

the Siren

A

man is often
secretly oppressed by
the role he has to
play—by always having to
be responsible, in control, and
rational. The Siren is the ultimate male fantasy figure because she offers a total release from the limitations of his life. In her presence, which is always heightened and sexually charged, the male feels transported to a world of pure pleasure. She is dangerous, and in pursuing her energetically the man can lose control over himself something he yearns to do. The Siren is a mirage; she lures men by cultivating a particular appearance and manner. In a world where women are often too timid to project such an image, learn to take control of the male libido by embodying his fantasy.

The Spectacular Siren

In the year 48 B.C., Ptolemy XIV of Egypt managed to depose and exile his sister and wife, Queen Cleopatra. He secured the country's borders against her return and began to rule on his own. Later that year, Julius Caesar came to Alexandria to ensure that despite the local power struggles, Egypt would remain loyal to Rome.

One night Caesar was meeting with his generals in the Egyptian palace, discussing strategy, when a guard entered to report that a Greek merchant was at the door bearing a large and valuable gift for the Roman leader. Caesar, in the mood for a little fun, gave the merchant permission to enter. The man came in, carrying on his shoulders a large rolled-up carpet. He undid the rope around the bundle and with a snap of his wrists unfurled it—revealing the young Cleopatra, who had been hidden inside, and who rose up half clothed before Caesar and his guests, like Venus emerging from the waves.

Everyone was dazzled at the sight of the beautiful young queen (only twenty-one at the time) appearing before them suddenly as if in a dream. They were astounded at her daring and theatricality—smuggled into the harbor at night with only one man to protect her, risking everything on a bold move. No one was more enchanted than Caesar. According to the Roman writer Dio Cassius, "Cleopatra was in the prime of life. She had a delightful voice which could not fail to cast a spell over all who heard it. Such was the charm of her person and her speech that they drew the coldest and most determined misogynist into her toils. Caesar was spellbound as soon as he set eyes on her and she opened her mouth to speak." That same evening Cleopatra became Caesar's lover.

Caesar had had numerous mistresses before, to divert him from the rigors of his campaigns. But he had always disposed of them quickly to return to what really thrilled him—political intrigue, the challenges of warfare, the Roman theater. Caesar had seen women try anything to keep him under their spell. Yet nothing prepared him for Cleopatra. One night she would tell him how together they could revive the glory of Alexander the Great, and rule the world like gods. The next she would entertain him dressed as the goddess Isis, surrounded by the opulence of her court. Cleopatra initiated Caesar in the most decadent revelries, presenting herself as the incarnation of the Egyptian exotic. His life with her was a constant game, as challenging as warfare, for the moment he felt secure with her she

In the mean time our good ship, with that perfect wind to drive her, fast approached the Sirens' Isle. But now the breeze dropped, some power lulled the waves, and a breathless calm set in. Rising from their seats my men drew in the sail and threw it into the hold, then sat down at the oars and churned the water white with their blades of polished pine. Meanwhile I took a large round of wax, cut it up small with my sword, and kneaded the pieces with all the strength of my fingers. The wax soon yielded to my vigorous treatment and grew warm, for I had the rays of my Lord the Sun to help me. I took each of my men in turn and plugged their ears with it. They then made me a prisoner on my ship by binding me hand and foot, standing me up by the step of the mast and tying the rope's ends to the mast itself. This done, they sat down once more and struck the grey water with their oars.

• *We made good progress and had just come within call of the shore when the Sirens became aware that a ship was swiftly bearing*

down upon them, and
broke into their liquid song.

• "Draw near," they sang,
"illustrious Odysseus,
flower of Achaean chivalry,
and bring your ship to rest
so that you may hear our
voices. No seaman ever
sailed his black ship past
this spot without listening
to the sweet tones that flow
from our lips . . ." • The
lovely voices came to me
across the water, and my
heart was filled with such a
longing to listen that with
nod and frown I signed to
my men to set me free.

—HOMER, *THE ODYSSEY*, BOOK
XII, TRANSLATED BY E. V. Rieu

*The charm of [Cleopatra's]
presence was irresistible,
and there was an attraction
in her person and talk,
together with a peculiar
force of character, which
permeated her every word
and action, and laid all
who associated with her
under its spell. It was a
delight merely to hear the
sound of her voice, with
which, like an instrument
of many strings, she could
pass from one language to
another.*

—PLUTARCH, *MAKERS OF
ROME*, TRANSLATED BY IAN
SCOTT-KILVERT

*The immediate attraction
of a song, a voice, or scent.*

*The attraction of the
panther with his perfumed
scent . . . According to the
ancients, the panther is
the only animal who emits
a perfumed odor. It uses
this scent to draw and
capture its victims. . . .
But what is it that seduces
in a scent? . . . What is it
in the song of the Sirens
that seduces us, or in the
beauty of a face, in the depths*

would suddenly turn cold or angry and he would have to find a way to regain her favor.

The weeks went by. Caesar got rid of all Cleopatra's rivals and found excuses to stay in Egypt. At one point she led him on a lavish historical expedition down the Nile. In a boat of unimaginable splendor—towering fifty-four feet out of the water, including several terraced levels and a pillared temple to the god Dionysus—Caesar became one of the few Romans to gaze on the pyramids. And while he stayed long in Egypt, away from his throne in Rome, all kinds of turmoil erupted throughout the Roman Empire.

When Caesar was murdered, in 44 B.C., he was succeeded by a triumvirate of rulers including Mark Antony, a brave soldier who loved pleasure and spectacle and fancied himself a kind of Roman Dionysus. A few years later, while Antony was in Syria, Cleopatra invited him to come meet her in the Egyptian town of Tarsus. There—once she had made him wait for her—her appearance was as startling in its way as her first before Caesar. A magnificent gold barge with purple sails appeared on the river Cydnus. The oarsmen rowed to the accompaniment of ethereal music; all around the boat were beautiful young girls dressed as nymphs and mythological figures. Cleopatra sat on deck, surrounded and fanned by cupids and posed as the goddess Aphrodite, whose name the crowd chanted enthusiastically.

Like all of Cleopatra's victims, Antony felt mixed emotions. The exotic pleasures she offered were hard to resist. But he also wanted to tame her—to defeat this proud and illustrious woman would prove his greatness. And so he stayed, and, like Caesar, fell slowly under her spell. She indulged him in all of his weaknesses—gambling, raucous parties, elaborate rituals, lavish spectacles. To get him to come back to Rome, Octavius, another member of the Roman triumvirate, offered him a wife: Octavius's own sister, Octavia, one of the most beautiful women in Rome. Known for her virtue and goodness, she could surely keep Antony away from the "Egyptian whore." The ploy worked for a while, but Antony was unable to forget Cleopatra, and after three years he went back to her. This time it was for good: he had in essence become Cleopatra's slave, granting her immense powers, adopting Egyptian dress and customs, and renouncing the ways of Rome.

Only one image of Cleopatra survives—a barely visible profile on a coin—but we have numerous written descriptions. She had a long thin face and a somewhat pointed nose; her dominant features were her wonderfully large eyes. Her seductive power, however, did not lie in her looks—indeed many among the women of Alexandria were considered more beautiful than she. What she did have above all other women was the ability to distract a man. In reality, Cleopatra was physically unexceptional and had no political power, yet both Caesar and Antony, brave and clever men, saw none of this. What they saw was a woman who constantly transformed herself before their eyes, a one-woman spectacle. Her dress and makeup changed from day to day, but always gave her a heightened, goddesslike appearance.

Her voice, which all writers talk of, was lilting and intoxicating. Her words could be banal enough, but were spoken so sweetly that listeners would find themselves remembering not what she said but how she said it.

Cleopatra provided constant variety—tributes, mock battles, expeditions, costumed orgies. Everything had a touch of drama and was accomplished with great energy. By the time your head lay on the pillow beside her, your mind was spinning with images and dreams. And just when you thought you had this fluid, larger-than-life woman, she would turn distant or angry, making it clear that everything was on her terms. You never possessed Cleopatra, you worshiped her. In this way a woman who had been exiled and destined for an early death managed to turn it all around and rule Egypt for close to twenty years.

From Cleopatra we learn that it is not beauty that makes a Siren but rather a theatrical streak that allows a woman to embody a man's fantasies. A man grows bored with a woman, no matter how beautiful; he yearns for different pleasures, and for adventure. All a woman needs to turn this around is to create the illusion that she offers such variety and adventure. A man is easily deceived by appearances; he has a weakness for the visual. Create the physical presence of a Siren (heightened sexual allure mixed with a regal and theatrical manner) and he is trapped. He cannot grow bored with you yet he cannot discard you. Keep up the distractions, and never let him see who you really are. He will follow you until he drowns.

The Sex Siren

Norma Jean Mortensen, the future Marilyn Monroe, spent part of her childhood in Los Angeles orphanages. Her days were filled with chores and no play. At school, she kept to herself, smiled rarely, and dreamed a lot. One day when she was thirteen, as she was dressing for school, she noticed that the white blouse the orphanage provided for her was torn, so she had to borrow a sweater from a younger girl in the house. The sweater was several sizes too small. That day, suddenly, boys seemed to gather around her wherever she went (she was extremely well-developed for her age). She wrote in her diary, "They stared at my sweater as if it were a gold mine."

The revelation was simple but startling. Previously ignored and even ridiculed by the other students, Norma Jean now sensed a way to gain attention, maybe even power, for she was wildly ambitious. She started to smile more, wear makeup, dress differently. And soon she noticed something equally startling: without her having to say or do anything, boys fell passionately in love with her. "My admirers all said the same thing in different ways," she wrote. "It was my fault, their wanting to kiss me and hug me. Some said it was the way I looked at them—with eyes full of passion. Others said it was my voice that lured them on. Still others said I gave off vibrations that flooded them."

*of an abyss . . . ?
Seduction lies in the
annulment of signs and
their meaning, in pure
appearance. The eyes that
seduce have no meaning,
they end in the gaze, as
the face with makeup
ends in only pure
appearance. . . . The scent
of the panther is also a
meaningless message—and
behind the message the
panther is invisible, as is
the woman beneath her
makeup. The Sirens too
remained unseen. The
enchantment lies in what
is hidden.*

—JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *DE LA
SÉDUCTION*

*We're dazzled by feminine
adornment, by the surface,
\ All gold and jewels: so
little of what we observe \
Is the girl herself And
where (you may ask) amid
such plenty \ Can our
object of passion be found?
The eye's deceived \ By
Love's smart camouflage.*

—OVID, *CURES FOR LOVE*,
TRANSLATED BY PETER GREEN

*He was herding his cattle
on Mount Gargarus, the
highest peak of Ida, when
Hermes, accompanied by
Hera, Athene, and
Aphrodite delivered the
golden apple and Zeus's
message: "Paris, since you
are as handsome as you are
wise in affairs of the heart,
Zeus commands you to
judge which of these
goddesses is the fairest." •
"So be it," sighed Paris.
"But first I beg the losers
not to be vexed with me. I
am only a human being,
liable to make the stupidest*

mistakes." • The goddesses all agreed to abide by his decision. • "Will it be enough to judge them as they are?" Paris asked Hermes, "or should they be naked?" • "The rules of the contest are for you to decide," Hermes answered with a discreet smile. • "In that case, will they kindly disrobe?" • Hermes told the goddesses to do so, and politely turned his back. • Aphrodite was soon ready, but Athene insisted that she should remove the famous magic girdle, which gave her an unfair advantage by making everyone fall in love with the wearer. "Very well!" said Aphrodite spitefully. "I will, on condition that you remove your helmet—you look hideous without it." • "Now, if you please, I must judge you one at a time" announced Paris. . . . Come here, Divine Hera! Will you other two goddesses be good enough to leave us for a while?" • "Examine me conscientiously," said Hera, turning slowly around, and displaying her magnificent figure, "and remember that if you judge me the fairest, I will make you lord of all Asia, and the richest man alive." • "I am not to be bribed my Lady. . . . Very well, thank you. Now I have seen all that I need to see. Come, Divine Athene!" • "Here I am," said Athene, striding purposefully forward. "Listen, Paris, if you have enough common sense to award me the prize, I will make you victorious in all your battles, as well as the handsomest and wisest man in the world." • "I am a humble

A few years later Marilyn was trying to make it in the film business. Producers would tell her the same thing: she was attractive enough in person, but her face wasn't pretty enough for the movies. She was getting work as an extra, and when she was on-screen—even if only for a few seconds—the men in the audience would go wild, and the theaters would erupt in catcalls. But nobody saw any star quality in this. One day in 1949, only twenty-three at the time and her career at a standstill, Monroe met someone at a diner who told her that a producer casting a new Groucho Marx movie, *Love Happy*, was looking for an actress for the part of a blond bombshell who could walk by Groucho in a way that would, in his words, "arouse my elderly libido and cause smoke to issue from my ears." Talking her way into an audition, she improvised this walk. "It's Mae West, Theda Bara, and Bo Peep all rolled into one," said Groucho after watching her saunter by. "We shoot the scene tomorrow morning." And so Marilyn created her infamous walk, a walk that was hardly natural but offered a strange mix of innocence and sex.

Over the next few years, Marilyn taught herself through trial and error how to heighten the effect she had on men. Her voice had always been attractive—it was the voice of a little girl. But on film it had limitations until someone finally taught her to lower it, giving it the deep, breathy tones that became her seductive trademark, a mix of the little girl and the vixen. Before appearing on set, or even at a party, Marilyn would spend hours before the mirror. Most people assumed this was vanity—she was in love with her image. The truth was that image took hours to create. Marilyn spent years studying and practicing the art of makeup. The voice, the walk, the face and look were all constructions, an act. At the height of her fame, she would get a thrill by going into bars in New York City without her makeup or glamorous clothes and passing unnoticed.

Success finally came, but with it came something deeply annoying to her: the studios would only cast her as the blond bombshell. She wanted serious roles, but no one took her seriously for those parts, no matter how hard she downplayed the siren qualities she had built up. One day, while she was rehearsing a scene from *The Cherry Orchard*, her acting instructor, Michael Chekhov, asked her, "Were you thinking of sex while we played the scene?" When she said no, he continued, "All through our playing of the scene I kept receiving sex vibrations from you. As if you were a woman in the grip of passion. . . . I understand your problem with your studio now, Marilyn. You are a woman who gives off sex vibrations—no matter what you are doing or thinking. The whole world has already responded to those vibrations. They come off the movie screens when you are on them."

Marilyn Monroe loved the effect her body could have on the male libido. She tuned her physical presence like an instrument, making herself reek of sex and gaining a glamorous, larger-than-life appearance. Other women knew just as many tricks for heightening their sexual appeal, but what separated Marilyn from them was an unconscious element. Her background

had deprived her of something critical: affection. Her deepest need was to feel loved and desired, which made her seem constantly vulnerable, like a little girl craving protection. She emanated this need for love before the camera; it was effortless, coming from somewhere real and deep inside. A look or gesture that she did not intend to arouse desire would do so doubly powerfully just because it was unintended—its innocence was precisely what excited a man.

The Sex Siren has a more urgent and immediate effect than the Spectacular Siren does. The incarnation of sex and desire, she does not bother to appeal to extraneous senses, or to create a theatrical buildup. Her time never seems to be taken up by work or chores; she gives the impression that she lives for pleasure and is always available. What separates the Sex Siren from the courtesan or whore is her touch of innocence and vulnerability. The mix is perversely satisfying: it gives the male the critical illusion that he is a protector, the father figure, although it is actually the Sex Siren who controls the dynamic.

A woman doesn't have to be born with the attributes of a Marilyn Monroe to fill the role of the Sex Siren. Most of the physical elements are a construction; the key is the air of schoolgirl innocence. While one part of you seems to scream sex, the other part is coy and naive, as if you were incapable of understanding the effect you are having. Your walk, your voice, your manner are delightfully ambiguous—you are both the experienced, desiring woman and the innocent gamine.

Your next encounter will be with the Sirens, who bewitch every man that approaches them. . . . For with the music of their song the Sirens cast their spell upon him, as they sit there in a meadow piled high with the moldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon their bones.

—CIRCE TO ODYSSEUS, *THE ODYSSEY*, BOOK XII

Keys to the Character

The Siren is the most ancient seductress of them all. Her prototype is the goddess Aphrodite—it is her nature to have a mythic quality about her—but do not imagine she is a thing of the past, or of legend and history: she represents a powerful male fantasy of a highly sexual, supremely confident, alluring female offering endless pleasure and a bit of danger. In today's world this fantasy can only appeal the more strongly to the male psyche, for now more than ever he lives in a world that circumscribes his aggressive instincts by making everything safe and secure, a world that offers less chance for adventure and risk than ever before. In the past, a man had some outlets for these drives—warfare, the high seas, political intrigue. In the sexual realm, courtesans and mistresses were practically a social institu-

herdsman, not a soldier," said Paris. . . . "But I promise to consider fairly your claim to the apple. Now you are at liberty to put on your clothes and helmet again. Is Aphrodite ready?" • Aphrodite sidled up to him, and Paris blushed because she came so close that they were almost touching. • "Look carefully, please, pass nothing over. . . . By the way, as soon as I saw you, I said to myself: 'Upon my word, there goes the handsomest young man in Phrygia! Why does he waste himself here in the wilderness herding stupid cattle?' Well, why do you, Paris? Why not move into a city and lead a civilized life? What have you to lose by marrying someone like Helen of Sparta, who is as beautiful as I am, and no less passionate? . . . I suggest now that you tour Greece with my son Eros as your guide. Once you reach Sparta, he and I will see that Helen falls head over heels in love with you." • "Would you swear to that?" Paris asked excitedly. • Aphrodite uttered a solemn oath, and Paris, without a second thought, awarded her the golden apple.

—ROBERT GRAVES, *THE GREEK MYTHS*, VOLUME I

To whom aw I compare
 the lovely girl, so blessed by
 fortune, if not to the
 Sirens, who with their
 lodestone draw the ships
 towards them? Thus, I
 imagine, did Isolde attract
 many thoughts and hearts
 that deemed themselves
 safe from love's
 disquietude. And indeed
 these two—anchorless
 ships and stray thoughts—
 provide a good comparison.
 They are both so seldom
 on a straight course, lie so
 often in unsure havens,
 pitching and tossing and
 heaving to and fro. Just so,
 in the same way, do
 aimless desire and random
 love-longing drift like an
 anchorless ship. This
 charming young princess,
 discreet and courteous
 Isolde, drew thoughts from
 the hearts that enshrined
 them as a lodestone draws
 in ships to the sound of the
 Sirens' song. She sang
 openly and secretly, in
 through ears and eyes to
 where many a heart was
 stirred. The song which she
 sang openly in this and
 other places was her own
 sweet singing and soft
 sounding of strings that
 echoed for all to hear
 through the kingdom of the
 ears deep down into the
 heart. But her secret song
 was her wondrous beauty
 that stole with its rapturous
 music hidden and unseen
 through the windows of the
 eyes into many noble
 hearts and smoothed on the
 magic which took thoughts
 prisoner suddenly, and,
 taking them, fettered them
 with desire!

—GOTTFRIED VON STRASSBURG,
 TRISTAN, TRANSLATED BY
 A.T. HATTO

tion, and offered him the variety and the chase that he craved. Without any outlets, his drives turn inward and gnaw at him, becoming all the more volatile for being repressed. Sometimes a powerful man will do the most irrational things, have an affair when it is least called for, just for a thrill, the danger of it all. The irrational can prove immensely seductive, even more so for men, who must always seem so reasonable.

If it is seductive power you are after, the Siren is the most potent of all. She operates on a man's most basic emotions, and if she plays her role properly, she can transform a normally strong and responsible male into a childish slave. The Siren operates well on the rigid masculine type—the soldier or hero—just as Cleopatra overwhelmed Mark Antony and Marilyn Monroe Joe DiMaggio. But never imagine that these are the only types the Siren can affect. Julius Caesar was a writer and thinker, who had transferred his intellectual abilities onto the battlefield and into the political arena; the playwright Arthur Miller fell as deeply under Monroe's spell as DiMaggio. The intellectual is often the one most susceptible to the Siren call of pure physical pleasure, because his life so lacks it. The Siren does not have to worry about finding the right victim. Her magic works on one and all.

First and foremost, a Siren must distinguish herself from other women. She is by nature a rare thing, mythic, only one to a group; she is also a valuable prize to be wrested away from other men. Cleopatra made herself different through her sense of high drama; the Empress Josephine Bonaparte's device was her extreme languorousness; Marilyn Monroe's was her little-girl quality. Physicality offers the best opportunities here, since a Siren is preeminently a sight to behold. A highly feminine and sexual presence, even to the point of caricature, will quickly differentiate you, since most women lack the confidence to project such an image.

Once the Siren has made herself stand out from others, she must have two other critical qualities: the ability to get the male to pursue her so feverishly that he loses control; and a touch of the dangerous. Danger is surprisingly seductive. To get the male to pursue you is relatively simple: a highly sexual presence will do this quite well. But you must not resemble a courtesan or whore, whom the male may pursue only to quickly lose interest in her. Instead, you are slightly elusive and distant, a fantasy come to life. During the Renaissance, the great Sirens, such as Tullia d'Aragona, would act and look like Grecian goddesses—the fantasy of the day. Today you might model yourself on a film goddess—anything that seems larger than life, even awe inspiring. These qualities will make a man chase you vehemently, and the more he chases, the more he will feel that he is acting on his own initiative. This is an excellent way of disguising how deeply you are manipulating him.

The notion of danger, challenge, sometimes death, might seem outdated, but danger is critical in seduction. It adds emotional spice and is particularly appealing to men today, who are normally so rational and repressed. Danger is present in the original myth of the Siren. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus must sail by the rocks where the Sirens, strange

female creatures, sing and beckon sailors to their destruction. They sing of the glories of the past, of a world like childhood, without responsibilities, a world of pure pleasure. Their voices are like water, liquid and inviting. Sailors would leap into the water to join them, and drown; or, distracted and entranced, they would steer their ship into the rocks. To protect his sailors from the Sirens, Odysseus has their ears filled with wax; he himself is tied to the mast, so he can both hear the Sirens and live to tell of it—a strange desire, since the thrill of the Sirens is giving in to the temptation to follow them.

Just as the ancient sailors had to row and steer, ignoring all distractions, a man today must work and follow a straight path in life. The call of something dangerous, emotional, unknown is all the more powerful because it is so forbidden. Think of the victims of the great Sirens of history: Paris causes a war for the sake of Helen of Troy, Caesar risks an empire and Antony loses his power and his life for Cleopatra, Napoleon becomes a laughingstock over Josephine, DiMaggio never gets over Marilyn, and Arthur Miller can't write for years. A man is often ruined by a Siren, yet cannot tear himself away. (Many powerful men have a masochistic streak.) An element of danger is easy to hint at, and will enhance your other Siren characteristics—the touch of madness in Marilyn, for example, that pulled men in. Sirens are often fantastically irrational, which is immensely attractive to men who are oppressed by their own reasonableness. An element of fear is also critical: keeping a man at a proper distance creates respect, so that he doesn't get close enough to see through you or notice your weaker qualities. Create such fear by suddenly changing your moods, keeping the man off balance, occasionally intimidating him with capricious behavior.

The most important element for an aspiring Siren is always the physical, the Siren's main instrument of power. Physical qualities—a scent, a heightened femininity evoked through makeup or through elaborate or seductive clothing—act all the more powerfully on men because they have no meaning. In their immediacy they bypass rational processes, having the same effect that a decoy has on an animal, or the movement of a cape on a bull. The proper Siren appearance is often confused with physical beauty, particularly the face. But a beautiful face does not a Siren make: instead it creates too much distance and coldness. (Neither Cleopatra nor Marilyn Monroe, the two greatest Sirens in history, were known for their beautiful faces.) Although a smile and an inviting look are infinitely seductive, they must never dominate your appearance. They are too obvious and direct. The Siren must stimulate a generalized desire, and the best way to do this is by creating an overall impression that is both distracting and alluring. It is not one particular trait, but a combination of qualities:

Falling in love with statues and paintings, even making love to them is an ancient fantasy, one of which the Renaissance was keenly aware. Giorgio Vasari, writing in the introductory section of the Lives about art in antiquity, tells how men violated the laws, going into the temples at night and making love with statues of Venus. In the morning, priests would enter the sanctuaries to find stains on the marble figures.

—LYNNE LAWNER,
LIVES OF THE COURTESANS

The voice. Clearly a critical quality, as the legend indicates, the Siren's voice has an immediate animal presence with incredible suggestive power. Perhaps that power is regressive, recalling the ability of the mother's voice

to calm or excite her child even before the child understood what she was saying. The Siren must have an insinuating voice that hints at the erotic, more often subliminally than overtly. Almost everyone who met Cleopatra commented on her delightful, sweet-sounding voice, which had a mesmerizing quality. The Empress Josephine, one of the great seductresses of the late eighteenth century, had a languorous voice that men found exotic, and suggestive of her Creole origins. Marilyn Monroe was born with her breathy, childlike voice, but she learned to lower it to make it truly seductive. Lauren Bacall's voice is naturally low; its seductive power comes from its slow, suggestive delivery. The Siren never speaks quickly, aggressively, or at a high pitch. Her voice is calm and unhurried, as if she had never quite woken up—or left her bed.

Body and adornment. If the voice must lull, the body and its adornment must dazzle. It is with her clothes that the Siren aims to create the goddess effect that Baudelaire described in his essay "In Praise of Makeup": "Woman is well within her rights, and indeed she is accomplishing a kind of duty in striving to appear magical and supernatural. She must astonish and bewitch; an idol, she must adorn herself with gold in order to be adored. She must borrow from all of the arts in order to raise herself above nature, the better to subjugate hearts and stir souls."

A Siren who was a genius of clothes and adornment was Pauline Bonaparte, sister of Napoleon. Pauline consciously strove for a goddess effect, fashioning hair, makeup, and clothes to evoke the look and air of Venus, the goddess of love. No one in history could boast a more extensive and elaborate wardrobe. Pauline's entrance at a ball in 1798 created an astounding effect. She asked the hostess, Madame Permon, if she could dress at her house, so no one would see her clothes as she came in. When she came down the stairs, everyone stopped dead in stunned silence. She wore the headdress of a bacchante—clusters of gold grapes interlaced in her hair, which was done up in the Greek style. Her Greek tunic, with its gold-embroidered hem, showed off her goddesslike figure. Below her breasts was a girdle of burnished gold, held by a magnificent jewel. "No words can convey the loveliness of her appearance," wrote the Duchess d'Abrantès. "The very room grew brighter as she entered. The whole ensemble was so harmonious that her appearance was greeted with a buzz of admiration which continued with utter disregard of all the other women."

The key: everything must dazzle, but must also be harmonious, so that no single ornament draws attention. Your presence must be charged, larger than life, a fantasy come true. Ornament is used to cast a spell and distract. The Siren can also use clothing to hint at the sexual, at times overtly but more often by suggesting it rather than screaming it—that would make you seem manipulative. Related to this is the notion of selective disclosure, the revealing of only a part of the body—but a part that will excite and stir the imagination. In the late sixteenth century, Marguerite de Valois, the infa-

mous daughter of Queen Catherine de Médicis of France, was one of the first women ever to incorporate décolletage in her wardrobe, simply because she had the most beautiful breasts in the realm. For Josephine Bonaparte it was her arms, which she carefully always left bare.

Movement and demeanor. In the fifth century B.C., King Kou Chien chose the Chinese Siren Hsi Shih from among all the women of his realm to seduce and destroy his rival Fu Chai, King of Wu; for this purpose, he had the young woman instructed in the arts of seduction. Most important of these was movement—how to move gracefully and suggestively. Hsi Shih learned to give the impression of floating across the floor in her court robes. When she was finally unleashed on Fu Chai, he quickly fell under her spell. She walked and moved like no one he had ever seen. He became obsessed with her tremulous presence, her manner and nonchalant air. Fu Chai fell so deeply in love that he let his kingdom fall to pieces, allowing Kou Chien to march in and conquer it without a fight.

The Siren moves gracefully and unhurriedly. The proper gestures, movement, and demeanor for a Siren are like the proper voice: they hint at something exciting, stirring desire without being obvious. Your air must be languorous, as if you had all the time in the world for love and pleasure. Your gestures must have a certain ambiguity, suggesting something both innocent and erotic. Anything that cannot immediately be understood is supremely seductive, and all the more so if it permeates your manner.

Symbol: Water.

The song of the Siren is liquid and enticing, and the Siren herself is fluid and ungraspable. Like the sea, the Siren lures you with the promise of infinite adventure and pleasure. Forgetting past and future, men follow her far out to sea, where they drown.

Dangers

No matter how enlightened the age, no woman can maintain the image of being devoted to pleasure completely comfortably. And no matter how hard she tries to distance herself from it, the taint of being easy always follows the Siren. Cleopatra was hated in Rome as the Egyptian whore. That hatred eventually led to her downfall, as Octavius and the Roman army sought to extirpate the stain on Roman manhood that she came to represent. Even so, men are often forgiving when it comes to the Siren's reputation. But danger often lies in the envy she stirs up among other women; much of Rome's hatred for Cleopatra originated in the resentment she provoked among the city's stern matrons. By playing up her innocence, by making herself seem the victim of male desire, the Siren can somewhat blunt the effects of feminine envy. But on the whole there is little she can do—her power comes from her effect on men, and she must learn to accept, or ignore, the envy of other women.

Finally, the intense attention that the Siren attracts can prove irritating and worse. Sometimes she will pine for relief from it; sometimes, too, she will want to attract an attention that is not sexual. Also, unfortunately, physical beauty fades; although the Siren effect depends not on a beautiful face but on an overall impression, past a certain age that impression gets hard to project. Both of these factors contributed to the suicide of Marilyn Monroe. It takes a genius on the level of Madame de Pompadour, the Siren mistress of King Louis XV, to make the transition into the role of the spirited older woman who continues to seduce with her nonphysical charms. Cleopatra had such an intellect, and had she lived long enough, she would have remained a potent seductress for many years. The Siren must prepare for age by paying attention early on to the more psychological, less physical forms of coquetry that can continue to bring her power once her beauty starts to fade.