

Becoming Woman

A Journey Toward Fullness

BY CARRIE GROSSMAN

Several years ago, a friend called to tell me about this new guy she was dating. “Our relationship is totally different from anything I’ve ever experienced,” she said. “I’m not sure how to explain it, but I feel like a woman with him.”

Who knows why, but her words touched my heart, and suddenly I wanted to feel like a woman too. There was only one issue: I had no idea what that actually meant.

Woman—a gorgeous word, so full and round. But how many females truly contemplate its significance? In a culture that offers few coming-of-age rituals to honor the maturation process, how many of us even know when we have crossed the threshold from little girl to young lady to fully bloomed woman? Is there a rule-book that says when we have ripened into our womanhood? Do we step into it all at once or come into it gradually, like a fruit that blushes and softens more with each passing day?

Surely, there is no hard and fast answer to this. How could there be? For some, menarche marks a turning point in a girl’s relationship with her body, an initiation into the wonder of her sacred being. For others, a sexual encounter, pregnancy, or experience of profound heartbreak ushers her into more fullness. Whatever the catalyst, one thing seems certain: becoming a woman is a journey that has no end. After all, what is a woman but the feminine mystery in form? What is a woman but the shining expression of Shakti? Can anyone define her depths?

In truth, woman is a koan who cuts through conceptual mind, for the feminine cannot be known through logic. While on some level, gender may be socially constructed, the essence of woman is unnamable. Unfortunately, most girls aren’t taught to honor themselves body, mind, and spirit. This dishonoring leads them to believe that their worth must come from outside, instead of from within. Society further entrenches this view by objectifying



women and applauding them for being attractive, above all else. Little attention is given to the beauty of a woman’s heart, which yearns to be celebrated and seen.

Although the soul is neither male nor female, perhaps incarnating into one’s sexual essence is part of the soul’s expansion into greater love. Yes, perhaps the soul that shines within the body of a woman longs to fully feel her feminine grace. This has been my experience, at least. Deepening into my womanhood has been a sacred journey into the great unknown, a journey that continues to unfold. Though I don’t *really* know what a woman is, beyond the limiting realms of biology, sociology, and psychology—beyond stereotypes—the inquiry itself is a meditation. And the inquiry itself is what I love, for what could be more beautiful than diving into the mystery of oneself?

In my ever-evolving exploration, I have come to believe that—in her completeness—a woman is something to aspire to, much like a holy virtue. She is a chalice who comfortably holds all opposites: child and crone, virgin and vixen, saint and shrew. She has made peace with polarity, and understands that light and dark are consorts that entwine inside her very own

being. Like musk from a deer, her sexiness emanates when she rests in her authentic self.

To me, a woman owns her stuff and knows how to hold it all with tenderness. She doesn’t turn away from fear, but embraces it. Though painful at times, her sensitivity is the most beautiful quality in existence. Sometimes she feels strong and sometimes she doesn’t; either way, it’s okay. She hungers for truth even when it slices her heart, and understands that life only wants to open her to more of her magnificence. When she feels ugly, ignored, and small, she knows that there is radiance underneath, powered by an intelli-

gence that is far beyond the mind.

Yes, she has stories about herself that may be false, but she works to witness them. Unlike the girl who gets lost in a narrative, she goes inside the story then moves beyond it. She gets that this world is an illusion held together by the secret yarn of spirit, but she doesn’t deny the beauty that is here. Though on the surface she may appear soft, in her core she is stronger than a diamond. Of course she forgets this, but there are plenty of opportunities to remember. She is brave enough to meet pain *and* pleasure fully, without closing down. It’s not always easy, but who said it would be?

Once in a while she feels desperate for something that has no name. It’s not always comfortable to be with that feeling, but when she really surrenders, a door opens to the infinite. She knows she doesn’t need a partner to be happy, yet she still longs for one because the fire burns her awake. At times she feels full from the inside, and that fullness spills out of her in the form of light. She wants to give that light to someone resonant, for she knows there is nothing more sacred. When love is shared in deep communion, it blesses the whole wide-open world.

A woman's heart is full of rain clouds, shedding tears for the suffering it sees. She carries a weapon called compassion, though sometimes she forgets to wield it on herself. The wilderness lives inside her body, and so does a ferocious lover who is hungry to be claimed—maybe by a man or woman, maybe by the wind and stars. She's not afraid of her yearning; rather, she dives into it.

When she gets caught up in her habitual tendencies and feels like hiding from the world, she understands that it's the child inside who feels scared. This child gets lost in her fears and can't see beyond them. She wants someone to make things better, and she blames the world for how she feels. But these old stories don't scare a woman. No. A woman holds her little girl and says, "Don't worry, darling. There's room for you here." She knows that her patterns are like masks she hides behind, and one day those masks will fall away because she is destined to discover her original face.

Injustice enrages her, but she uses that blaze to illuminate the darkness. She knows that woman has been ignored for far too long—her soft heart squashed and her body conquered. This violence is imprinted in her energetic field as a collective, unconscious grief and rage. Sometimes it rises to the surface, and she feels an intensity of emotion that does not belong to her. Though it may hurt, as she feels this pain, she helps to heal an ancient feminine wound.

Now and then she messes up, but mistakes are a perfect part of the path; what matters most is recognizing them and being humble enough to apologize. When life knocks her down, she feels the earth. Maybe she weeps, but then she plants her anger in the soil and rises up reborn. She values kindness and tries her best to forgive. Usually, it doesn't happen all at once, but that doesn't matter. She stopped trying to "fix" herself long ago; now she lets life fix her in its own invisible way. Now she allows her heart to ripen effortlessly, without force.

A woman is an enigma embodied, a delicious paradox. She has but one desire: to let life ravish her ever-more deeply into her true nature. What more could she possibly want? 🐦

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