



Clarissa Pinkola Estés tells the story from the deserts and mountains of Northern Mexico about a wolf woman, a collector of bones, who resurrects the wild spirit of life from the depths of the Underworld.

"There is an old woman who lives in a hidden place that everyone knows but few have ever seen. As in the fairy tales of Eastern Europe, she seems to wait for lost or wandering people and seekers to come to her place.

They say she lives among the rotten granite slopes in Tarahumara Indian territory. They say she is buried outside Phoenix near a well. She is said to have been seen traveling south to Monte Alban in a burnt-out car with the back window shot out. She is said to stand by the highway near El Paso, or ride shotgun with truckers to Morelia, Mexico, or that she has been sighted walking to market above Oaxaca with strangely formed boughs of firewood on her back. She is called by many names: La Huesera, Bone Woman; La Trapera, The Gatherer; and La Loba, Wolf Woman.

The superstitious call her soul stealer, claiming she weaves a dream catcher to snatch up those who would cross over and cage them in the light of her fire. The sole work of La Loba is the collecting of bones. She is known to collect and preserve especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world. Her cave is filled with the bones of all manner of desert creatures: the deer, the rattlesnake, the crow. But her specialty is said to be wolves.

She creeps and crawls and sifts through the montañas, mountains, and arroyos, dry river beds, looking for wolf bones, and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, when the last bone is in place and the beautiful white sculpture of the creature is laid out before her, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing. And when she is sure, she stands over the criatura, raises her arms over it, and sings out. That is when the rib bones and leg bones of the wolf begin to flesh out and the creature becomes furred. La Loba sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being; its tail curls upward, shaggy and strong.

Loba sings more and the wolf creature begins to breathe. And still La Loba sings so deeply that the floor of the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon. Somewhere in its running, whether by the speed of its running, or by splashing its way into a river, or by way of a ray of sunlight or moonlight hitting it right in the side, the wolf is suddenly transformed into a laughing woman who runs free toward the horizon. So it is said that if you wander the desert, and it is near sundown, and you are perhaps a little bit lost, and certainly tired, that you are lucky, for La Loba may take a liking to you and show you something — something of the Soul."

Wild Woman Archetype

1. What comes to mind when you think of "Wild Women"? What wild women do you think of from stories, culture, or life experiences?
2. What does the Wild Woman represent to you?
3. La Loba and other Wild Women from folklore live as outsiders, separated from community. Why do you think they are separated? Do you think they left or were removed?
4. Estés suggests that many women have become disconnected from their "wild" nature. Can you identify moments in your life when you felt either particularly connected to or disconnected from your instinctual self?
5. Many women daydream about running away to the wild, buying a plot of land for all their women friends to live on, or just living in the woods. What can you do in your life to answer this call of the wild; this call from the wildness within you?
6. Unlike many Wild Women from folktales, La Loba doesn't work her magic through spells or spoken words, but through song. Has there been a time when music or singing has awakened something wild within you?
7. The story states, "The sole work of La Loba is the collecting of bones. She is known to collect and preserve, especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world." From these bones, discarded and lost, she creates wolves who turn into women; women that are wild, free, and given a second life. What bones within you are at risk of being lost? How can you sing life into them? What would you become if you were given a second chance at life?



This discussion guide was created by Tree of Knowledge Community Coven for the women of Madison Correctional Facility and encourages personal reflection around the topics of myths, culture, and theology. For more Pagan prison ministry resources, please contact support@treeofknowledgeindiana.com

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