moment is what I have and then hunt for the gem in the crisis.

Finding the thread of gold

Within the story is a vein of gold. Such is the old alchemical adage – the pursuit of gold distilled from lead, the distilling of the process. We don't want to get rid of the hardwiring, because therein is the strength, in the fire the phoenix emerges. But first off

the payoff of the story we are already telling has to be explored, because it is part of what keeps the system in place.

By payoff I mean the thing we get from doing something again and again so matter how much suffering it seems to produce. Every pattern has something that keeps us hooked. Whilst the love story we tell may limit, whilst the patterns we engage in time and again may hinder, they also provide us with a basis and strength. We are not only well versed in our scripts we also derive something from the map. Another way to say this is that the pattern cycles because it is not yet complete, completion is trying to happen. So the story gets frozen into a one sided telling.

In Process Work this idea is linked to the concept that a state becomes frozen when the process has not been able to unfold completely. We get stuck, caught at an edge, and so the process starts spinning. As in the symbol of alchemy, the tool used in this framework is to amplify the process, to place heat on the energy, to put fire under it and in this way focus all awareness on the energy as it appears to our senses. With this level of concentrated focus the process starts to melt and unfold. But amplification is only the first step, the unfolding needs to be distilled into an essence. This is the gold. The gold is the essence, it is the heart of the matter, the core, the gist, the quality behind the energy.

So to start we hunt down what makes the pattern nourishing to us, we work out why we keep going back. If we return to my story line of betrayal, I feel used and try to make myself useful; at base the belief is that I am not worth enough to keep love. Yes love may come to me, but abandonment and deceit will soon follow. If we unfold this pattern

a bit more and extract the flow it becomes something like this: I meet someone and love happens, this someone after some time begins to seem emotionally unavailable, starts to be closed, distant, demanding, deceptive; and I feel the fear, pain, the deep gritting hurt of disconnection, the shame of loss though not the fulfillment of severance. So in response what I tend to do is either disconnect fully myself or reach out and try to make things work. I build fences even though I know it is over, I tolerate my lover taking other lovers, I try to find a way to satisfy, to please, I put my needs aside. And secondarily I find ways to assert my freedom, I rebel under the water line. In response, as one would imagine, my lover demands more, criticizes, controls more and simultaneously is less emotionally supportive. This confirms – as happens in the script – the set up of my belief system which convinces me I am not just alone, I am shamed into isolation. The thing is in all of this I get something, but it takes a bit to work out what that is.

When some fire is placed under my discomfort I start to see that I too need my space, I too want my freedom, I am someone who doesn't like to be restrained. My mother will testify to this stubbornness. As will the lovers who caught the flip-side of my pattern – patterns flip in an attempt to give us an experience of the other side. Deeper into this set up is the payoff of forcing me back onto myself and with that a core strength I have, which is the capacity to stand alone. I am not afraid of complete isolation; I am a friend to my own company. I also can live off very little affection and contain my needs. That too is a strength. My one sidedness of being sensitive and caring is pushed into balance as I am pushed back on myself, forced into holding a space for myself. The pattern is trying to unfold. Except the way it happens, the payoff, is a ransom that doesn't truly liberate in the end. It deceptively keeps us stuck like a mafia set up.

To overturn a stone you have to grasp it first. Within my pattern is a part of me that is wild, beholden to no-one, free, but it is forced underground by my desire to meet my partners needs.

As I begin to grab hold of my capacity to stand for myself, even if this means standing apart from my lover, my deeper desire to have a relationship in which I feel met without being overpowered is evoked, and something starts to shift in me. The dynamic starts to lose its charge. The charge is the pull towards something in me I have disavowed, a part of me that hasn't had enough air time in my play. And as I unfold this element the love story starts to get some traction, it stops spinning. A vein of gold in this pattern is my own autonomy.

Some time after my marriage ended I found my wedding ring. For some reason I felt compelled to put it on my hand again. Not on the finger of sanctity, but on my hand none the less. And in my mind it was a wedding to myself, to take the experience I had of losing myself in another and bring it back to myself, wed my commitment to being as close as possible to my own heart. Eventually the ring came off but the symbolic marriage to my own hand remained.

This is just the start of a new love story, always we come to this with a beginners mind, but in it is a gem of wisdom. To tell a new love story you start with what you are telling, you put some fire under the belly of the plot and discover what is trying to unfold, and then you run with it without knowing where the path will take you. But there are sign posts to guide one, a yellow brick road, marked with the aspects of our patterns that hold powers we know and do not know we have.

Encounters with the high and low dream

The idea that myth may be a way through the chronic conflicts we experience brings us into the field of dreaming - in myth something else sings to us beyond the story we tell, something that transcends and points to a deeper story telling. Conflict, the perpetual ever visiting conflicts we face in our core relationships, is the dream door into telling a new story. The myth makes the conflict a window into something else, it gives us a way through. It has given me a way through.

The high and low dream are the seasons in a relationship, the tides that ebb and flow in. The concept is used in Process Work to describe different dream states in a relationship or mood. It developed as a way to work with states that had become stuck, like a heavy persistent mood or an intractable conflict. The high dream is constellated in moments of intense bliss and connection; the low dream in times of coldness, strife, difficulty and hopelessness. Both dreams speak to the relationship myth, and can be seen as extensions of the myth into two extreme dreamscapes. If we can delve into and deepen each dream then the story can become more fluid. If not, the state can become fixed and polarized and we may start to swing from one to the other; the relationship goes bipolar.

To get at what this dreaming may be you ask about the early vivid experience of being together, be it in a dream, event, memory. You begin to uncover the first dreaming, imagery, unusual flirts and happenings that brought love into the equation. The high dream can be used to bring a relationship back into connection with what the vision is.

In the haze of time and built up issues, feeling the high dream can clarify again what you are doing with each other, why you are together. In difficult times the low dream calls for a deepening, this time into the despair. So deep that the quality behind the state starts to become apparent. It doesn't matter which direction you go, what matters is going deep into what the dream is.

Getting connected with the vision behind the relationship can usher in a new page, be it more connection or the decision to part. Love stories contain both and sometimes telling a new love story means ending a chapter with someone, or redefining a new way of connecting.

When I met the man who made my heart sing again, i had my divorce documents in my hand. I entered into a new experience, a door was closing, the low dream I had held was factual. And yet I discovered that within that low dream of total loss, the pain of the severance of a promise to hold each other's hearts, I had found more of myself. I entered into the new relationship owning my experience, less in need of the other to fill my void; I held my autonomy and a new dreaming was constellated.

The new dreaming held fragments of yearning for a partnership in which we could adventure together, a desire to create together, yoga mats parallel, and an affinity of heart. And of course the insecurity too, the fear of loss, the uncertainty of how it would work, if our paths were congruent.

In moments when that low dream gripped I tried to stalk my awareness, hunting the dream for its message. The kind of stalking harnessed in Process Work is one of harnessing a second attention, attending to what is being sniffed at with an attitude of

interest and invitation. So as my insecurity would arise, I tried to do something different, I turned to my lover and told him, I spoke my fearful dreaming and laid it out. And something magical began to happen, the shame lessened (since shame propels the need to hide, the action of concealment), with transparency the threat of discovery no longer threatened. The insecurity no longer resting inside, now outed, spoken, the experience could dream further - and a sharing of vulnerability became love strengthening.

The high and low dream are of the same thread, the same dream, when they can dance the vision of the relationship has a chance. Beneath these dreams is a deeper essential level which hold both, the ether which holds both poles, the earth rootedness that nature offers without reserve. Tapping into the essence behind the dreaming can bring a wise eye to what is happening and offer a perspective to each dream not seen before. Like any practice that seeks to deepen into essence what is asked for is the willingness to connect with something timeless and beyond polarity, be in a place on the earth, a movement, a posture on the mat, a way of breathing, a form of concentration, sitting in a sacred space, a prayer. Whatever method used the idea is to find what lies beneath the dance, connect with the music. From that place the rhythm of the story can be felt, the heart beat.

Who are you really loving?

What is this story we tell when we love? Who are we really loving? Of course it is the other. And we know the other is inside us too. But what does it really mean when we distill the constant self-help call to love yourself. Personally I have found resistance when told I need to love myself. It makes me want to run into the trees. Not because I don't get it but because something in it rings hollow, smells too sweet, seems a little too wafty for my scorpionic attitude to life.

But there is something to it. In asking the question of who are you really loving I am met with my nature as I know it. In the heat of some of the hardest heartbreak I had the gift of mentors tell me to remember that this other, this person who seems to be my entire world, they are not the only world, and though I seem to spin in that orbit totally, with a little perspective I could see that the orbit was much larger. What I was loving, what I love, is a human being that resonates with my heart, who steps into my experience and calls upon me to share myself, and evokes something in me that I am only partially aware of.

It is the face of something but beneath this surface is more. The image I believe I am in love with is a reflection on the water of my awareness. I can only peer so far and then eventually I have to reach into the image, disturb the water, let it ripple and explore what is beneath.

Another way to say love yourself is get behind your nature and do not give it up in relationship. We try to change ourselves for the other as we become absorbed into the image the other person wants for us. We start to try and live it or we fight it. Instead the idea is to follow ones nature and make it transparent, reveal faces that may not sit easily with the image we are ascribed. This means telling the story as you see it, not only as the other may want it, and dropping the commentary of all that we believe we should be, or at least make the commentary transparent so we can have a conversation with it.

An often met character in the dialogue we may have with ourselves as we try to say I love me or I love you, is with our critic. Inner or outer the critic often seems to hold us ransom, with our value in the critics hands determining our worth in the moment. What tends to happen is the critic goes unchallenged. So it is useful, when the critical voice is heard, to step up and question it. Take the wisdom offered and discard the rest. Criticism has value in placing awareness on feedback that might prompt growth, but if unchecked it has a tendency to castrate creativity and usurps our power. In the dialogue of love making we have to also make space for this voice, but do so with a loving embrace for the possible one sidedness the critic may contain.

The biggest change I noticed in me following my divorce was the feeling of not needing another. I wanted to be with someone else yes, to love, but my heart was no longer looking for a filler. In a way the very thing projected onto me in my prior relationship - my lovers need for me to not need him, to be self-reliant, confident, emotionally contained - and the thing that most disturbed me about him - his selfishness and emotional distance

- merged into something that I hold now. The face of loneliness and distance that I tried to love shifted into an internal composure. I move into love now knowing that the one I may love is transient, though I may potentially spend decades with my lover, the face I see and love is a fragment of the wholeness. And with that I am able to give the very freedom I sought. The freedom to dance with me on the page of the love story we are telling, and be part of the writing, knowing that what I am loving is the dance.

The solution is already happening

In Process Work there is an idea that the solution or wisdom you are trying to locate in a process is already happening⁴⁵. In other words the solution is not sought out in history or future proposals. It is tracked down in the moment through noticing the signals of change, of something wanting to unfold, in the process already underway.

So in the story we tell we are already telling a love story of change, transformation, shifting. We are envisaging new maps of love as we walk the heart territory we know. It is in the seeing, the mapping of the ground , that the possibilities emerge.

This means you can find what you are looking for in what is emerging now. As I understand it the story goes something like this: Arnold Mindell (the founder of Process Work) was in a session with Marie Louise Van Franz and she in traditional Jungian analytical framework asked him about his dreams. He, being a physicist, challenged this

⁴⁵ Arnold Mindell, *The Dreambody in Relationships* (Portland: Lao Tse Press, 2002).

notion with a question as to why she could not uncover his process in what he was presenting in the moment. Essentially – as I see it – he was calling on her to speak to his process in the moment and not refer to a dream or something past. Mindell's work led into a signal based tracking of uncovering the unconscious by noticing very precisely what is happening to the client in the moment. Basically he put forward a case for the idea that we don't need to get historical, or futuristic, rather we can locate what we are looking for in what is happening in the moment. The trick is to look for the solution on the sidelines.

If we think back to following the disturbance, it is all about becoming conscious of what is on the margins of awareness, specifically the stuff that tickles us in a way that doesn't feel so comfortable or conversely in what turns you on. In the same way, finding the solution is about noticing and bringing awareness to the less known part of experience, because when we are caught in an identity we can get one-sided, which means our wisdom becomes linear - what is less known is the side that has answers to questions we might not even know we are posing.

Coming at life from this angle compels an attitude of studying yourself, your story and your relationships with a curiosity that wants to notice the things we don't usually want to notice. And do so with the knowing that the solution lies therein, wisdom is waiting to be unfolded. But stalk your awareness with the attitude of wanting to know more about what you find. It is easy to locate something and turn it into a demand, a criticism, a finding that is hard to digest. Instead we track with the smell of hunting, and the hunger of willingness to taste whatever we find.

In stalking my awareness, in this writing, I find myself at the ending of a chapter in the midst of a love story unfolding. As it emerges so to do the edges of all I bring to the story I tell. And yet, in the heart map I have is a belief in malleability, that the fire in me can spin and unfold into new stories, love stories that have their own wisdom, if I can just give them a chance to live.

The love story will outlive any form or skeleton, we are story telling animals with heart. Let us weave out stories of love as artists, partake in the telling. And perhaps the story may stretch into a telling, a verse, a declaration, a poem, a touch, a love making, a pursuit, a longing, and more - into the fires of passion and the com-compassion that spins this world.

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