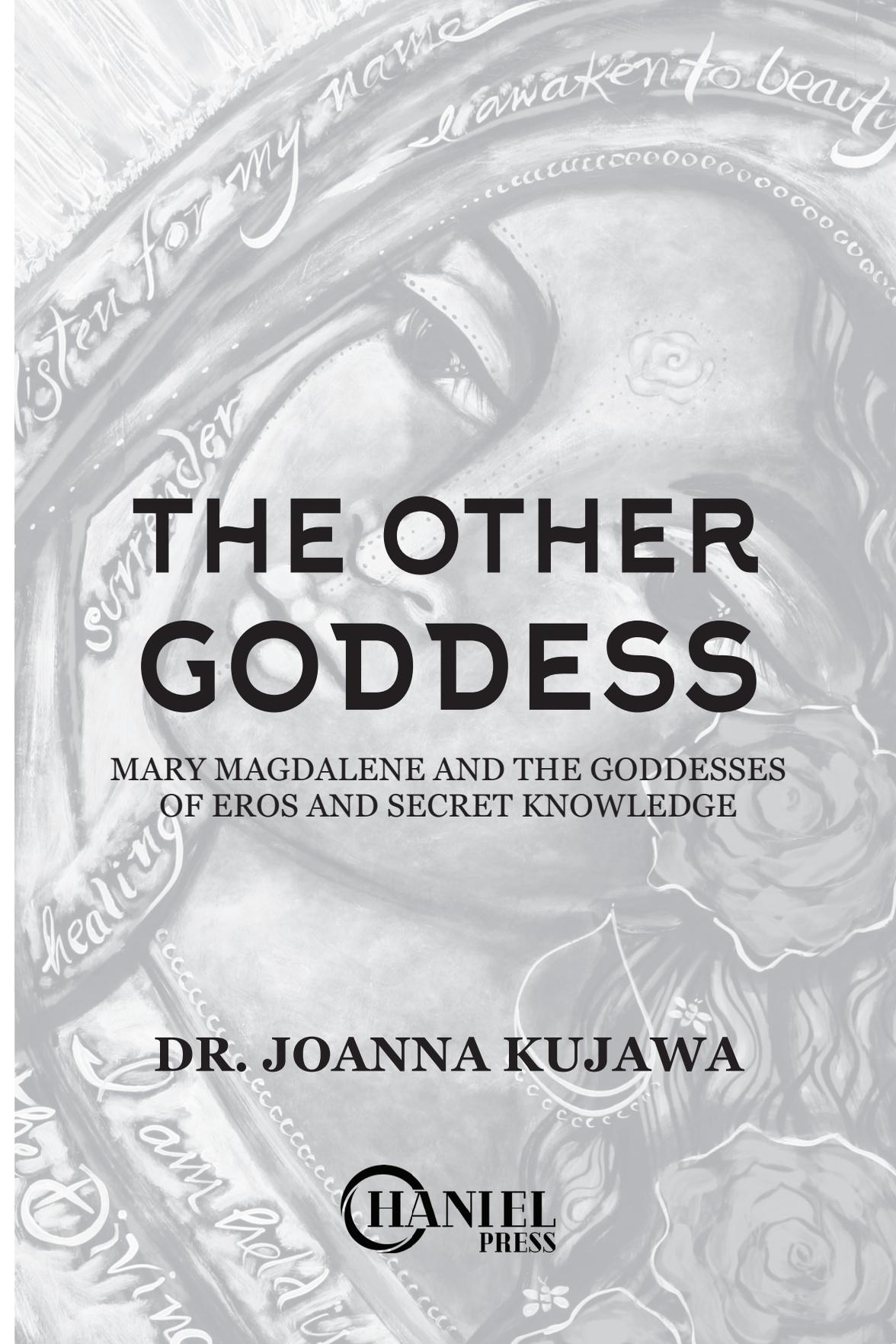


DR. JOANNA KUJAWA

listen for my  
drawn to beauty  
surrender  
healing

# THE OTHER GODDESS

MARY MAGDALENE AND THE GODDESSES  
OF EROS AND SECRET KNOWLEDGE



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OF EROS AND SECRET KNOWLEDGE

DR. JOANNA KUJAWA

 HANIEL  
PRESS

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Dr. Joanna Kujawa

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*That which produces bliss should be used in  
worship since it ravishes the heart.*

—ABHINAVAGUPTA

*I trust them because they have tasted the fruit.*

—ROGER HOUSDEN

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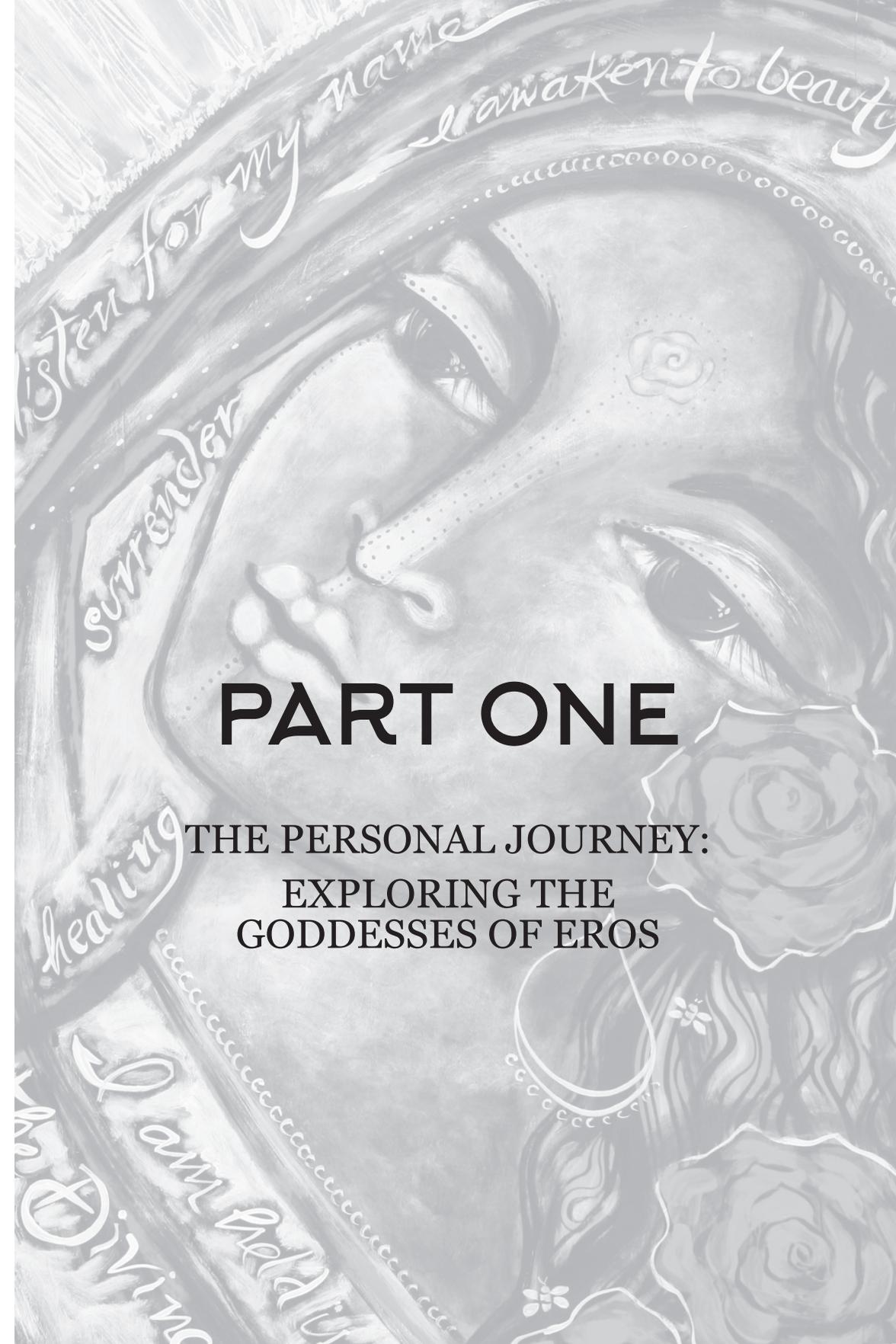
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listen for my name  
I awaken to beauty

surrender

# PART ONE

THE PERSONAL JOURNEY:  
EXPLORING THE  
GODDESSES OF EROS

healing

I am held by  
Divine



# DISCOVERING EROS

**W**hen I was in my late teens and living in communist Poland, I observed my girlfriends offering their virginity to their boyfriends on their 18th birthday, then witnessed them marching to the altar three months later because, of course, they had fallen pregnant. In those days nearly everyone considered this normal. But for me the idea of being stuck early in life in marriage and motherhood before I could even explore who I was and what other paths I might walk seemed a worse fate than death itself.

I was looking for other examples of what a woman was or could be, but the Communist posters of well-muscled worker women driving tractors or waving red flags didn't appeal to me. My family was intensely Catholic and I often went to one of the beautiful baroque churches in my hometown where I found in the soft and opulent naves images of the two Catholic goddesses, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.

I had already begun to feel the surge of Eros in all its promise and delight, so I was not keen on imitating the example of the virgin mother. I was more intrigued by the portrayal of Mary Magdalene, who was prominent in Jesus' story yet somehow rejected and pushed

to the side. I asked myself, was it because she was not a virgin? Could it be that her life was much more interesting and her wisdom much deeper than what I had learned in religion classes? Only later in life did I realize that her presence in Christianity—notable as it was, though suppressed at the same time—wasn't that different to the presence of Eros in our lives. I saw that Mary Magdalene represented the possible unification of Eros and spirit, which Christianity struggled to accept.

It took quite a feat of imagination to construe myself differently from what I saw around me. I found consolation in studying the myths of ancient goddesses, unaware that later in life I would find a source of great wisdom there.

At first, I was fascinated by three Greek goddesses whose stories I read before going to bed. These were Athena, Aphrodite and Artemis. I admired Athena because, like her, I loved knowledge, though I thought her cold and remote. Aphrodite's sensual touch was attractive to me, while Artemis added a sense of adventure and independence to the two other goddesses.

A bit later, I explored more magically assertive goddesses such as Circe and the Hindu erotic super-heroines Radha, Sundari and Kali. I didn't know back then about Inanna or Isis and showed no interest in them until many years later. So, while I watched my girlfriends rushing to the altar, I buried myself in books. In the meantime, I was playing with Eros in my imagination. I wondered what it might be like to be with a tall, handsome Viking. Being a playful being, Eros likes to be engaged with, even if only in the mind.

At some point I met a Swedish businessman who, out of the blue, showed up in my hometown and I, knowing nothing about sensual seduction, took to playing with his imagination. It was the time of Elton John's song *Nikita*, and I was not that different from her—a blonde, dreamy girl walking among Eastern European tanks during a time of

martial law. My seduction of this foreign *imaginal* worked well enough for him to jump through the hoops of the Communist bureaucratic nightmare to invite me to Sweden, based on nothing more than the short, platonic encounter shared in my hometown. The affair did not last, as the reality of living in a Swedish suburb taught us he was no Viking and I was not a Nikita.

For a while, I thought this to be the end of my dream of Eros. I returned to Poland to continue my studies of ancient goddesses until, a few months later, I had another opportunity to escape the Communist grayness, this time to Paris at a girlfriend's invitation. I left Poland with nothing but a borrowed suitcase and ten American dollars. Once in Paris, I recovered from that ill-fated Swedish affair quickly. My erotic imagination moved swiftly from the Viking archetype to a French libertine archetype, as I explored the allure of Frenchmen.

This might seem a rather flamboyant introduction to exploration of the mysterious avenues of Eros, though with Eros nothing is ever what it seems. Eros is as different from sexuality as eroticism is from sex, so Eva Pierrakos tells us in her book *The Pathwork of Self-Transformation*. The French know this well and for that reason prefer to refer to the beautiful attraction that is the play of Eros as *erotique*, rather than sexual. Sexual force without the erotic element, Pierrakos says, is very animalistic, enjoyable only for a period of time and ultimately 'utterly selfish' and meaningless spiritually.

Eros, on the other hand, which lives mostly in our imagination, manifests as a desire to know and experience the other. It can manifest as a strong attraction, but this is a different level of attraction. While sexual attraction can create an intense yet temporary chemistry between two people, erotic attraction is more focused on the powerful desire to connect with another, to truly and completely know them. This knowing includes sexual union but goes beyond it. Eros, or erotic

connection rather than chemistry, serves to create a bridge between our being and the being of the other on whom our erotic desire is fixed.

Let me give you an example. In an instance of pure sexual attraction, we may experience great sexual pleasure but have no desire to truly know the person. Often we may experience the strange feeling that despite the great sex, we have little to say to each other. In this respect, even great sex without a deeper connection is largely meaningless and leaves us empty, despite being physically satisfied.

Erotic desire is more fulfilling because of the presence of a deeper connection. For the same reason, our sexual experiences when Eros is present are also much deeper and more satisfying. We feel that not only do we know the other person better, but also that we have somehow come to know ourselves in the process. This leaves us mysteriously connected and bedazzled by the experience because it allows us to touch our souls and feel a deep if fleeting connection with another person.

This is a gift that should not be rejected. Pierrakos calls this ‘the quest for the other soul,’ as the sexual encounter in this case is merely a conduit to the experience of a profound connection and knowing of the soul of another. You may not know anything about the mundane aspects of this other person’s life, but you get to know them at a much deeper level, a level people who have known that person for years may never know. This is the power of Eros.

Yet even Eros, as we well know, wears itself out. Eros loves to be playful. Eros loves to be beautiful at all times. Eros loves the new. Eros becomes bored if it isn’t constantly curious about the other. Eros moves on. All the greatest romances of this world are based on Eros and die because of Eros. This is why Pierrakos says romantic love is only the final point for those who refuse to evolve spiritually and move beyond it. I must admit that without knowing the possibility of something

higher, it's true that romantic love seems like the best of all possible deals, because what usually comes after it is marriage—and few of us know how to sustain Eros in marriage. Alternatively, like all great romances, romantic love usually comes to an abrupt end.

Fortunately, this is not all we have available to us. Apart from sexual attraction or the adventurousness of Eros, we also have love. Love, Pierrakos tells us, is a 'permanent state of the soul.' What is this permanent state of the soul and how we can achieve it? This is the difficult part. We need to be willing to do two things: to grow spiritually, which requires us to constantly work on ourselves, and at the same time stay open to Eros. This also means not being afraid to completely expose ourselves to another, including our soul, our darkness, and our ugly parts.

Do you have the desire, the stamina and the courage to do this?

Let me refer you to Pierrakos again: 'When you find the other soul and meet it, you fulfill your destiny.'

Do you dare? Are you prepared to risk all for this 'complete mutual revelation of one soul to another?' Because this is what it takes.

For this revelation to be possible, we need to constantly grow and move to a higher possibility with ourselves and with our partner. This requires facing the shadowy parts of ourselves and healing them. Pierrakos teaches us that truly soulful love is not possible without this. We need to grow. We need to attain our highest possibility. Then, as the great tenth-century Tantric philosopher Abhinavagupta once said, 'You will walk upon this earth as gods.'

In Paris I learned that not even Eros, without a desire for spiritual growth, can hold a relationship for long. Eros needs to be lived. Without this, life is only a set of mundane responsibilities. But Eros also needs to be entertained at the highest possible level and used to open up the new field of divine play, our own highest possibility.

After publishing one article on Eros and spirit, I received many personal confessions of erotic-spiritual experiences from readers. They contained experiences through Eros of the mystical that happened outside the mundane reality of relationships. One woman shared a beautiful story of an erotic encounter that turned out to be a moment of self-realization for both parties and yet was outside the understanding of what's normally called 'a relationship.' Like many mystical experiences, this one was both life-shattering and transformative, so that it pierced through the walls of the lovers' perceptions.

Suddenly a new door of perception opened for them and a new, much more beautiful holistic and divine vision of all creation was available to them. Their lovemaking experience took them out of their bodies and was later described by this reader as a form of grace and benediction. The shattering part of the experience was also the realization that they could not be together, as they were otherwise attached to other people. In a strange and beautiful way, several decades later they met again when the woman was finishing her studies to become a civil celebrant. She was asked to perform her first funeral rites over the body of a man whose body had been shipped to her location, for reasons unknown to her. The body turned out to be that of her former lover with whom she had shared the mystical experience triggered by Eros.

Another reader, male this time, recalled a mystical experience of an erotic but not sexual type when he felt the presence of a young Indian woman with long, flowing hair—first within his own being, then outside himself breathing at his neck with her hand gently resting on his heart. He felt a form of erotic sensation that shook his entire being. He recognized her as Devi ('the goddess' in Sanskrit) herself who had come to him in this erotic and beautiful form. For days he walked the streets weeping with joy, aware that this extremely personal

and erotic episode was also mystical in nature and had connected him to the feminine in its divine form.

My own and others' experiences have convinced me that to entertain Eros at the highest possible level, we need to know what shapes the perceptions of Eros in our psyche – and that is why we need to explore the goddesses of Eros.

# EXPLORING THE GODDESSES OF EROS

## • APHRODITE

**T**he first goddess that we need to explore is Aphrodite, the Ancient Greek goddess of beauty, love, passion and pleasure. The stories of her birth vary, including the one told in Homer's *The Illiad*, which describes her as the daughter of Zeus and Dione, an *Oceanid* or ocean nymph. The most popular myth comes from Hesiod's eighth-century BCE poem *The Theogony*, in which he describes the origins of gods and goddesses. My preference is for Hesiod's version simply because it's more beautiful.

Hesiod describes Aphrodite as born from the sea foam near the island of Cyprus, where the Titan Cronus killed his father Uranus and threw his father's genitals into the sea. The story mythically connects Aphrodite's status as the goddess of beauty with erotic love by mixing sea foam with sperm. This is also the most popular image of Aphrodite in Sandro Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus*. Venus was Aphrodite's name during the Roman Empire when Rome conquered Greece and adopted its goddesses and gods. Astrologically, Aphrodite

is represented by the planet Venus. She is often symbolized by a dolphin, rose, swan or shell.

There is a certain charm and sensuality in the stories of Aphrodite, which are an unending stream of doomed romances. This is probably why we so easily identify with her or, at least, love to adore her. She arouses us and her romantic adventures provide a background for our own failed loves and romances. For example, she was forced by Zeus to marry the ugly Hephaistos, yet at the same time carried on sexy affairs with the handsome and manly Aries, God of War, and many others. Despite being a goddess of beauty, pleasure and love, it was still not within her powers to choose her own husband and she was often humiliated in her romantic adventures.

It was not always so. I was surprised to discover that Aphrodite was just another version of an earlier goddess from Sumer known as Inanna, or as the Egyptian goddess Hathor. Like Inanna and Hathor before her, Aphrodite was once also known as the goddess of war and was a force to be reckoned with. Then something happened to her and she lost her power.

While researching this book, I found a wonderful essay by Susan Hawthorne, ‘The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite’ in *Goddesses in Myth, History and Culture*. Hawthorne traces the original archetype of Aphrodite as the goddess of love and beauty, whose power even Zeus was afraid of, but who was gradually disempowered. The stories of the all-powerful Aphrodite were, no doubt, told and written by someone else. From a position of power, she moved to one of ridicule, trapped by her own desires and in need of and begging Zeus for help! In modern terms, she became the Marilyn Monroe of Olympus—beautiful, yet disempowered and demeaned.

‘The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite’ is one of the hymns presumably written by Homer around the eighth century BCE. Hawthorne

examines its 293 lines and discovers that, originally, Aphrodite was described as ‘all-powerful.’ She is Aphrodite the Golden who ‘stirs up’ sweet longing both in gods and humans, including Zeus himself, whom ‘she deceives at her pleasure.’ At a certain point, the fates are reversed and Zeus somehow manages to make Aphrodite fall in love with a mortal man, Anchises from Troy. She falls in love and desires Anchises so deeply that she pretends to be a mortal woman just so she can share the pleasure of lovemaking with him. As a result of this romance, the hymn tells us, her human lover gains power and status, whereas she is disgraced as a goddess who has fallen for a mortal. The goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and desire falls victim to her own powers—or her misused and manipulated powers. What was once her strength has now become her downfall.

In one way, we can agree with Hawthorne’s interpretation of the hymn to Aphrodite. It’s no secret, and painfully obvious to any woman, that feminine sensuality and sexuality have been hijacked, along with the whole idea of the goddess. What it means to be a sensually empowered woman has been defined for us by a generation of patriarchs who have oppressed humanity for too long. By humanity, I mean both women and men.

In more modern times, this idea has been defined by the media and Hollywood in a most devious way. Then, of course, comes the fashion industry, which again defines women and their beauty in extremely limiting ways that damage lives and people’s self-image, and which drain the joy of life away or even stymie the possibility of being a beautiful and sensually empowered woman.

The entertainment and fashion industries have examples of Aphrodite-like women who have fallen from their places of power. These women, although adored for their beauty, were also ridiculed and humiliated at times. Marilyn Monroe was the classic example of

an Aphrodite-woman; so were, less tragically, Elizabeth Taylor and many others.

On a more mundane level, I observed this ‘fall’ the most brutal way when, as a 21-year-old woman, I heard two older men talking about an older woman who had just come into the store they were in. They both had known her in the past as a great beauty and no doubt had desired her back then. They pointed at her and with malicious smiles exchanged comments about her age and how ‘nothing was left of the whore’s looks anymore.’ I doubt the woman was ever a ‘whore,’ and the epithet probably came from their once-frustrated and unfulfilled desire for her. I was stunned not only by the vulgar brutality of their words, but also by how they were completely missing her current beauty. The woman was radiant and graceful in an almost ephemeral way, and her only fault was not being young. Yet this was enough to berate her as ‘fallen.’

We can also take a more universal approach toward the idea of the ‘fall of Aphrodite’ the poignant story of a common sense of disempowerment that both women and men experience when falling in love and falling into desire. According to the tradition of esoteric Hinduism, we become ‘deluded by our own power.’ Instead of being in charge of our gifts, including the gift of love and desire, we ‘fall in love’ instead of ‘being in love.’ This is what I learned from one Parthasarathy, a spiritual master from India whom I met while lecturing for Monash University in Malaysia. He said, ‘Do not fall in love; rise in love.’ This is a simple and life-changing shift in thinking about being in love—and yet I have many examples, as does everyone else, of how this is the most difficult thing to do and the most deceitful. How often have we entered into a romantic relationship feeling the irresistible power of Eros and attraction only to end up crying and feeling humiliated, left to ponder our ‘mistakes.’

Perhaps staying in power is not the lesson of Eros and love. Perhaps the whole lesson is to surrender power? But surrender to what? Certainly not to another person—that, we know, is a mistake. But to what? Perhaps to the loveliness of Eros itself? Perhaps to the loveliness of the ‘sweet longing’ of which the hymn to Aphrodite speaks? More often than not, we fall in love with this feeling, with the loveliness of the surrender in love. The ‘falling’ has its own rewards, but it certainly also has its consequences.

## • RADHA

When we speak of the loveliness of Eros, we can’t forget the goddess Radha, who in my opinion is a spiritualized version of Aphrodite. The goddesses of ancient Greece are like Hollywood stars, while the Hindu goddesses have a connection to the divine realm, and their actions are focused on the domain of the Self, on spiritual improvement, on achieving oneness with the divine—although this does not mean they don’t have frivolous moments or never misuse their powers.

In popular Hindu mythology, Radha was a milkmaid who fell in love with Lord Krishna. Although she was the wife of another man, she became Lord Krishna’s consort. In 12th-century poems by the poet Jayadeva, Radha is represented as the goddess of love and devotion. Radha’s longing and devotion for the beloved are her main attributes.

Unlike Aphrodite, Radha was never powerful on her own terms. Quite the opposite, her power derives from her love and devotion for her beloved. She is the ultimate expression of what in Hinduism is called a *bhakta*, or a person who devotionally worships a personal god or goddess. The power of a *bhakta* comes from this devotion, from complete absorption with the beloved, and isn’t that different from the

loving devotion and merging described by the Sufi poet Rumi, with whom most Westerners are familiar.

In Hindu mythology, Radha never lost her power because she never sought it. Her devotion *is* her power. Her devotion is eventually transformed into divine love. Her love spiritualizes her. She represents the love and bliss of being within proximity of the divine, which leads her to being one with the divine. Through this proximity, she herself becomes divine.

Both Aphrodite and Radha are beloved goddesses because we identify with their love struggles. Ah! The misery and ecstasy of romantic love! They do not stop themselves when the arrow of Eros arrives. Aphrodite might become frustrated when this happens to her, as she is used to being in charge, but Radha just goes for it. She longs for the romantic high. She longs for the erotic high that comes with this. She spends days dreaming of her beloved, real or imaginary, and truly and unconditionally believes that finding her beloved, being with her beloved, is the most important thing in her life. Radha loves the bliss of romantic love without bounds.

On a more personal level, Radha represents that part in ourselves that's our longing for love, especially for romantic love. She longs for her soulmate; and if she doesn't have one, she longs to have a soulmate. She is the part of us that loves being in love.

At one level, she can also represent our addiction to romance, and she may become bored after the romantic interlude passes and the more mundane realities of the relationship kick in. Instead of facing these realities, Radha may choose to move to another romantic high— and when that passes, to another one. She is that friend who marries at least four times or who never marries because marriage is too 'mundane' for her (or him). On another level, she might be the genuine longing for a 'true' love, a deep sense of connection and intimacy through a

romantic relationship. She dreams of a romantic ‘soulmateship’ at the deepest level.

I experienced that feeling after my divorce from an abusive and short-lived marriage that forced me to redefine what I really wanted to give in a relationship and what it was that I really valued in masculinity. I have always been attracted to male energy and received the same response from masculine energy in my life. This relationship was based on a strong and intense attraction. Although that particular marriage was a bad experience, I didn’t want to give up on the loveliness and sexiness of the merging of the feminine and masculine in my life. I was very honest with myself at that point.

However, I noticed that again and again I associated masculinity with an alpha-type personality that’s often aggressive and, on closer inspection, in some men a sign of insecurity. It became clear to me that I did not want that in my life anymore. So I began redefining what was really attractive to me. This was not a rational process, a strategy, a list of things I like in men. It was a much more intuitive process.

To start with, I gave myself a lot of space and time away from men. I moved in with two other women and didn’t date anyone for some time. Before and after work, I meditated a lot. In quiet moments, I surrendered to the longing for a loving relationship, allowing my imagination to flood me with images from my subconscious without any intellectual judgement. For example, I remembered how years earlier I had cut out a picture of a man from the men’s magazine section of the Canadian *Maclean’s* news magazine. I even remembered the name of the article, ‘The Portrait of a Casanova.’

‘That’s interesting,’ I thought at the time. Then I let myself wonder what it was about the man that I found so attractive. This man was a bit of a rebel in his profession, a psychoanalyst who questioned Freud and definitely his own person. He loved women, perhaps too much,

but that was a thing of the past and now he was happily married to a woman who had also had an interesting past. Most of all, I was attracted to his intelligent face, a certain *je ne sais qua* about his smile, which was half-indulgent and half-amused, and to his unquestionable masculine charm, which I found irresistible. About nine months later, I met my partner of many years now who pretty much covers all the qualities I had found so irresistible in the man from ‘The Portrait of a Casanova,’ including his male charm and handsomeness.

What I am trying to say here is that I surrendered unconditionally to my longing and was brutally honest with myself. I didn’t pretend that I wanted a ‘family man’ or whatever my friends told me I should be looking for. I let myself long for my idea of a new man and indulged in that longing.

This does not mean that playing Radha always brings us what we want. A Radha-person may experience a continuous feeling of longing, the object of which may not even be identifiable, and where this feeling is a sense of something absolutely essential that’s missing in our lives. It’s important to remember that this longing can be sublime, as long as it doesn’t lead to depression, a constant nostalgia or even whinging. Ideally, it can be transformed into a merging with the transcendental, with the divine heart itself. In the Catholic tradition Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century Spanish saint, and in the Hindu tradition Anandamayi Ma, a 20th-century saint, probably fall into this category.

On a more practical level, this longing can also be transmuted into identification with a higher goal or a good cause of some kind, such as the feeling of being protective toward animals, trees, children, or some humanitarian goal of another kind. From my spiritual mentor, I have learned that all feelings are a permeation of divine love. Even the ‘lowest’ or most ‘negativity’ feelings (such as sadness, anger or

frustration) are just a form of divine love that has forgotten its true purpose and source.

However, as an archetype, Radha has her longing rewarded one way or another. She eventually merges with the beloved or internalizes the beloved and transforms herself because of the love and devotion, fulfilled or not, that she feels. Ultimately, her longing is her method and her liberation.

## • EROS AS A ROMANTIC TRAP: THE EXPERIENCE OF APHRODITE AND RADHA

The erotic trap happens whenever we become addicted to Eros. This can happen in two ways. Once Eros withers, we either move on from one relationship to another with the hope that the new beginning, the new person, can bring the sweet and exciting feeling of Eros back, or we hold onto the person with whom Eros entered our lives in a strong and powerful way.

Either way is a trap. In the first case, we move forever from one partner to another in our search for Eros, which meets us only briefly—and the more we move on, the less Eros cares to manifest for us. In the second scenario, we become a romantic slave to another in the false belief that this other will bring us the sweet experience of Eros, which is both deeply erotic and spiritual. In both cases, we forget that the experience of Eros is within *us*—that *we* are the constant factor, not the other person. But in not knowing it is *we* who trigger the experience of Eros within us, we falsely believe it comes from them. We become a willing addict, a willing slave.

In my life, I have fallen into that trap once. Instead of theorizing about it, I will describe how it felt, as I have written it and published it

in many stories. Once upon a time, as a woman in her mid-30s, I met a man who triggered the experience of my own Eros. I was a Radha because I was delighted in the suspended state of consciousness that overrides all boundaries and judgements, in the seductive promise of an erotic high and the mysterious longing that fired up my soul. But I was also an Aphrodite, deluded by her own power. I walked into the trap of Eros believing I could control not only Eros itself, but also the outcome of the romance. I believed I could control the powerful attraction and not respond to it again after the first encounter. ‘One night,’ I thought, ‘that’s it.’ That night lasted seven years.

I could have walked away, but I didn’t. Willingly, impatiently, hungrily, I fell into his body. I fell into the sweetest darkness of desire. Devouring and predatory, sweet death by desire—no one should underestimate its power.

Desire is not just lust. It is a profound awakening to the longings hidden in our soul. It defies all obstacles, all prohibitions. It’s a mysterious force more delicious than anything society can offer as a bribe to stay away. It rules our whole being. We are captive and want to stay so.

Even lust is a slave to desire. We lust more because we desire even more, because we want to quench the desire, because it gets us closer to the desire, because we can feel the desire at its peak and hope it will last forever—that we will live forever wanting more of the same sweetness, the same pain. We hope the insane longing will keep the desire eating at us like a strange, painful ecstasy that has to be satisfied but never will be. But we do not believe it. We think we will have this one night, and that the next day we will leave it behind and do what we have always done—travel, study, write. Just this one night of surrender to desire, we think. But we do not know what this means, except that it looks us in our eyes and asks, *Do you dare to play with me?*

●———— THE PERSONAL JOURNEY ————●

This is the trap of Eros, seductive in its beauty and dangerous in its power.

**END OF EXCERPT**