The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine Study Guide

The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine by Sue Monk Kidd

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

THE DANCE OF THE DISSIDENT DAUGHTER is writer Sue Monk Kidd's memoir of her odyssey of feminist rebirth, shaking off the chains of patriarchy, learning to embrace her feminine soul, and telling the world some badly-needed truths.

Sue Monk Kidd, a successful freelance writer of articles for Christian publications and lecturer on spirituality begins to feel constricted by her Southern Baptist faith and examining earlier mystical traditions and liturgical churches leaves her feeling left out as a woman. Husband Sandy is a Southern Baptist minister, religion teacher, and college chaplain. They are married 19 years when Sue's quest begins. Sandy is not rigid or authoritarian, never demands that Sue "submit," but he initially resists her journey based on non-verbalized fears about what will happen to their relationship.

Sue's quest begins slowly when she sees herself giving birth to herself in a dream. At a retreat, she embarrasses herself by introducing herself as Fr. Sue. In the forest at the monastery, Sue builds a Big Bird nest and begins nurturing her Feminine Wound. Feminist works of art, ancient and modern, move her and inspire her to study. She takes time off for a spiritual retreat, which Sandy resents. She learns much and pours out everything when she returns. Sandy surprises her by saying he has realized how he has been defending the status quo and excluding her experience. Sandy's transformation takes years of reading, questioning, and struggling.

During the quest, Sue sometimes wants to run away from what she sees but cannot. At a Jungian retreat, she watches dancing women by the sea but cannot join in. At best, she touches a turtle shell - and turtles become a powerful and recurring force in her life. Sue studies patriarchy critically, discovering how systematically and subtly it creates in women a gaping inner hole. Sue fills with both fury and fear but feels stuck in place, until she is energized by seeing two men laughing at her daughter Ann stocking toothpaste on her knees. Sue moves forward for herself, for Ann, and for all women.

Sue feels at home in a circle of trees, learns to dance, to make rituals, to open herself to myths, to face off internal patriarchal voices, and to bury them. She opens to the Divine Feminine, overcomes the Judeo-Christian taboo of speaking of Goddesses and feels her consciousness expanding to connect to the whole earth. She achieves peace with male-dominated Christianity as she sees hopes that the feminine can achieve balance. Sue begins to heal and yearns to bear brave witness to the world. She becomes one-in-herself. Sue is happy for all she has gone through, before and after reconstruction. That someone or something always appears when she needs it makes her grateful.

As the book ends, Sandy is driving them home from dropping off daughter Ann at college. Sue has left Ann a note encouraging her to develop as a woman and always speak the truth. Sandy asks Sue what she is mulling over in silence and hears a cogent summary of her six-year quest. Never before has she thought about it so systematically. Over the next two years, she writes this book, and leaves readers with the message: "She is in us."

Part 1, pgs. 1-28

Part 1, pgs. 1-28 Summary and Analysis

"Awakening" opens with author Sue Monk Kidd rebuking two men standing over her 14-year-old daughter Ann stocking toothpaste. They laugh about women belonging on their knees. Sue's struggle with how women are treated in the culture has been stalled, fearing self-discovery, but uttering her "declaration of intent" makes her feel like a newborn. Sue is a full-time writer, married for 18 years, raising two adolescent children, attending church regularly, and uncomfortable with the word "feminism." One night two years ago she dreams about giving birth to herself, alone on an island, and gradually sees that she must rethink her life as a "man-made" woman and reclaim her soul. Eight years later, she is ready to share the experience of rediscovering the "Divine Feminine presence." All assumptions must be cast away, which takes time. Sue begins a new journal.

Sue needs to shake off the stereotypes of the "good" Christian woman, wife, mother, and daughter. She has reading beyond the Baptist tradition, but all spiritual and mystical writings are written by males, and in visits to monasteries and Eucharists, women may not say the words most natural to them: "This is my body, given for you." When Ann at age eight asks why Baptists ordain no women deacons, Sue recalls at the same age being shocked when a Vacation Bible School teacher concedes that God makes males "the head." For years, Sue has been a prolific writer and speaker, addressing an audience remote from feminist spirituality. She sees that she has been in "Deep Sleep," about what the subordination of women does psychologically and spiritually.

Later, Sue labels her state as "Unambiguous Woman": putting male authority figures at the center of her life and accepting to be secondary. She is not outwardly submissive, but lives with no "inner authority," behaving as male-sanctioned. When she reminds Sandy of a planned retreat, he grimaces, Sue shouts and stalks away, unable to explain why she is a jumble inside. When Sue tries to "get talkative" with God, his maleness puts her off. She needs to ally with the "Sacred Feminine": that which keeps a woman powerful and grounded in herself but connected to everything. Sue wishes she had heard about this earlier, so she could have seen that she is on a natural, genuine path; she might not, however, have allowed herself to embrace it.

Studies show that girls lose feistiness in adolescence and begin deferring to boys. They sleep numbly but see fitful glimpses of the fearful truth. They grow perfectionist but feel powerless and overwhelmed. Nothing in the way that women are treated has gotten through to Sue. Statistics upset her, but lead to no action. Only pain can prompt the beginning of the journey, and this comes during a routine monastery visit, when she embarrassingly introduces herself to her spiritual director as Fr. Sue, and she suspects that her way of being a woman is masculine. In the morning, Sue walks in the forest and impulsively gathers a Big Bird-sized nest to hatch the rest of her life. She sees that she must forgive herself for not being born male. Sue recalls at age 12 hearing Eve called

"second in creation and first to sin," as a Baptist preacher diagrams authority: God → husband → wife → children. This prepares her to hear, 25 years later, feminist tenets.

Part 1, pgs. 28-59

Part 1, pgs. 28-59 Summary and Analysis

The "Feminine Wound" is a major theme in the book. Feeling that she is the only woman who feels it, Sue tries to avoid facing up to it by diving into the holiday season. She senses that being female is not inferior, but inferiority is so consistently pressed on women that they absorb it by osmosis and the wound enlarges. Recently, friend Betty tells of seeing a family in which the father takes the son to the edge of a rushing river but the mother forbids the older sister to approach the danger. This is how girls learn to "hang back." A 1991 survey shows that as parents and teachers expect less from girls, girls "dumb themselves down" to be less threatening. In church, it is no better; in Bible stories, women support heroic men, sermons stress nonthreatening female roles, and it does no good to hear the scriptures "explained away" because feminine pronouns are missing from hymns and prayers.

Television and movies reinforce that women are supposed to take care of men. When they enter the workforce, women must still keep the house, face ceilings, and see silenced women around them. The Feminine Wound comes when women internalize the message that they are secondary. It is also inherited, part of Jung's "collective unconscious" in which thousands of years of rejection dance with conscious beliefs. New mothers thus apologize to their husbands for bearing a daughter. Recognizing that the Wound is a pivotal moment in a woman's growth, and acknowledging that victimization exists is not the same as identifying oneself as a victim. When women see how society devalues and limits them, the old securities and identifications disappear and they can courageously forgo prudence. This becomes Sue's path in the new year.

Sue refers to the "Winter of Resistance" in which she battles the new consciousness, not expressing the pain lest she become accountable in a new way. Sue is a "slow unlearner," for lack of teachers. Unable to banish her awakening, she trivializes it, comparing the Feminine Wound to the environment, crime, war, and homelessness. The first time that Sue objects to women getting a "rotten deal" and is called a "screaming feminist," she drop s the topic like toxic waste, but sees how negative stereotypes brand and discredit women and force them to back off. The church uses this technique to maintain the status quo. Sue attends a mixed-gender retreat at which a male clergyman admits the church makes mistakes but one must forgive and move on. Two women gently oppose him, one asking why the church cannot repent and change, and the other inviting him to look up from the bottom, where women live excluded. He sees what she means.

During the spring, Sue grows less prudent and dreams about earthquakes and floods. In May she attends a Jungian retreat for 40-50 women on St. Simon Island. Sensing a "now-or-never moment," she accompanies them to the beach for a full moon celebration. Sue is appalled at talk of the "Great Mother," but is mesmerized seeing them dance and play, loving their womanhood. They venerate a huge sea turtle shell as

source of support, wisdom, and strength; as they leave, Sue surreptitiously brushes her hand across it. Sue describes this to Betty, a friend of five years, and they begin to meet regularly to name their wounds and sacred realities. Going to another woman is a "breakthrough act," because women are programed to turn to men for solutions and insight.

To name is to "define and shape" reality, an exclusively male privilege, benefiting male needs and oppressing women. Sue spends the summer acknowledging and expressing the Feminine Wound, painting painful, startling pictures as deeply buried emotions surface. Acknowledging wounded feelings brings relief. It is like Toto pulling back the curtain on the Wizard of Oz, revealing his behind-the-scenes manipulations, and allowing Dorothy to mobilize and oppose him. Sue paints women without feet, mouth, or hands, and wonders at the mutilations. She finds a picture of a handless Virgin Mary and realizes that Mary comes closest to representing the feminine "side" in Christianity, but is a humble, submissive virgin. Sue recalls spending the night in a Catholic home and being pulled to a statue of Mary, fa forbidden fruit. She wonders now if her painting suggests reclaiming feminine divinity, but tucks this away as too bold.

In late summer, Sue burns her drawings and sifts the ash, thinking about unnaming everything and defining things for herself. The psyche compensates for a wound much like an ankle: remolding tissues, favoring the other side, changing the posture. Seeing that women "buy in" to cultural oppression, becoming "good daughters to the cultural father," Sue looks hard at her own daughterhood. Seeing a René Magritte painting, Sue wonders how "Everywoman" is created. Are women handed cultural "scripts" to live out on a male-designed set with males playing the heroic roles? Do they merely paint by numbers out of belief that Eve is formed from Adam's rib. Sandy moves on, unable to see Sue's fascination. She has said little about her awakening to him, so he is surprised to hear herself proclaiming feminism. When he seems to give permission, Sue gets loud and Sandy rails back at being the target for pent-up anger. Such volatility is common during awakening, and male resistance is rooted in the fear of change, of women "turning the tables on them." Men must be invited to become part of the quest. As Sue contemplates "Tentative de l'Impossible"she sees the man holding the brush as one's cultural father from whom one seeks validation. She begins probing her "feminine scripts."

The script "Gracious Lady" dates from Miss Belle's charm school, learning to be "female impersonators." In the film Fried Green Tomatoes, Evelyn Couch is a "Gracious Lady," proper, passive, and meticulous until she attends a feminist meeting at which they explore their vaginas with mirrors (Evelyn makes a non-offending exit) and Mrs. Threadgoode tells her about a firebrand girl, Tawanda, who breaks every social rule. Evelyn rams her car into one that steals her parking place, shouting "Tawanda!"

The "Church Handmaid" script comes from thrice-weekly attendance at Baptist services. She visits her childhood church, trying to recapture a slipping attachment to faith, but sees that she has outgrown this empty goldfish bowl. She feels like a seafarer before people know that the world is not flat and considers the Episcopal Church as a "larger fish tank," but cannot face Sandy and the kids. She continues attending the Baptist

church, hearing masculine pronouns and feeling a non-entity. Women run nurseries and social halls but not pulpits and places where theology and policy are defined. Why are the loyalest members and greatest consumers sidelined? The hymn "Faith of Our Fathers" crushes Sue: a male Supreme Being vests all authority in males. Suppressed tears flow.

"Secondary Partner" is how Sue feels watching Sandy sleep. She misses the women's movement while attending church programs that promote male authority, where women are like planets circling the sun. Sandy is not rigid or authoritarian. They have both inherited a model in which a woman may have home and career but find fulfillment only in husband and family. Males assume that they are entitled to come and go as they please, but if the wife has to go to a conference, they must discuss how long she will be gone and how he will cope. Sue does not become merely a "woman behind the man," but does look to Sandy for approval, validation, and identity. She recalls the movie Shirley Valentine, where a 42-year-old housewife with grown children visits Greece - against her husband's orders - stays, blossoms, and when her husband comes to fetch her, he fails to recognize her. Watching Sandy sleep, Sue wants to find her "unused life," but has qualms.

"The Many-Breasted Mother" is an image that comes to Sue watching a story about a dog nursing her pups and a litter of orphaned kittens. Women are trained to be vulnerable to the needs of others. Virginia Woolfe describes having to kill the self-sacrificer within. Sue says that this must at least be disempowered and is uncomfortable at needing to be "The Favored Daughter." As a child, Sue excels in everything, hoping God will forgive her for the "original sin" of being born female; as an adult she is a perfectionist, worried about not measuring up. She meets another Favored Daughter who recalls going to a ballgame when her brother gets sick; her father is disappointed when she fails to grab a loose foul ball and she spends her life sure that she will mess up everything

Finally, "The Silent Woman" script comes to Sue as she recalls her sketches and reflects on all that she has stifled. How has she internalized the message of inferiority and found safety in silence? Bible verses calling on women to be silent and submissive play a part, and the "uppity" have love and approval taken away. As Sue begins to feel that her creative voice is confined, she reads the myth of Philomela, raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, and banished to a life of silence. She weaves tapestries to tell her story and is liberated. Against much resistance, women's truths are coming out and causing the world to split, but many women, still weaving their tapestry of stories, are fearful.

Part 1, pgs. 59-83

Part 1, pgs. 59-83 Summary and Analysis

A year after her first dream, Sue's awakening is too fragile to reveal but she begins forming a "Feminist Critique" that confronts her with "Patriarchy," the basis for Western civilization, so pervasive that it is as invisible as polluted air. Patriarchy is first of all "Hierarchical," descending from God through males to women, children, and nature (with embedded sub-hierarchies of race, culture, and economics), accepting dominance and dependence as natural. Hierarchy gives rise to "The Great Imbalance," whereby the masculine is valued above the feminine. In tribes where weaving is done by men it enjoys high prestige, while where it is done by women it is low. A woman proposing to a church committee something sees it tabled as unreasonable, but later a male gets it adopted.

Greater value is placed on male experiences than female ones: "Head over Heart." Psychologists confirm differences in how the sexes make moral choices: "web model" (interconnections and central relationships) vs. hierarchical (autonomy, individualism, and competition). Both sexes contain both qualities, but their socialization differs. The problem lies in the valuation that patriarchy attaches to supposedly male traits over female ones. Trying to picture a culture where valuing is equal, Sue meets an old woman in a T-shirt calling for the military to hold bake sales and the PTA to get the Pentagon budget. Sue sees humanity owing its survival to "subversive women." Like the Tin Man in The Wizard of Oz , patriarchal society's heart is cut away by a "cursed ax."

Another imbalance consists of "Spirit over Nature." Males supposedly are spiritual, heavenly, and transcendent over nature, while females are sensual and earthy, perhaps because of their monthly cycle, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and caring for the infirm. Nature is being raped and disregarded and the church stands aloof, seeing the earth as fallen and matter inherently evil, to be conquered and studied. The earth is just a "way station" to redemption in the Father's house. Womanhood is too "visceral" for patriarchal religion. The Bible shows womanly conditions as unclean and needing purification before they can touch men. Women cannot be both holy and sexual; they are temptresses.

"Despair and Compassion" strike Sue as she drives in town thinking about her new awareness and sees an unknown woman weeping on the steps of a business. It makes Sue weep for weeks over the Feminine Wound - which is truly a human wound. Critiquing her own faith tradition is painful, but deposits powerful energy inside, which flows out either as love or hostility; one must work hard to have it flow toward compassion. Sue sees Christianity's rigidity about women as a "Tamper-Proof Bottle." Tradition is supposed to deliver dogmas, rites, and practices from generation to generation, but the church is doing too good a job of perpetuating patriarchy. Sue begins reading feminist theologians to see if there has ever been a time when women

are equal. Sandy agrees with one writer that Jesus is a feminist, showing he embraces the ideal, even if he cannot relate practically. This is better than lip service.

Sue finds in early Christianity two traditions about women: Jesus' revolutionary, egalitarian practice, which preaches liberation and mutuality, and the continuation of the pre-Christian patriarchal approach. By 200 CE, most Christian communities accept the anti-feminist Letter of Timothy into the canon and women are silenced. When Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire, women find salvation only in marriage or virginity. Sue studies the Bible for passages about women and is shocked to find only 111 women among the 1,426 people named in the Old Testament (slightly better in the New Testament) and the prescription clear: women bear children in pain and desire their husbands. They are made for man. Millions consider this inspired and required. Sue wishes Gal. 3:28, where Paul talks of no male or female in Christ could have been the rule. She is agitated to see shocking statements about women appear in all ages of Christianity. Augustine is the worst. A male God sends a male savior whose legitimate representatives are all male. Women must be marginal. It is sobering.

A picture of Eve being tempted by a serpent makes Sue think about woman being blamed for evil in the world. Reading has showed her that in antiquity, snakes symbolize female wisdom, power, and regeneration. Frequently they are companions to the Goddess. Reading this taboo word, Sue recoils irrationally. Thousands of years of repression and conditioning are being women's reviling of the "Sacred Feminine," and it is hard to reprogram oneself that it is just a word. Something clicks, and Sue studies how the snake comes to embody evil in Jewish and Christian tradition and represents Satan in the origin myth. Could patriarchy be discrediting the Feminine Divine? The Eden story floats in humans and informs their vision of the world. The fight over the ERA and Civil Rights is full of references. Why does Yahweh put enmity between Eve and her Feminine Source?

Sue feels deeply betrayed by the Christian tradition she has served and is aware of anger. It rises slowly, because she keeps it contained. Being afraid of the power of anger, the church equates it with sin. For most of her life, she has refrained from anger as gracious ladies do, taking refuge in depression. She grieves helplessly over what has been and is being done to the feminine soul. She wants to give herself permission to get angry, and it comes while having lunch with a recently ordained female minister, who is told to remove her earrings before officiating, so as not to call attention to her sex. Sue gets furious at all injustices to women, realizes that anger is a "justifiable response," and releases it consciously more often, and stops being depressed. Betty lets her rant and she fills her journals. She sees that anger can provide energy for constructive behavior.

Sue is surprised to find an ancient, patriarchy-free source within herself. Sue's turning point comes when an old woman, who comes to personify feminine wisdom, premiers in a dream. As she points at the Baptist church steeple, it turns into a rocket, and the numinous power tells her it will not take her where she wants to go. The woman is in Sue's mind when she sits ina pew hearing the preacher talk about the Bible as the Christian's "sole and ultimate authority." Everyone nods approvingly, but Sue wants to

shout "no!" She is guided by her own soul. The church has a stake in keeping people orthodox, so the independent-minded are scary. Sue is scared contemplating leaving her security zone, but knows her female soul needs to get out. How many times can she betray her soul before it stops calling to her? Sue slips out early, feeling like she is drowning. Looking at the steeple, she identifies the woman in the dream with Wisdom in the Bible, telling her she is fighting her own soul.

Needing to trust her Feminine Wisdom, Sue joins the Episcopal Church. It is a last-ditch effort to remain orthodox. She plunges it, enduring the patriarchal elements and enjoying the beauty and sacredness. She cannot for the children's sake challenge the whole institution of Christianity without becoming a "bad mother." They accept her move and eventually, with Sandy, become Episcopalians. Sue hopes her awakening helps them find inward wisdom too. By summer, however, she feels restless and alienated by masculine liturgies and longs for an appropriate feminist sacred environment. A male priest tells her such thoughts are "counterproductive." She keeps attending services until the dam breaks and she cannot accept a wholly-masculine Power of Being. She is frightened.

Sandy sees that something is on Sue's mind and tries to get her to defer to his wishes and drop the feminist thing. Sue feels like Cinderella's sisters in Anne Sexton's poem, cutting off toes and heels to fit the shoe. Sue learns later that an awakening feminist usually causes a marital explosion and worries about the risks. She hears that flies sealed a long time in an aerated jar do not try to escape when it is opened. They are safe and life outside does not exist. Sue identifies and struggles to find the daring and energy to fly. She has in two years "survived a landslide of awareness," and knows she must go forward or backward. That is the weekend when she sees Ann on her knees in the drugstore and she leaves the jar for all daughters everywhere. She follows her inner flute.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary and Analysis

"Initiation" picks up in winter, shortly after the "catalytic" day in the drugstore. She has a vague sense of entering a new phase, but does not know that women seeking the Sacred Feminine experience must first make the "Great Transition." Attachment to the confining patriarchal world must die so a new mystery can rise inside. Following one's "soul-path" is painful but alluring. Sue knows she belongs on it but does not early in the winter know the intensity to come as the girl-child conceived and birthed in her during awakening grows rambunctious and grows into the woman she will be.

As Sue and Sandy spend New Year's Eve quietly reading, Sue is struck by the image of an unexplored gorge and pictures capturing herself like a unicorn, a symbol of woman's deepest center. Sue coordinates a retreat with a February speaking engagement in San Francisco, but Sandy asks her not to go. Sue longs for a marriage where paths allow an unconditional sharing of soul, but neither can hear the other's cry. For weeks Sue feels like she is dissolving, not knowing if what she is attempting is possible. Sometimes she panics and daydreams of regressing, but flies to California. During the flight, she catalogs all she is losing. Years later, she visits Crete with fellow feminist journeyers, and enters total darkness in the Skoteino Cave. There, she remembers this flight, when she connects with the Goddess of the Dark before knowing her name and the importance of receiving light from other women. Contemplating descent as the plane prepares to land, Sue flips nervously through a magazine and sees a picture of a circle of trees with sun striking the center. She wishes she could disappear into the magazine, into this container holding and nurturing. Sue prays for the first time to "Mothergod."

After her speaking engagement, Sue stays in a cozy bed-and-breakfast. The sense of isolation becomes dreadful, but she does not attempt to leave. She feels the "awful abyss" between shattering and new reality, and pictures herself as a windsock hanging empty after a gale. She weeps over risks to marriage, career, daughterhood, and religion. Her view of the Divine has expanded, but casting off familiar symbols and "salvation through male saviors" is hard. She begins saying goodbye to the woman she has been. Crossing the gorge, she longs for shortcuts, but now knows a wise woman would have told her to live in the moment. In a Sumerian myth, the Goddess Inanna sheds one piece of clothing at each level of her descent into the underworld, arriving naked. There she is turned into a piece of meat, hung from a hook, and resurrected as a woman. The days at the inn are Sue's meat hook and she is glad to be off of it - but is also glad to be present in her life, despite the sense of loss and unmeaning. Holding onto the circles of trees helps.

Sue sees a group of Chinese Americans performing tai chi, with the lone woman, elderly, resembling the woman of her dreams, boldly improvising and ignoring the rest. Sue feels inward energy rise and allows her new feminine consciousness to be born, regardless of sacrifices. While the descent continues for many months, the fear lessens.

Sue notes: awarenesses and processes usually recur, with women owning them more fully each time. That afternoon, Sue briefly visits the Mercy Center in Burlingame and sees a replica of Leonardo da Vinchi's Cartoon of St. Anne. Anne's lap seems like a sacred space, a place of containment and embrace where a woman could be born. On the flight home, Sue remembers the picture and thinks about Sandy.

Sandy hugs her at the airport, she details her experiences, and he surprises her by showing that his consciousness is awakening. Sandy's transformation takes years but is awesome. He reads, questions, and struggles to live an "egalitarian and feminist vision," returns to school to become a psychotherapist, and counsels couples undergoing change. In the beginning, Sue is uncertain about the marriage they have imploded and are re-creating without assumptions. In April, Betty accompanies Sue on a speaking trip, and at a lake they create an impromptu ritual and ask the Feminine Divine to welcome, guide, and bless them. Sue goes on to create many rituals and does not understand how they alter her consciousness - but they do.

Weeks later, Betty and Sue are driving when they happen upon the Springbank Retreat Center. Sr. Kathleen shows them around this place that embraces the creation spirituality of Matthew Fox and honors feminine and Native American spiritualities, ecology, and contemplation. In the chapel, Sue is struck, seeing the Cartoon of St. Anne and feels pulled into the Great Lap. In July, Betty and Sue return for a weekend, and while hiking in the woods, find a circle of trees, which Sue finds even more startling. Sue walks around, touching the trunks, and feels the embrace of nature. Betty too is touched. Digging up two stumps, they realize they have removed a dead patriarchal tree and reclaimed feminine ground, and create a large white stone altar.

That night, by flashlight, Sue and Betty instictually home in on the circle, build a fire, and like the women on the beach two years earlier dance with untamed energy, leaving exile and coming home. Feeling freed, Sue recalls lodging once with a retired couple and being horrified to see the man drown trapped squirrels. When he is at church, she gleefully releases them. It is a holy thing for women to free themselves of inner trappers. In the woods, Sue feels free of patriarchy. They dance until they fall, satiated but vibrantly alive. That night, Sue dreams of two beneficent red snakes and awakens feeling reunited with this "lost and defiled symbol of feminine instinct." A woman's initiation includes many crossings of the threshold into regenerated feminine consciousness, and each woman finds her own way to cross over. She knows she is on the right trajectory.

In September, Sue crosses another threshold by entering Jungian analysis with a female analyst. She dreams of labyrinths and a bare-breasted woman with snakes wound up her arms. Sue becomes a sleuth, seeing archetypal meanings in libraries. She discovers that in Minoan Crete until 1450 BCE the culture worships a female deity and honors women. The labyrinth is a dominant symbol. Sue is struck by pictures of two ancient statues, bare-breasted, flounce-skirted, each with snakes, and marvels how they get into her dreams. Jung explains that pre-patriarchal human history resides in the collective unconsciousness and can be unearthed in dreams. Sue studies the myth of Ariadne. The extant myth is created under patriarchy in the 7th century BCE and

reflects a female response to the male takeover of Minoan culture, but its earlier layer, before Ariadne is downsized from a "Most Holy" supreme power to a "Daddy's princess" but can be seen.

Studying Ariadne, the princess playing her role in the old king's realm, Sue deals with her own daughterhood issues. Sue pictures Ariadne confined in the palace, her moment of escape "ripening," when Theseus arrives to free Athens from the curse of having every seven years to provide seven sacrifices to Minotaur, a man/bull that lives in the labyrinth beneath King Minos' palace. Ariadne falls in love and wants to be taken away when Theseus leaves. Sue identifies key liberation moments in her life but knows many women cannot find the "heroic, freeing energy" within and unconsciously project it onto a male. Breaking this spell is essential to taking up an autonomous life.

As Theseus enters the labyrinth to kill the Minotaur, Ariadne extracts a promise of marriage and removal from Crete before giving him a ball of thread to unwind slowly and lead himself back to the surface afterwards. Before patriarchy, the labyrinth is a symbol of the divine womb, turning Theseus' return a rebirth. A woman's journey through the labyrinth is a dismantling, a gradual sloughing off, of everything she has blindly followed in collusion with patriarchy. At the core is one's feminine soul and the new life she brings consciously back into the world. Sue is still dismantling on New Year's Eve and worrying about abandoning her success as a Christian author and speaker and starting over. She dreams about seeing herself in a coffin holding the inspirational magazine with which she has just signed a contract. Sue is on the cover. It takes two years to become official, but Sue breaks then with her old kind of writing.

In the myth, the Minotaur, half-man and half-bull lurks beneath King Minos' palace, but in older feminine versions, Minos is the Moon Bull personified in the Minotaur, bullying, hampering, and destroying women's lives. Sue sees the Minotaur in the judgmental inner voice that most recently tells her she is capable only of "Christian" writing. Jungians see this as the "inner masculine"or "negative animus." Sylvia Plath calls it a murderous, tempting "demon of negation." Women must recognize this impulse toward dominance and self-hatred. When the Minotaur feels threatened, it holds on tight and appears frequently in dreams.

Sue dreams regularly about a patriarchal figure she calls "The Bishop" because of his garb, who orders her back into line and to be quiet., and destroys her writings as the Bishop of Constantinople does the poet Sappho's in 350 CE. The Bishop reminds her she is "just a woman." When The Bishop appears, Sue tries to "bring him to consciousness," where she can challenge his authority. Once, Sue is shut up in the Bishop's house needing to vomit, but he forbids it. Following her analyst's suggestion, Sue re-enters the dream, grows antlers, tosses the Bishop across the room, retreats to watch his house collapse - and vomits. The picture makes Sue laugh and depression leaves. Sue learns that the deer is associated with Artemis, Greek goddess of independent women. Sandy gives her a pair of antlers that a friend finds and she hangs them, thankful for Sandy's growing support and as a reminder of the strength it takes to break the power of patriarchy. At Springbank, Sue and Betty give patriarchy a symbolic funeral, lest The Bishop come back in some other form of "Father knows best."

During a cold weekend at Springbank, Sue plants bulbs in the circle of trees, feeling how wounded her feminine life is, struggling to recreate her marriage and having to explain herself to people. It seems like she will be in this "dying" phase forever. Planting the daffodils, Sue thinks about Aridane's saving thread, which is also "the umbilical cord of the Goddess," and woman's wisdom, intuition, and voice, and imagines it spinning out from her solar plexus. Sue calls the energy taking her to fulfillment "Big Wisdom." In the woods, Sue sees that whenever she refuses to pick up her thread, she gets lost and afraid; when she is loyal to it, it guides her. Sue and Betty are one another's "permission giver," prodding and encouraging one another to go out on limbs - literally and figuratively. That spring, they ritualize the labyrinth by laying hundreds of yards of textile thread along the trails in an inward spiral to the circle of trees, in order that night in complete darkness to follow it trustingly. When they finish, independently, they contemplate their deed in a circle of blooming daffodils.

Near tears, Sue tells her analyst that she must end her Christian writing but does not know how she can. She is like a belligerent child on the first day of school, having to be dragged. The analyst says Sue must write out of her Self, not her ego. She is outgrowing the old way. Sue has always wanted to try fiction but has not dared - and cannot now be sure she will succeed. The analyst turns sharp, asking if she has anything to say to her generation of women. This unlocks Sue's creativity and a voice within tells her to write her personal story, without concern about selling it.

The "Many-Breasted Woman" begins decaying, as Sue sees her children's lives are theirs to live without oversight and or management. The "Secondary Partner" has been dying as Sue and Sandy renovate their marriage to the point that he says nothing about Sue and Betty going to New Mexico to tramp about in audacious hats. The "Silent Woman" unmuzzles herself as Sue goes before a conference of 500 church women not with a standard speech but truths about the Feminine Divine. The night before she dreams about Nefertiti long beautiful neck and laughs in the morning about sticking her own out. Many denounce her as "dangerous" to her editors, but she takes this as a compliment and overcomes the loss of support and approval. She no longer frets over the "Church Handmaid" as she opens to the presence of the Divine Feminine.

In June, Sue and Sandy fly to London. In the National Gallery, sue is captivated by Titian's painting of Ariadne on the island of Naxos. After slaying the Minotaur, Theseus takes Ariadne as far as Naxos and abandons her. The painting captures her reaching for his departing ship and looking back to see Dionysus, come to console and love her. Sue paces excitedly in front of the painting, sure that she is on the verge of finding wholeness and assuming authority as a woman. Seeing Sandy watching her in a funny way, Sue realizes she does not need an external man to be complete, but chooses to be with him. Sue leaves the museum wondering what she will discover on her Naxos.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary and Analysis

"Grounding" picks up Sue's story after a year and a half of initiation. In Avebury, Sue and Sandy come upon a stone circle larger than Stonehenge, which a tourist book says is shaped to represent the Goddess' body. When Sandy reacts to the taboo word, Sue "unpacks" its meaning, realizing that every culture once worships the Great Goddess. While associated with fertility and sexuality, she also bestows justice and truth. Displaced by a male sky god, her memory is suppressed - and women are subordinated. Sue touches each stone and relights a votive candle. Celtic music helps her feel the "radiant mystery" of being embraced by the Goddess.

Sue ponders the "genderless, formless nature of the Divine." In the Bible, God says "I am that I am" — Absolute Being, transcending pictures but, needing symbols, people attach exclusively male ones and come to believe that God is actually male. God cannot be identified with the symbols any more than a dancer can be identified with a given dance. Internalizing the Divine Feminine affirms women as worthy and entitled, female sexuality as good, and makes women's experiences equally authoritative with men's. She recalls a six-year-old girl who talks about God as "he," because "God thought that would be the best thing to be." Such thoughts are crippling and pervasive. While the Bible claims that humans are made in God's image and are created both male and female, fear of female sexuality has crippled Western theology. "God" does not register as neuter and androgynous terms do not wipe out male assumptions.

Sue dreams about the Goddess' birth and is told by angels her name is "Herself." This is like a "personal big bang," a universe expanding outward. "Restrictive God-talk" is entrenched at the center, but the Divine is always beyond the edge. Herself is an inner experience, not someone "out there" (fairy godmother) or "back there" (ancient religion). Nelle Morton tells of a 1972 conference when a reader changes in 2 Cor. 5:17 the pronoun: "If anyone is in Christ, now she is a new creation," the women feel it in the gut and yell, "Yeah!" Sue agrees: Herself must be embraced within, but external images and symbols also must be recovered, because they point to Herself's presence.

Several years later, Sue visits Gournia, Crete, one of the last places that the Great Goddess flourishes. Sue and companions hike to the ruins of a sanctuary and search the debris to find an altar, a "kernos stone," clean it, and leave an offering, Sue feels connected to everything. Back in the summer when Sue first dreams of Herself, she and Betty visit artist Meinrad Craighead, whose Hagia Sophia reminds Sue of the Cartoon of St. Anne. Meinrad's studio has seven altars, moving Sue to hang a shelf in her study. Her first acquisition is a replica of he Minoan Snake Goddess, chosen because at the Jung Institute a curator pulls a slide of it at random from among 30,000. Sue learns that while matriarchal times are not utopian, they are egalitarian, non-violent, and do not split nature and spirit. Reclaiming that consciousness, integrating it into the evolving world, and balancing it with masculine forms becomes her goal. Faced with the choice of

assigning feminine qualities to a male God, uncovering feminine dimensions in the Trinity (the Holy Spirit), and speaking about God equally as female and male, Sue chooses the third.

Sue searches for the Sacred Feminine in Christianity. El Shaddai in the Bible signifies "the almighty," literally the "God of the mountain," but "shad" also means "breast." "Rechem" means compassion, but is literally "womb." Issuing from God's womb makes everyone close relatives. Much of the female imagery is obscured in translation, viz., Dt. 32:18, where "writhing in labor" is softened to "giving birth" — or even turned into God "fathering" Israel. Symbols must be unfrozen to participate in the Divine in new ways: imaging baptismal waters as uterine, the Eucharist as breastfeeding, and the divine-human covenant as the bonding of soul-sisters. The Hebrew ruah — "spirit" — means the life of God or the essence through which the Divine acts. This later becomes hokhmah — "Wisdom"— personified as a woman and Godlike: preexisting, participating in creation, ordering, inspiring, and permeating all things; teaching, loving, mediating God's love, guiding God's will, knocking on the door of the human soul, and hovering in the beauty of the natural world. Though mentioned more often than the male heroes, Wisdom is scarcely heard of.

In the New Testament, Wisdom becomes the Greek Sophia, whom St. Paul says boldly becomes the Christ (1 Cor. 1-2). John talks about "the Word" (Logos), who like Wisdom preexists, reconciles, reveals, and is God's "immanent presence in the world." Sue adds a Jesus-Sophia figure to her altar and seeks why Sophia is nearly deleted from Christianity. It may be a reaction to gnosticism, which challenges the early orthodoxy, loses, and is excluded from the New Testament. Logos salvages crucial elements without appearing to collude with the gnostics. In 1945, manuscripts are unearthed in Egypt including texts excluded ca. 150 CE from the canon. They talk of a Divine "Mother-Father." Later Christian mystics like Julian of Norwich and Jacob Boehme develop the idea of God as Divine Mother, but the Goddess behind Sophia and Wisdom never becomes autonomous. Sue dreams about Craighead's Hagia Sophia painted large in an old basilica.

Knowing that the language of religion forms behavior, Sue wonders how Divine Feminine symbols, when integrated, will affect thought and life. In March, she plants three cedar trees in her backyard, completing a circle. Lying on her back, she feels part of the quilt of creation, a manifestation of the Divine One. It is a feeling of mystical oneness and interconnection; resacralized nature; and liberation to struggle for value, dignity, and power for every human. "We-Consciousness" may well hold the key to earth's survival. The universe is a dance of subatomic particles and fields of energy. When relating to Herself, women attain a natural connectedness. Unlike Father God's distant love, a product of theism, Mother Goddess' love is unifying, nonhierarchical, and inclusive. "Theism" holds that God is wholly beyond the world, transcendent, untouchable. Humanity needs to be drawn into Divine Mother's lap and turned into a global family. Female Friend and Divine Sister would also be useful images.

Sue's "we-consciousness" breakthrough comes while reading about dolphins, imagining putting on their sleek body and swimming in polluted waters. Boundaries dissolve for

Sue and grief boils up for the dolphins. As the mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg says, Sue "lies down in fire," wondering how she has ignored ecology so long. Soon afterwards, Sue finds Ann watching a documentary in which fishermen dump dead dolphins overboard, while surviving dolphins wail. Ann is crying, making a primal connection to the earth. Sue touches the tears and they suffer together. As "we-consciousness" erupts, Sue digs out a totem carving that she buys in Kenya in 1974 as a conversation piece and has packed away. Studying the intricate interconnections of the figures of pregnant women, Sue sees the Divine One carving creation from herself. Ujamaa means family or community in Swahili, and this one is the family of Mungu — "the Divine."

Sue spends time outdoors and adds natural objects on her altar, telling Ann that they express the Divine as do the Minoan Goddess and Jesus-Sophia. The Divine "coinheres" everything. Sue adopts a "panentheistic" outlook: the Divine is expressed by the universe but is larger than it. The Divine Feminine symbol eliminates dualism by leaving nothing outside the realm of divinity ("Divine Immanence"). Goddess forces people to embrace all of life's experiences. Sue first senses it on a beach in Crete, watching women, most over 50, wading naked and laughing into the sea. Women need to know that they embody the Goddess and unlearn Christianity's lessons about shame and the "curse." They can then honor, nurture, listen to, and delight in their bodies, feel they are a "vessel of the sacred," and live from the gut rather than from the head. When Goddess consciousness returns, the earth will become holy again, no longer a disposable stop on the way to heaven. When matter breathes divinity, humans will stop dominating and destroying the earth, but accept responsibility for it. Humanity must be reinvented and Herself is key to ecological wisdom.

One spring evening, Sue, Betty, and friend Ramona tie their wrists together and ask "What binds you?" Sue's answer is "fear and silence." She thinks of writer Janet Frame recalling a teacher who praises her for being quiet and "no trouble at all." Women suffer not only because it is the human condition, but also because they are women, as in the biblical story of a woman raped and murdered to keep ruffians from assaulting a male guest. The man cuts up her corpse and sends it to the twelve tribes of Israel as evidence. Why is this story of injustice and suffering never told? Why is the woman nameless and not celebrated for laying down her life and having her body broken and given for many? Sue thinks of the thousands of women murdered in God's name, violated, abused, beaten, harassed, impoverished, mutilated, denied equality, passed over, silenced at home, and marginalized in churches, and embraces their struggle as her own.

Maya Angelou says that no matter what people do to her, "like air, I'll rise." Susan Griffin writes about men trying to put a female lion to sleep but being devoured. Goddess roars and refuses to be silenced. The house needs reconstruction, not wallpapering. "Still I rise" becomes a chorus of voices. Feminine spiritual consciousness follows Jesus in placing love and justice over traditional law - better than the institution bearing his name. It brings the mighty down from their thrones and exalts the humble, as Mary of Nazareth says - questioning patriarchy itself. Hence, the resistance to the powerfully

"other" idea of Goddess. Goddess ignites Sue's "still I rise" voice and is the voice itself. Women are not "dresses, helpless before the iron."

Sue creates a space for healing as she grounds herself. Healing is a grace and cannot be forced, but one can create a refuge. Sue recalls an episode of Northern Exposure in which character Ruth Ann gives refuge to a fox that powerful Maurice wants to hunt. It is a modern myth: cruel patriarchal wounder, wounded, and compassionate healer. Sue needs an internal Ruth Ann, willing to pick up a shovel and defend her. Sue dreams about visiting a museum to look at statues of the divine and finds a Pietá with Mary's lap empty and climbs onto it. The marble turns warm and soft and the Goddess holds her and kisses her wounded places.

Sue, Betty, and other women sit in the circle of trees as Springbank to weave wisteria vines into a basket. They fall naturally into the rhythm as they talk about their lives, fears, struggles, and hopes. They work all afternoon, producing a huge basket, which they agree to share; whoever needs it most calls the current holder to send it over. It reminds the women that they are not alone. Bonding and sisterhood are essential to survival Sue recalls Sweet, her African-American nanny. Growing up in the South, Sue lives with segregation without seeing it. When Sweet needs to relieve herself during a drive, they stop by a stand of trees, because gas station restrooms are for whites only. At age eleven, the inhumanity strikes Sue and she joins Sweet in the trees. They watch their streams of urine form a river. As she is grounding herself, Sue often dreams about Sweet. In one, Sweet gives her a box to keep her snake in.

To heal, women need to tell their stories and have them witnessed. Stories give new insights into one's own story, rouse questions, illumine conflicts, engender hope, and summon strength. Solidarity means identifying without necessarily agreeing; it is unity not uniformity, listening not fixing, digging down to the place where sols meet and love comes. By meeting with groups of women, Sue sees that her life is larger than she imagines. They hear her into speech and love her into healing.

Attending a Jungian conference, Sue and Sandy walk through the snow, talking about Sue's grounding. On a footbridge over a stream, Sandy agrees that culture needs feminine spiritual consciousness. She sees that they have healed and are in a new place. The healing comes from experiencing "Deep Being," focusing heart, mind, body, and soul purposefully, acceptingly, and attentively. Deep Being allows a woman time and space to relate with her Feminine Self and mend her fragmented places. Each woman must create her own way, but Sue offers some examples.

Sue first experiences Deep Being in her analyst's solarium. Some sessions are "show-and-tell," examining her writings, artwork, and symbolic treasures. Once, she brings in a walking stick that she has whittled from a dead tree limb she finds at Springbank and varnished. Suddenly, she knows the ways of her journey. Tangibles like walking sticks and antlers are missed without attention to Deep Being. Analysis is not a prerequisite to a feminine journey, but some safe outlet for telling and hearing the truth is.

Zen meditation helps experience Deep Being. Sue devotes 20-30 minutes a day to sitting alertly, observing her breathing, thoughts, and feelings without being caught up in them. "Mindfulness" has no goal. One watches whatever is present in a non-judgmental way. It sounds easy, but takes six months for Sue's mind not to wander. It is like gently house-training a puppy. Sue learns to greet fear, anger, and hurt, because banished feelings cannot be transformed. She rocks her Feminine Wound like a crying baby. When it stops, she can understand what causes the wound and transform it.

Nature is a potent healer. Sue leads a workshop, "Women and Mother Earth." On the last day, she has participants find something that speaks to them, hear its message, and bring it in (if this is possible without causing harm). The women find things that match their particular wounds. When the workshop ends, Sue finds a turtle in a hole she has dug. Realizing that she must ground herself thus, Sue begins paying attention to the cycles of moon, the animals and plants in her garden, feeling the earth's slow rhythms, and honoring her own natural rhythms. Such awareness brings healing.

The Bishop returns to Sue's dreams, tries to hit her with the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, but is weak. She wrests them away and comes upon the old crone, who tells her to look in her paper bag. The tables that she has stuffed inside have become a "Matryoshka" (Russian nesting doll). As the crone sings about womanhood, Sue envisions herself as beautiful, exuberant, wise, and valuable. She buys a Matryoshka (meaning "mother") for her altar, above which she hangs a crescent moon-shaped mirror to remind herself to honor the Feminine Divine in her own soul.

The Matryoshka makes Sue want to discover and celebrate mother-daughter stories in her family. She knows that her parents are disappointed to get a first-born girl, seen in the roll-top desk she treasures going to the first male child who carries the Monk name, while Sue gets a hutch. Sue buys Matryoshka dolls for her mother and 95-year-old maternal grandmother, and writes them about interconnectedness, renewal, and transformation. Months later, Sue visits Grandmother Sue, who has named the dolls Roxie, Sue, Leah, Sue, and Ann, after the line beginning with her own mother. The last doll's namesake has yet to been born. Grandmother says how she rejoices in the nursery that Sue is a girl.

Sue remembers this at Crete's Skoteino Cave. Emerging from the damp darkness, they feel the air lighten, and see a circle of light. The first out hail their followers: "Wonderful! It's a girl!" Two days later, they visit Zeus' birthplace and find that milk offered on his altar has spoiled. Some cannot embrace the Divine Mother because their patriarchal-minded mothers reflect negative images. In the Trapeza Cave, the women name their mothers as far back as they recall, and the connection quickens inside. In Zakros, they sing about "Mountain Mother" and come upon a large stone that reminds Sue of St. Anne and the Great Lap. Taking her turn sitting on it, Sue recites her mothers' names and feels healed. A photo of her sitting there beaming is on her desk. Before going on the Goddess tour, Sue sends her mother an essay, "Going Back for Mary." For Christmas, her mother gives her a pewter statue of Mary, showing she understands the journey and blesses it.

Early in awakening, Sue allows anger against injustice to rage, but knows that anger will have to be healed and transfigured from conflagration to cooking. The church is a flash point for her anger because of the depth of trust she feels it betrays. Eventually, she redirects her energies to writing, imagining, speaking, and empowering other women. She moves from rage to outrage. Outrage is "love's wild and unacknowledged sister." Sue speaks at a contemplative conference at the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, her first visit since the Fr. Sue fiasco. She is emotional entering this "microcosm of the entire father-world." She recalls being segregated in the balcony because she is female and again feels the pain caused by patriarchal Christianity, but is touched by the chants and appreciates the honor paid to Mary as Mother of God. The monks are non-violent, blending the ordinary and the holy. Christianity's "deep song" is haunting and nostalgic.

Sue joins a few men and women learning a liturgical dance. One day she walks in the woods and finds a life-sized statue of Christ kneeling in agony. She contemplates her alienation from Father God and feels a small willingness to bridge it. As they dance on the main floor of the church during mass (unprecedented), Sue sees that the feminine ultimately cannot be denied or shut away, and her bitterness dissolves. An elderly monk sits transfixed by joy and love, and Sue feels the old, familiar presence and the need for a balance of male and female symbols. Craighead writes that the two movements are not in conflict; they just water different layers of the soul. Sue cannot forgive everyone in "one grand swoop," but does what she can when she can. Forgiveness is letting go and moving on. The circle of trees adds a new dimension: place of compassion. In Atlanta one Sunday, Sue pick a bouquet of wild daffodils to leaves on the front steps of a Baptist church, making peace.

After two years of grounding, Sue feels she is creating a real, unorthodox, and personal spiritual path. Her vision of religious experience has changed and expanded. It includes a web of rituals, a community of women, various forms of prayer, experiencing nature, relating to her inner life, working creatively, and struggling for love and justice. It is not the exile she initially fears, but a coming home to her heart. Sue agrees with the Dalai Lama: "My religion is kindness." Sandy and the children understand Sue's path, but others are puzzled, skeptical, and alarmed. She understands this: new space is invisible to those who have not entered. After the illusions are gone and a woman wakes up, she dances a new dance. Some stay in the church and try to make a difference. Others cannot do that without being co-opted. When Sue attends church she connects with the people and honors the deep song. Sue chooses to be a "loving dissident" and to dance its dance.

Walking the beach late one night with Sandy, Sue is entranced watching a giant sea turtle lumber out of the water, dig a pit in which to ground herself, and lay her eggs. She thinks of earlier encounters with turtles , touches this turtle's shell, and looks into her eyes. Sue has come full circle and is ready to lay eggs of her own. She is filled with love for her female life. Sue walks alongside the turtle as she heads back to the ocean and watches her disappear. She sings Sappho's words about a lovely tortoise shell and sometimes still hears the turtle's sounds, digging in the sand that night. She imagines her a lyre.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary and Analysis

"Empowerment" picks up weeks after meeting the turtle, as Sue wonders how she can plant her journey in the world. She has not yet experienced femaleness as power or inner authority. Does she dare? Does she have "the ovaries"? Something is coagulating inside, a volcanic island is emerging. She recalls an interview with Maya Angelou, in which the poet says a writer must have something to say, the ability to express it, and the courage to express it all. Sue suddenly understands empowerment. The newly-awakened woman is like a sapling transplanted into hostile soil; until it finds ground in a circle of trees, it is dry. In the circle, they put down roots, grow strong, and lose truth, creativity, and vision like the seeds of a cottonwood tree. Sue wonders why she is uncomfortable writing "power." Perhaps it is because of how power is practiced, as control, domination, staying up by keeping others down - ruthless, loveless. Power ought to be having one's part matter when engaging in vital discourse.

Sue' smother sends her an old newspaper clipping about a zoo raising money to buy a bison. Sue wants to donate her grandfather's rare buffalo head nickel - in person. The story makes the papers and Sue at age three believes her nickel buys the buffalo whom she names Billy. The clipping triggers a series of buffalo dreams. In the last one, a shaman tells Sue to take "buffalo medicine." She researches this and finds white buffaloes are sacred and powerful. The Lakota Sioux tell of a White Buffalo Calf Woman who gives Native people the sacred pipe and teachings, promising to return. Sue is intrigued and impressed by the buffalo's survival after nearly being wiped out. During a retreat, she meets a Cherokee woman, who believes the dreams are a gift meant to make her powerful. While visiting friend Terry in Colorado, Sue buys a replacement buffalo nickel to carry as a reminder. Terry takes her to "Buffalo Overlook," close to 27 massive animals grazing inside a fence. Sue gets as close as she can. Sue finds a tuft of buffalo hair, which she knows carries the medicine, leaves her coin as an offering, and realizes she has been empowered to voice her soul, nurture inner authority, and embody her sacred feminine experience.

Before the buffalo dreams begin, Sue is visited by the crone again and told that her heart is a seed that she must plant in the world. Sue feels the need to witness to what has been maturing inside her. The world needs a new ecological witness, to embrace interconnection and interrelatedness, to dismantle hierarchies of power, to hear voices on behalf of the powerless. Mystics seek the Divine inwardly, but prophets bring revolution to society. The time has come for these functions to intertwine and find fulfillment. After six years of being sequestered, Sue feels new bravery. She goes on a last retreat at Springbank, walks the circle of trees, and prays for every woman who will come here.

Sue recalls the kjerringsleppet — "women on the loose" — a team of 35 Norwegian women who open the 1994 Winter Olympics at Lillehammer by skiing down the giant

slalom. The group forms in 1989 to protest a male-only competition at Alpine Center. They crash the opening ceremonies clanging cow bells - and become beloved. Sue thinks back over the roles she has played under patriarchy and adopts the kjerringsleppet image and motto: "To improvise, surprise, and come uninvited." Women of power are improvisational artists, speaking, acting, and trusting herself, valuing her own knowledge. Powerful women must surprise themselves and make the world gasp. When women speak truly they speak subversively and refuse to be uninvited.

Sue has long felt the need to reorient her writing career. Her "cottonwood tree" is full and just needs a stiff wind. It comes at a art museum, which advertises an exhibition, "Telling Tales," that claims each canvas contains a narrative. A half-dozen do nothing for Sue, but Sappho tells a tale. It darkly pictures the Greek poet on a divan, having dropped her lyre. Sue feels her own lyre's silence. She researches what little history retains about Sappho and discovers she is extravagantly lyrical and powerful, joyful, sublime, but capable of insult and irony. In 350 CE her writings are ordered burned. Only 700 lines and fragments remain out of the 500 poems she writes. Sue arranges to study fiction that summer at Emory University in Atlanta to learn to write from a new, deeper place. Sandy gives her a replica of a Minoan fresco of a woman playing a lyre made from two golden snakes, with the note, "Strum your heart out." Sue's musician friend Karen in Utah reminds Sue that women's creativity has always exists, but has been misappropriated by men. Women have too often been content to be muses rather than musicians, and those who create too often parrot patriarchal thought. Those women who speak authentically are neglected, obscured, and overlooked.

It breaks Sue's heart to hear women claim not to be creative. Sometimes this comes from thinking of creativity too narrowly. The soul must love and create. Creativity must be acknowledged and explored to find the deepest passion and treating that as a newborn baby. One must then commit to one's creative path. At writers' conferences, Sue sees women with books inside them that they never write down, and knows the dilemma firsthand. Women naturally multi-task but this can distract. She sees the need to draw boundaries and forbids the family to interrupt her work except for bona fide emergencies. Creative "sacred dawdling" should not be confused with resistance to acting, which stifles. Rapturous imagination matters little if one does not do the legwork to get ideas out into the practical world. One must also learn how to cope with dry periods. Sue turns to nature, meditates, and creates rituals to nourish and renew herself.

"Authority" in Greek means "to stand forth with power and dignity." Women often first feel that when their backs are to the wall. It happens to Sue when she speaks nervously about the Christian suppression of the feminine at a mainline denominational conference. A male clergyman wags a finger and scolds her. As her knees buckle, she recalls a quote about using one's strength in service to one's vision being more important than fear and experiences a "dose of buffalo medicine." She repositions her feet, focuses on the fear inside that male, and says only they have different visions about women. Some women misunderstand female authority and act out like male bullishness - overbearing, opinionated, controlling, and enforcing. True female authority

comes from "internal solidity." Such a woman is intrepid, gentle, fierce, waiting, leaping as needed.

Sue is baffled and intrigued by Esther Harding's contention that "virgin" originally does not mean chaste, but belonging to oneself. It is an attitude: being "one-in-herself." Such a woman can have sex but remain untouched by patriarchy. When one belongs to oneself, one can connect with the rest of life without being trapped or dependent. Sue's trip to Crete takes place that fall. Before departing she reads about Goddess Hera's annual ritual bath at Kanathos, renewing her virginity. On Crete, Sue and Terry swim out to a deserted island. They explore a bit, ritually immerse themselves three times, and Sue lies down to have a plaster cast made of her face, thinking about Ariadne abandoned and becoming one-in-herself on Naxos. The decorated mask makes Sue smile, remembering.

Sue happens upon a PBS program about picketing suffragettes being arrested in front of the White House in the 1920s. When they go on a hunger strike in jail, they are force-fed, but their resistance to gastric tubes earns them the sobriquet "iron-jawed angels." They hold out and U.S. women get the right to vote. Having never thought much about these women, Sue is unprepared for the emotion their story releases. She doubts she could withstand the weight of cultural tradition for justice's sake as they do, but wants to nurture such toughness. When opposition comes, Sue recalls the iron-jawed angels: as when a male priest friend feels obliged to tell her she is harming her children by setting a bad example, or a Bible-waving woman stomps out of a presentation, declaring her an "abomination." Sue also recalls the grandmother in Strictly Ballroom, who tells her granddaughter, who wants to do a daring new dance, "A life lived in fear is a life half lived." In Athens, the women are impressed by the Erechteheum atop the Acropolis, whose massive room is held up by caryatids in the shape of "strong-necked" women.

Empowered women must live trusting the truth in their souls, convictions in their hearts, and wisdom in their bodies to affect the world around them. In Crete at the Kato Symi shrine, 15 women gather in the cavity of a massive ancient tree, feeling part of it. Sue knows she must become a sacred place wherever she is - to become the experience. She has known powerful women like that and thinks of Walt Witman's preface to Leaves of Grass - flesh must be a great poem - and Margaret Atwood's novel, Surfacing: "I lean against a tree. I am a tree, leaning." This is embodying. Women can embody the Sacred Feminine by embracing nature. Sue loves to go to the ocean. Once she is there before sunrise and dances with the waves, sand, birds, and shells. She begins picking up trash. Soon Sandy and then perfect strangers join in.

Heraclitus says one cannot step twice into the same river, for it changes continually. Empowerment means seeing clearly at every moment. The Tao of Pooh teaches "things are as they are." As one changes, things around her do also, for all things are linked. The planetary crisis cannot be ignored and one cannot stay locked in old patterns. How does the Sacred feminine relate to one's living an ordinary day? Sue awakes early and studies her bedroom, Sandy's face. As she leaves to make coffee, live shine in everything and she aches with love. Every task seems holy and right. Sue wishes these moments were more common. She wants to be a feminine center, telling and being the

truth. She hears about a rural woman who tells a poll taker that if it were her last day on earth she would hoe her garden, care for her children, and talk to her neighbors. The ordinary is what matters. That is how the world is profoundly changed.

In Heraklion on Crete, Sue buys Ann a statue of Nike, Goddess of Victory, uniting womanhood and power. Sue wants to plant the seed of a female journey in her daughter's life. Time comes for Ann to leave for college, and Sue spends the night remembering moments in her daughter's life. Sue is happy that Ann takes Nike to her dorm room. Sue leaves a written wish that Ann always listen to her Deepest Self and speak Her truth always. During the ride home, Sue is wistful and lost in reverie.

When Sandy asks what she is thinking about, she pours out for the first time in a systematic way all of her experiences: self-birthing, calling herself father, uncovering the Feminine Wound, failing to run away, dancing women, critiquing patriarchy, feeling the inner hole, getting furious and scared, feeling stuck - and being energized when men laugh at Ann on her knees. She and her husband create a new marriage. She feels at home in a circle of trees, learns to dance, make rituals, open to myths, face off internal patriarchal voices, and buries them. She opens to the Divine Feminine and feels her consciousness expanding to connect to the whole earth. She begins to heal and yearns to bear brave witness to the world. She becomes one-in-herself. Sue is happy for all she has gone through, before and after reconstruction. There is no ending to her story. Nothing is neat on such a journey. There are no guarantees. Sue's story is particular, a thread in a larger fabric. That someone or something always appears when she needs it makes her grateful. Sue leaves readers with the message: "She is in us."

Characters

Sue Monk Kidd

The author of the memoir, The Dance of a dissident Daughter, Sue is a fairly prolific and successful writer of inspirational Christian pieces, in her late thirties, married to a Baptist chaplain, and the mother of two teenage children, Bob and Ann. She is born and raised in Georgia during times of segregation, whose inequity she realizes when her nanny, Sweet, must urinate in the trees because restrooms are for whites only. Sue joins her on the hillside in solidarity. Sue is brought up to be soft-spoken and sweet-mouthed. Sue gives no details of her education or career prior to writing, concentrating on her spiritual awakening, which begins when she is 38. Sue has always prayed but is tending towards silent meditation. She has always found waking up from sleep hard, so awaking from spiritual slumber is hard. The first fictional story she writes is about a sleepwalker ignoring warnings until she crashes a car.

Sue examines closely the steps of her journey, never hiding or excusing her fears and lethargy. She experiences self-birthing in a dream, calls herself "Fr. Sue" on a retreat at a monastery, builds herself a Big Bird Nest, uncovers her Feminine Wound, and wants to run away from what she sees but cannot. At a Jungian retreat, she watches dancing women but cannot join in. She critiques patriarchy, feels an inner hole, fury, and fear, but feels stuck - until she is energized watching men laugh at Ann on her knees.

Sue and Sandy clash and Sue's fears about losing family and career grow, but she perseveres and they create a remarkable new marriage. Sue feels at home in a circle of trees, learns to dance, to make rituals, to open herself to myths, to face off internal patriarchal voices, and to bury them. She opens to the Divine Feminine and feels her consciousness expanding to connect to the whole earth. She begins to heal and yearns to bear brave witness to the world. She becomes one-in-herself. Sue is happy for all she has gone through, before and after reconstruction. That someone or something always appears when she needs it makes her grateful. Sue leaves readers with the message: "She is in us."

Sandy Kidd

Sue Monk Kidd's husband, Sandy is a Southern Baptist minister, religion teacher, and college chaplain. They are married 19 years when Sue's quest begins. Sandy is not rigid or authoritarian, never demands that Sue "submit," but he initially resists her journey based on unverbalized fears about what will happen to their relationship. Sandy is waiting for her at the airport and hugs her tightly when she returns from a speaking engagement and retreat in San Francisco that he had opposed, and Sue holds back nothing about her experiences. Sandy surprises her by saying he has realized how he has been defending the status quo and excluding her experience. Sue sees his consciousness awakening but is cautious - and cautions readers: she has seen women

stay in and leave marriages, and the choice is always hard. Sandy's transformation takes years to evolve, but it is awesome. He reads, questions, and struggles to live an "egalitarian and feminist vision." He returns to school to become a psychotherapist and counsels couples going through change. Sue gives no details of Sandy's spiritual journey, saying it is his story to tell or not. As the book ends, Sandy is driving them home from dropping off daughter Ann at college. He asks Sue what she is thinking about silently, and she provides a cogent summary of her quest. Never before had she thought about it so systematically.

Betty

Sue Monk Kidd's closest friend geographically and it appears spiritually, Betty enters Sue's life at a women's luncheon five years before Sue's awakening Sue tells Betty about the resistance she is feeling, which helps her name her experience. They meet regularly and gradually name their wounds and sacred realities. Going to another woman is a "breakthrough act," because women are programed to turn to men for solutions and insight. The beach and Betty help Sue see women as "namers of reality." Betty turns a cornfield into a woodland garden where women can gather to talk, dance, and feed their souls.

Meinrad Craighead

A New Mexico artist, Craighead has in her studio seven altars, that Sue Monk Kidd appreciates as windows into her soul, moving Sue to hang a shelf in her study and begin to stock it with sacred objects. One of Craighead's paintings, Hagia Sophia, depicts a woman in a red-hooded cloak between two owls reminds. It reminds Sue of Leonardo da Vinci's Cartoon of St. Anne. In her book, The Mother's Song, Craighead talks about her Catholic heritage and deep foundations in Mother God as not conflicting, but watering different layers in her soul.

Karen

Sue Monk Kidd's musician friend who lives in Utah, Karen reminds Sue that women's creativity has always exists, but has been misappropriated by men. Women have too often been content to be muses rather than musicians, and those who create too often parrot patriarchal thought. Those women who speak authentically are neglected, obscured, and overlooked.

Ann Kidd

Sue Monk Kidd's teenage daughter, Ann helps her mother awaken to action in her feminine journey when two men stand over her as she stocks toothpaste in a drugstore, her after school job, and laugh that they like seeing girls on their knees. Ann regularly shows interest in her mother's reading, and asks questions. Sue never tries to push Ann

or her brother Bob (mentioned only by name but never discussed) into following. Sue wants them to find themselves when the time comes. Sue tells Ann about Sophia and sees the effect on her female self. Once, Sue finds Ann crying over a television program about dolphins dying in gill nets. Sue gives Ann a statue of Nike, Goddess of Victory, uniting womanhood and power. Sue wants to plant the seed of a female journey in her daughter's life. Time comes for Ann to leave for college, and Sue spends the night remembering moments in her daughter's life and is happy that Ann takes Nike to her dorm room.

Madonna Kolbenschlag

A feminist Catholic nun, Madonna . Kolbenschlag is best known for her book Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye, in which she talks about having either to defect to patriarchy or become a deviant. Sue Monk Kidd chooses to dance the "dance of dissidence" — providing the title of this book. Other quotations about female empowerment are sprinkled throughout the text.

Leah Monk

Sue Kidd Monk's mother, Leah is implied to have gone along with patriarchal ways of giving preferential treatment to Sue's younger brothers. Sue remembers, however, how Leah's maternal love units her with her siblings when they fight: mother forces them to look into one another's eyes for two minutes to realize who counts in their lives. Before going on her Goddess tour to Crete and Greece, Sue sends Leah an essay she has written, "Going Back for Mary." For Christmas, her mother gives her a pewter statue of Mary, showing she understands the journey and blesses it.

Fr. Paschal

The smiling monk with shaven dark hair and round glasses who serves as Sue's retreat director, Fr. Paschal is flustered when she inadvertently introduces herself as Fr. Sue." He assumes it is nervousness, but it is something deeper. This Freudian slip helps start Sue on her spiritual quest.

Sappho

The great ancient Greek poet whose writings are ordered burned in 350 CE by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Sappho - through a moody painting in an art exhibit - makes Sue Monk Kidd feel her own lyre's silence. She researches what little history retains about Sappho and discovers she is extravagantly lyrical and powerful, joyful, sublime, but capable of insult and irony. Only 700 lines and fragments remain out of the 500 poems that Sappho writes.

Grandmother Sue

Sue Monk Kidd's maternal grandmother after whom she is name, this grandmother rejoices at Sue's birth, exclaiming, "It's a girl!" She tells Sue this at her 96th birthday, and her words come back to Sue at the Skoteino Cave in Crete. Grandmother names her nested Matryoshka dolls for the generations beginning with her own mother, Roxie, through Ann Kidd's not-yet-conceived daughter. She contrasts with the unnamed paternal grandmother who insist that the roll top desk Sue loves must go to the firstborn boy who will continue the Monk name.

Sweet

Sue Monk Kidd's African-American nanny while growing up in the Old South. Sue lives with segregation without seeing it. When Sweet needs to relieve herself during a drive, they stop by a stand of trees, because gas station restrooms are for whites only. At age eleven, the inhumanity strikes Sue and she joins Sweet in the trees. They watch their streams of urine form a river. As she is grounding herself, Sue often dreams about Sweet. In one, Sweet gives her a box to keep her snake in. Sue recalls visiting monasteries and being required to sit, segregated in the balcony, as blacks are in movie theaters in her youth

Terry

Sue Monk Kidd's friend of ten years, Terry lives in Colorado. They share each other's experiences through phone calls, letters, and visits when possible. After reawakening memories of a buffalo Sue "adopts" as a three-year-old, she dreams about these animals that she learns are central in Native American spirituality. During a visit, Terry drives Sue to "Buffalo Overlook," where Sue finds a tuft of buffalo hair, which she knows carries the medicine. She leaves her coin as an offering. Terry accompanies Sue on her journey to Crete and helps her make a face mask.

Objects/Places

Abbey of GethsemaniAbbey of Gethsemani

The Trappist monastery in Kentucky associated with Thomas Merton, the Abbey of Gethsemani hosts a contemplative conference at which Sue Monk Kidd speaks, her first return to a monastery since the Fr. Sue fiasco. She is emotional entering this "microcosm of the entire father-world." She recalls being segregated in the balcony because she is female and again feels the pain caused by patriarchal Christianity, but is touched by the chants and appreciates the honor paid to Mary as Mother of God. Taking part in a liturgical dance puts Sue on the floor of the church and the smile of an elderly monk helps her bridge the gap between male and female divinity.

Avebury

A small village between Oxford and Glastonbury, England, Avonbury is the site of a megalithic circle of stones larger than Stonehenge. A tourist book says it is a religious center in the 3rd millennium BCE and the shape may represent the shape of the Goddess' body. When Sandy reacts to the taboo word, Sue tries to "unpack" its meaning from her recent reading. Sue touches each stone as she had the trees at Springbank and relights a votive candle someone has left. She hears Celtic music played on a flute and feels the "radiant mystery" of being embraced by the Goddess.

Crete

An island in the Mediterranean south of Greece, Crete is home to many ancient artifacts of a pre-patriarchal society that worships the Mother Goddess. Sue Monk Kidd and friend Terry visit there as part of a group of 14 feminists on a spiritual journey. It occurs when Sue is already mature in her feminist faith, but is so vital to her struggle that she refers to it many times in anticipation. Particularly important is a descent into the Cave of the Goddess of the Dark, Skoteino. They descend four damp, slippery levels to the cave floor and blow out their candles to experience five minutes of total blackness, during which Sue loses boundaries and feels like she is floating. She recalls the flight to California that begins her Initiation phase. Sue sees the importance of receiving light from other women - and permission to be what one is. Climbing back to the surface, seeing a circle of light is like a rebirth, and the women greet one another with calls of "It's a girl!" — echoing words her maternal grandmother says she utters as Sue's birth.

Sue and Terry also swim out to a deserted island, explore , ritually immerse themselves three times, and Sue lies down to have a plaster cast made of her face, thinking about Ariadne abandoned and becoming one-in-herself on nearby Naxos Island. In the Trapeza Cave, the women name their mothers as far back as they recall, and the connection quickens inside. In Zakros, they sing about "Mountain Mother" and come upon a large stone that reminds Sue of St. Anne and the Great Lap. At the Kato Symi

shrine, the women gather in the cavity of a massive ancient tree, feeling part of it. Sue knows she must become a sacred place wherever she is - to become the experience. n Heraklion, Sue buys Ann a statue of Nike, Goddess of Victory, uniting womanhood and power.

Feminine Wound

The "Feminine Wound" comes from society's pressing on women that they are inherently inferior. Feeling that she is the only woman who feels it, Sue tries to avoid facing up to it, but comes to see all women suffer from it. It is absorbed by osmosis and the wound enlarges. A 1991 survey shows that as parents and teachers expect less from girls, girls "dumb themselves down" to be less threatening. In church, it is no better; in Bible stories, women support heroic men, sermons stress nonthreatening female roles, and it does no good to hear the scriptures "explained away" because feminine pronouns are missing from hymns and prayers.

Jung Institute Archives for Research in Archetypal Symbolism

During a speaking engagement in San Francisco, Sue visits the Jung Institute and in the Archives for Research in Archetypal Symbolism is amazed when an assistant curator pulls a slide at random from the 30,000 stored, depicting the Minoan Snake Goddess about whom she has been reading. Sue thinks, "Herself," orders a replica, and digs into history to see how once women and men are equals. Sue enters weekly Jungian analysis with an unnamed woman analyst, who helps her discover the root of her Feminine Wound and heal it. Sue claims that analysis is not necessary for every woman on a spiritual journey, but insists everyone needs a means of expressing and hearing the unvarnished truth.

Mercy Center

Mercy Center is a Roman Catholic-run but open-minded retreat center in San Francisco, CA . It is booked when Sue Monk Kidd wants to stay there while lecturing, but after an intense, lonely retreat in a bed-and-breakfast, she drops in to Mercy Center briefly on her way home. She is struck by a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's Cartoon of St. Anne, which Sue takes as an image of the Feminine Divine. Months later, Sue encounters the same painting at the Springbank Retreat Center in South Carolina and is struck by the coincidence.

National Gallery

Located on London's Trafalgar Square, the National Gallery houses Titian's gargantuan painting, Bacchus and Ariadne, whose myth Sue Monk Kidd has been studying. Sue

sees feels herself after a year and a half of initiation, moving through spiritual death and rebirth, to the point of seeking to put down roots and ground herself in her new female self and the Divine Feminine. Husband Sandy is less taken with the image and afterwards they have a confrontation over her spiritual journey.

Springbank Retreat Center

A Roman Catholic retreat center in the low country of South Carolina, Springbank is a happy find for Sue Monk Kidd and her friend Betty as they drive to a speaking engagement. Sr. Kathleen greets and shows them around this place of spiritual retreat, embracing the creation spirituality of Matthew Fox and honoring feminine and Native American spiritualities, ecology, and contemplation. In the chapel, Sue is struck, again facing the Cartoon of St. Anne and feeling its pull. Sue and Betty return to Springbank many times, enjoying a circle of trees and inventing rituals that help them bond together and with nature. Clearing two stumps helps them feel like they are rooting out patriarchy. A larger circle of women work together to weave a great basket from wisteria vines, which they later share among themselves, the one needing the most help and support receiving it.

St. Simon Island

The site of the "Journey into Wholeness Conference, a Jungian retreat in May of Sue Monk Kidd's awakening, St. Simon Island lies off the coast of Georgia. Participants, far more advanced in feminist awakening than Sue dance on the beach to celebrate the full moon. They find and venerate a tortoise shell. Sue is too unsure of herself to join in but as she is following the others away, she touches the shell.

Patriarchy

A system of social organization marked by male authority or supremacy, patriarchy is a hallmark of Western civilization, and is only beginning to decline. In learning to recognize patriarchy, Sue Monk Kidd develops her Feminist Critique. Patriarchy values rationality, independence, competition, efficiency, stoicism, and militarism over "art, listening, , intuition, nurturing, and attachment."

Turtle

An ancient symbol of feminine strength and wisdom, the turtle is in some ancient mythologies said to hold the world axis on her back Sue Monk Kidd learns of this while on a Jungian retreat, and touches the carapace that retreatants find washed up on a beach, but is still too new in her awakening to take part in the celebration of the Mother Goddess. Later, when she has grounded in the Female Divine, Sue watches a giant sea turtle lumber up out of the ocean, dig a nest, and deposit her eggs. Sue feels one with

nature and exults in being female. She accompanies the turtle back to the water and watches her swim away.

Themes

Authority

Sue Monk Kidd describes her original state as "Unambiguous Woman" — putting male authority figures at the center of her life and accepting to be secondary. She is not outwardly submissive, but lives with no "inner authority." Over time, she discovers the "Sacred Feminine" — that which keeps a woman powerful and grounded in herself but connected to everything else. Going to another woman becomes for Sue a "breakthrough act," because women are programed to turn to men for solutions and insight.

Much of the book deals with the nature of patriarchy, a system of social organization marked by male power, authority, and supremacy. It is a hallmark of Western civilization, and is only beginning to decline as the women's movement advances. In learning to recognize patriarchy, Sue Monk Kidd develops her Feminist Critique. Patriarchy values rationality, independence, competition, efficiency, stoicism, and militarism - the supposedly masculine characteristics — over the supposedly feminine ones: art, listening, , intuition, nurturing, and attachment. It is based on the theory that God ordains a hierarchy at which "he" sits atop. It descends through males to females, children, and nature. Dominance and dependence as natural. Psychologists confirm differences in how the sexes make moral choices: "web model" (interconnections and central relationships) vs. hierarchical (autonomy, individualism, and competition). Both sexes contain both qualities, but their socialization differs. The problem lies in the valuation that patriarchy attaches to supposedly male traits over female ones.

Entering the "Empowerment" phase, Sue is uncomfortable even writing the word "power," and wonders if perhaps this is because of how power is practiced in the world: as control, domination, staying up by keeping others down, ruthless and loveless. Power ought mean the right to have one's say matter when engaging in vital discourse. Sue begins to be empowered when she takes "buffalo medicine." She researches this and finds white buffaloes are sacred and powerful. A Cherokee woman tells Sue that her dreams are a gift meant to make her powerful. Finding a tuft of buffalo hair, which she knows carries the medicine, convinces Sue that she has been empowered to voice her soul, nurture inner authority, and embody her sacred feminine experience.

Women of power are improvisational artists, speaking, acting, and trusting herself, valuing her own knowledge. Powerful women must surprise themselves and make the world gasp. When women speak truly they speak subversively and refuse to be uninvited. Women's creativity has always exists, but has been misappropriated by men. Women have too often been content to be muses rather than musicians, and those who create too often parrot patriarchal thought. Those women who speak authentically are neglected, obscured, and overlooked. Some women misunderstand female authority and act out like male bullishness - overbearing, opinionated, controlling, and enforcing. True female authority comes from "internal solidity." Such a woman is intrepid, gentle,

fierce, waiting, leaping as needed. Empowered women must live trusting the truth in their souls, convictions in their hearts, and wisdom in their bodies to affect the world around them.

Religion

Religion stands at the heart of this memoir, as Sue Monk Kidd struggles with acting out the "Church Handmaid" script that she is handed at birth. After years of Baptist services, Sue feels her attachment slipping. She tries the Episcopal Church as a last-ditch effort to remain in the Christian fold, but within months feels restless and alienated by masculine liturgies. She longs for an appropriate feminist sacred environment. Sue is crushed that a male Supreme Being vests all authority in males, forbidding women to say the words most natural to them: "This is my body, given for you." Sue feels deeply betrayed by the tradition she has served and rejects the Bible as a "sole and ultimate authority." She wonders if a picture of a handless Virgin Mary - who comes closest to representing the feminine "side" in Christianity - but is not yet ready to reclaim feminine divinity.

Sue studies intensely and finds the Bible purporting that women are unclean temptresses who cannot be both holy and sexual. Reading feminist theologians, Sue finds that Jesus' revolutionary, egalitarian preaching is, by 200 CE, usurped by the patriarchal approach, and women are silenced. She is agitated to see shocking statements about women appear in all ages of Christianity. When she reads about the Great Goddess, worshiped as supreme in all cultures before a male sky god displaces her, Sue initially recoils from the taboo word, until she see that considers that patriarchy has discredited the Feminine Divine. Jung explains that pre-patriarchal human history resides in the collective unconsciousness and can be unearthed in dreams. When Sue dreams about the Goddess' birth and is told by angels her name is "Herself," it is a "personal big bang." "Restrictive God-talk" is entrenched at the center, but the Divine is always beyond the edge. Herself is an inner experience. Knowing that the language of religion forms behavior, Sue wonders how Divine Feminine symbols, when integrated, will affect thought and life. Feminine spiritual consciousness brings the mighty down from their thrones and exalts the humble, as Mary of Nazareth says - questioning patriarchy itself. Hence, the resistance to the powerfully "other" idea of Goddess.

The church is a flash point for Sue's early anger because of the depth of trust she feels it betrays, but she moves from rage to outrage, "love's wild and unacknowledged sister." Sue still hears Christianity's haunting and nostalgic"deep song." When Sue attends church she connects with the people and honors the deep song. Mystics seek the Divine inwardly, while prophets bring revolution to society; the time has come for these functions to intertwine and find fulfillment. After six years of being sequestered, Sue feels new bravery. She goes on a last retreat at Springbank, walks the circle of trees, and prays for every woman who will come here. Sue agrees with the Dalai Lama: "My religion is kindness."

Nature

Sue Monk Kidd owes much of her spiritual renewal to a gradual acceptance of a non-dualistic view of healing nature. Early on, she is too inhibited to join women dancing on a beach at a full moon celebration and is appalled at talk of the "Great Mother." Males supposedly are spiritual, heavenly, and transcendent over nature, while females are sensual and earthy, perhaps because of their monthly cycle, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and caring for the infirm. As a result, nature is being raped and disregarded and the church stands aloof, seeing the earth as fallen and matter inherently evil, to be conquered and studied. The earth is just a "way station" to redemption in the Father's house. Womanhood is too "visceral" for patriarchal religion. Seeing a circle of trees in a magazine, Sue wishes she could disappear into this container holding and nurturing and prays for the first time to "Mothergod."

At Springbank Retreat Center Sue and her friend Betty experience nature profoundly many times. They find and ritually purify a real circle of trees, giving patriarchy a symbolic funeral. In the woods, Sue sees that whenever she refuses to pick up her life's thread, she gets lost and afraid; when she is loyal to it, it guides her. Sue and Betty ritualize the labyrinth, an ancient symbol of the womb, by laying hundreds of yards of textile thread along the trails in an inward spiral to the circle of trees, in order that night in complete darkness to follow it trustingly. When they finish, independently, they contemplate their deed in a circle of blooming daffodils. In March, she plants three cedar trees in her backyard, completing a circle. Lying on her back, she feels part of the quilt of creation, a manifestation of the Divine One. It is a feeling of mystical oneness and interconnection; resacralized nature; and liberation to struggle for value, dignity, and power for every human.

"We-Consciousness" may well hold the key to earth's survival. The universe is a dance of subatomic particles and fields of energy. When relating to Herself, women attain a natural connectedness. "Theism" holds that God is wholly beyond the world, transcendent, untouchable, but humanity needs to be drawn into Divine Mother's lap and turned into a global family. When Goddess consciousness returns, the earth will become holy again, no longer a disposable stop on the way to heaven. When matter breathes divinity, humans will stop dominating and destroying the earth, but accept responsibility for it. Humanity must be reinvented and Herself is key to ecological wisdom. Women can embody the Sacred Feminine by embracing nature. Sue loves to go to the ocean. Once she is there before sunrise and dances with the waves, sand, birds, and shells. She begins picking up trash. Soon Sandy and then perfect strangers join in.

Style

Perspective

Sue Monk Kidd is a successful evangelical Christian writer and lecturer who has begun to expand beyond the confines of the Southern Baptist tradition before beginning to discover how she suffers from a "Feminine Wound." Married to a Baptist chaplain and teacher, Sandy, Kidd is not unduly oppressed, outwardly submissive, or controlled, but comes to see the need to perform a "Feminine Critique" of her life. She struggles with giving up the comforts of Christianity as the psychical and spiritual pain it causes grow too deep, to identify and die to patriarchal strictures, to be reborn with a feminist soul, to embrace a Feminine Divine, and to stand her ground firmly and share the good news of her discoveries. Even those who reject her ultimate theology can fault her sincerity and good will. She demolishes the straw men of patriarchy by pathos.

Kidd has the advantage of being a skilled professional writer, who knows how to tell a story and convince a reader. She has long kept a voluminous journal of thoughts, observations, dreams, and questions. She is also a visual artist, which comes in handy as she seeks to sort out her feelings. Kidd is far more creative than the "average" woman, but argues that no woman is without creative talents. Not all might be up to telling this story, but all are up to making the journey. Kidd admits ignorance about mythology and goddess religions, and chronicles how she learns about them. What she says about Jungian psychology comes from undergoing analysis and reading up on dreams and myths. She shows herself to be at best an amateur biblical scholar and church historian. Kidd admits that not all women will follow the same path, but that all must pass by certain key positions in their quest, and above all insists that the journey is worth it despite all costs.

Kidd obviously writes for women, addressing their needs and challenges. She mentions her husband peripherally and suggests how women ought to treat the men in their lives, trying to help them understand what they are going through. She is candid that this is not always possible and is thankful that Sandy turns out so well. The book is valuable reading for open-minded males, but leaves them wishing they knew better how to be like Sandy.

Tone

The Dance of the Dissident Daughter is long-time Christian spiritualist writer Sue Monk Kidd's reflections on an exhausting eight years that she spends sloughing off encrusted patriarchal traditions to find and empower her feminine self. As it is her autobiography, the mood is necessarily subjective, but Kidd is a skilled and careful writer, citing experiences by other women on the same quest and a wide variety of scholars drawn from archeology, history, literature, mythology, medicine, and psychology to back up her

arguments and explain how she formulates her ideas. She relates the high and low points of the quest in moving detail.

Kidd is eminently open about her fears and reservations, even to admitting she does not want to risk her commercial success as a writer and lecturer. She admits that there are a vast number of ways in which the various steps in the process of finding one's feminine center can proceed - but insisting that some steps are mandatory in some form. She is honest about the impact her evolution has on her husband, family, and friends, admits that she knows women whose outcome is not as good as hers: for her husband becomes an ardent feminist through his own deep struggle and reeducation. She does not include a disclaimer that other's results may vary, but makes it clear this is the case - but insists that the struggle is worth it, no matter the cost.

There is nothing arrogant or proselytic about Kidd's style. She allows that some women are able to remain within the traditional forms of Christianity while finding themselves, but explains why for her this is impossible. She admits struggling with the word "Goddess," with such sincerity that the most fundamental of readers should be able to commiserate. She doubtless loses them when she embraces the Feminine Divine, but it is their loss. The book is a powerful testimony to an intense eight-year struggle, filed with delightful, colorful anecdotes, warm reminiscences, and generally ample scholarship.

Structure

Four numbered and titled parts, each of which is broken down by major and minor headline titles. Three epigraphs precede each part, setting the mood for the discussion. The story is generally chronological, following the eight years of author Sue Monk Kidd's spiritual journey. For lack of illustrations, the reader must rely on Internet tools to see the various art works and locales she enthusiastically describes. Without this, much of the impact is lost. The reader also does well to look the names of any unfamiliar feminist writers that Kidd quotes and alludes to without offering background information. The text is preceded by Acknowledgments and an indispensable Introduction explaining why Sue writes the book and how she hopes it can help women at all stages in the quest. It is followed by Notes and Permissions. An index would have aided close reading, as Kidd jumps excitedly back and forth in the chronology at times.

Part 1, "Awakening" provides a lengthy description of how Kidd's journey begins. It jumps backward to childhood memories and forward to clarifying events, but generally covers the first two years of her spiritual quest, roughly in chronological order. Part 2, "Initiation" centers on the myth of Ariadne, about whom Kidd reads and whose picture by Titian she sees. Kidd is creating rituals to reinforce her growth. The lengthy Part 3, "Grounding" picks up Sue's story after a year and a half of initiation, reviewing her theological struggles and acceptance of and by the Divine Feminine. Brief Part 4, "Empowerment" picks up weeks after meeting the turtle, as Sue wonders how she can plant her journey in the world. suggests ways in which women can use what they learn. It concludes with touching scenes of her daughter's going away to college, taking with

her a memento of her mother's struggles. After riding in silence a while, Kidd summarizes for husband Sandy everything she has gone through and what it all means. Her story is not over. It is a thread in a great tapestry.

Quotes

"Conception, labor, and birthing — metaphors thick with the image and experiences of women — offer a body parable of the process of awakening. The parable tells us things we need to know about the way awakening works — the slow, unfolding, sometimes hidden, always expanding nature of it, the inevitable queasiness, the need to nurture and attend to what inhabits us, the uncertainty about the outcome, the fearful knowing that once we bring the new consciousness forth, our lives will never be the same. It tells us that and more.
"I've given birth to two children, but bring them into the world was a breeze compared to birthing myself as a woman. Bringing forth a true, instinctual, powerful woman who is rooted in her own feminine center, who honors the sacredness of the feminine, and who speaks the feminine language of her own soul is never easy. Neither is it always welcomed. I discovered that few people will rush over to tie a big pink bow on your mailbox.
"Yet there is no place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming. But more than that, birthing the kind of woman who can authentically say, 'My soul is my own,' and then embody it in her life, her spirituality, and her community is worth the risk and hardship." Part 1, pg. 12.

"Suddenly I heard a little cough behind me and, turning, saw a smiling man with shaven dark hair and round glasses. 'I'm Father Paschal,' he said.
"At that moment I opened my mouth and uttered what is undoubtedly the most embarrassing Freudian slip of my life. I said, 'Hello, I'm Father Sue.'
"He got a funny look on his face. Heat flared in my cheeks.
"'Are you feeling nervous about being here?' he asked, attributing my word slip to anxiousness.
"I hated to tell him that no, actually I was an old hand at monasteries. 'I must be,' I said.
"We chatted a while longer, though I don't recall a thing we said after that. My face stayed warm a god half hour." Part 1, pg. 24.

"Another woman who was a student of ancient mythology told us that the turtle was a feminine symbol of strength and wisdom. 'Did you know that in some ancient cultures the turtle shell was considered the base and support of the universe? It was said the whole world axis sat on her back.'
"Silence fell as we stared at the carapace, ink-gold beneath the moon. One by one the women began to dance again, dipping to brush their hands across the shell as they circled it, as if they were touching the source of feminine support, wisdom, and strength.
"It was a ritual of deep beauty that I could only watch from the edge. But when the women finally walked back up the beach, I lagged behind just long enough to brush my hand across the shell." Part 1, pg. 37.

"The point, however, is that women have been socialized toward certain choices and experiences, and these experiences need to be value in a way that is not inferior to men's experiences. Indeed, as I made my critique, the problem seemed to me not that there are differences but rather how we value these differences.

"It seemed clear that patriarchy has valued rationality, independence, competitiveness, efficiency, stoicism, mechanical forms, and militarism - things traditionally associated with the 'masculine.' Less valued are beingness, feeling, art, listening, intuition, nurturing, and attachment - things traditionally associated with the 'feminine.'
"As a patriarchal institution, Christianity has tended to value 'masculine' attributes more than those connected with the 'feminine.' Author Margaret Starbird put it succinctly: 'Institutional Christianity, which has nurtured Western civilization for nearly two thousand years, may have been built over a gigantic flaw in doctrine - a theological "San Andreas Fault": the denial of the feminine." Part 1, pg. 63.

"The old woman has shining white hair and a face that hangs in folds and furrows down to her shoulders. Her lips are apple red, and she carries a walking stick with a snake wound around it. I notice strange flashes in the air about her as if someone is shaking out gold glitter.
"She points to the church steeple. As she does, it changes from a steeple to a rocket ship aimed at the sky. The old woman shakes her head and says, 'You think this will take you where you need to go. Think again.'
"Crazy dream, crazy old woman, I told myself when I woke. But there was no denying she was a numinous figure with enormous energy and power. She lingered in my thoughts for days.
"Then one morning in late November, I sat by myself in the church balcony during Sunday service. My two children were sitting with friends. I don't recall why Sandy wasn't there.
"The minister was preaching. He was holding up a Bible. It was open, perched atop his raised hand as if a blackbird had landed there. He was saying that the Bible was the sole and ultimate authority of the Christian's life. The sole and ultimate authority.
"I remember a feeling rising up from a place about two inches below my navel. It was a passionate, determined feeling, and it spread out from the core of me like a current so that my skin vibrated with it. If feelings could be translated into English, this feeling would have roughly been the word no! Part 1, pg. 76.

"In a moment of sadness I wondered what would become of us. He didn't understand the extraordinary passion in my year for this journey; he didn't know my fierce need to be unbridled, the ache for my feminine soul. I yearned for his support. I wished for a marriage where we could walk paths that allowed for the unconditional sharing of soul. Without it, marriage becomes very lonely.
"Writing poignantly about the strain on her marriage that came from following her feminine journey, Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda Bolen wrote, 'The need to share what we experience, to be listened to, to have what is going on inside us matter to the person we are married to, to engage in a two-way dialogue, is the cry of one soul yearning to meet another.
"It was my cry, but I couldn't seem to make it haerd. And to be honest, I couldn't hear his cry very well, either." Part 2, pg. 91.

"Is there a feeling more gleeful than opening a cage and setting something captured free? I was reminded of the time I stayed at a bed-and-breakfast owned by a retired couple. One morning as I strolled in the backyard gardens, I saw the man checking wire

cages the size of shoe boxes, which were tucked discreetly among the shrubs. Most of them, I noticed, were filled with squirrels. I watched, horrified, as he carried the cages to the backyard pool, lowered them one by one into the water, and left them there until the squirrels' frantic little bodies stopped scrambling and they drowned. Then he disposed of the bodies and reset the traps.
"That evening when the man had left to go to church (that's right, church!), I went all about the yard throwing open the cages and feeling the most delicious sense of glee as the squirrels shot out and up the trees, making riotous leaps through the branches.
"I believe most women have inside us one of those figures who goes around laying discreet traps, trying to cage, restrict, and drown the spirited, natural parts of us, the parts that go leaping through life. And it is a good thing, a holy thing even, to circle around by stealth, if necessary, and set them free again." Part 2, pg. 106.

"I remembered the time I discussed this fear and resistance with a minister who was genuinely interested in creating inclusiveness in his church. He thought we should forgo recovering Divine Feminine images and more directly toward abstract, androgynous images; we should neuter the language and symbol of the Divine. He said we shold use only the word God, not Father or he or his.
"'But the word God does not register in us as neuter.' I said. 'Technically it may not imply any particular gender, but what registers and functions in the mid is male.'
"As McFague says, androgynous terms only 'conceal androcentric and male assumptions behind the abstraction.' How many times had I heard someone say, 'God is not male. He is spirit.'?
"The minister looked at me. 'Then where does that leave us?'
"'I think it leaves us in the position of finding ways to speak of the Divinity equally in female as well as male terms,' I said.
"He looked at me with alarm and dismay as his own ambivalence about the feminine surfaced. 'Oh dear,' he said.
"The 'oh dear' reaction is common. It's the uh-oh-what-will-they-think? How-can-it-be-done? Questions that surface inside." Part 3, pgs. 139-140.

"Theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson clarifies this immensely important point. She presents three distinct approaches frequently taken as we seek to recover the Sacred Feminine:
"'One seeks to give "feminine" qualities to God who is still nevertheless imagined predominantly as a male person. Another purports to uncover a "feminine" dimension in God, often finding this realized in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. A third sees speech about God in which the fullness of female humanity as well as of male humanity and cosmic reality may serve as a divine symbol, in equivalent ways.'
"My approach became the third way. My aim wasn't helping Yahweh get in touch with his 'feminine side.' I wasn't interested in merely identifying one aspect of the Trinity as feminine. When we stop there, inevitably the feminine aspects end up as secondary and subordinate, acting in the same 'limited roles in which females are allowed to act in the patriarchal social order.'
"I was interested in a balance, which meant envisioning female image, form, and symbol that could contain the fullness of divinity, just as there were male image, form, and symbol that contained the fullness of divinity." Part 3, pg. 145.

"Suddenly I was engulfed by an image - dolphins despairing, weeping over what humans are doing to their waters. I sat still, gazing through the window, my heart starting to burn in a strange way. I tried to imagine what it was like to be a dolphin. I took myself out of the skin-encapsulated ego I often walked around in and placed myself in the sleek body of a dolphin. I imagined swimming waters laced with drift gill netting, poisoned by billions of tons of toxic waste, oil, and sewage.
"Some weeks later I read Susan Griffin's lines about a red-winged blackbird: 'I fly with her, enter her with my mind, leave myself, die for an instant, live in the body of this bird whom I cannot live without ... because I know I am made from this earth as my mother's hands were made from this earth.'
"I had entered that same elusive place inside where consciousness overlaps and boundaries dissolve. Grief boiled up. Tears curved under my chin. I felt a deep and holy connection with dolphins that startled me with its intensity. I had, as the mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg put it, lay down in fire." Part 3, pgs. 156-157.

"Restoring the feminine symbol of Deity means that divinity will no longer be only heavenly, other, out there, up there, beyond time and space, beyond body and death. It will also be right here, right now, in me, in the earth, in this river and this rock, in excrement and roses alike. Divinity will be in the body, in the cycles of life and death, in the moment of decay and the moment of lovemaking.
"I love this statement by Andrew Harvey: 'Everyone has known something in lovemaking of the great lovemaking of the universe. Everyone who has ever had one tender orgasm with someone else has known something of the divine. The divine is everything foaming around everywhere. We're all in connection with it, but we've not been given permission ... We've not been taught how to understand our glimpses and how to follow them.'
"The symbol of Goddess gives us permission. She teaches us to embrace the holiness of every natural, ordinary, sensual, dying moment. Patriarchy may try to negate body and flee earth with its constant heartbeat of death, but Goddess forces us back to embrace them, to take our human life in our arms and clasp it for the divine life it is - the nice, sanitary, harmonious moments as well as the painful, dark, splintered ones." Part 3, pgs. 160-161.

"An old monk sat on the front row in his black-and-white robe. I met his gaze, then turned. When I looked back, he was still watching me. He looked nearly transfixed by it all, his mouth parted like a child's, his eyes smiling, and I realized it was joy and love I was seeing on his face.
"I was a woman dancing around the monastery altar - present, included, celebrated, loved. It was ll there in the monk's face, and I knew even then that his face seemed to me the face of Father God. Suddenly I felt again the old, familiar presence.
"That dance, which opened into unexpected healing, became my reuniting bridge. It evoked a mysterium coniunctionis, the unity of the divine symbol in which the Sacred Feminine and the Sacred Masculine began to come together in my life.
"What is ultimately needed is balance - divine symbols that reflect masculine and feminine and a genuine marriage of the masculine and feminine in each of us. Meinrad Craighead in her book The Mother's Song refers to this. Her Catholic heritage and her deep foundation in God the Mother came together, she says. 'The two movements are

not in conflict, they simply water different layers in my soul.' Dancing at the monastery taught me what she meant." Part 3, pg. 189.

"I had bought a card with a turtle on the front, which I intended to give her the next day. I opened it now in the late hours of the night and sat thinking about what I wanted to tell her. In the end I wrote what a gift her life was to me then scrawled one bit of parting wisdom, condensing it all down to this: 'Whatever else you do, listen to your Deepest Self. Love Her and be true to Her, speak Her truth, always.'
"The next day we drove to the college and began to unpack Ann's things in her new dormitory room. She unzipped a suitcase and to my surprise lifted out Nike. 'Where should I put her?' she asked.
"Just that, Where should I put her? But so much more was going on than that simple question. As I watched her place Nike first on the top of the desk, then on her dresser, the moment grew more and more transparent to me. Some kind of transmission was taking place, a transmission of female wisdom from my life to hers, a passing on of consciousness, of the potential for sacred poetry that lives in the feminine soul. All this was symbolized in the little statue with the laurel wreath. The gift was going with her into the world.
" 'The daughters of your daughters of your daughters are likely to remember you, and most importantly, follow in your tracks,' writes Clarissa Pinkola Estés." Part 4, pg. 224.

"I look back now and I am grateful. I recall that whenever I struggled, doubted, wondered if I could pull my thread into this fabric, someone or something would always appear - a friend, a stranger, a figure in a dream, a book, an experience, some shining part of nature - and remind me that this thing I was undertaking was holy to the core. I would learn again that it is all right for women to follow the wisdom in their souls, to name their truth, to embrace the Sacred Feminine, that there is undreamed voice, strength, and power in us.
"And that is what I have come to tell you. I have come over the wise distances to tell you: She is in us." Part 4, pg. 228.

Topics for Discussion

How does Sue Monk Kidd use captive flies and squirrels as symbols? What sets them apart and what does each teach her during her quest?

How do works of art affect Sue Monk Kidd. Which seems to move her most? Can you identify with one particular art piece - or have one that moves you? How?

What role does darkness play in the quest for female renewal?

Why does Sue Monk Kidd believe "God" cannot register in the mind as neuter? Do you agree or disagree? Support your answer.

How does Sandy Kidd figure in the memoir? Does the author cover his experiences in sufficient detail? What would you ask him if you had the chance?

What is Sue Monk Kidd's understanding of ritual? Which ritual (if any) do you most identify with?

At the end of the memoir, Sue Monk Kidd is thankful that someone or something always shows up when she needs help in her quest. Which someone or something do you think has the most impact on her?