

CHARMERS
=&=
CON ARTISTS

& THEIR
FLIP SIDE...

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SANDRA SCOTT



REDEMPTION
PRESS

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2nd printing in 2007.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA
98022.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-595-2 (Print)
978-1-63232-596-9 (ePub)
978-1-63232-597-6 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006910114

written for those who hurt,
the charmed and the Charmer

DEDICATED TO

Sharon
Bonnie
Diane
Donna
Joyce
P. K.
Tonya
Gwen
Charlene
Carroll
Barbara

. . . and all the others.

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PREFACE

There are many people who unknowingly or knowingly allow themselves to be given over to evil – to using and abusing others. Many of them believe they are merely coping and surviving, so they feel no guilt. Some don't care. This is written to educate and teach appropriate, healing responses.

“All that is necessary for evil to prevail is that good men do nothing.” . . . Edmund Burke

“Men who manipulate and violate others will never listen to their pain and pleas. They will only listen to good men who hold them accountable for their bad behavior. Where else should we expect to find a collection of good men but in the church and the courts?” . . . Sandra Scott

PREFACE

Ignorance is *never* bliss. What we don't know can and usually will hurt us. Truth often hurts as well, but in a cleansing, healing way.

Prophets, seers, and truth-tellers have never been popular. They make people uneasy. They make us feel exposed and vulnerable. When fun or pleasure are unveiled as destructive, the news is rarely welcomed. Wanting to “kill the messenger” is not uncommon, but it doesn't change the message.

The uglier the information seems to us or the more difficult the news is to believe, the greater becomes our human instinct to live in denial. The more important the information and the more persistent the deliverer, the more resistant the hearers are likely to become.

Those who watch and don't understand—the ones who don't see beyond the appealing surface—shake their heads and see the wronged one as delusional, paranoid, or meanspirited. They fall prey to sympathizing with the instigator in his crafty portrayal of his innocence. The result is invalidation of the victim's experience. Victims then doubt their own perception and even their sanity.

Meanwhile, both the perpetrators of evil and the onlookers grow in their disdain for the revealer of the reality. It spoils their comfortable lethargy and the lull in which they suspend and numb their awareness. This is particularly true when some of the most charismatic and likable people are unmasked as dangerous to be around. Charmers and con artists are so appealing, so soothing to the spirit, and they are such desirable agents of a feel-good society, we really don't want to know we are being fooled. How could it be so wrong, when it “feels” so right?

Regardless of the cost, we *must* be made aware. The price of not seeing or hearing truth is too great. Not knowing can put us in harm's way. It can rob us of our dignity, our integrity, and endanger our very souls.

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As an educator and a professional, I am on a quest to provide information to those reluctant to know—information without which anyone is a potential victim of seduction. I have encountered great resistance to this information from the people who are in the best positions to help and advocate for victims: the courts, law enforcement, clergy, and employers.

Sometimes there are loved ones—people to whom a victim needs to turn—who can't grasp what they are hearing and have no idea of how to help. Most alarming has been that there are many in the mental health field whose knowledge is sorely limited. Ignorance allows Charmers, con artists, and abusers to exist and flourish.

The purpose of this book is to identify Charmers and warn readers of the Charmer's threat to them. It is also intended to validate and help those drawn in and hurt by Charmers. Finally, the information here is offered to allow Charmers to see themselves at a crossroads at which they can make a choice: either to move toward integrity, or to continue in deepening pathology. Unfortunately, most Charmers cannot or are not willing to choose the first alternative, since they believe they are getting their needs met.

I speak from personal experience with both a Charmer and a con artist. It was only after my own recovery and after observing similar patterns in others' stories, that I realized what my own journey had truly been. This realization marked the beginning of understanding the road I had traveled.

A reader can greatly misunderstand or misuse this book. It is important for anyone who starts it, to finish it; otherwise, those who identify with the information could become discouraged. My purpose is to provide awareness and healing for both the charmed and the Charmer.

Don't be discouraged if you just don't "get it" or if you do see it but just can't break free of your situation. As you read, you may discover that you've "been there" or that you "are there." Facing such

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a reality and dealing with it is not an easy process but you are not alone. Perhaps this book will plant the seed from which your courage will grow.

This information offended a number of people when I introduced it. Interestingly, most of those who were offended were not Charmers. They were simply afraid I was criticizing some of their dating-and-mating techniques, and they feared becoming ineffective or looking foolish in their relationships. This is not about the healthy, age-old, male-female mating dance. It is about misuse of that process, whether in romantic or other relationships. Another group of people who were apprehensive about discussion of this subject were those who knew full well that they *do* take advantage of people, and they feared exposure. Then there were some Charmer-types who listened to and even agreed with the information, either believing that they would not be recognized by others or thinking that it did not apply to them, since they did not see themselves clearly.

The case studies I use are an amalgamation of many stories from many sources. Parts are fictional examples, except in the cases of well-known people, which have already been well documented. Otherwise, the names, places, and other identifiable parts have been changed. Any similarity with actual people or situations is purely coincidental.

Individuals who have been duped already, recognize and applaud this work, while lamenting that they didn't know earlier the information it contains. To those people who have trusted me by sharing the experiences and heartaches they have had with a Charmer or con artist, I am grateful. It is for them and other potential victims that I have written this work, and it is to them it is dedicated.

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*Wisdom begins with knowledge.
Knowledge empowers.*

There is a story of a frog placed in a beaker of cold water over a low flame in a laboratory. The water warmed slowly, one degree at a time. Since frogs are cold-blooded animals, this frog started out very comfortably, but gradually it began to die without even realizing what was happening. There was no struggle, just a gentle drifting into death. There was probably even a degree of contentment . . . until it was too late.

This illustrates what happens to many people who are lulled into a seemingly blissful (usually exciting) relationship with a Charmer. All the while, they think they are happy and having the time of their lives, only to find, over time, that they have lost themselves. Usually there is a lack of tangible evidence to the contrary, and with the subtleties of the circumstances, they begin to doubt themselves, their

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perceptions, and their own ability to discern reality or to improve their situation.

The Charmer doesn't win in the long run either. The same frog illustration applies to him or her. The seeming success he experiences makes him believe life is working for him. But his life is marked by emptiness and a lack of real intimacy with others. His is an emotional and spiritual death.

What makes this so tragic is that the Charmer either does not know or does not let anyone else know the inner workings of his life so that he can get help. Charmers are resistant to the very information that could set them free. The danger for them is that theirs is behavior that usually escalates, since the rewards increase and further forestall consequences.

The ones the Charmer is hurting don't realize what they are dealing with and are so emotionally addicted to the Charmer that they either can't get themselves free, or they are so lost in the ecstasy of the high, that they don't even want to know they are at risk. Frequently, a wiser friend or family member sees the reality and tries to warn the believer, only to be rebuffed.

A Charmer is not a diagnosis found in the *DSM IV*¹ (the diagnostic manual used by all mental health professionals). It is my own "tag" for a personality type best identified by this descriptive term. It *does not* refer to nice people who are charming.

I first became acquainted with the word *Charmer* (in psychological terms) through discussing a case with a colleague. A charismatic, personable husband, described by most people as "just the nicest guy you could ever know," was also very subtle in his control of the relationship and had an unsettling ability to be both self-serving and irresponsible toward his commitments. His wife, quite oblivious to the paradox, seemed puzzled by how much anger she was feeling. She was impatient with herself and felt guilty because of the anger

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she was directing at her wonderful husband. The marriage was no longer working for them, and the woman accepted the blame herself, even though the evidence didn't support her conclusions.

When my friend, with whom I was discussing this case, tagged the husband as “a Charmer,” I asked for a prognosis for him and the marriage. Her response was discouraging and caught me quite off guard. “It's negative,” she said. “Charmers don't come in for therapy. If they do, it's only to placate someone. They don't see a problem, because life works for *them*, so why should they change? If they do come in, they don't stay in therapy—unless they succeed in also charming the therapist.”

With a sense of helplessness as a counselor, feelings of sympathy for the wife, and dread for the marriage, I set out to learn all I could about Charmers. I began collecting case studies, looking for common threads to provide clues.

First I realized that *nice* does not always mean what the speaker intends. *Likable* or *lovable* may be more appropriate. *Nice* denotes a person whose walk equals his talk; it speaks of good values and behaviors.

I found that divorce devastated the partners of Charmers, and they were unable to recover normally. Many of them, years later, were still trying to figure out what had happened. They suffered far more self-doubt, low self-esteem, loss, and guilt than did others who went through divorce.

For those who did not divorce or separate from their Charmer, they lived with a level of sad acceptance and self-blame. The only way they could continue was with a level of denial, suppressing feelings of confusion, anger, and self-abandonment. They had greater bouts with depression. They had moments of highs, sharing life with an exciting, life-on-the-edge spouse, but the payoff was a great many more very low times. They found themselves entangled in a web, seduced into the spiral of addiction from which they knew they should extricate

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themselves. They feared facing a mind-boggling recovery process if they did. Fear of the unknown was greater than their suppressed pain. Only the fleeting highs they could grasp here and there offset the pain of staying.

I began noticing how many public figures and those who make the headlines fit into the profile. I saw similar characteristics in people who were abusive—whether it was physical abuse in domestic violence, murderous rage, destruction of public or private property or the breaking of other laws, or whether it was in the more subtle techniques of stalking, harassment, verbal or emotional abuse. The latter style seemed more the arena of the Charmer. I found many Charmers were abusers in private. They were masters of charm in persuading their victims to trust them again.

Addictions and abuse are both ultimately about *control*. Addiction is a desperate attempt to seize control by someone who feels out-of-control in his life. His substance (or activity) provides temporary feelings of relief and euphoria. When the rush is gone or unfulfilling, the cycle begins again with a greater need than before. It is the only disease that successfully convinces the diseased that he is not afflicted.

The blatant abuser lacks the Charmer's skills and ability to gain control willingly from the victim, so he bullies, intimidates, and uses force. When the Charmer's charm no longer works, he will usually just move on, knowing there are vast opportunities for him elsewhere. However, if there is a lot at stake for him—a relationship or job he needs or the protection of his public image—he will feel justified in forcing his agenda. He will redouble his efforts to use his skills, but to the extent that the goal is important to him and that his skills are no longer effective, he will become abusive.

A favorite technique of the Charmer is to be passive-aggressive. The pay off for this approach is his ability to control his environment by doing nothing and quietly orchestrating the frantic choreography

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of those around him, thereby avoiding responsibility for the results, but being the primary beneficiary.

The research led to new questions:

- What's the difference between being charming and being a Charmer?
- How does one become a Charmer?
- Is a Charmer truly happy?
- Does a Charmer know he's a Charmer?
- What about his conscience? His integrity?
- What's the difference between a Charmer and a con artist?

For those who have had a Charmer in their lives, there was immediate identification with my research. They may not have had a name for it before, but there was relief in having someone finally put a label on their experience.

For Charmers, this information will create different reactions, including pain and disappointment, depending on their level of integrity. There are degrees of being a Charmer that run along a continuum, from the obvious silver-tongued Lothario or backslapping salesman, to the more diabolical and pathological examples of Ted Bundy or Adolph Hitler, with accompanying levels of destruction and victimization.

Not everyone who gets charmed gets hurt. Usually it's the people closest to a Charmer who suffer: his inner circle, those who are up close and personal, his captive audience. That usually means family members or those whom the Charmer needs most. The ones who enjoy an association with the Charmer and pay little or no price are usually part of the Charmer's general public, one of his many audiences. Those people find it hard to believe anyone would not feel the same sense of fun, excitement, and privilege that they do. Since they haven't been close enough to the flame to get singed, burned, or

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consumed, these people on the periphery envy those in the Charmer's inner circle.

But for those—both Charmers and their victims—caught in the unending dance, there is a sense of elation as well as of confusion. Everything looks so good on the outside, but inside is an unfilled cavern. People who have a contrary, secret inner life and obsessions are not healthy, happy people, no matter what their facade.

To be charming is a wonderful, admirable attribute. That's not the same as operating as a Charmer. Being in the company of the Charmer is very appealing. They are usually attractive people (or appealing in some way) with great communication skills, though not necessarily verbal. They may be easily identified or be very subtle in their demeanor. But there is a difference in what we think we see and what's really there. There's a difference between being charming and being a Charmer. There's a difference between having charisma and being a user.

To say a person is charming conjures images of someone who is warm, easygoing, amiable, gracious—someone who knows the appropriate response to anyone in any situation. Such a person is smooth, has an air of confidence, yet demonstrates a caring sensitivity to others. The French say he is *debonair*, that he has *savoir-faire*. He's the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine of life go down.

The Charmer, however, can be harmful to the mental and emotional health of those closest to him, and eventually to his own well-being. He is charming, but instead of his charm being an outward expression of his inner self, there is, under the surface, an ulterior purpose for his own gain.

Unless you've had first-hand experience, you probably wouldn't recognize a Charmer or understand the hurt he or she can cause. Nor will you likely identify with any of this unless you or someone close to you has already been hurt. And if you are a Charmer, you may not realize the truth about yourself unless you

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know the characteristics and identify with the things that motivate and typify a Charmer.

Some charmers, such as a Ted Bundy at one extreme, are eventually exposed and suffer the consequences. Then there are those, such as O. J. Simpson, who we discover have lived two different lives: a charming public image that effectively concealed a darker side at home with immediate family members. Many Charmers may not abuse to the point of actually breaking the law (e.g., John Kennedy's breaking his word and betraying his wife with his infidelities), but there are those who will bend or break laws and rules of society to effectively cover or get away with their behavior (e.g., Bill Clinton). It's this kind of excitement that makes them feel vibrant, alive, and in control of their realm. (I must make it clear, at this point, that this is not a party issue; regardless of your political alignment, Kennedy and Clinton are the two politicians about whom the most has been written recently, thus identifying them with this subject.)

All Charmers are very good at walking the edge of the line that would expose them. It's their "high." They are risk takers and can talk out of both sides of their mouths as needed. They are also able to compartmentalize what they do, so they see no relevance of behavior in one area to that of other parts of their lives. They truly see themselves as victims— "the good guys."

It is rare, and with great effort on the part of someone else, that a Charmer is finally exposed. Yet, even after he is exposed, a Charmer will not recognize the truth about himself, and interestingly, the one who exposes a Charmer is usually attacked as the problem and suffers the loss of his own credibility, well-being, and even safety. Such a person risks a great deal trying to help.

Regardless of the proofs presented, there are still legions of people who will refuse to believe evidence that reveals the truth about a Charmer's deceptions. These people prefer the comfort of their delusion. The Charmer is their champion. He or she represents the

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pinnacle of the human experience—that of being in control of one’s own realm, of being on top of the heap.

At the other end are the Charmers who manage to spread themselves so thin that hardly anyone gets close to them. They are the ones, with the tentative smile, that are surprised to discover they are actually bleeding and can’t quite figure out how it all happened. Their relationships are all so shallow and hit-and-run, that they never allow any feedback on their behavior. They leave hurting people, broken relationships, and devastation in their wake—for someone else to clean up, if it’s repairable at all.

To get his *needs* met—to survive, at least in his own mind—the Charmer operates as a “people pleaser.” He must manipulate others to get what he needs. As we will see later, the con artist is a “people pleaser,” as well, but operates this way to get what he *wants*. He has a broader goal in mind.

NOTE: The term *Charmer* includes the con artist only when describing methods of operation both Charmer and con artist may employ. However, the two are indicated separately when describing the person or his/her motives or goals.

(Because Charmers are more often male than female, most references and pronouns in this work are rendered in the masculine. This is not an indictment, but rather a convenience in writing and reading. Please recognize that references here also apply to female Charmers. Male or female, except for a few variations due to gender, the descriptions remain the same for both.)

CHARMING? A CHARMER?
OR A CON ARTIST?

DESCRIPTION AND PROFILE OF A CHARMER

H E'S THE PIED PIPER you cannot resist following, even when he steps out of the way to safety and leads his followers over a cliff and into a vast abyss. He's Peter Pan with promises to take you to Never-Never Land where you'll never have to grow up. He's exciting and irresistible.

He believes he is special and that it takes a special person to understand his specialness. He makes you believe you are special too, because you are able to understand him. This hooks you into supporting and defending him without question, ignoring evidence or comments to the contrary. He has an excuse or reason for everything. He has his own brand of logic that is seductively convincing in getting you to believe in him and his rationale.

He is subtle in soliciting special privileges with his winning smile, his piercing eye-contact, or his obvious interest in you, any of which seem to overshadow his meager request for accommodation. You see, the same rules that apply to others should not restrict him. He wants

you to bend them or suspend them. All the while, he has you believing you are being generous, magnanimous, or more understanding than others.

He has an unusual talent for ingratiating himself to others, and he easily picks up on the special interests of others or their vulnerabilities and plays to them. He knows how to appear to be the giver; in fact, he may do a lot of giving. What you can't see is that the price you will pay later will be greater than the value you receive from him.

But who thinks about tomorrow's hangover while enjoying tonight's party? He is intoxicating to be around. Things happen; excitement reigns. You believe *you* are on the receiving end and that he is your benefactor. You feel on top of world.

Sooner or later, though, you begin to realize that these feelings are being offset by bouts of depression, anger, inadequacy. You experience a lowering of your self-esteem and a diminishing confidence in your perception of people and circumstances. You believe that it must be you. It couldn't be him!

Your feelings are getting hurt—deeply and frequently—but it will be a long time before you see that, because he *can't* feel love deeply, neither can he feel deep guilt or pain, especially that of others. In fact, if you question the Charmer's behavior or express your ill-treatment, these concerns are minimized or dismissed. Whenever the Charmer is caught or confronted on any behavior, he or she expects always to be forgiven, without consequences or really resolving anything. The Charmer can apologize at the drop of a hat, with a straight face, and not mean a word of it.

The better and more accomplished the Charmer, the longer it will take for anyone to uncover the truth. He will usually move on to other devotees and try to discredit his accusers. This may even come in the form of an apology but with the underlying message, "Well, that's their

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perception, but I'll be the bigger person and take the responsibility, rather than expose them or be unkind to them." He's very good at making himself the hero in even the worst situation.

Or a Charmer can really mean he is sorry, but that's as far as it goes. That's the end of it as far as he is concerned. No one has the right to monitor his behavior to see if it is consistent with his promises. He may truly, sincerely apologize but have no intention of accepting any real consequences or making real amends. He may do something significant to make it look real, or even make it real, if it gets him something bigger as a payoff. Even his remorse is manipulative and short-lived, and there is never true repentance.

He never intends really to change anything that works for him. He may disguise it next time, learning from his mistakes, so he won't be caught again. He may even tell you there will be no "next time." But there will be. It's the way he lives. Why should he change? Even when he really means to change (to make his life work even better for him), he's all but incapable. Years of repetition, of believing his own hero image, and of a surface level of self-satisfaction have become so ingrained that he operates automatically.

Eventually, you begin to see that he is the one benefiting from *your* support and devotion and what they buy for him. You may start catching him in lies and deception in many forms, and you may notice his increasingly obvious and blatant demands on everything and everyone around him. You notice that your choices, your needs, your desires all give way to pleasing or being with him. And you have done it willingly. You wake up to find you've lost yourself somewhere along the yellow brick road.

He appears to like everyone and to be very likable. He seems to have all the right moves and words in social situations. Many Charmers will have a sterling reputation, while others are the disarming, playful, naughty rogue. He may be smooth, or he may present himself in the least suspicious way: as a self-effacing, even bumbling, needy

individual. All are designed to draw you in. He may be admired or aggressively sought after by others. If you get close enough, however, the charm will eventually take on a macabre appearance. It will begin to sting and then devour you.

Being a Charmer has little to do with intelligence, but more to do with cleverness. Charmers are at both ends of that spectrum. Their quest for survival is at a base, impulsive level; it has become instinctive. It is at the same level as the animal kingdom. A higher level of intelligence or accomplishment merely provides access to a higher level audience.

Charmers count on others to be too gracious, too well-mannered, too mature, or too kind to confront them, so they continue to be able to get away with their behavior. They are also adept at turning around any challenge to make the accuser appear petty, jealous, delusional, judgmental, or rude. If someone doesn't support them, they are able to make it look like "sour grapes" on the other person's part. The absence of confrontation is interpreted by them as approval of what they do.

They will usually have a series of broken or shallow relationships. The more shallow a life is lived, the more easily it becomes bored and needs to seek more extreme (and often perverse) ways to stimulate, titillate, and be satisfied.

They like to see how close to the edge they can get and still survive or even win. Like the children of alcoholics or other dysfunction, they gravitate to a well-known, comfortable scenario that will produce in them a familiar feeling, even if it is very short in duration and even if they hate it and it makes them miserable. It's what they are used to and the only thing they believe they can effectively handle.

Without realizing it, they are on a self-destructive path. They know they are isolated and lonely; they can't face that, so they cover up any way they can. This makes them prime candidates for addic-

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tions: substance abuse, gambling, excessive activity or recreation, workaholism, sexual addiction, and anything else they can use to fill the vacuum or provide a quick fix.

Most Charmers will demonstrate extreme shifts in personality: high/low, kindness/sarcasm, etc. Their negative side is usually covert, or it may show itself in humor that is cynical or at someone else's expense.

A Charmer depends on the reputation of his converts to carry him if he gets caught. His remaining defenders will turn on any accuser, usually with great venom. A Charmer is amazingly proficient at getting those who continue to believe in him to defend him “to the death”—whether it means loss of career or reputation—even after evidence of their delusion has been revealed. What is pathetic about those believers is that they actually think the Charmer cares about them. They don't see they are being used. Believers don't recognize their own need to believe that someone has “made it”—has taken charge of life—as the Charmer appears to have done. That fantasy gives them hope for themselves.

When things begin to unravel, believers may start to wonder if they're going crazy. They may think they're becoming delusional or paranoid. They can't bear to believe their trust has been misplaced and that they've been played for a fool. So pride or pain persuades them to go on believing the unbelievable.

“Am I the only one who senses that something is wrong here?” you ask yourself. “Am I jealous, overly sensitive, or too critical? It must be me since I appear to be the only one who sees it.” But, it's more than puzzling. It's feeling drained, having life siphoned from you. Yet this seems so inconsistent with what everyone around you thinks. They believe you are fortunate to be in the inner circle of one so revered.

The Charmer accelerates his skills on those who challenge him. With those people, the Charmer will periodically test the limits to

which he can go and yet win out. These victims are given subtle messages that nothing they do is quite good enough. They are being taught that they, not the Charmer, are the problem. Actually, the Charmer is a bottomless pit of need, but the message he conveys is that it is someone else's fault for not being able to fill him up. His defense is to go on the offense:

- “You are imagining things.”
- “You are being overly sensitive.”
- “You just don't understand.”
- “Can't you just go along with things?”
- “Can't you take a joke?”
- “I'm doing the best I can!” (This one leaves you stuck feeling and looking ungrateful.)
- “What about what *you* are doing?”

Or he will sweetly apologize for his behavior, but you both know it will not be the last time. Past experience has taught you that he believes if he says the magic words, “I'm sorry,” everything will be fine. He then sees he has a clean slate, without any consequence or reference to the infraction and without any amends being made.

The pattern will leave you, once again, optimistic that it will be different next time, hoping there will never be a next time, believing because you want desperately to believe. You defend his behaviors, rationalizing violations of moral and legal rules. But in the end, you feel inadequate and inaccurate in assessing what you see, hear, and feel. It leaves you doubting yourself and your concept of reality.

Instead of getting angry at the Charmer's manipulation of you and your perception of a situation, you feel ashamed at not seeing things more clearly, and you feel guilty for challenging him and making a

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big deal out of it. You are led to believe you are a troublemaker, an alarmist, or a poor sport. The message is that *you* are the problem.

To stay in good graces or to avoid the wrath of their Charmer, victims end up compromising their own value system and what they know to be right. They live with a cancerous guilt that erodes their life, their individuality, and their very spirit.

The Charmer *appears* to have great sensitivity to others and to *understand* all *about* feelings—both his own and those of others. He seems to have invisible antennae to grasp onto the people who will respond positively to him. These same antennae tell him exactly what will appeal to and win that person to himself and just how far he can go with it.

He is a genius at imitating virtue and portraying himself publicly in a very positive light. It makes him very appealing company. He usually possesses a ready sense of humor and can tell a good story or do something to make others laugh or feel good. His particular method of operation may be to be a wonderful, adoring listener, letting the other person shine for the moment, endearing himself to them.

A Charmer is a master at ingratiating himself to others. He has a “Ted Kennedy style of leadership”: he assesses which way the wind is blowing, steps out in front of everyone, and yells, “Follow me!”

But real feelings (apart from those surrounding his own fears) are a limited or absent experience for a Charmer. He operates at a surface level with well-developed communication skills in lieu of expressing at a real or deep level. The feelings he does allow are the ones that directly affect himself. In place of real empathy for someone’s pain, he may feel frustrated or sad at the inconvenience it causes him. He may even be skillful at feigning empathy and saying, “I feel your pain.” While he might say the right words, his motive (though others may never know it) is always his own welfare.

As a result, genuine intimacy is a remote possibility for the Charmer; although he allows and encourages others to feel intimacy toward him. He's a good pretender, and he may even feel emotionally intimate for brief periods of time or fleeting moments.

Charmers are limited in their ability to truly love anyone. Love is to want, encourage, and support another person to be all he or she can be, which is to realize their full human potential. It is to value them, to be honest with them, to remain committed for the long haul, and to be concerned for and contribute to their needs and welfare beyond your own desires.

The Charmer fears having a victim realize his or her full human potential. While the victim is growing, he or she may uncover the truth about the Charmer's shallowness and his lack of ability to have a reciprocal relationship. The Charmer's existence depends on the victim's denial of the dysfunctional nature of the relationship, or their relationship will cease to exist. Therefore, the affection of a Charmer is not truly love but a tool for manipulation.

Because of the charmer's shallow relationships, he fears feelings below a surface level. That would make him vulnerable. That means taking emotional risks. (Many who are grandiose about taking physical or financial risks are compensating for their inability to take emotional risks.) Numbing, denying, or suppressing feelings gives the Charmer a belief that he is not accountable or responsible. He believes that if he doesn't acknowledge the feeling, the information, or the problem, there is no obligation to deal with or change anything. The Charmer will then dump them onto someone else. This passive aggressive behavior begins a round of rationalizing, projecting, or blaming. It is then easy for him to think or say, "That's their problem, not mine."

Just saying that, does not mean it's true. What it really means is this: "It is their problem to deal with; I choose not to." Thus, the

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mess is left for someone else, while the Charmer walks away with no feeling of guilt or remorse, oblivious to the inconvenience, hurt, frustration, anger, humiliation, or debt that they have left. The victim then looks hysterical or out of control with his or her feelings and with the task of smoothing out the situation. Charmers believe they've left nothing behind; it just magically disappeared. They manage to stay just out of reach, to move just at the moment of reckoning.

The Charmer looks for shortcuts, and to him, the end justifies the means. Not owning a problem, however, does not relinquish ownership; it merely transfers temporarily one's belief about the problem. The problem remains to be faced later when it resurfaces, as it must. By then, it may have a different face, have a different form, or have been pushed onto someone else. The Charmer survives only because of his ability to shift attention, either onto himself (if that's his need at the moment) or onto someone or something else, to divert scrutiny of his motives or behavior when such scrutiny might injure his image.

For instance, in a family where anger is not allowed to be appropriately expressed, a boy may have ongoing, unresolved anger. If he projects that anger onto his mother and it is never resolved, sooner or later he will project it onto a girlfriend, a wife, or all women. He may tend to overreact to even a small infraction. If his anger is at his father, he may choose to emulate that parent in order to "best" him. In some cases, such a man will need an inordinate amount of male bonding throughout life to fill the need for a good relationship with another man.

Unresolved anger in people will be spilt onto whomever is perceived as being weaker or more vulnerable than themselves at the moment. People who struggle in this way need to feel in control, so they do it by being controlling of others. One of the techniques a

man may use for gaining control may be to become a “ladies’ man.” What better way to control and extract vengeance?

If a girl is the victim of emotional or physical incest by a parent, she may see herself as worthless, since the one who is supposed to love and protect her has abused her by drawing her into an inappropriate role. Chances are good that she will never be allowed to express her rage (or any other feelings, for that matter). Without that emotional outlet, and without having her feelings validated by someone, she may then decide she’s not worthy of good treatment. Many such women become prostitutes, promiscuous, or homosexual, all of which can provide a false sense of being the one in control of a relationship. They can also become easy prey for Charmers.

When a child’s needs are not met by his or her caregivers, that child’s survival instincts take over, doing whatever it takes to get those needs met. Many are able to rise above such obstacles to become the person, the parent, the friend, they didn’t have. The less productive survival methods of childhood usually become the problems of adulthood. One method is to escape into addictions to ease the pain. The Charmer is addicted to self-preservation. His unmet needs must find expression, compassion, grieving, and healing in order for him to let them go in exchange for healthy responses. The healthy person is able to see those issues as childish solutions which need to be reevaluated and replaced with adult wisdom. Charmers remain locked in the childish fears, which they go on covering with more sophisticated, acceptable ways of surviving.

Charmers are people who have learned to use their personal appeal and interpersonal skills to rescue themselves from what they believe to be stressful or dangerous situations. The better those skills work for them and the longer they have used them, the more perfected they have become at being Charmers, not really learning to problem-solve or deal honestly with life.

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Charmers are not content people. They appear very successful in their lives, but *they* know they are limited in certain ways. They put all their faith and confidence in their ability to manipulate people and events. Their inner fear is that they will meet those along the way who will see through their facade and refuse to be manipulated. They run away from those people. They do anything they can to dismiss them from their lives or to discredit them.

Charmers rarely allow themselves in-depth self-examination or opportunity for feedback to realize what they are doing. Moments of stress or confrontation may uncover it, but Charmers are very good at avoiding both of these things or at quickly losing any memory of them.

They have learned how to maintain a false self—a public image and a “hero” self-image, which reflect a pseudo happiness that even they have come to believe. Because they are not in touch with many feelings nor experiencing feelings at any real depth, they have low self-esteem. They don’t really know their true “self.” They don’t enjoy being alone unless in hiding or pouting. They crave attention or adoration or just being around people to reassure themselves that they are functioning and in control of life.

Interestingly, when this information is presented in a noncondemning way, some Charmers may open up to take a serious look at their lives and will have great sadness about the methods they’ve used and how it makes them feel about themselves. For them, it can become a moment of truth, a change of direction, and a reclaiming or establishing of a healthy, fully functioning person. The individual level of maturity and integrity will determine a Charmer’s openness.

Just looking at the behaviors discussed thus far, it becomes evident that the main issue for the Charmer is one of immaturity, which focuses on self. It is the picture of one stuck in adolescence or earlier childhood. In the process of growing up, one learns an increasing

vocabulary of feelings. One of the most important emotions and signs of maturing is an ever-growing sense of empathy—the ability to see things from another person’s perspective and to equate their feelings with your own. For the Charmer, even viewing someone else’s pain will really only invoke the awfulness for himself if he were in that same situation, rather than the pain *the other person* is feeling. A growing, maturing individual also becomes comfortable in feeling and managing the emotions they’re developing, learning the difference between appropriate and inappropriate responses to one’s own feelings, as well as a sensitivity to the feelings of others.

The case studies that follow will illustrate varying degrees of being a Charmer, as people in general have varying levels of maturity and integrity. Some Charmers are more dangerous than others. Some are more subtle than others. Those factors both determine and depend on how effectively they operate. Some are better at their skills than others. Some are physically more attractive than others, which enhances their appeal and ability to be effective. Some stay in one place too long until someone catches on and perhaps exposes them. This may push them to move on to another audience, to change or accelerate their tactics and strategy, or to become abusive if moving on isn’t feasible. The greater degree to which one is a Charmer, the closer to pathology—*pathology* meaning “a character disorder or mental illness.”

The fortunate ones face themselves and turn toward healthy recovery. However, their numbers are few because there are so many comfortable exits.