

The I and the tiger - the strong woman's desire for the strong man

Are you a strong woman?

“She [Madonna] is a complex modern woman. Indeed, that is the main theme of her extraordinary achievement. She is exploring the problems and tensions of being an ambitious woman today. Like the potent Barbara Streisand, whose maverick female style had a great impact on American girls in the Sixties, Madonna is confronting the romantic dilemma of the strong woman looking for a man but uncertain whether she wants a tyrant or slave. The tigress in heat is drawn to surrender but may kill her conqueror.”¹

One can hardly describe modern woman's situation better than Camille Paglia does in the above quotation. In her videos, Madonna presents herself on one hand as a subject being conquered by muscular men, on the other hand as a dominatrix in black leather, subjugating dozens of gorgeous men. How can one and the same woman use such conflicting pictures in order to express herself? Inconceivable really. But there must be something behind Madonna's message. How else can we explain her world-wide success?

Immediately after finding her conqueror comes the revenge for having subjugated herself to him. The tigress is looking for her master. But she does not tolerate anyone who is stronger than she is. Whoever enters battle with her, the man who dares to challenge her, is risking his life.

As you are holding this book in your hand, dear Reader, the title has probably aroused your curiosity. It's all about the strong woman's desire for the strong man. Do you recognise this desire? Do you sometimes dream that Tarzan will come and carry you off to his house in the jungle? Do you love films in which the independent woman falls for the hero with the broad shoulders? Do you yearn for a man to come along who will not be irritated by your confident manner, who will just treat you like a woman, who will protect you and guide you through life? And do you hate yourself at the same time for sometimes feeling this longing inside you? If so, you are in the right place. Welcome to the club!

I wrote this book for myself, for my girlfriends and for my clients who drew my attention to this conflict. I wrote it for all modern women who recognise the romantic dilemma of the strong woman and do not know what to do about this dilemma.

What is a strong woman? A strong woman is a woman who has emancipated herself. I don't mean those horrible images that spring to mind when women's libbers are being disparagingly discussed. I don't mean the man-eating monster with thin lips pressed together

who has banished sex from her life. I don't mean the bluestocking who is more masculine than all the men on earth put together. Neither do I mean the austere woman with her hair screwed back tightly who wears grey suits and lives alone with her collection of cactus plants.

I mean attractive women who lead an active sex life. I mean women who have learned to believe in their own strength and who do not wait for a man to come along and save them. Women who like laughing, who love their bodies and who love men's bodies and who have a good network of friends. Women who are curious to find out what life has in store for them, who can argue their point of view and who know how to accomplish their goals. Women who earn their own money, who have developed their own personality and hence have added a personal dimension to their lives. These women are truly emancipated. They have put the achievements of the feminist movement to work for them and live a more varied life than their grandmothers and mothers lived. And they love men and men play an important role in their lives.

If you can recognise yourself in this description, then you are what I call a strong woman. And you probably have also come up against the romantic dilemma of the strong woman that I am going to write about in this book. You have gathered many scars in various tigris-battles. Any many men are walking through this world who have struggled with you and who still bear the wounds of these battles. Men who are marked by the tigris. You have hurt and have been hurt. And because the strong woman is also an intelligent woman, you have since begun to realise that a certain game always repeats itself in tigris-battles. You would actually like to figure out this game but you don't know what you should do.

Strong women want more than just the fight. Strong women carry a fragile longing in their hearts. They hear the tender melody of love. A melody which is so gentle that it can even appear to be kitschy. They hold pictures of flowing veils, as delicate as spiders' webs, and of tender caresses deep in their soul. They are stroked by thin petals on which the morning dew sprays shining pearls. Their bodies long for devotion, for union, for a profound coming together of man and woman. They carry the capacity for true, magnanimous love within them. And because they are tigresses, they would go through fire and water for the man they love, they would defend their love before the whole world.

But they are irritated by this desire deep within them. And they have not been very successful in exploiting this capacity in their lives so far. The majority of them have been deeply hurt because of this very capacity. Thus, strong women do not know whether this capacity is a strength or a weakness. Any that is why there are suspicious of this capacity.

But they still love men. They love their deep voices, they love their strong bodies and the smell under mens' arms. They love hairy chests and stubbly faces. Between their legs lives the craving for that male something they want to receive and embrace. They want to bandage the wounds of their heroes, they want to be his home and his comfort. The stronger the woman, the more eternal the love she has to bestow upon a man. But woe the man who arouses these feelings in her! This man has conquered the tigress. And the tigress must kill her conqueror.

Tanja is twenty-eight years old, owns her own hairdressing salon and is a successful business woman. She is a lovable person, an attractive woman and interesting to talk to. She longs for a relationship with a man. "How is the love life?", I asked her the last time I was there. "Well, at the moment there's this guy, he's two years younger, he's very nice but he really gets on my nerves. I know it sounds crazy but every time he brings me roses I could just throw them back at him. I treat him badly and all he says is "I understand, my love." That drives me completely mad. "Oh dear", I say. "It doesn't sound as if you two have much of a future together, from what you tell me." Tanja knows that her partner is a very nice man. She is also aware of the fact that she behaves unjustly towards him. But she cannot help it. And it makes her sad that she cannot do anything about it because she is actually longing for a loving relationship. She is secretly fascinated by a marine officer who is never there because he is always away at sea and who probably has a different girl in each port. She shares her heart with him. She shares everyday life, however, with the guy who brings her roses, the guy who understands everything. But the guy who brings her roses cannot conquer her heart.

I am talking to my best friend. We are talking about men. Strong women do not talk about men all the time, by the way. They also talk about politics, culture, ecology and world peace. But today we are talking about men. "We actually have been unfair to men all our lives" says my best friend. "We fell in love with the lonely wolf. And we fell in love with him because he was a stray. We tempted him and seduced him into giving up his stray ways with all the wiles we had. And the minute he gave them up, the minute he told us he loved us and stayed the night, we got sick of him. We could not stand him being around. We made a lap dog out of the wild wolf and the lap dog annoyed us. Then we threw him out. Maja, that is really unfair of us." "But what are we supposed to do?" I ask desperately. "I know you're right. And even though I know you're right, I still cannot do anything about my feelings. We had to domesticate the wolf and he's boring when he is domesticated, because I love the wolf and not the lap dog. But at the same time, the wolf has to be tamed. What in God's name should I do?"

Such a dialogue leaves me staring at a brick wall. I tell my psychoanalytical friends and colleagues about it at a meeting. “That’s it! That’s exactly it!”, shouts Michael, a man who loves tigresses and who bears many wounds he received after fights with them. “That’s exactly the way it was with me! I was happy with myself and my independence. And then I fell in love. At the beginning I fought it and then I surrendered. And then the woman just walked all over me. I became a disposable object. I learned that women are dangerous. It doesn’t matter how much in love I am, I am always on my guard against them. I know that I am dealing with an opponent. I always keep my distance. And since I’ve adopted this strategy, I have no more problems with women.”

I talk to Karl, a good friend of mine. He is fifty-five years old and loves women. In the 70’s, when the universities had become a stronghold of the feminist movement, he got involved in fighting for women’s rights. Back then he called himself a “radical feminist”. He was proud of his attitude and the women applauded him for it. He had many relationships with women in the course of his life, but not one lasted. And today he says that he never actually understood what exactly it was that women wanted from him. Women often left him despite his huge efforts to be an emancipated man. Two years ago he got to know Giovanni, an Italian. Giovanni is the same age as him and has women hanging off him, even though he is neither particularly rich nor especially good-looking. Karl, the radical feminist, learned from Giovanni how to treat women. Do you know, dear Reader, what Giovanni’s secret is? You will protest indignantly when you hear it. Karl also hesitated a long time before he told me. “Do you know how Giovanni manages to have all these women chasing him? He leaves them waiting. It’s as easy as that. I always phoned and sent letters. Giovanni lets at least four days go by after meeting a woman before he contacts her again. And then of course the women are all eager. I have had no more problems with the chicks since I adopted the same approach, pardon the expression.”

I had to agree with Giovanni, even though it took a lot out of me. I had to admit, grinding my teeth, that this tactic would have also worked on me. How well I can remember all those hours with my girlfriend, sitting next to the phone waiting for it to ring (back in those days when we didn’t have answering-machines). Those days, when we were waiting for our stray wolf to phone, we wouldn’t even dare to go out and buy a bottle of milk, because the wolf could have phoned in just those two minutes we didn’t spend sitting next to the phone. Of course Wolf didn’t phone that day, nor the next, nor the day after that. And the less he called, the stronger our love for him became. We never considered the nice boy next door as a partner, the nice boy who was always there when we needed him, who we could pour our

heart out to, who dried the tears we cried because of Wolf. We cursed Wolf but at the same time we couldn't rid ourselves of him. We hated him, but the minute he turned up, without having phoned of course, we went to bed with him straight away and had the best orgasms. When the nice boy from next door shyly put his hand on our knee in the cinema, we smiled gently at him and nicely but very decidedly placed his hand back on his own knee.

I have thought about this tricky situation of the strong woman for many years; I have discussed it with my girlfriends night after night; I have accompanied many clients on their journey in the search for a solution to this game between men and women which causes so much pain on both sides. This book contains all I have learned about this game over the years. The matter is rather complicated. If it were straightforward, the strong women would have solved it for themselves; after all, they are intelligent. Like most problems to which we have not yet found the answer, the romantic dilemma of the strong woman and her desire for the strong man involves various factors in a disastrous combination.

In order to crack this disastrous combination, we will need some knowledge of psychology. If you wish to clarify this matter for yourself, you will have to learn something about the structure of the human psyche, especially the structure of the female psyche. I am going to introduce you to the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung in the following pages. I hope to be able to explain, by using Jung's theory, the reasons why the romantic dilemma of the strong woman occurs in our day. If you understand my explanations, then you will have an instrument which you can use on yourself to get out of this game, a game you have wanted to stop playing for some time now anyway.