

# Killing the bear



Judith Minty's story, "Killing the Bear," is about a woman who commits murder against her sexual self. Although, she wants to move on with life, she realizes that she must kill this bear in order to be at peace with herself.

While I was reading, I chose to focus on the two aspects of the psyche, specifically the id and the ego. The id, the bestial nature of the bear, in the woman's life, and the ego, the real world, represented by the woman's cabin. It is always hot for this woman. The summer heat was an all-consuming, sexual tension inside her. She lives only for the summer, marking each day, but the rest of the year, and even the rest of her life, it means nothing to her. At the end of the summer, she immediately plans for the next summer. Although in denial of her own heat, her sexuality, she seems, at the same time, to live for it.

I noticed that during the summer, she lived in an isolated cabin, the woman builds herself a rational world, hammering and painting on her space. This real world is disturbed by the presence of a wild bear. When she first sees the bear, he is distant, frightening, like the awakening of sensuality in a young woman. He scares her a little and "her hands lift to cover her breasts," a somewhat sexual response to the bear's presence, suggesting displacement of her sensual urges on the bear.

Downplaying her fear of the bear, she intellectualizes the bear, recounting facts and stories she has heard about bears. However, even during this intellectualization, she reflects on her animal nature and its destruction. Her memory of her mother burning her stuffed bear mirrors, in a roundabout way, her current situation and her ultimate solution to the live bear's

presence. At the end of the stuffed bear story, she observes that her mother misspoke when she said, " I'm sorry for burning the animal in you."

Although, the mother " killed" the woman's childhood beast, the adult woman is facing the same animal, the living beast in herself, again.

When I was reading, I could tell that her sexuality, the bear, grows bold and more insistent, threatening her rational world, the woman's fear grows. She buys a gun for protection, snapping at the flirting clerk that " she didn't need a man" as she pays for it. She denies her baser needs and desires, yet at the same time, she wants to seek out and dominate her sensuality, to go " hunting" for her beast. Ironically, she chooses to use a gun, a violent phallic symbol, to kill her sexuality.

" Killing the Bear" is a great example of how an author can use the real world symbolically to mirror the inner psychological world of human beings. In the story, the natural world which threatens the woman reflects all the baser elements that people usually try to internalize, control, or sometimes reject. However, in the story, the woman's barriers against her nature, her " civilization", are not enough. She can never quite tame the beast within.