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Dying to Be an Analyst

Elizabeth Schofield-Bickford

This article is a personal exploration of the symbol of the scorpion, a rather unloved, kept in the shadows aspect that lives in us all. I will discuss my encounter with the scorpion and its impact on a transitional time in my life. The symbol of the scorpion is amplified using dream material, myth, science, and astrology. The article also amplifies and invites readers to explore the tension of the time when the poison becomes the medicine.

This article is a personal exploration of the symbol of the scorpion. In Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works*, Jung writes, “The symbol provides the expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other way. It is pregnant with meaning and is a living thing as long as it continues to hold that meaning” (1971/1921). This article is a work in progress, something that has been moving in me and wanting my focus. An experience I had with a scorpion wanted to be worked on. It was last year after the North-South Conference (an annual meeting of the San Francisco and Los Angeles Jung Institutes that spans more than 50 years) that I had a Snapple Diet Peach Iced Tea and the underside of the bottle cap revealed Real Fact # 733, “All scorpions glow” (Figure 1).

Even with the appearance of this interesting Real Fact #733, could I risk bringing this personal work to the surface, of being referred to as the woman who presented on the scorpion? The Scorpion Lady. On the other hand, could I not? Winnicott said, “It is a joy to be hidden and disaster not to be found” (1990, p. 186). Part of me would like my experience with the scorpion to stay hidden, yet it must be found.

The paradoxical pull of wanting to remain hidden with needing to be found is challenging for me. When I searched “paradox” in Ladd’s *A Concordance for Jung’s Collected Works* on the ARAS website, I found, “A paradox is an affront to the logic of consciousness, so it is a deliberate defeat for the rational ego. Paradoxes point to the Self.” I chuckled to myself at the poignancy of the statement. Over the years, since beginning the training program to become a Jungian analyst at the institute in Los Angeles, I have chuckled often in this same way, usually after suffering at the lucidity of the truth revealed to me in the moment. The implication of paradox and living with the tension produced brings my anxiety to the fore, and retreat and humor are often the artillery I have at hand. In the course of my training at the institute, my defenses have been exposed and made more conscious and are continually in the process of being stripped away. As a by-product, I live more closely to paradox and I admit, I don’t like it much while needing it at the same time.



Margaret Nielsen, *Deer One*, oil on canvas, 30 × 48 in., 1983.



FIGURE 1. "All scorpions glow."

The urge to write about the paradoxical nature of the scorpion comes from deep in my psyche; it is an invitation to integrate my darker aspects that I have long disowned. I had never considered the scorpion as a significant symbol for me. Scorpions almost always conjure repulsion and fear in me. Who would consciously choose such a thing? Anybody? I am still not entirely comfortable uttering the word, as it incites images of the thing itself. Scorpions conjure associations of evil, darkness and death for this "once-upon-a-time" Catholic. How could the scorpion make its way to such a "good girl" like me? Scorpions are stealth predatory arachnids that come out at night, cannot stand the radiation of the sun for long periods of time and are fierce predators that are well armed with pincers and poisonous venom. They are things to be avoided at all costs. It's one of those creatures in a group with leeches and ticks, whose existences I can neither justify nor grasp. I avoid the scorpion terrariums at Pet Depot, passing by them with a surge of anxiety to look at the turtles or fish in the next aisle or whatever else may feel less scary. What could they have to do with me? It is time to find out.

Since I began the training program, it feels as though something has been dying in me and I have been grieving in the psychological exfoliation that is part of the program for me. The encounters with the Self and the defeats suffered; the continual confrontation with my complexes; the exposure and slow prying loose of my persona; the

loss of my mother in November 2017; the loss of time spent with my children as a result of being in the program as well as their growing and moving away from the family in a variety of ways, the most pressing being my son's cross country departure for college in the fall.

In *Man and His Symbols*, von Franz says,

The Self can be defined as an inner guiding factor that is different from the conscious personality and that can be grasped only through the investigations of one's own dreams. These show it to be the regulating center that brings about a constant extension and maturing of the personality. But this larger, more nearly total aspect of the psyche appears first as merely an inborn possibility (1964, p. 162).

A week before my meeting with the Review Committee in the spring of 2017 in which I was applying for advancement into control, I had a dream. For the purposes of this paper, I take up only a small portion of the dream.

I walked into my bedroom and on the left bedside pillow was a black scorpion (Image 2). My son (who was 15 at the time and in the dream as well) went to it unafraid and picked it up by its tail and put it on the ground. My husband and son were both on the ground guiding the scorpion, keeping it in a small circular area on the ground and being careful not to hurt it or get stung. The scorpion gets past them and makes its way to me. I am seated on the ground ready to receive it, guide it and keep it close. At the last minute in a panic, I stand up because I am afraid.

I awoke from the dream with a feeling of dread. "Oh no," I thought to myself. I was horrified that my dream had a scorpion in it at all. I hate scorpions!! I thought, "This cannot be good." I was frightened and angry at its symbolic meaning. "This is awfully bad timing for a symbolic death and transformation," I thought to myself. I wondered if this could be about my upcoming meeting. The appearance of the scorpion felt like an imposition to me, "Oh great, now I gotta deal with this." I was a brat about it, caught in a combination of good girl and puella complexes that had a hold on me and made the scorpion very difficult for me to look at with all that defensive inflation going on. The dream had to shake me up to get my attention, and it did just that.

The bedroom in the dream was my parents' bedroom in my childhood home. The bed itself was mine and my husband's from our present home. Thinking of my parents' bedroom, I was reminded of a mysterious and significant event took place in that room when I was an infant. As my mother tells it, I was napping on my parent's bed. My mother came to check on me and it seemed to her that I had stopped breathing. The doctor was called, he came to the house and "revived me" according to my mother. It seems I was unresponsive to her, the subject of another paper. This story was told by my mother many times over the years. "We almost lost you," she'd say. Could that have been my first scorpion sting, as an infant? This scorpion energy is old and part of my history, an ancestral piece perhaps, passed down to me to absorb and transform. My mother's shadow has become my own. My mother's unconscious attitude toward her own darkness, anxiety and depression begs me to look at it.

In the dream, I was afraid for my son and thought he was being reckless in his handling of the scorpion. He was cautious in his approach and surprisingly skillful in his manner. My husband was unafraid as well. They were fine. I was afraid, taken over by the anxiety and repulsion at the presence of the primitive, venomous shadow embodied



FIGURE 2. Scorpion.

by the scorpion. I was too afraid to confront consciously what my animus, portrayed by my son and husband in the dream, was sending my way. I did not want to be stung, to be changed by it, to pick it up. I didn't want anything to do with it. I couldn't openly take up the gift offered to me (Figure 2).

Then, the night before my control advancement meeting, I was watching a program called "Peaky Blinders" about a criminal gang set in England in the 1920s. It's quite a violent program. One of the set pieces was an elaborate nightclub called "The Eden." I was struck by this image. A huge scorpion was on the mat of a boxing ring that was in the center of the club. There was blood on the mat of the ring and a man, the owner of the club, seated in a chair. When I saw this, I thought, "Uh oh!" And I had a disturbing intuition that my meeting was not going to go well. Here was the scorpion again. As the camera pulled back, it revealed that the theme of the club was indeed, the scorpion. I tried to shake it off but couldn't. It stuck with me ... to me. I wanted to turn away and "unsee" it. The next day just before my meeting an internal light switched on and I was hijacked by the thought, "This is not going to go well." I tried to let go of this thought, but I couldn't get the scorpion image out of my mind.

My meeting was a *mortificatio* experience I felt rotten, dead and tortured. I know that I am not alone in my experience and that dying and deadness are necessary for my process. I did not pass into the Control stage of training. I needed the time to turn the scorpion's poison into medicine. Paracelsus, the fifteenth-century physician and alchemist observed, "All substances are poison. There is none which is not a poison. The right dose differentiates a poison and a remedy." I would need to expose myself to the scorpion in order to learn what dose would provide the remedy for me.

The writing of this presentation has aided me in part of that process. In hindsight, I wish I could have brought this material into my meeting with me at the time. I would have benefited from the receptive, engaging and skillful animus in my dream. In keeping the dream hidden inside of me, I was protecting myself from a sensed attack from

what might happen if I exposed the dream and its revelations about me. It is difficult for me to let others know how sensitive and vulnerable I am. It gives them a kind of power I'm not sure I want to give. In leaving the scorpion out, I lost the connection and opportunity that bringing the scorpion into the room could have generated. All the same, a scorpion was constellated in the room and I was stung, penetrated.

The scorpion contains the symbolism of the opposites of life and death, for it has the strange quality that when completely cornered it is supposed to commit suicide... my father was once sitting at night with some friends in a temple in Japan when they saw an enormous scorpion walking along in the moonshine... they made a ring of fire round it, and the scorpion actually killed itself with its own tail. Because there is no conscious meaningful suicide in nature, the scorpion has attracted this projection of knowing the secret of killing and renewing itself... (von Franz, 1977, p. 103)

Did I sting myself or was I stung by what I projected into the committee? I felt paralyzed by the sting and grew cold as I was unable to gather the words to maintain my point of view in the meeting. I watched myself sink below the surface as I retreated into a familiar kind of autistic consciousness, without a voice, unable to relate in the room. I took offense at the truths that were being revealed in the meeting. What an urchin I became inside. I crashed to the ground and backed away under a rock and was slowly dying, initiated into the depths by the transformative energy of the scorpion.

As much as I hate to say it, that meeting was the "right" meeting for me at the time. There wasn't another meeting I could have had. I prepared for my second advancement meeting after a year of living more closely to the shadows exposed by contact with the scorpion. Two days before my meeting, I was sitting with a patient in my office. I noticed that the page on my yellow notepad on the table next to my chair was full and needs to be turned to the next page. I flipped it over and on the very next page were notes I had taken on the scorpion in a meeting with a supervisor. This time, I welcomed the reminder to take the scorpion in with me and not to leave it behind. I felt that I had nothing to lose. That same evening at home after a full day of seeing patients, an image on my Pinterest feed appeared. I don't check on my Pinterest feed often. I usually send notifications to the trash without looking at them. But on this day, I had received an email with "Suggested Pins for You." And there it was on my phone, a tattoo image that I had tried to find a few months prior and was not able to locate. Synchronistically, it found its way back to me. Now, I was compelled to follow the image. I felt that I had to confront the actual thing itself. I had to look at it, try to meet it as best I could. It was clear that the scorpion had a message for me. For me, images pave the road to words. So, I began the journey with gathering images first. I had to take in the images before I could begin writing (Figure 3).

At over 420 million years old, scorpions date back to the Silurian period. That's about as primitive as you can get. They are likely descended from marine life and are in the same class of Arachnida with spiders and mites. Spiders I could live with; mites, I'm not so fond of. There are over 1750 species with 25 species known to have venom capable of killing a human. Venom is comprised of numerous neurotoxins, approximately forty-nine. Each is used to paralyze and/or kill different prey. Scorpions are cloaked in a tough exoskeleton that reflects ultraviolet light and is excellent protection from predators. They have eight legs and those unmistakable pedipalps, or pincers, that hold the victim long enough for the scorpion to discern how much venom to inject into its prey, if any at all. If a scorpion determines that its prey can be managed and held with its

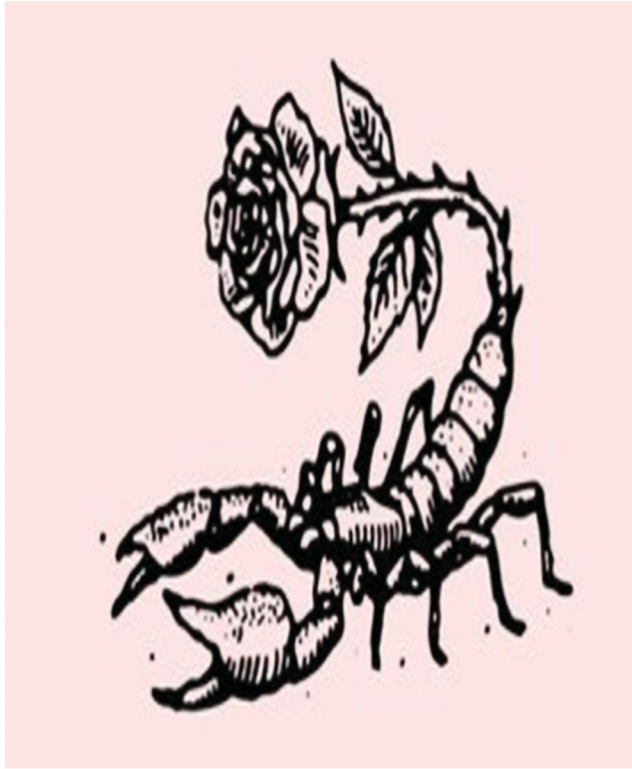


FIGURE 3. Tattoo.

pincers, then no venom is used to paralyze or kill. It just begins dining without the use of anesthesia. Scorpions are carnivorous and feed externally by spitting up enzymes that dissolve the prey so that it can be taken in in liquid form.

Scorpions have adapted to a wide range of environmental conditions and are found on every continent with the exception of Antarctica. They did not occur naturally in places such as Japan, Ireland, Britain and New Zealand but trade and commerce managed to introduce scorpions almost everywhere on the planet. They are hardy and adaptable, with the ability to survive where other animals cannot. Some are able to survive underwater for forty-eight hours. They can live up to 20 years if they don't fall prey to bats, owls and snakes (Caspari, 2003).

The segmented tail, the metasoma, is probably the thing that sends many people packing when a scorpion is nearby. The tail is made up of five segments. At the furthest end of the tail is the telson, the stinger. The sensitive hairs on the scorpion's tail and pincers help it to navigate. In addition to these hairs, comb-like structures called pectines are sensory organs located on the scorpion's underbelly just below the sternum. Scorpions have poor eyesight in spite of two eyes on top of their body and an additional two to five pairs along the front of the body near the mouth. I found it interesting exploring these "sensing" aspects and how the scorpion is so well equipped and able to navigate. Their physical form points to their heightened sensitivity with the adaptations of pectines under the body and the many hairs that document and help them understand the nature of their reality. All these attributes of the scorpion call to mind my own inferior sensation and it strikes me that this is part of the scorpion's gift to me, the awakening of a sleepy sensate.

The scorpion mating ritual resembles a wrestling match. Males take the females by the pincers and a battle of strength and will takes place. When the female relents, the male deposits sperm on the ground and drags the female over it. This image calls to mind the tension of the opposites and the possibility of the healing power of the scorpion for me, filled with creativity and engagement. Cannibalism is not out of the question for scorpions. Occasionally, a male scorpion could be a snack after a romp on the jungle floor. The gestation period for scorpions can be as long as eighteen months with a brood of up to one hundred babies. Young are born alive and climb up on the mother's back after birth. They will be carried by their mother and will set out on their own after their first or second molting, usually 10 to 20 days (Caspari, 2003).

Scorpions are attentive and caring mothers. Scorpplings are fed, transported and protected from predators by the mother. However, mothers will eat their babies if enough resources cannot be found or if the mother becomes stressed out. In the Near East, the scorpion was a symbol of motherhood. The Scorpion goddesses of Egypt, Serket and Hededet are adorned with or accompanied by scorpions. Both are conflated with Isis at varying times and each goddess differs slightly in her incarnation.

Hededet is known for her protective and motherly qualities and is often depicted with a scorpion on her head while she nurses a child. Serket who is more widely known is associated with the first dynasty and is one of four protective deities that guard coffins and canopic chests and the overseeing of the embalming pavilion. Serket protects, watches and supervises the preparation of the body for the afterlife. She is endowed with the sting of death and its antidote. She fulfills the role of the mother goddess in which she was called, "Serket, the great, the divine mother" (Wilkinson, 2003, p. 235).

I heard this passage taken from *A Clearing of Enigmas* at a recent lecture given on Alchemy by Pamela Power at the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles on March 9, 2019. It called to mind Serket's duties.

The embalming process included a bathing of the corpse in soda-lye. The word natron comes from the Egyptian word n-t-r which means god. By soaking the corpse in god-liquid it was, so to speak, deified and immortalized. Step by step the corpse was transformed into a shape of 'eternal' matter. This immortalization was simultaneously a complete regeneration of the dead personality; a rebirth not out of the womb of a woman, but out of Nun, the primordial waters of the universe... (von Franz, 1999, p.11)

This segment deepened both my understanding of the alchemical aspects of the scorpion and of their importance. It also calls to mind the liquifying of prey the scorpion must do in order to take nourishment from its food.

The full form of her name, Serket hetyt, means "she who causes the throat to breathe," life-giving and life-ending (Wilkinson, 2003). I think about my breathing episodes. Was the scorpion goddess in my parents' room when I was an infant and stopped breathing? Or when my 7th grade teacher Mrs. Davies called me up in front of the class to find the Fertile Crescent on a spinning globe? I was mortified as I struggled to find it. After what seemed like an eternity, she stopped the globe and pointed it out. I walked toward my seat and passed out on in the aisle a few feet from my desk. (Maybe Serket is here with me as I struggle to regulate my breathing during this presentation.) What is dying and being reborn in this moment?

Camunda, the Hindu goddess of death and destruction associated with the scorpion, is a form of Durga, the Mother of the Hindu Universe, and represents one of the Seven Mothers. She is the source of life and the bringer of death. Camunda is decorated

with skulls and serpents. A scorpion crawls up her belly. This figure would usually have four arms and a weapon in each hand. In some depictions of Camunda, her fingers are mysteriously held up to her lips, perhaps as an indication of her association with poison and her power over death and rebirth.

Camunda serves also to inspire new life in her devotees: in numerous traditions, meditation on the face of death and destruction as symbolized by her can result in the recognition of the limits of the ego, which is tied to the individual, mortal body, and this can lead to a new orientation, that is, to a spiritual rebirth. (Moon, 1997, p. 163)

This was my experience after my first control advancement meeting.

These scorpion goddesses inhabit the Fertile Crescent which is often called “The Cradle of Civilization.” It is a crescent-shaped area in the Middle East from the Persian Gulf through modern day Syria, Jordan, Israel and Egypt. It is thought of as the birthplace of agriculture, writing, trade, science, history and organized religion. This is the area I couldn’t find in Mrs. Davies 7th grade social studies class. In *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann says, “The death-underworld aspect of the goddess generally known as Ishtar is often symbolized by scorpions. The giant griffins with the scorpion’s tail may be dominant beasts of a Great Goddess of Tell Halaf, (in ancient Syria) who encompasses the darkness of the heavens and the underworld” (1955, p. 216). Mushhush is a griffin with the head of a viper, the front legs of a lion, the talons of a raptor and the tail of a scorpion. The first image is from Babylon, circa 575 BCE. The image below is an image of Mushhush, the figure that has graced many of my sandtrays in my personal analysis. They are identical. When I discovered this, my heart raced. I felt like I had found some ancient lost treasure, precious to me. The feeling I have when I spot this figure on the shelves of my analyst’s office is one of childlike glee. There is something wondrous and awesome about the figure. It’s so unusual and strange looking but to me it seems friendly. As I reflect on this, I understand that the terrible aspects of the Great Mother have been wanting my attention for longer than I had imagined. She has been there, waiting for me, to integrate these pieces (Figure 4 and 5).

Scorpio is the eighth sign of the Zodiac and it carries with it the meaning of utter destruction and renewal after self-destruction. “The geometry of Eight is symbolically connected to the archetype of the mother goddess in both her light and dark aspects. It is the constant, infinite, imploding and exploding cosmic breath of living spiritually where the ego operates in service of the Self” (Eastwood, 2002, p. 157). The constellation is associated with more than one version of a Greek myth. According to one myth, Orion boasted that he would kill every animal on the earth. Artemis and her mother, Leto, sent a scorpion to kill Orion. The scorpion won the battle and Zeus put the scorpion in the heavens. In another myth, Apollo grew angry and sent a scorpion to attack Orion because he claimed to be a better hunter than Artemis. Zeus put Orion and Scorpius in the sky, but they are not visible at the same time of the year.

In my research on Scorpio, I came across the Twelve Labors of Hercules. The tough lessons that Hercules labor teach are some of the lessons of Scorpio rising, dying in order to awaken. “We rise by kneeling, we conquer by surrendering, and we gain by giving up” (Rocks, retrieved online). A confrontation with that which is dark, hidden, destructive and taboo in my own nature is what the scorpion demands. The way for me to confront these inside of myself was to come into the training program. Unfortunately, these unconscious dark aspects are met in the external world in precarious places like committee meetings and within the Self, in the form of destructive and



FIGURE 4. Mushush tile image from Ishtar Gate in Babylon, 575 BCE.



FIGURE 5. Mushush in sandtray.

obsessive emotional states that can plague my psyche—including episodes of greed, envy, jealousy and the desire for power.

When I was younger, in my early teens, my rapid-cycling bi-polar older sister was into astrology. It was the 70s and astrology had gained popularity. I have Scorpio rising

in my chart. I remember my sister making a face and saying, “Oh God, Scorpio, they’re intense, secretive and mysterious. They never show their feelings.” At the time, I resented her negatively slanted comments about my intensity. After all, she is one of the most intense people I know. My entire family danced around her illness for years, and as a teenager, I was unable to shield myself from the impact of her psychotic intensity, the subject of another paper. My association to the sign of Scorpio became tainted until this paper in which the exploration of Scorpio’s influence in my chart has brought clarity, self-understanding and freedom from the unwelcomed knowing of my sister.

My primitive emotional states can pull me down. Astrologer Damian Rocks says, “Like the Hydra, such emotions can only be conquered through submission, which means aligning the self to something greater than the individual. If not released, these states seethe and fester within the psyche, exploding from time to time in a powerful and destructive force.” Picking up the scorpion from my dream leads me here. A brutal encounter with the Self that eventually generates self-compassion is good medicine.

As synchronicity would have it, I recently attended a workshop at the LA Institute on “The Archetype of Time: Imaginal Exploration of the Moment of our Birth.” This workshop deepened my understanding and relationship to the ascendant Scorpio in my chart and its ruling planets, Mars and Pluto, the gods of war and the underworld. At one time, my associations to Mars included raging men armed with spears and massive wrestlers struggling to take opponents down. Rust blowing on the surface of a dry red landscape. No life, no moisture. Mars has 15% of its iron in the surface soil. At one time, there must have been great amounts of oxygen in the atmosphere. The presence of highly-oxidized iron gives the planet its red color.

But, let’s not forget that symbolism is also a physiological fact: the blood is red because of the iron in it! The main ores of iron are pyrite and haematite. Haem means blood and pyr means fire-blood and fire ... Within the human body the fire-energy of Mars is seen in the metabolic process. Iron has a key role in the combustion processes within the tissues of the body, whereby food is turned into energy. In this process, which never ceases while life is present, there is the restless energy of Mars ... (Kollerstrom, para. 6)

I imagine a cluster of cells that begins to differentiate. The drive to survive, to push through, maintain, stay the course on the voyage of life. I imagined Mars as a stage in each person’s development. This fueled my imagining of what may have been accessed by the doctor the day he came to our house to revive me on my parents’ bed. Could it be that the Mars in me was resuscitated? I certainly needed Mars to survive in my family. I have a better understanding both of the part it plays in my psyche and of the fallout if I am unable to embrace its potential. Pluto is small but mighty. In 1930, when Pluto gained recognition as a planet, it was designated to rule Scorpio along with Mars. In perpetual darkness, Pluto is the farthest planet from the sun. This planet governs the reproductive system and is about transformation, regeneration and rebirth. It governs the underworld and things hidden from view. The god of the underworld, Pluto represents what is buried deep inside, the shadow, what we would like to remain hidden and most often, the part that needs to be worked on. Pluto and Charon, one of Pluto’s larger moons named after the figure who ferried the dead across the River Acheron to the underworld, rotate in orbit with the same hemispheres facing one another. I am still wondering how it is that this fact grabs me so, that Pluto and Charon never look away from each other, they orbit together. They seem to look after one another.

At first, I had no association to Pluto. Then I remembered an acting exercise I did at the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute in New York, New York back in 1986. We called it “The Animal Exercise.” Students had to inhabit an animal with their body. We worked slowly and methodically, from the inside out, on the weight and position of each limb of the animal as it moved, chewed, stretched, walked, etc. I was exploring, letting my body find the animal it wanted to work on. I found myself skipping with a rag doll-like quality to my limbs and a kind of dopey vocal quality. I called the character, a dog, Pluto. I am not and have never been a Disney fan. I wasn’t aware of the Disney character named Pluto. Remembering this inner character, my inner character, feels significant to me as it relates to the scorpion.

After presenting a version of this paper at the 2019 North/South Conference in Santa Cruz, I was asked by several people if I had ever done standup comedy. I found this amusing and curious, and mildly annoying. I was not trying to be funny, it came naturally. I really wanted to be smart and academic, something that is really not my nature, the academic part that is. I felt the audience was with me and I decided to go with it. God forbid! I have been shamed around my sense of humor often in my life, but especially by the acting teacher who taught the class that did “The Animal Exercise.” She would often tell me that I was hiding behind my sense of humor. Well, maybe I was and maybe I do. And still, here is Pluto, the god of the Underworld and the name of my imaginal dog being written about in the same paragraph. What could the god of the Underworld and my Pluto have in common? I mean, aside from me? How am I serving them both? In reflecting on this, I am reminded of a subject I have been drawn to for a while, the fool. The fool that lives close to the darkness of realities of life. The fool is the only one who can deliver truth to the king in many instances. Perhaps my Pluto has returned to reintroduce me to this idea. I have a connection to the emergence of things in me that have been quieted and kept in the shadow, my nature, including the sense of humor that I relegated to the depths all those years ago. My Pluto has been held in the underworld.

Thinking about my nature and the nature of things, this fable comes to mind.

The Scorpion and the Frog

A scorpion and a frog meet on the bank of a stream and the scorpion asks the frog to carry him across on its back. The frog asks, “How do I know you won’t sting me?” The scorpion says, “Because if I do, I will die too.” The frog is satisfied, and they set out, but in midstream, the scorpion stings the frog. The frog feels the onset of paralysis and starts to sink, knowing they both will drown, but has just enough time to gasp “Why?” Replies the scorpion: “Because it is my Nature.”

I read and reread this fable of the scorpion hitching a ride with a frog and I wanted the story to end differently. I wanted to be pleasantly surprised by the scorpion and have both creatures make it across the stream safely. No such luck. The initiation into the darker aspects of life and the unconscious is not easily borne. The meaning of the story is clear: creatures (including people) will remain true to their natures, in spite of external influences. The frog takes the scorpion at its word, poor thing, and agrees to carry the scorpion; there is really nothing in it for the frog. The scorpion will remain true to its nature and sting the frog, even though it is treated with trust and kindness. Regardless of our wishes, or even our intentions, it is to our Nature alone that we will be true. (This story is most likely not an Aesop’s Fable. It is most likely a version of one of the stories in *The Fables of Bidpai*, first translated into English from the original

Sanskrit in 1570. It is believed that the fable goes back to 200 BC and may be a part of a collection also referred to as Panchatantra.)

On this journey, I discovered surprising medical applications of scorpion venom. A unique approach in solving the problem of flying blind during certain brain surgeries: fluorescent molecules, attached to naturally occurring toxins, including scorpion venom, that attach to the cancers and light them up. The so-called Tumor Paint, developed by Dr. Jim Olson, is currently working its way through clinical trials. It hinges on molecules, found in nature, that can occupy a unique niche in the body's chemistry. Knowing that venom and other neurotoxins operated by bonding to structures in the brain, a team experimented with extract from a deadly scorpion called the deathstalker.

While Tumor Paint is classified as a drug, because it's injected into the patient, surgeons described it as more of a tool, something extra to aid in surgery. When Tumor Paint enters a patient's blood stream, it makes its way to his or her brain, and to the tumor. The Tumor Paint seeks out cancer and grabs onto it. By embedding a fluorescent particle in the paint, Olson and his team are able to make tumors light up under infrared laser light, making the tumor margins easier to identify. (Infrared is invisible to the eye, so surgeons still have to operate via a screen, but that is common, says Olson (2019)).

This Tumor Paint research was of particular interest to me because, in 2010, I was diagnosed with a cerebellopontine angle tumor, a benign brain tumor. While my diagnosis was not as grave as others and my 28 fractionated radiation treatments shrunk the mass inside of me, I couldn't ignore the synchronicity. As I lay down for each daily four- to seven-minute treatment, my head attached to the table by a mesh mask that inhibited any movement, my focus came to rest on a small red round light attached to the ceiling, a Mini-Mars of a sphere. I don't know if it had a purpose in the procedure, but it became a place for me to release the trappings of my writhing ego. I have taken my body for granted for many years. When situations of disability and impairment come about, the fear of helplessness and restriction is unbearable. These challenges have become the catalyst for experiencing surrender and learning to open up to trusting others. When I asked my doctor about the radiation beams and the possibility of their causing cancer, she said to me, "Well, if there is cancer in the beam's path, it could speed the growth of that particular mass." I thought what the hell? Talk about antidote and poison.

So, for a few minutes each of the twenty-eight days that I was fixed to the table, I had imaginal conversations with this Mini-Mars. I told the light how scared and angry I was and that I hoped it could help heal me and stop this thing growing in my head. The light was comforting to me. It was constant and I projected a healing nature into it. I gave myself to it. I began to wonder what this light may have seen. Who else may have lain beneath it? Other victims of the scorpion? I imagined the suffering, the pain, the egos held hostage in the body without escape, the thrashing before the surrender and the softening toward death. I imagined it must be hard for the light to witness all this. I thought that the light may be furious. I know I was at times. I felt companionship in the light; it held me as I transcended the fear. Over our 28 encounters, the Mini-Mars periodically morphed into HAL 2000, the computer from Stanley Kubrick's (1968) film, *2001* and I wondered if the light would dream.

In China, dried scorpion is used in traditional healing of rheumatoid arthritis, epilepsy and pain reduction, and is sold on the street. The psychoactive principle in the scorpion's nature is no secret to ancient cultures. In Afghanistan, scorpions are dried



FIGURE 6. Scorpion pose in yoga.

and smoked as a substitute for opium. There are street vendors in India that will sell a scorpion sting; it is known there that after the pain wears off, one can experience well-being and euphoria for up to 10 hours (Hopkins, 2014).

Another way the scorpion comes into human lives is through yoga. The scorpion pose is one of the most challenging. In his book, *Light on Yoga*, B. K. S. Iyengar, the founder of Iyengar yoga states:

The head, which is the seat of knowledge and power is also the seat of pride, anger, hatred, jealousy, intolerance and malice. These emotions are deadlier than the poison, which the scorpion carries in its sting. The yogi, by stamping on his head with his feet, attempts to eradicate these self-destructing emotions and passions. The subjugation of the ego leads to harmony. (1995, p. 388) (Figure 6)

So, I have been cooking with the scorpion. Amplifying the symbol of the scorpion has proven to be an alchemical journey. The sting is painful and the benefits are numerous. The scorpion in my dream is an expression of the Self—the Self provides the antidote for its own poison. In this way the scorpion may be seen as an alexipharmic, *alexein* meaning “to ward off” and *pharmakon* “poison,” similar to an antidote or

panacea. The black scorpion in my dream brings both poison and antidote that shed light on experiences in my past going back to infancy. This is certainly more than I bargained for when I began this exploration. I suppose looking into the unconscious is always more than we bargain for, for better or worse.

The scorpion reveals much to me: the dark aspects of The Great Mother, my personal mother and myself; it illustrates the moody, stubborn and prideful sides of the puella; and the toxicity of a good girl gone bad. My feelings of fury around my mother's maternal shortcomings were exiled, and I carry aspects of her shadow. My good girl and puella complexes are shades of my mother's unexamined life. Much had to be sacrificed, to die in me, in order to carry my mother's shadow. This is what I am invited to engage with. So, in following the scorpion, much has died and been reborn.

I grew up in a chaotic household and much of my childhood was spent internally trying to look away from darkness in my ancestry with its mental illness and addiction. I had no one to mediate the darkness for and with me. Early on in life, my intuition made me feel anxious, lonely and strange. Insight and understanding that I had as a child for others' suffering and pain were not valued. In my adolescence, I grew to hate my own resilience and strength because it aided in my being a pillar of my family at too early an age, the subject of another paper. Some positive aspects of my shadow that were cast off and folded in with shame are more held and welcome since the work on this paper. I feel more connected to my deeply intuitive and feeling nature, and to my gravitational pull toward the darkness, my intensity and my stealthy acerbic wit are less hidden.

A case comes to mind. I work with an eight-year-old girl, Zoe, whose recently diagnosed schizophrenic father is in jail for matricide. She has not yet been told the details of his disappearance. She believes he is away for work. I wonder what aspects of her father's shadow Zoe will carry. She has been using crosses, churches, snakes, skeletons, grave-stones, spiders, scorpions, coffins and wolves in the sandtrays that she has been creating in my office. A few months ago, she threw a gathering of scorpions, skeletons, ladybugs, flies and snakes in the tray, then she quickly scooped them up from the sand and threw them on my chair. She needs me to sit with/on these things until she is ready. I am incubating, perhaps hatching them for her until the time when she is ready to meet them.

Since working on this paper, she has done a tray that was more organized with three scorpions in it, two black and one purple. The two black scorpions threaten a nearby Pegasus. Are the scorpions ready to sting this beast that has the capacity to generate watery springs with the clap on its hoof? The purple scorpion is next to a grim reaper figure. Both are dangerously close to a baby warrior/buddha figure. They seem to be provoking the young warrior/buddha figure who is in a karate "ready" stance. What is at risk of being stung and transformed in Zoe? Perhaps her innocence, the image of her father, her relationship to her paternal grandmother. The scorpions have moved from my chair back to the free and protected space of the tray where Zoe's psyche is free to work on these scorpions and the symbolic nature they hold for her.

A number of meaningful things happened while working on this project. One of my best friends died. He was very important in my life and I will miss him terribly. While I was writing this paper, I had a dream that I gave birth to a baby; my son and husband were present. The baby was wrapped in an African or South American native fabric. Two weeks later, I had another birth dream in which I am wearing a white doctor's lab coat and delivering my own baby. I have never had two birth dreams so close together. I can't ignore the synchronicity that touches me so deeply.

In the *Book of Symbols*, it says, "All this is essential to the mysteries of death and rebirth, letting go, and becoming, for which the scorpion is anciently famous. Thus, the

alchemists are said to have celebrated “scorpion time,” when base metals turned into gold” (2010, p. 218). Sharing this work has been my “scorpion time.” Death and rebirth, embodied. Cycling through again and again.

I recently had a session with a patient who was wearing a necklace with a pendant of a real scorpion encased in resin. I saw it. I had to check. Breaking the therapeutic frame, I asked, “Is that a real scorpion in there?” “Yes,” she said proudly. “I lost it for a while and found it recently. Isn’t it great?” I stumbled a bit, fumbling for words. I looked at it with childlike envy and excitement. I thought, “How come she has a scorpion necklace and I don’t?” I wanted a scorpion necklace too! I calmed my coveting inner child and said to her, “Yes, it is great!”

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