

the Charmer

Charm is seduction without sex. Charmers are consummate manipulators, masking their cleverness by creating a mood of pleasure and comfort. Their method is simple: they deflect attention from themselves and focus it on their target. They understand your spirit, feel your pain, adapt to your moods. In the presence of a Charmer you feel better about yourself. Charmers do not argue or fight, complain, or pester—what could be more seductive? By drawing you in with their indulgence they make you dependent on them, and their power grows. Learn to cast the Charmer's spell by aiming at people's primary weaknesses: vanity and self-esteem.

The Art of Charm

Sexuality is extremely disruptive. The insecurities and emotions it stirs up can often cut short a relationship that would otherwise be deeper and longer lasting. The Charmer's solution is to fulfill the aspects of sexuality that are so alluring and addictive—the focused attention, the boosted self-esteem, the pleasurable wooing, the understanding (real or illusory)—but subtract the sex itself. It's not that the Charmer represses or discourages sexuality; lurking beneath the surface of any attempt at charm is a sexual tease, a possibility. Charm cannot exist without a hint of sexual tension. It cannot be maintained, however, unless sex is kept at bay or in the background.

The word "charm" comes from the Latin *carmen*, a song, but also an incantation tied to the casting of a magical spell. The Charmer implicitly grasps this history, casting a spell by giving people something that holds their attention, that fascinates them. And the secret to capturing people's attention, while lowering their powers of reason, is to strike at the things they have the least control over: their ego, their vanity, and their self-esteem. As Benjamin Disraeli said, "Talk to a man about himself and he will listen for hours." The strategy can never be obvious; subtlety is the Charmer's great skill. If the target is to be kept from seeing through the Charmer's efforts, and from growing suspicious, maybe even tiring of the attention, a light touch is essential. The Charmer is like a beam of light that doesn't play directly on a target but throws a pleasantly diffused glow over it.

Charm can be applied to a group as well as to an individual: a leader can charm the public. The dynamic is similar. The following are the laws of charm, culled from the stories of the most successful charmers in history.

Make your target the center of attention. Charmers fade into the background; their targets become the subject of their interest. To be a Charmer you have to learn to listen and observe. Let your targets talk, revealing themselves in the process. As you find out more about them—their strengths, and more important their weaknesses—you can individualize your attention, appealing to their specific desires and needs, tailoring your flatteries to their insecurities. By adapting to their spirit and empathizing with their woes, you can make them feel bigger and better, validating their sense of self-worth. Make them the star of the show and they will become

Birds are taken with pipes that imitate their own voices, and men with those sayings that are most agreeable to their own opinions.

—SAMUEL BUTLER

Go with the bough, you'll bend it; \ Use brute force, it'll snap. \ Go with the current: that's how to swim across rivers— \ Fighting upstream's no good. \ Go easy with lions or tigers if you aim to tame them; \ The bull gets inured to the plough by slow degrees. . . . \ So, yield if she shows resistance: \ That way you'll win in the end. Just be sure to play \ The part she allots you. Censure the things she censures, \ Endorse her endorsements, echo her every word, \ Pro or con, and laugh whenever she laughs; remember, \ If she weeps, to weep too: take your cue \ From her every expression. Suppose she's playing a board game, \ Then throw the dice carelessly, move \ Your pieces all wrong. . . . \ Don't jib at a slavish task like holding \ Her mirror:

slavish or not, such
attentions please. . . .

—OVID, THE ART OF LOVE,
TRANSLATED BY PETER GREEN

Disraeli was asked to
dinner, and came in green
velvet trousers, with a
canary waistcoat, buckle
shoes, and lace cuffs. His
appearance at first proved
disquieting, but on leaving
the table the guests
remarked to each other that
the wittiest talker at the
luncheon-party was the
man in the yellow
waistcoat. Benjamin had
made great advances in
social conversation since the
days of Murray's dinners.
Faithful to his method, he
noted the stages: "Do not
talk too much at present;
do not try to talk. But
whenever you speak, speak
with self-possession. Speak
in a subdued tone, and
always look at the person
whom you are addressing.
Before one can engage in
general conversation with
any effect, there is a certain
acquaintance with trifling
but amusing subjects which
must be first attained. You
will soon pick up sufficient
by listening and observing.

Never argue. In society
nothing must be discussed;
give only results. If any
person differ from you, bow
and turn the conversation.

In society never think;
always be on the watch, or
you will miss many
opportunities and say
many disagreeable things.

Talk to women, talk to
women as much as you
can. This is the best
school. This is the way to
gain fluency, because you
need not care what you say,
and had better not be
sensible. They, too, will
rally you on many points,

addicted to you and grow dependent on you. On a mass level, make gestures of self-sacrifice (no matter how fake) to show the public that you share their pain and are working in their interest, self-interest being the public form of egotism.

Be a source of pleasure. No one wants to hear about your problems and troubles. Listen to your targets' complaints, but more important, distract them from their problems by giving them pleasure. (Do this often enough and they will fall under your spell.) Being lighthearted and fun is always more charming than being serious and critical. An energetic presence is likewise more charming than lethargy, which hints at boredom, an enormous social taboo; and elegance and style will usually win out over vulgarity, since most people like to associate themselves with whatever they think elevated and cultured. In politics, provide illusion and myth rather than reality. Instead of asking people to sacrifice for the greater good, talk of grand moral issues. An appeal that makes people feel good will translate into votes and power.

Bring antagonism into harmony. The court is a cauldron of resentment and envy, where the sourness of a single brooding Cassius can quickly turn into a conspiracy. The Charmer knows how to smooth out conflict. Never stir up antagonisms that will prove immune to your charm; in the face of those who are aggressive, retreat, let them have their little victories. Yielding and indulgence will charm the fight out of any potential enemies. Never criticize people overtly—that will make them insecure, and resistant to change. Plant ideas, insinuate suggestions. Charmed by your diplomatic skills, people will not notice your growing power.

Lull your victims into ease and comfort. Charm is like the hypnotist's trick with the swinging watch: the more relaxed the target, the easier it is to bend him or her to your will. The key to making your victims feel comfortable is to mirror them, adapt to their moods. People are narcissists—they are drawn to those most similar to themselves. Seem to share their values and tastes, to understand their spirit, and they will fall under your spell. This works particularly well if you are an outsider: showing that you share the values of your adopted group or country (you have learned their language, you prefer their customs, etc.) is immensely charming, since for you this preference is a choice, not a question of birth. Never pester or be overly persistent—these uncharming qualities will disrupt the relaxation you need to cast your spell.

Show calm and self-possession in the face of adversity. Adversity and setbacks actually provide the perfect setting for charm. Showing a calm, unruffled exterior in the face of unpleasantness puts people at ease. You seem patient, as if waiting for destiny to deal you a better card—or as if you were confident you could charm the Fates themselves. Never show anger, ill temper, or vengefulness, all disruptive emotions that will make people defensive. In the politics of large groups, welcome adversity as a chance to show the charming qualities of magnanimity and poise. Let others get flustered and upset—the contrast will redound to your favor. Never whine, never complain, never try to justify yourself.

and as they are women you will not be offended. Nothing is of so much importance and of so much use to a young man entering life as to be well criticised by women."

—ANDRÉ MAUROIS, *DISRAELI*,
TRANSLATED BY HAMISH MILES

Make yourself useful. If done subtly, your ability to enhance the lives of others will be devilishly seductive. Your social skills will prove important here: creating a wide network of allies will give you the power to link people up with each other, which will make them feel that by knowing you they can make their lives easier. This is something no one can resist. Follow-through is key: so many people will charm by promising a person great things—a better job, a new contact, a big favor—but if they do not follow through they make enemies instead of friends. Anyone can make a promise; what sets you apart, and makes you charming, is your ability to come through in the end, following up your promise with a definite action. Conversely, if someone does you a favor, show your gratitude concretely. In a world of bluff and smoke, real action and true helpfulness are perhaps the ultimate charm.

You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question.

—ALBERT CAMUS

A speech that carries its audience along with it and is applauded is often less suggestive simply because it is clear that it sets out to be persuasive. People talking together influence each other in close proximity by means of the tone of voice they adopt and the way they look at each other and not only by the kind of language they use. We are right to call a good conversationalist a charmer in the magical sense of the word.

—GUSTAVE TARDE, *L'OPINION ET LA FOULE*, QUOTED IN SERGE MOSCOVICI, *THE AGE OF THE CROWD*

Examples of Charmers

1. In the early 1870s, Queen Victoria of England had reached a low point in her life. Her beloved husband, Prince Albert, had died in 1861, leaving her more than grief stricken. In all of her decisions she had relied on his advice; she was too uneducated and inexperienced to do otherwise, or so everyone made her feel. In fact, with Albert's death, political discussions and policy issues had come to bore her to tears. Now Victoria gradually withdrew from the public eye. As a result, the monarchy became less popular and therefore less powerful.

In 1874, the Conservative Party came to power, and its leader, the seventy-year-old Benjamin Disraeli, became prime minister. The protocol of his accession to his seat demanded that he come to the palace for a private meeting with the queen, who was fifty-five at the time. Two more unlikely associates could not be imagined: Disraeli, who was Jewish by birth, had dark skin and exotic features by English standards; as a young man he had been a dandy, his dress bordering on the flamboyant, and he had written popular novels that were romantic or even Gothic in style. The queen, on the other hand, was dour and stubborn, formal in manner and simple in

*Wax, a substance naturally
hard and brittle, can be
made soft by the
application of a little
warmth, so that it will take
any shape you please. In
the same way, by being
polite and friendly, you can
make people pliable and
obliging, even though they
are apt to be crabbed and
malevolent. Hence
politeness is to human
nature what warmth is to
wax.*

—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER,
COUNSELS AND MAXIMS,
TRANSLATED BY T. BAILEY
SAUNDERS

*Never explain. Never
complain.*

—BENJAMIN DISRAELI

taste. To please her, Disraeli was advised, he should curb his natural elegance; but he disregarded what everyone had told him and appeared before her as a gallant prince, falling to one knee, taking her hand, and kissing it, saying, "I plight my troth to the kindest of mistresses." Disraeli pledged that his work now was to realize Victoria's dreams. He praised her qualities so fulsomely that she blushed; yet strangely enough, she did not find him comical or offensive, but came out of the encounter smiling. Perhaps she should give this strange man a chance, she thought, and she waited to see what he would do next.

Victoria soon began receiving reports from Disraeli—on parliamentary debates, policy issues, and so forth—that were unlike anything other ministers had written. Addressing her as the "Faery Queen," and giving the monarchy's various enemies all kinds of villainous code names, he filled his notes with gossip. In a note about a new cabinet member, Disraeli wrote, "He is more than six feet four inches in stature; like St. Peter's at Rome no one is at first aware of his dimensions. But he has the sagacity of the elephant as well as its form." The minister's blithe, informal spirit bordered on disrespect, but the queen was enchanted. She read his reports voraciously, and almost without her realizing it, her interest in politics was rekindled.

At the start of their relationship, Disraeli sent the queen all of his novels as a gift. She in return presented him with the one book she had written, *Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*. From then on he would toss out in his letters and conversations with her the phrase, "We authors." The queen would beam with pride. She would overhear him praising her to others—her ideas, common sense, and feminine instincts, he said, made her the equal of Elizabeth I. He rarely disagreed with her. At meetings with other ministers, he would suddenly turn and ask her for advice. In 1875, when Disraeli managed to finagle the purchase of the Suez Canal from the debt-ridden khedive of Egypt, he presented his accomplishment to the queen as if it were a realization of her own ideas about expanding the British Empire. She did not realize the cause, but her confidence was growing by leaps and bounds.

Victoria once sent flowers to her prime minister. He later returned the favor, sending primroses, a flower so ordinary that some recipients might have been insulted; but his gift came with a note: "Of all the flowers, the one that retains its beauty longest, is sweet primrose." Disraeli was enveloping Victoria in a fantasy atmosphere in which everything was a metaphor, and the simplicity of the flower of course symbolized the queen—and also the relationship between the two leaders. Victoria fell for the bait; primroses were soon her favorite flower. In fact everything Disraeli did now met with her approval. She allowed him to sit in her presence, an unheard-of privilege. The two began to exchange valentines every February. The queen would ask people what Disraeli had said at a party; when he paid a little too much attention to Empress Augusta of Germany, she grew jealous. The courtiers wondered what had happened to the stubborn, formal woman they had known—she was acting like an infatuated girl.

In 1876, Disraeli steered through Parliament a bill declaring Queen Victoria a "Queen-Empress." The queen was beside herself with joy. Out of gratitude and certainly love, she elevated this Jewish dandy and novelist to the peerage, making him Earl of Beaconsfield, the realization of a life-long dream.

Disraeli knew how deceptive appearances can be: people were always judging him by his face and by his clothes, and he had learned never to do the same to them. So he was not deceived by Queen Victoria's dour, sober exterior. Beneath it, he sensed, was a woman who yearned for a man to appeal to her feminine side, a woman who was affectionate, warm, even sexual. The extent to which this side of Victoria had been repressed merely revealed the strength of the feelings he would stir once he melted her reserve.

Disraeli's approach was to appeal to two aspects of Victoria's personality that other people had squashed: her confidence and her sexuality. He was a master at flattering a person's ego. As one English princess remarked, "When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England. But after sitting next to Mr. Disraeli, I thought I was the cleverest woman in England." Disraeli worked his magic with a delicate touch, insinuating an atmosphere of amusement and relaxation, particularly in relation to politics. Once the queen's guard was down, he made that mood a little warmer, a little more suggestive, subtly sexual—though of course without overt flirtation. Disraeli made Victoria feel desirable as a woman and gifted as a monarch. How could she resist? How could she deny him anything?

Our personalities are often molded by how we are treated: if a parent or spouse is defensive or argumentative in dealing with us, we tend to respond the same way. Never mistake people's exterior characteristics for reality, for the character they show on the surface may be merely a reflection of the people with whom they have been most in contact, or a front disguising its own opposite. A gruff exterior may hide a person dying for warmth; a repressed, sober-looking type may actually be struggling to conceal uncontrollable emotions. That is the key to charm—feeding what has been repressed or denied.

By indulging the queen, by making himself a source of pleasure, Disraeli was able to soften a woman who had grown hard and cantankerous. Indulgence is a powerful tool of seduction: it is hard to be angry or defensive with someone who seems to agree with your opinions and tastes. Charmers may appear to be weaker than their targets but in the end they are the more powerful side because they have stolen the ability to resist.

2. In 1971, the American financier and Democratic Party power-player Averell Harriman saw his life drawing to a close. He was seventy-nine, his wife of many years, Marie, had just died, and with the Democrats out

of office his political career seemed over. Feeling old and depressed, he resigned himself to spending his last years with his grandchildren in quiet retirement.

A few months after Marie's death, Harriman was talked into attending a Washington party. There he met an old friend, Pamela Churchill, whom he had known during World War II, in London, where he had been sent as a personal envoy of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. She was twenty-one at the time, and was the wife of Winston Churchill's son Randolph. There had certainly been more beautiful women in the city, but none had been more pleasant to be around: she was so attentive, listening to his problems, befriending his daughter (they were the same age), and calming him whenever he saw her. Marie had remained in the States, and Randolph was in the army, so while bombs rained on London Averell and Pamela had begun an affair. And in the many years since the war, she had kept in touch with him: he knew about the breakup of her marriage, and about her endless series of affairs with Europe's wealthiest playboys. Yet he had not seen her since his return to America, and to his wife. What a strange coincidence to run into her at this particular moment in his life.

At the party Pamela pulled Harriman out of his shell, laughing at his jokes and getting him to talk about London in the glory days of the war. He felt his old power returning—it was as if *he* were charming *her*. A few days later she dropped in on him at one of his weekend homes. Harriman was one of the wealthiest men in the world, but was no lavish spender; he and Marie had lived a Spartan life. Pamela made no comment, but when she invited him to her own home, he could not help but notice the brightness and vibrancy of her life—flowers everywhere, beautiful linens on the bed, wonderful meals (she seemed to know all of his favorite foods). He had heard of her reputation as a courtesan and understood the lure of his wealth, yet being around her was invigorating, and eight weeks after that party, he married her.

Pamela did not stop there. She persuaded her husband to donate the art that Marie had collected to the National Gallery. She got him to part with some of his money—a trust fund for her son Winston, new houses, constant redecorations. Her approach was subtle and patient; she made him somehow feel good about giving her what she wanted. Within a few years, hardly any traces of Marie remained in their life. Harriman spent less time with his children and grandchildren. He seemed to be going through a second youth.

In Washington, politicians and their wives viewed Pamela with suspicion. They saw through her, and were immune to her charm, or so they thought. Yet they always came to the frequent parties she hosted, justifying themselves with the thought that powerful people would be there. Everything at these parties was calibrated to create a relaxed, intimate atmosphere. No one felt ignored: the least important people would find themselves talking to Pamela, opening up to that attentive look of hers. She made them feel powerful and respected. Afterward she would send them a

personal note or gift, often referring to something they had mentioned in conversation. The wives who had called her a courtesan and worse slowly changed their minds. The men found her not only beguiling but useful—her worldwide contacts were invaluable. She could put them in touch with exactly the right person without them even having to ask. The Harrimans' parties soon evolved into fundraising events for the Democratic Party. Put at their ease, feeling elevated by the aristocratic atmosphere Pamela created and the sense of importance she gave them, visitors would empty their wallets without realizing quite why. This, of course, was exactly what all the men in her life had done.

In 1986, Averell Harriman died. By then Pamela was powerful and wealthy enough that she no longer needed a man. In 1993, she was named the U.S. ambassador to France, and easily transferred her personal and social charm into the world of political diplomacy. She was still working when she died, in 1997.

We often recognize Charmers as such; we sense their cleverness. (Surely Harriman must have realized that his meeting with Pamela Churchill in 1971 was no coincidence.) Nevertheless, we fall under their spell. The reason is simple: the feeling that Charmers provide is so rare as to be worth the price we pay.

The world is full of self-absorbed people. In their presence, we know that everything in our relationship with them is directed toward themselves—their insecurities, their neediness, their hunger for attention. That reinforces our own egocentric tendencies; we protectively close ourselves up. It is a syndrome that only makes us the more helpless with Charmers. First, they don't talk much about themselves, which heightens their mystery and disguises their limitations. Second, they seem to be interested in us, and their interest is so delightfully focused that we relax and open up to them. Finally, Charmers are pleasant to be around. They have none of most people's ugly qualities—nagging, complaining, self-assertion. They seem to know what pleases. Theirs is a diffused warmth; union without sex. (You may think a geisha is sexual as well as charming; her power, however, lies not in the sexual favors she provides but in her rare self-effacing attentiveness.) Inevitably, we become addicted, and dependent. And dependence is the source of the Charmer's power.

People who are physically beautiful, and who play on their beauty to create a sexually charged presence, have little power in the end; the bloom of youth fades, there is always someone younger and more beautiful, and in any case people tire of beauty without social grace. But they never tire of feeling their self-worth validated. Learn the power you can wield by making the other person feel like the star. The key is to diffuse your sexual presence: create a vaguer, more beguiling sense of excitement through a generalized flirtation, a socialized sexuality that is constant, addictive, and never totally satisfied.

3. In December of 1936, Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Chinese Nationalists, was captured by a group of his own soldiers who were angry with his policies: instead of fighting the Japanese, who had just invaded China, he was continuing his civil war against the Communist armies of Mao Zedong. The soldiers saw no threat in Mao—Chiang had almost annihilated the Communists. In fact, they believed he should join forces with Mao against the common enemy—it was the only patriotic thing to do. The soldiers thought by capturing him they could compel Chiang to change his mind, but he was a stubborn man. Since Chiang was the main impediment to a unified war against the Japanese, the soldiers contemplated having him executed, or turned over to the Communists.

As Chiang lay in prison, he could only imagine the worst. Several days later he received a visit from Zhou Enlai—a former friend and now a leading Communist. Politely and respectfully, Zhou argued for a united front: Communists and Nationalists against the Japanese. Chiang could not begin to hear such talk; he hated the Communists with a passion, and became hopelessly emotional. To sign an agreement with the Communists in these circumstances, he yelled, would be humiliating, and would lose me all honor among my own army. It's out of the question. Kill me if you must.

Zhou listened, smiled, said barely a word. As Chiang's rant ended he told the Nationalist general that a concern for honor was something he understood, but that the honorable thing for them to do was actually to forget their differences and fight the invader. Chiang could lead both armies. Finally, Zhou said that under no circumstances would he allow his fellow Communists, or anyone for that matter, to execute such a great man as Chiang Kai-shek. The Nationalist leader was stunned and moved.

The next day, Chiang was escorted out of prison by Communist guards, transferred to one of his own army's planes, and sent back to his own headquarters. Apparently Zhou had executed this policy on his own, for when word of it reached the other Communist leaders, they were outraged: Zhou should have forced Chiang to fight the Japanese, or else should have ordered his execution—to release him without concessions was the height of pusillanimity, and Zhou would pay. Zhou said nothing and waited. A few months later, Chiang signed an agreement to halt the civil war and join with the Communists against the Japanese. He seemed to have come to his decision on his own, and his army respected it—they could not doubt his motives.

Working together, the Nationalists and the Communists expelled the Japanese from China. But the Communists, whom Chiang had previously almost destroyed, took advantage of this period of collaboration to regain strength. Once the Japanese had left, they turned on the Nationalists, who, in 1949, were forced to evacuate mainland China for the island of Formosa, now Taiwan.

Now Mao paid a visit to the Soviet Union. China was in terrible shape and in desperate need of assistance, but Stalin was wary of the Chinese, and lectured Mao about the many mistakes he had made. Mao argued back.

Stalin decided to teach the young upstart a lesson; he would give China nothing. Tempers rose. Mao sent urgently for Zhou Enlai who arrived the next day and went right to work.

In the long negotiating sessions, Zhou made a show of enjoying his hosts' vodka. He never argued, and in fact agreed that the Chinese had made many mistakes, had much to learn from the more experienced Soviets: "Comrade Stalin," he said, "we are the first large Asian country to join the socialist camp under *your* guidance." Zhou had come prepared with all kinds of neatly drawn diagrams and charts, knowing the Russians loved such things. Stalin warmed up to him. The negotiations proceeded, and a few days after Zhou's arrival, the two parties signed a treaty of mutual aid—a treaty far more useful to the Chinese than to the Soviets.

In 1959, China was again in deep trouble. Mao's Great Leap Forward, an attempt to spark an overnight industrial revolution in China, had been a devastating failure. The people were angry: they were starving while Beijing bureaucrats lived well. Many Beijing officials, Zhou among them, returned to their native towns to try to bring order. Most of them managed by bribes—by promising all kinds of favors—but Zhou proceeded differently: he visited his ancestral graveyard, where generations of his family were buried, and ordered that the tombstones be removed and the coffins buried deeper. Now the land could be farmed for food. In Confucian terms (and Zhou was an obedient Confucian), this was sacrilege, but everyone knew what it meant: Zhou was willing to suffer personally. Everyone had to sacrifice, even the leaders. His gesture had immense symbolic impact.

When Zhou died, in 1976, an unofficial and unorganized outpouring of public grief caught the government by surprise. They could not understand how a man who had worked behind the scenes, and had shunned the adoration of the masses, could have won such affection.

The capture of Chiang Kai-shek was a turning point in the civil war. To execute him might have been disastrous: it had been Chiang who had held the Nationalist army together, and without him it could have broken up into factions, allowing the Japanese to overrun the country. To force him to sign an agreement would have not helped either: he would have lost face before his army, would never have honored the agreement, and would have done everything he could to avenge his humiliation. Zhou knew that to execute or compel a captive will only embolden your enemy, and will have repercussions you cannot control. Charm, on the other hand, is a manipulative weapon that disguises its own manipulateness, letting you gain a victory without stirring the desire for revenge.

Zhou worked on Chiang perfectly, paying him respect, playing the inferior, letting him pass from the fear of execution to the relief of unexpected release. The general was allowed to leave with his dignity intact. Zhou knew all this would soften him up, planting the seed of the idea that perhaps the Communists were not so bad after all, and that he could change

his mind about them without looking weak, particularly if he did so independently rather than while he was in prison. Zhou applied the same philosophy to every situation: play the inferior, unthreatening and humble. What will this matter if in the end you get what you want: time to recover from a civil war, a treaty, the good will of the masses.

Time is the greatest weapon you have. Patiently keep in mind a long-term goal and neither person nor army can resist you. And charm is the best way of playing for time, of widening your options in any situation. Through charm you can seduce your enemy into backing off, giving you the psychological space to plot an effective counterstrategy. The key is to make other people emotional while you remain detached. They may feel grateful, happy, moved, arrogant—it doesn't matter, as long as they feel. An emotional person is a distracted person. Give them what they want, appeal to their self-interest, make them feel superior to you. When a baby has grabbed a sharp knife, do not try to grab it back; instead, stay calm, offer candy, and the baby will drop the knife to pick up the tempting morsel you offer.

4. In 1761, Empress Elizabeth of Russia died, and her nephew ascended to the throne as Czar Peter III. Peter had always been a little boy at heart—he played with toy soldiers long past the appropriate age—and now, as czar, he could finally do whatever he pleased and the world be damned. Peter concluded a treaty with Frederick the Great that was highly favorable to the foreign ruler (Peter adored Frederick, and particularly the disciplined way his Prussian soldiers marched). This was a practical debacle, but in matters of emotion and etiquette, Peter was even more offensive: he refused to properly mourn his aunt the empress, resuming his war games and parties a few days after the funeral. What a contrast he was to his wife, Catherine. She was respectful during the funeral, was still wearing black months later, and could be seen at all hours beside Elizabeth's tomb, praying and crying. She was not even Russian, but a German princess who had come east to marry Peter in 1745 without speaking a word of the language. Even the lowest peasant knew that Catherine had converted to the Russian Orthodox Church, and had learned to speak Russian with incredible speed, and beautifully. At heart, they thought, she was more Russian than all of those fops in the court.

During these difficult months, while Peter offended almost everyone in the country, Catherine discreetly kept a lover, Gregory Orlov, a lieutenant in the guards. It was through Orlov that word spread of her piety, her patriotism, her worthiness for rule; how much better to follow such a woman than to serve Peter. Late into the night, Catherine and Orlov would talk, and he would tell her the army was behind her and would urge her to stage a coup. She would listen attentively, but would always reply that this was not the time for such things. Orlov wondered to himself: perhaps she was too gentle and passive for such a great step.

Peter's regime was repressive, and the arrests and executions piled up. He also grew more abusive toward his wife, threatening to divorce her and marry his mistress. One drunken evening, driven to distraction by Catherine's silence and his inability to provoke her, he ordered her arrest. The news spread fast, and Orlov hurried to warn Catherine that she would be imprisoned or executed unless she acted fast. This time Catherine did not argue; she put on her simplest mourning gown, left her hair half undone, followed Orlov to a waiting carriage, and rushed to the army barracks. Here the soldiers fell to the ground, kissing the hem of her dress—they had heard so much about her but had never seen her in person, and she seemed to them like a statue of the Madonna come to life. They gave her an army uniform, marveling at how beautiful she looked in men's clothes, and set off under Orlov's command for the Winter Palace. The procession grew as it passed through the streets of St. Petersburg. Everyone applauded Catherine, everyone felt that Peter should be dethroned. Soon priests arrived to give Catherine their blessing, making the people even more excited. And through it all, she was silent and dignified, as if all were in the hands of fate.

When news reached Peter of this peaceful rebellion, he grew hysterical, and agreed to abdicate that very night. Catherine became empress without a single battle or even a single gunshot.

As a child, Catherine was intelligent and spirited. Since her mother had wanted a daughter who was obedient rather than dazzling, and who would therefore make a better match, the child was subjected to a constant barrage of criticism, against which she developed a defense: she learned to seem to defer to other people totally as a way to neutralize their aggression. If she was patient and did not force the issue, instead of attacking her they would fall under her spell.

When Catherine came to Russia—at the age of sixteen, without a friend or ally in the country—she applied the skills she had learned in dealing with her difficult mother. In the face of all the court monsters—the imposing Empress Elizabeth, her own infantile husband, the endless schemers and betrayers—she curtsied, deferred, waited, and charmed. She had long wanted to rule as empress, and knew how hopeless her husband was. But what good would it do to seize power violently, laying a claim that some would certainly see as illegitimate, and then have to worry endlessly that she would be dethroned in turn? No, the moment had to be ripe, and she had to make the people carry her into power. It was a feminine style of revolution: by being passive and patient, Catherine suggested that she had no interest in power. The effect was soothing—charming.

There will always be difficult people for us to face—the chronically insecure, the hopelessly stubborn, the hysterical complainers. Your ability to disarm these people will prove an invaluable skill. You do have to be careful, though: if you are passive they will run all over you; if assertive you will make their monstrous qualities worse. Seduction and charm are the most effective counterweapons. Outwardly, be gracious. Adapt to their every

mood. Enter their spirit. Inwardly, calculate and wait: your surrender is a strategy, not a way of life. When the time comes, and it inevitably will, the tables will turn. Their aggression will land them in trouble, and that will put you in a position to rescue them, regaining superiority. (You could also decide that you had had enough, and consign them to oblivion.) Your charm has prevented them from foreseeing this or growing suspicious. A whole revolution can be enacted without a single act of violence, simply by waiting for the apple to ripen and fall.

Symbol: *The*

Mirror. Your spirit holds a mirror up to others. When they see you they see themselves: their values, their tastes, even their flaws. Their lifelong love affair with their own image is comfortable and hypnotic; so feed it. No one ever sees what is behind the mirror.

Dangers

There are those who are immune to a Charmer; particularly cynics, and confident types who do not need validation. These people tend to view Charmers as slippery and deceitful, and they can make problems for you. The solution is to do what most Charmers do by nature: befriend and charm as many people as possible. Secure your power through numbers and you will not have to worry about the few you cannot seduce. Catherine the Great's kindness to everyone she met created a vast amount of good will that paid off later. Also, it is sometimes charming to reveal a strategic flaw. There is one person you dislike? Confess it openly, do not try to charm such an enemy, and people will think you more human, less slippery. Disraeli had such a scapegoat with his great nemesis, William Gladstone.

The dangers of political charm are harder to handle: your conciliatory, shifting, flexible approach to politics will make enemies out of everyone who is a rigid believer in a cause. Social seducers such as Bill Clinton and Henry Kissinger could often win over the most hardened opponent with their personal charm, but they could not be everywhere at once. Many members of the English Parliament thought Disraeli a shifty conniver; in person his engaging manner could dispel such feelings, but he could not address the entire Parliament one-on-one. In difficult times, when people yearn for something substantial and firm, the political charmer may be in danger.

As Catherine the Great proved, timing is everything. Charmers must know when to hibernate and when the times are ripe for their persuasive powers. Known for their flexibility, they should sometimes be flexible enough to act inflexibly. Zhou Enlai, the consummate chameleon, could play the hard-core Communist when it suited him. Never become the slave to your own powers of charm; keep it under control, something you can turn off and on at will.