



The Hundred and First Spectacular Suicide

If you want to do something truly radical, kill yourself. We'll have one less reader, but the world will be a better place.

—from *ANSWER Me!* #2

MER DOUR BRITISH voice was as cold as a mentholated cough drop. She left me a distant, tinny-sounding voicemail message saying she needed to verify my address.

Sounding more forlorn, she logged a similar message the next day, adding with a curt finality, “and don’t bother calling after tomorrow.”

I sit shivering in my dank, mossy, tomblike basement, wondering why I can’t call after tomorrow.

I dial her hotel in northern California. The desk clerk connects me to that meek Anglican voice.

The unidentified British girl timidly asks whether my address is the same as listed in *ANSWER Me!* #4.

Yes.

Pause...

Uh, I’m writing a book about white trash and publishing a book by Peter Sotos. You can order them from that address.

Pause...

Trying to fill the silence, I ask,

Is that all?

“Yes.”

I don’t ask why she wants my address.

Instead, I say,

OK—goodbye.

And she says goodbye, too.

A week later I’m in the same clammy concrete basement pecking away at my computer keyboard when the phone rings. It’s a reporter from the local newsweekly, seeking my comments about the three British kids who killed themselves.

What?

“A couple days ago some British kids shot themselves, and Scotland

Yard said one of them had made numerous phone calls to your voicemail number.”

I have no idea what this is all about.

He says he’ll call back with more information.

The dog starts barking. I run upstairs to find two reporters for *The Oregonian* at my front door. They, too, want to hear what I have to say about the three British kids who committed suicide.

Come on in. Don’t mind the dog. I just got a call from Willamette Week about this. What the hell is going on?

“On February 21st,” says a tall, graying newsman, “a young British man and woman shot themselves at a gun range in Mesa, Arizona. The next day their friend, a girl who’d been with them in the States for six weeks, drove up a mountain road in northern California and shot herself in the head. Investigators found that she’d called your voicemail number several times and that last week you phoned her at a hotel down near Redding.”

British girl...northern California...I called her hotel...oh, FUCK.

A sinking feeling in my stomach like a rapidly falling elevator.

God, yeah, I talked to some girl with a British accent for about a minute last week. She had called asking about my mailing address. I probably still have her messages on tape.

I fetch my microcassette player, and together we listen to the disembodied voice of a girl who’s no longer alive.

Over the next few weeks, details of the suicides slowly begin leaking in through police detectives and news reporters.

The fresh young corpses were those of Stephen Bateman, Ruth Fleming, and Jane Greenhow, the girl who called me. Bateman and Fleming were twenty-two; Greenhow was twenty-three.

The trio had lived together in the dentally challenged lily pad called England. They all habitually wore black military-style gear on their pale white skin. They all shared an ideological fondness for the Nazi forces which nearly blitzkrieged their homeland into nothingness. All three were exceedingly brainy.

Jane, who had a pretty canary face and short, carrot-colored hair, played the cello. Ruth, a bit more plumply puggish and with her bangs dyed Aryan blonde, played the violin. Both girls had recently graduated from Leicester University with first-class degrees in physics and astrophysics.

Stephen, who Teutonicized his name into Stefan, was a dropout dreamer who toiled in a potato-chip factory. After his suicide, his mother described him thusly:

Stephen was a very intelligent, kind boy who worried a lot. He was never in trouble growing up, but in his late teens he seemed unable to find an anchor in his life.

His anchor...or millstone...became a Hitlerian nihilism which translated into fascist fashion such as SS uniforms and an affected Kraut accent. He met Jane Greenhow at a nightclub and was soon goosestepping inside her vagina. Stefan, Jane, and Ruth moved into a house in Andover, where their cadaverous demeanor had neighbors calling them "The Addams Family." Stefan's affections gradually shifted from Jane to Ruth, and he started sieg-heiling between her legs instead.

In January, 1996, the three abruptly sold all their belongings and purchased plane tickets to America. Bateman informed a neighbor that he and the girls planned to join a Nazi cabal in Detroit.

The night before leaving, Bateman and Fleming stayed at a Salvation Army hotel in London. They left behind several items which hotel workers turned over to investigators. A notebook entry outlined their last-minute chores:

Check the guns, get rid of the car, clean the house, dye hair.

Bateman had jotted the phrase KILL THEM ALL onto a check stub. A macabre snapshot featured Fleming, garbed entirely in black and with her face caked in white makeup, holding a sign that said

SUICIDE

The word was apparently written in dripping blood.

On January 6th, the three touched down in Detroit. They flew on to Vegas the next day and rented two cars, with Greenhow driving solo. Over the next few weeks, the three wormed their way through the Plains states and the desert Southwest, a trio of pasty Nazi Goths aimlessly stormtrooping through cowboy country.

There were unsubstantiated rumors that they plotted to assassinate wrinkled Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole. It was also thought that they attempted to hook up with aging Arizona white supremacist Jack Maxwell Oliphant, only to find that he had croaked shortly before their arrival.

Jane apparently split off from her friends sometime in mid-February. Bateman and Fleming settled in the dusty, prickly-pear-laden town of Casa Grande, Arizona, taking residence at the Boots and Saddle

Motel and making regular pilgrimages to a local gun range. In their motel room, detectives later found a doctor's prescription form on which Fleming had entered her "name":

OBERGRUPPENFUHRER STAATSPOLITZEI
(HEAD SQUAD LEADER—STATE POLICE)

And her "address":

HELL AGONY ETERNAL

On February 21st, Stefan and Ruth entered their beloved gun range, rented a pair of revolvers, squeezed a few shots at the paper targets, stepped back, placed the barrels in their mouths, counted down, and blasted their bright white melons into Valhalla.

Meanwhile, Jane Greenhow ate her meals alone, staring despondently out her motel's dining-room window overlooking California's icily shimmering Lake Shasta. Hotel workers described her as "sad...lonely and real quiet...an odd nut."

On the day of her partners' suicides, she phoned the Las Vegas car-rental agency to tell them she'd be late returning her vehicle. A clerk informed her that Ruth and Stefan had killed themselves. "She freaked out," said a rental agent. "She started crying."

Jane hastily checked out of her hotel. She placed a frantic last-ditch call to her parents in England, but Mum and Dad weren't home.

Greenhow drove a short stretch of Interstate 5 north toward Oregon. She then exited the freeway and headed up a remote mountain road which ended at a spot called Conflict Point.

Once there, she connected a garden hose to her car's tailpipe and sat with the motor running, hoping to die in her own little gas chamber. Then, seemingly growing impatient, she grabbed her black-market Glock pistol, stuck it in her mouth, and sent a 10mm meteor crashing through the brilliant galaxy inside her skull.

What happens in one's head as the bullet's going through your brain?

Was there a blip of regret as she pulled the trigger?

Did she hear the gun fire? Did it sound like the roar of a crowd cheering *der Führer*? Did her life flash before her eyes? Did she see Nordic lightning?

Or was her birthday candle instantly blown out?

The human body is such a delicate soap bubble. POP! She's gone. A forestry official found the body. Blood had gushed from the ears

and nose. Black combat clothing and boots. Hair dyed black, cut short, and shaved over the ears. Thick black feline eyeliner. Eyes wide open.

Jane's hand still clutched the gun. A note found near her body was addressed to "My Glock":

I am so sorry I have to leave you now, the only one I am reluctant to leave behind....I am so sorry we never got to consummate our relationship. I know we could have had such fun together. Alas, always too many regrets....[We were] brought together through strength, honesty, purity, always so cold and removed, both designed to be able to act almost instinctively when fully operational. Perhaps my firing pin was under tension for too long. I guess you just functioned more reliably—I jammed.

A phony check for six million British pounds was found at the scene, "one pound per Jew" killed in the Holocaust. There was a photo of Greenhow and Bateman at a German war memorial. Jane's handwritten journal decried all things British, and British men in particular. Greenhow referred to herself as "Ms. Hitler" and likened her demise to that of the Third Reich:

As in WWII, the better side lost. And the better side had a promise, a goal, a clear idea of what it wanted and how to get it. The other side, hopelessly inept....

Jane had also written a letter to Debbie and I, mailing it four days after speaking with me and two days before capping herself. The letter apparently passed through investigators' hands, because although it was dropped in the mail only four hundred miles away from Portland, it doesn't reach my P.O. box—sealed with duct tape, no less—until nearly two weeks after Jane sent it.

Jim and Debbie:

You can't reply—I'm dead. This is the money I had left. I knew that if you had it, you would use it to contribute to *your* good, and not the "greater good," the "common good." If you don't want it, don't take it. To try and explain all in a letter is futile. I acted. If I thought explaining to anyone else would do any good, I'd be alive, and stupid."

—Jane

Enclosed with the letter are three money orders, each for \$700. Two of them were made payable to me, one to Debbie.

The \$2,100 seems like blood money, almost as if I'm being paid for Jane's suicide. If I spend a penny of it, I'll appear to be endorsing her death. Jane has thrown a stick of dynamite in my lap, and I need

to get rid of it quickly.

I mail the money back to Jane's parents in England.

Because of my one-minute phone conversation with a depressed stranger, most news-media buzzards are certain I'm a *Nationalsozialist* mastermind who orchestrated three deaths. I'm pegged as the sinister puppeteer who'd used the power of literary autosuggestion to nudge these Children of the Queen into snuffing themselves.

The Oregonian headline is "Portland Publisher Goad Tied to Suicide." *Willamette Week* coyly queries, "Did a Portland Publication Goad Three Brits to Pull the Trigger?"

The Limey press, in its incomparably stuffy-yet-tawdry way, seizes upon the story's implications of youthful Britons gone wrong in Wild Redneck America. London's *Daily Mirror* runs a photo of me looking slimy and demented over the caption "WARPED: Publisher Jim Goad and His Evil Magazine." It describes *ANSWER Me!* as a "sick death-and-rape magazine....[that] glorifies mutilation, rape, and suicide and publishes horrendous pictures of death and disfigurement."

As with the White House Shooter, I find myself being blamed for something about which I feel zero culpability. Just as I'd been "connected" to Duran's shooting, I'm "tied" to these suicides, and there seems no way to cut the ropes loose.

I will eventually be hounded by British TV crews, movie producers, and book authors for my comments about the suicides. I refuse every interview. My reaction isn't, "Great—more publicity! More power!" Instead, I sit in my cold basement and cry for the sad-but-brilliant girl who spent her last days alone.

And I find myself angry with Jane that she never told me what was wrong. If I had known she was suicidal, I would have tried to persuade her against it.

Could I have stopped her?

If I said, "Don't do it," and she asked, "Why?," what would I have answered? What reason do I give her for staying alive that doesn't sound silly?

Do I tell her that life is worth living? I'm not sure it is.

That it gets better? It doesn't.

That there's hope? There isn't.

What would I have told her?

Only that I've been there.

I've stared at pill bottles. I've crammed a shotgun shell into the chamber and thought about sticking the barrel in my mouth. I've peered over a bridge's railing down at the dirty river far below. I've contemplated

tying plastic bags snugly around my neck. I've pondered rolling up the car window and slinking off to sleep while the engine runs.

I know how sad one can get looking at happy people.

I've gazed around me and wondered what I possibly could have done to deserve being placed here.

I've cried my eyes bloodshot and didn't feel any better for it.

I've felt as if I've been slowly bleeding inside my whole life.

I've felt as if the world was happily engorged on my misery like six billion swollen ticks.

I've felt like shoving my fist all the way down my throat and yanking out the pain.

I've felt like a seagull walloped by an oil slick, flapping about helplessly on frothy black sand.

I know emptiness. And heartache. And wanting to die, die, die.

There is no reason to live. There is no reason to die. Jane, all I would have told you is that maybe I know what you felt like.

You were only an eight-hour drive away from Portland. I would have asked you to come up, have some coffee, and talk with me and Debbie. You can sleep on the couch. Tell us something you like to do, and maybe we'll all go out and do it together...

The three bullets which killed Jane, Ruth, and Stefan would have been so much better spent elsewhere. There are so many brains out there whose rudimentary functioning wouldn't be significantly impaired by a bullet:

Men with auburn halos of feces rimming their gnarled anuses, chicken grease dribbling down their chins while they reach into their grimy boxer shorts and paw at their saggy, misshapen, gray-haired, hang-dog bloodhound balls;

Their squalidly gelatinous twat wives squatting on bean-bag chairs, munching Fritos and picking at bleeding mosquito bites while watching "reality" TV shows.

Those are the non-suicidal. The should-be-suicidal. The never-will-be-suicidal.

I'd imagine that the suicide rate among the mentally retarded is rather low. But the top percentile shouldn't be killing itself.

Why did Jane do it? With most suicides, the motive is clear, especially when a note is found. But Jane's note raised more questions than it answered.

Some speculated that this was merely a soured love triangle, yet that would only explain Jane's suicide, not Ruth and Stefan's.

Others theorized that the trio's possible disillusionment with American Nazi groups fueled their despair. Perhaps a sobering eye-ful of Yankeeland's rusted-trailer version of fascism led them to conclude that their war was lost.

There were intimations that the three were adherents of chaos theory and believed that their suicides would set off a chain of important sociopolitical events.

Or maybe they were just tired.

Or maybe their brains grew too big for their heads.

Or maybe they gazed deep enough into the universe to realize there's nothing out there.

Or maybe they wanted to impress me.

If Jim Goad told you to jump off a bridge, would you do it? And if you did, whose fault would it be?

Jane's letter to me contained this crucial sentence:

I acted.

I wrote about suicide; she acted. So if she was the actress, was I the playwright? Did she turn my words into flesh?

How clearly defined is the line between word and deed? What separates the voyeur from the participant? When do you stop thinking and start doing?

How far can you stray into the shadows before you can't find your way back?

How long does a Christian preacher rail against faggots before he wants to suck one off?

How much can radical feminists write about rape before a few fantasies seep into their minds?

How extensively can you "research" suicide before you want to kill yourself?

Previously, *ANSWER Me!* had only flirted with death. Now it was married to it. What sort of Pandora's Box had my writing unlocked? Had I willed something into being?

Jane Greenhow had called me to confirm an address listed in *ANSWER Me! #4*, but it's almost inconceivable that she hadn't seen the third issue, which focused on suicide. Issue #3's centerpiece was a sixty-page compendium titled "Killing ME Softly, Roughly, and Just About Every Other Fucking Way Imaginable: 100 Spectacular Suicides." As a graphic device for that article, I had magnified the word SUICIDE from old newspaper headlines and scattered it throughout the layout.

Ruth Fleming, perhaps imitatively, posed for a photograph holding a card with the word SUICIDE scrawled on it.

Jane Greenhow's note to her Glock was campily fetishistic like my homage in *ANSWER Me! #3* to a shotgun I called The Reverend. Fleming and Bateman frequented a public gun range—a form of recreation which doesn't exist in England—just as Debbie and I did for an article in Issue #3.

Drawings of Hitler adorned the front and back covers of the Suicide Issue. Ol' Dolfy was also featured as one of my 100 Spectacular Suicides; like Jane and friends, he allegedly exterminated himself with a bullet to the head. An unhealthy affinity for Hitleria also played a role in the deaths of Dan Burros and Gregg Sanders, two more of our spectacular suicides.

Perhaps the most eerily relevant suicide featured in Issue #3 was that of Ian Curtis, the Joy Division singer who was said to have hung himself wearing a Nazi brownshirt.

Regarding Curtis's fans, I had written:

Regrettably, most of them have failed to pursue their emulation to its logical extreme and hang themselves.

Like Curtis, Jane Greenhow was thought to be the loser in a love triangle. And Joy Division cassettes were found in the vehicle where Jane shot herself.

The British Suicide Kids weren't the only carcasses somewhat murkily linked to *ANSWER Me! #3*.

Kurt Cobain, the scruffy, moppety, dirty-dishwater-haired helmsman of grunge trio Nirvana, was similar to Ian Curtis in his bellyaching lyrical hopelessness. During Nirvana's final concert in Seattle, artist Jim Blanchard schmoozed his way backstage by giving the concert promoter some free comic books and *ANSWER Me! #3*, for which he had drawn the cover art. At one point in the evening, Blanchard spotted Cobain sitting on a couch and reading *ANSWER Me! #3*.

The centerfold to that issue was a photo of a man sitting on a couch with a shotgun between his legs, his head blasted to bloody gristle.

A few months later, Kurt Cobain blew off his clinically depressed head with a shotgun.

Was he influenced by *ANSWER Me!?* Or did it merely resonate with a wish already buried deep within his smack-addled heart?

Shortly after the British Suicide Kids extinguished themselves, I receive a letter from a woman in California:

Please remove my name from your mailing list. Last summer my son hung himself. Your magazine was found in his bedroom. What you're doing is very sad.

I never answer the woman. I don't know what to say.

In 1993, Debbie placed a prank call to Dr. Jack Kevorkian, famous for helping terminal patients end their lives. She lied and told him she had ovarian cancer, asking for his aid in killing herself. She taped the call and printed the conversation's transcripts in the Suicide Issue.

Four years later, Debbie was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

Did she wish it on herself? I'll never know.

And I'll never know why Jane Greenhow sent the last of her money to me.

Did she think I'd be pleased by what she did?

Did she choose me as her eulogist, hoping I'd write about her as if she were a morbid sort of pop hero?

Did she think I'd merely play up the sensational elements of her death and turn her into The Hundred and First Spectacular Suicide?

During those pauses in our phone call, was she dying to confide how lonely and sad she was?

Why wouldn't she tell me what was wrong?

I like having answers, but I don't have any answers for this.

So awash in cold sunlight one late-fall afternoon, I sit out on the bleachers staring at the unfeeling sunset and waiting for a hint of Jane's voice.

All I hear is the bitter wind.

