

MY YEAR WITH ANNE

DEAD.

After eleven years with Debbie, we both know it's over. The marriage is dead. I've wrestled with love and lost. Love had been my religion, but I discovered there was no God. For months I've been telling her I'm leaving. I'm just not sure when. I have nowhere to go, but I have to go anyway.

I feel hopeless. Ready to die.

And along comes Anne.

One of her ex-boyfriends would later tell me that Anne has a knack for coming into a person's life at the lowest point and finding a way to drag them even lower.

I close my eyes and see an image of Anne in a long white nightgown, floating toward me.

Infecting my life. Sweet Dracula girl. Fifteen years younger than me and a thousand times more twisted.

I liked Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*.

I liked Patty McCormack in *The Bad Seed*.

And I like Anne from Oregon City.

Anne has a malevolent, reptilian grin as if she knows secrets about you. She speaks in a Valley Girl accent, her speech littered with "ums," "Likes," and "awesomes." She has straight black hair with Cleopatra bangs. A round baby face with thick lips and an upturned, porcine snout. Bugged-out psycho eyes. An emaciated, boyish body with li'l cupcake tits and milky skin. A tattoo of three daisies near her bush. Feature-for-feature she's no great shakes, but she carries herself extremely well. She oozes pheromones like tree sap. She smells like raisins and wine.

Anne says she's "100% sinner." She hands out business cards describing herself as a "Psychotic Neo-Nazi Bitch With a Whip." She plans on getting BITCH tattooed on one arm, SLUT on the other. She claims to be "more of a fucking misanthropist than any of you." She says that she molests children. She likes to torture animals. She brags that as a babysitter, she enjoyed dropping infants on their heads, then savoring that stunned, silent moment before they'd start screaming. She's a troublemaker and shit-stirrer with the loudest, foulest mouth I've ever heard on anyone. A stripper. Blood donor. Welfare-scammer. Shoplifter. Homewrecker. My kind of gal.

Anne is a diagnosed manic-depressive who'd been hospitalized four times as a teen for suicide attempts. She has tidy little scars on one wrist to prove it. At age fourteen she suffered a breakdown and literally didn't leave her bedroom for three months, pissing and shitting in buckets her mom left near the bed. A male psychiatrist who examined Anne playfully poked at her belly and said she was too young to be so depressed, that she should be out dating boys and having fun. After Anne left the examination room, the shrink turned to Anne's mom and said there was no hope for her. She'd only get worse.

Anne says that the only way she can rebel against her longsuffering hippie parents is by being a homeless, hatemongering, drug-addicted asshole cunt. She tells me that throughout her teens she terrorized the household, threatening to harm or kill her family members. She accused her mom of being a dyke and said she'd burn in

hell. She called her younger brother stupid and taunted him about his prominent harelip. She says her family wishes she'd die or at least go away.

She didn't lose her virginity until age eighteen. Then she made up for lost time. Thirty-five guys over the next three years. Of all these liaisons, only two lasted more than a week. Both of them were married men. Both guys got divorced while seeing Anne. The second married man was a milksop who allowed her to dominate him. But all the other boys had kicked her to the curb.

Everyone was always telling her to leave.

I'm Boy #36.

Married Man #3.

In the summer of '96 she sends me her zine *Cryptic Crap*. Its cover collage features Beavis and Butt-head playing air guitar in front of a swastika and the phrase "Human Suffering Rulez!" The centerfold shows several pictures of a topless, rapturous Anne mincing around captions such as "I wuv myself sooooo much!" She's always smiling in her pictures.

And Debbie never smiles.

I send her a copy of my latest flyer with a note saying I think her zine is funny. I say she can pick a free item from the flyer. She selects the *HATESVILLE!* CD, which spotlights my spoken-word rendition of "Let's Hear it for Violence Toward Women!" Anne later tells me she'd play that track at maximum volume and jerk off to it.

A few months pass. She sends me another zine called *ZAP!* It features the obligatory boobie shots, but its tone is much harsher than *Cryptic Crap*. I zero in on an article called "Sex is..." which shows Anne naked in the fetal position surrounded by little fortune-cookie sentences. One of them says "[Sex is] something I do to abuse myself." Another calls her a "disposable cunt." Another says something to the effect of, "Please, please, don't think I'm a piece of shit while you're fucking me—or at least pretend you don't." Love to her was pain, torture, psychosis, and humiliation. I wonder what the hell had gone wrong. I feel protective of her. I feel bad that she missed the prom and had never gone on a date that didn't involve porno peep booths and crystal meth. I think to myself that I'd never treat her that way if given the chance.

She had personalized my copy of *ZAP!* with silver magic marker. She wrote, "Hey, Mr. Casting Director—pick me! Pick me! Oh, please, pick me!"

She starts asking people in Portland about me. One of them says I'm very polite when I talk to you, but I grit my teeth as if I can't stand being in your presence. Anne loves it.

In May of '97 comes another zine, *Motherfuckin' Titty-Suckin' Two-Balled Bitch*. Another boob shot. A note with her phone number, asking me to call. I leave a message on her voicemail. Nothing much. Just my return number.

A couple of weeks later, I make a live bookstore appearance at Portland's Reading Frenzy to coincide with *The Redneck Manifesto's* release. A few days afterward I get another letter from Anne, along with a Xerox of her naked ass. She wants to know if I'd publish a book consisting of three articles she'd written:

"100 Shitty Things I've Done to Hurt Other People";

"100 Shitty Things Others Have Done to Hurt Me";

"100 Shitty Things I've Done to Hurt Myself."

She says she'd almost come to my book reading, but she got cold feet a block away from the store and turned around. She ends her letter, "Fuck you, Jim Goad—

I'm usually afraid of no one, but you're the only person who scares me." She signs the letter with a drawing of a chicken.

... I've just been obsessing over you the last couple of days. So I suggest that if you don't want me to call you and bother you that you quit calling me, because that's the kind of person I am, very obsessive. And you are my latest obsession.

—Voicemail message from Anne, 3:53 AM, May 26, 1997

On Memorial Day she leaves a message saying that she might be stripping tonight, but probably not, so I should call her. Maybe we could hook up at her apartment downtown.

When I drive over the St. Johns bridge and head downtown, I know I'm crossing a line. A point of no return.

I phone her from a lonely old phone booth in a dark part of town. She tells me to call back in ten minutes. It seems there's the small matter of kicking her boyfriend out of her apartment and out of her life. When I call back, she gives me the address to a monthly hotel right off Burnside Street's bag bitches and crackheads.

She opens her apartment door and seems taller, skinnier, and prettier than she had in her zines. The place is a matchbox efficiency about the size of a jail cell. She has a hurricane victim's sense of decorative style. Roaches crawl through the debris.

She sits down spread-eagled on a small, sticky plastic mattress. She's wearing shorts and no panties, revealing her black-bushed snapper. She fills a pipe with a nugget of skunk bud and lights it.

"I'm the best fuck in Portland," she boasts, exhaling smoke. She says her boyfriend is a fag. Says I'm a babe. "Wanna see my tits?" she asks, flashing them before I can respond.

Nervous, I suggest we go for a ride. We head for her hometown of Oregon City, slicing through the warm late-spring mist. As we're driving, she unzips my jeans and begins fellating my schween. She keeps asking when we're gonna go back to her place and fuck.

And this girl would eventually wind up feeling used for sex.

She asks me to hit her. I playfully grab her hair and shake her head, accidentally bumping it into the passenger's-side window. I quickly apologize. She laughs as if I'm not a very good abuser.

I ask her,

So, um, exactly how many times did your daddy molest you?

She says he never did.

She tells me she heard that Debbie was bitchy and wears too much makeup. When she calls Debbie "hideous," I tell her to leave Debbie out of it.

We get back to her place and disrobe in the dark. I try going down on her, but she won't let me. I flip over on my back. She straddles me on top. I cum in about three seconds. While forcefully grinding my wilting erection, she asks me a strange question in rhythm with her hip thrusts:

"You're...coming...BACK...aren't...you?"

She doesn't like the idea of me leaving for good.

Moonlight spills in through her window as we lay about naked. "Oh, by the way," she says, "I'm HIV-positive."

I tell her I don't care.

It turns out that she's lying. But I don't care.

When I get home at around four in the morning, Debbie wakes up and asks me where I'd been. I tell her I'd fallen asleep down in the basement.

Two days later I go back to Anne's place with a shaved head and a baggie crank. She says crank makes her wet. I should've remembered it makes me dry. It siphons the blood straight out of my wee-wee, shriveling it down to thumbnail-size. For twenty hours she tries sucking my prune dick. Twenty hours of her saying "It's not important" and me cursing my luck. I finally hoist my mast—barely—and "experience" her for about a minute and a half.

It's the last bad sex we'll ever have.

We go for a walk in the pale silvery morning. Later that day she leaves a voicemail message saying how she was checking out my ass as we strolled the empty streets. She likes my swagger. She digs how I threatened the parking-lot attendant. She calls me "the last masculine man in Portland."

I figure that with her sexual history and general wildness, she isn't going to be into anything heavy. But it gets heavy almost immediately. She starts leaving multiple voicemail messages for me daily, all of them marked "urgent." In one early message she says she's having trouble concentrating at her stripping job and that she's miserable when she isn't around me. So she quits stripping and says she's devoting her life to make me happy.

After a week, we're seeing each other every day. She plasters her apartment walls with blown-up Xeroxes of my photos from *ANSWER Me!* She surrounds herself with Jim Goad. And it's more than a little unsettling to visit her dilapidated micro-pad and be surrounded with Jim Goad, too.

One night I sift through unimaginably heavy Rose Festival Parade traffic to her lice-'n'-scabies soap-dish apartment. And as I sift through rubbish on her floor while she's downstairs in the laundry room, I find a booklet written by her immediate ex, a fey spoken-word wannabe. One line sticks with me, something to the effect of, "Please don't break my little China-doll heart." I think of Debbie, and how my affair with a girl half her age would smash her heart into ceramic pieces.

Anne and I hang out in her sauna-like hovel, watching out the window as brightly festooned parade floats caterpillar their way past sweating onlookers. We can't sleep all night. At daybreak I suggest we drive out to the Columbia River Gorge and rent a motel. In a little town called The Dalles, we find a cool, quiet room with a slowly wheezing air conditioner. She painfully squints while lowering herself atop my wang and mutters, "You've got a pretty big cock...this is the best sex I've ever had." Soon afterward, she's asleep. She looks almost innocent.

I'm still restless. I sit on a chair next to the bed and watch some Sunday afternoon kids' fantasy show with the sound turned off. A witchlike character appears onscreen. It seem as if something is tormenting her. I think of Debbie and how my philandering will strip her down the ugly, desperate pain of betrayal.

Anne soon awakes, and we ride out to a gravel turnoff next to an isolated country road. It's near dusk. We face the sunset over the Columbia River Gorge's colossal mouth. The giant sky casts doubt over the greenish-golden fields.

There's doom in that wide-open sky.

I feel my fate setting along with the sun. A tear springs from my eye. I feel like I'm falling in love, and I know how much pain love can bring.

Falling in love. Down, down, down. You *fall* in love. You don't fly upward.

After a police car passes we pull into The Dalles again, fearful we'll be nabbed for a small sprig of weed we've been smoking. I park next to some train tracks in an abandoned section of downtown. We stare out the windows as a cold depression seizes us. I ask her if she knows what it's like to feel so bad you want to die. She sort of derisively laughs and says, "God, yeah," her wide eyes surveying the emotional damage in her life to this point. She seems to be saying, "You don't know the half of it."

The next morning, fog clouds dot the Gorge as we head west to Portland. She's scheduled for an abortion to eject the fetus her previous boyfriend had implanted. As we sit in the clinic's waiting room, she falls to the floor, grabs my ankles, and says, half-laughing, "I'm a lonely and desperate person."

I attend the operation and clutch her hand as they pump her full of anesthetics. "My ass ROCKS!" she shouts to the nurses as they reveal her nether regions. "Don't I have a great ass?...Look at my boyfriend—isn't he a babe?" As they ram a massive steel speculum up her twat, she shrieks, "Give it to me, daddy!" The doctors try to hush her, fearing that her banshee squeals will clear out the waiting room.

After the operation, she gives me some blood-soaked cotton gauze as a souvenir. We drive for a while and park beneath an overpass facing downtown Portland. I tell her I'll need to be getting home. She asks when she'll be able to see me again. With mascara smeared like two black eyes, she adds, "I mean, I'm totally in love with you already."

I tell her that the same dangerous word had occurred to me.

When I get home it's Monday afternoon, and Debbie's at work. She's left a note for me near the computer. It reads:

Here on Sunday thinking about the last eleven years and how we got this house for the both of us and the pets. I held back the tears all day. And then on the World News, they interviewed tornado victims who repeatedly said, "God doesn't give you more than you can handle." I sobbed to that.

Igor [our pug], who had been sleeping across the room by the white couch, got up from his nap, and pounced on me and licked my face manically for twenty minutes. It helped, but I'm still not cured.

I gulp and realize I'm falling in love again to punish myself.

God didn't give her more than she can handle.

After all, he didn't tell her about the twenty-one-year-old stripper.

Or that in a week, Debbie would be diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Or that on the night of her surgery, as she lay on a hospital bed with morphine dripping into her arm, the stripper and I would be rolling around on Debbie's bed at home.

And I really wish you could kidnap me right now, or that you could, you would.

Because I am so ready to run away from all this. I don't want to deal with any of it. '

—11:07 AM, Thursday, June 18, 1997

Summertime is gorgeous in Portland, the only time of year the sky isn't smothered in clouds. It rarely gets too hot. The days are long and drenched in syrupy sunshine. The nights are cool and buzzing with possibility.

For a while you can pretend that rain doesn't exist.

Or death.

Debbie's cancer shows me the difference between emotional death and the literal kind. Suddenly, death doesn't seem nearly so romantic. Suddenly, I don't want cancer or AIDS. I don't want to die. I push myself through a rigorous fitness regime: pumping iron, running, gobbling vitamins, and eating health food. I work myself into having a taut, angry body to prove I'm not dead. Or dying. Not like Debbie is. I run from Debbie as if the cancer will somehow rub off on me. I can't handle the morbid megatonnage of her condition. Watching her hair fall out. Seeing her legs get as skinny as a young pony's.

Every night I tell her I'm going out for a long drive in order to clear my mind. And every night I run straight into Anne's young, healthy arms.

Debbie's cancer dooms us. It casts a long, black ribbon of darkness over our heads.

We tell each other we're going to hell for what we're doing to Debbie.

And yet we keep doing it.

We both should be awarded trophies for conducting the most psychotic, contaminated, pseudo-romantic liaison in human history. It's not really love, because love implies sweetness and innocence. It's an intensely eroticized death wish. We both feed off the danger and suffocating closeness. People who know us are sure that we'll kill one another. Two angry psychos headed full-throttle for each other's throats.

Our theme song is Hank Snow's "Ninety Miles an Hour Down a Dead-End Street:

*Warnin' signs are flashin' by us, but we pay 'em no heed
'Stead of slowin' the pace, we keep pickin' up the speed
Disaster's getting' closer every time we meet
Doin' ninety miles an hour down a dead-end street.*

Combustible. Borderless. Unhinged. She eats my boogers, and I burn a cigarette on my forearm for her. We wonder what it would feel like if we were to, say, drive to a small rural town and shoot a transient point-blank in the head. Or kidnap a small black boy and pose for pictures with him at rap concerts and the zoo before returning him to the playground.

We indulge in a sort of terroristic fun to scare off the death we feel is chasing us. Driving, driving, driving, as if we don't want to stop for a moment to ponder what we're doing. Rolling through Portland like the Plague.

Running up to strangers on the street and snapping pictures of them as if we're paparazzi. Pulling cigarettes out of people's mouths and telling them it's a filthy, disgusting habit. Walking down hipster-thronged NW 23rd Street, both of us topless.

We call ourselves "Portland's Hottest Young Couple." Everyone's afraid of us. We get kicked out of almost every bookstore, mall, restaurant, and coffee shop in the city, mostly for her ear-splitting public displays. It's almost impossible to overstate how loud she is in public. She'll enter a room screaming and usually not leave until forcibly ejected. She'll be somewhere in the middle of one of her mega-decibel monologues, and people will flash me this stunned look, as if, "Which mental hospital did you find HER in?"

But she makes me laugh. She reminds me of how spontaneous and theatrical I'd been before teenage depression dampened it. Before adult depression killed it. I feel as if she's resurrecting part of me from the dead.

We make a killer comedy-writing team, driving around finishing each other's ideas. I drive while she scribbles notes.

We plan to do several zines:

BLOW Me!, whose premise is that happiness, fitness, family values, and greed are ultimately more offensive than suicide, murder, and rape. The magazine's centerpiece is a cartoon panel about my twenty-hour spate of crank-induced impotence. I suggest a centerfold pop-up where everything pops up by my dick.

Negro Love Child, the heartwarming tale of two ex-Nazis who find love and commitment through the adoption of a small black child from the inner city.

Rashawndasaurus, a coloring book about a strong, young, intelligent black female dinosaur.

Wheelchair City, a zine about handicapped people by two people who aren't.

We devise comic characters:

Bruno Penilucci, the planet's most homophobic man.

Lord Ashleigh St. John, a sadistic British aristocrat who still owns slaves in Alabama's hill country, and his incestuously attractive niece, Wee Lady Anne.

A rap group called Wiggaz in Jeepz and their hit, "Knockin' Da Boots."

Lonsdale, the flying anti-littering monkey.

The Gay Nazi ("Vee are heer, vee are queer—you VILL get used to it!")

And Stan 'n' Barb Taylor, an annoyingly wholesome, extraordinarily ordinary pair of real-estate agents from Beaverton, Oregon. Stan 'n' Barb are our most fully developed characters, with an extended family of sub-characters and an entire TV fantasy network based on their lives. They are also our normalcy-stricken alter egos, the happy squares we could never be.

Part of us wants to be Stan 'n' Barb. Desperately.

There's a desperation to our comedy.

And our sex.

We really can't spend time together without fucking.

We feel as if we'll somehow break a spell if we don't do it at least once daily.

Up in the hills. Next to the train tracks. On the roadside. Beneath the nuclear power plant. Out in the woods. In the parking lot behind the church.

Fucking even while she's recovering from her abortion and bleeding all over the place.

Fucking so hard, the bed collapses beneath us.

Fucking so hard in my car, she has permanent scars on her back from the friction. Just whomping her with the dick like I'm the LAPD and she's Rodney King.

Fucking and fucking and fucking until she bursts into tears and says she can't keep up with me.

We play up the age difference. I'm Joey Buttafuoco, and she's Amy Fisher. I'm Travis Bickle, and she's Iris the Teenaged Prostitute. I'm Kentucky coal miner Earl Harlan, and she's his granddaughter Sweetpea.

My cock is her baby bottle. Her ba-ba. She likes falling asleep with it in her mouth. She'll point at its purple veins and giggle excitedly. She suffers from obvious penis envy, or she wouldn't hover over mine for so long. She dawdles over my prick as if it holds all of life's secrets. She calls it "The Best Cock in the West." Shouts about my "porn-star cock" at a Portland magazine shop. E-mails a friend about how I tear her up with my "8-inch cock." (It's an exaggeration—a slight one.)

Despite all her sexual experience, she didn't even have an orgasm until she met me. She thought cumming was the same thing as getting wet. I take her from that point to where she's epileptically spasming from the second I shove it in her until a half-hour later when I dismount. She cums so hard, I can *feel* her pussy contracting around my cock. I'll push it in her to the hilt and just hold it there without pumping, and she quivers like a jellyfish. Total loss of control. She screams so loud as I stick her doggie-style, I'm afraid someone with call the cops.

Fucking and laughing and fucking and laughing and fucking and laughing with this young girl to prove I'm alive. And after eight or ten hours, she'll ask me to stay a little longer, and I always do. I'm gorging myself on pleasure because there's no pleasure with Debbie. None. There hasn't been for years. Debbie is a straight bummer.

I always get home late.

"Where'd you go tonight?"

Um, up into Washington, near Mt. St. Helens.

I pet the dog, kiss Debbie, and fall asleep, smelling of Anne.

THERE IS NO WAY IN HELL, even, Jim, even if you call me up and tell me you never want to see me again, I AM NEVER GOING TO FUCK ANYBODY ELSE AGAIN. I'm crazy, it may be crazy, that's maybe really obsessive and fucked-up, oh well!...I'm like the woman who stalked David Letterman with you! I'm sorry, that's how I feel. You're IT. So, you know, that may not be what you wanted to hear, but I am that much in love with you, to the point where I am devoted for the rest of my life.

—1:18 AM, Monday, July 28, 1997

Anne is a true believer. An apostle of The Gospel According to Jim Goad. She has forsaken everything and taken up my cross. But her devotion comes with a price. Just don't ever, ever, ever, ever leave her.

In June I catch her in a lie. She'd been bragging to a female bookstore owner that she's ruining another marriage, and the bookstore owner tells me about it. I confront Anne, who denies ever saying it. Oh, bullshit. I argue that the bookstore owner would have nothing to gain by telling me this, while Anne has everything to gain by lying. So Anne admits she lied. As we sit on the warm grass in a public park, I say I'm breaking up with her. She pounces on me and wraps her arms tightly around my waist. "Don't leave! Don't leave! Don't leave! I won't let you go!" she sobs. I've never seen anyone cry so hard. And I've never had anyone grab onto me and refuse to let go. I tell her I'm leaving—she can either accept a ride back to her place, or she can walk home. I stand up. She's still clutching onto me. I start walking. She still holds on, dragging her feet on the grass. She finally gets in the car. I drive her home. She cries all the way.

She tells me she cried for nine straight hours. She leaves a string of desperate phone messages choking back the tears. And ultimately, my hard ass softens. I feel bad for her again. I say that if she feels that strongly toward me, maybe we have something special. I go back to her.

In August I break up with her again. She screams "FUCK YOU!" at me during an argument, and I say I never tolerate such behavior from anyone, male or female. Fuck you, too, and goodbye. I stand up and start walking out of the apartment.

"How can you do this?" she wails.

Like this—watch me.

Barefoot, she follows me out of the building and into the street. As I try opening my car door, she lunges at me and holds on like an octopus. For fifteen minutes she stands there with her tentacles wrapped around me. I say I don't want to get forceful, but she'd better loosen her grip.

"Is it over, Jim?"

Yes. Now let go of me.

She does. And with those bare feet she walks straight into traffic, howling incoherently and tears soaking her puffy red cheeks.

A car slams on its brakes. It misses her by a foot. She runs away screaming. I drive away sighing.

Um, yeah, I know, I can't stop calling... Well, I still can't get over my habit. I haven't kicked it... I don't know, this is bothering you, probably, I mean I probably should just stop and leave you alone, but I really can't. Um, I'm really going crazy.

—3:14 PM, Thursday, August 14, 1997

Nobody exists in my mind except for you. I'm sick.... Oh, God, I'm deranged.... I want to hunt you down, I want you!

—5:29 PM, Thursday, August 14, 1997

Late in August, Anne's invited to give a live reading at a Portland bookstore as part of some cozy little zinester fest. Debbie hears about the event and wants to attend. I try persuading her against it, but she insists on going. And so we go.

My wife, my mistress, and I... all in the same small room.

Anne initially planned to read something about how she and her first married boyfriend used to run around town without his wife's knowledge. The bookstore owner, who knows about my affair, forbids her from reading it.

Debbie wears her curly blonde chemo wig and a white cotton dress with little banana and watermelon patterns. Anne wears a sheer nightgown and no bra. She disrupts everyone else's readings to the point where people are screaming at her to shut up. She finally gets up and reads her piece, which lists and describes the first twenty-five guys she fucked. People are still laughing nervously after the first five or so guys. By the time she reaches #25, everyone is silent and staring at the floor. People feel bad for her.

Regardless, she resumes interrupting everyone else after her reading and is booted out of the store. And after I drop Debbie off at home, I got out for one of my "rides" and impale Anne with the dick a few times.

The next day, Debbie asks me what I thought of Anne.

Oh, well, you know, I guess she was kinda funny.

"She seems like your kind of woman," Debbie says. I change the subject. I deliberately had avoided eye contact with Anne the previous night. And yet Debbie could somehow smell the connection between us. She would write in her diary that I fell in love with somebody named Anne that night, and that's what happens whenever a thirty-six-year-old man sees a cute twenty-one-year-old girl.

The bubble is burst. The fantasy summer is over. No more honeymoon. Seeing Debbie as someone real, rather than just an abstraction, ruins our Cartoon Psycho Funworld. It closes down the carnival. Debbie's contamination becomes ours.

Anne and I drive up to the hills like we always did. But instead of fucking, we cry and cry over Debbie. For hours.

Guilt. Self-hatred. Two psycho assholes who are laughing and fucking while a dying woman sits home alone in the summer heat. Two psycho assholes who are going to hell.

The jig is up. Anne and I become much more comfortable sharing our inner rottenness with each other. We become bottom feeders, eating each other alive. *[N]obody ever killed themselves over me...I always wished, cause I was weird, that when I was younger that my mom would kill herself or somebody would kill themselves in my family, 'cause then I wouldn't have to kill my own self.*

—1:35 AM, Sunday, August 31, 1997

It's called scapegoating. Transference. Guilt-projection. Hypocrisy.

Anne wears many masks, but there's no face behind them. She'll use whatever angle works and say whatever sounds right. It all depends on her audience and who's doling out the sympathy. One moment she's a "flaky liberal chick"; the next, a "psychotic neo-Nazi bitch with a whip." One minute she's the most mentally ill broad who ever lived; the next she's perfectly sane, because her psychiatrist said so. Today she's a raging killer cunt; tomorrow a tragic victim. She's either the ultimate misanthropist or a paragon of family values.

Which is all fine, on a purely Machiavellian level. But if you want to play at being moral, you should have some moral grounding. Some consistency. And Anne has none.

From what I can discern, Anne is fundamentally amoral and will do whatever is necessary to obtain personal power. But unlike world-class major-league sociopaths, she's extremely uncomfortable with this knowledge about herself. I think she's aware that there's something deeply flawed about her that renders her unlovable, but she wants to be loved. She wants people to see the...ehh...what do you call it?...the "good" in her. So she constantly seeks to justify all her actions with some moralistic rationale beyond the blind drive for power.

The girl just isn't happy being Satan. So she tries pawning it off on someone else.

As our guilt sets in and the arguments escalate, Anne becomes subject to fits of moral outrage and high-holy finger-pointing. My inner reaction is always, "You've gotta be kidding me." She's a turd walking on two legs trying to spray-paint herself with gold. She has the bloated sense of morality that only comes from having a guilty conscience.

Truly ethical people go about quietly being ethical. They feel no need to advertise. But the sinners are always shouting about all the good deeds they've done.

I like Anne's rottenness. A lot. She's very, very good at being bad. A Blue Ribbon winner. It's her hypocritical self-righteousness I can't stand.

She's the proverbial whore who wants to be a virgin again. The master abuser who can only see herself as a victim.

She purposely does something bad and then feels like a good person for feeling bad about it. Better yet, if she can get someone else to feel guilty about it, she'll feel like a saint.

The linchpin of her absurd claims to righteousness is this idea that by flaunting her drippingly ugly entrails for all the world to see, she's being more honest than everyone else. If someone isn't as masochistically exhibitionistic as she is, they're somehow being dishonest.

By claiming to be more evil than everyone else, she's trying to prove she's a better person than everyone else. She can't understand why the rest of the world can't just 'fess up and admit they're as bad as she is.

Maybe because they're *not* as bad as she is?

No. Couldn't be possible. She's on a sacred mission to broadcast everyone else's moral shortcomings. She anoints herself the Joan of Arc of Outing.

Huh. That's funny. Honesty should begin at home. For someone so savagely "honest," she never really comes clean about her wonderful abandonment issues. Or her delightful pussy hangups. Or the role she plays in her alleged victimization.

She lies about everything, yet fancies herself a truth-teller. She's very careful to admit facts which might make her look worse. And every eager to highlight things which make others look bad.

So when she goes on the attack about *my* alleged moral failings, what a marvelous coincidence that she's guilty of all of them.

She makes dozens of death threats against me.

Yet she says it's obvious I want her dead.

She leaves her boyfriend to be with me.

Yet she calls me despicable for leaving Debbie to be with her.

She says she doesn't understand how I could be with someone as stupid as Debbie for eleven years. More than once, she says she wishes Debbie would die. She even says she's jerking off to the fact that Debbie is shriveling up with cancer.

Yet she accuses me of being insensitive toward Debbie.

She sends insulting letters to my friends, consciously trying to isolate me from them.

Yet she accuses me of trying to isolate her from her friends.

Despite my offers, she's too weirded-out about her snatch to let me go down on her.

Yet when she's angry with me, she'll scream, "You never go down on me!"

She'll skip around in public yelling, "NIGGER! NIGGER!" brag that she's "never had sex with a minority," and claim that "white people are more attractive than other races."

Yet she accuses me of being a racist.

She repeatedly begs me to throw her down and rape her. And I always refuse.

Yet she files a false rape charge against me with police.

She'll say, "I want to be your slave."

Yet she accuses me of trying to control her.

She smashes my car windshield, tears up my books and CDs, and destroyed every window in an ex-boyfriend's 4x4.

Yet she accuses me of vandalism.

She brags about her dozens of sex partners.

Yet she calls me a slut.

She physically attacks me time after time.

Yet she calls me violent.

She says she's pretty enough to get any man she wants.

Yet she calls me vain.

She does all of these things.

Yet she accuses me of hypocrisy.

Er, look who's talking?

Takes one to know one?
Talk about the pot calling the kettle black?
Let she who is without sin cast the first stone?
I'm rubber, you're glue—anything you say bounces back to you?
It's as if she's trying to laser-beam all of her own foul traits into my body. Her guilt and self-loathing are hot potatoes which she tries tossing onto me.
Maybe if she can depict me as total shit, she won't feel so shitty about herself.
Maybe she's the perfect person to scapegoat Mr. Shit Magnet.
Maybe if I kill myself, she won't have to kill herself.
Um, like, y'know?
She thinks violence is wrong.
When she gets the worst of it.
Being "the other woman" is wrong.
Unless she's the other woman.
She's the most aggressively insulting person I've ever met, and yet the most easily insulted. The classic case of someone who can dish it out but can't take it.
She'll make fun of my nose job, and I'll laugh.
I'll make fun of her pig nose, and she'll cry.
She'll make fun of my teenaged homo past, and I'll laugh.
I'll make fun of her prepube lesbo past, and she'll cry.
She'll make fun of the time I couldn't get it up, and I'll laugh.
I'll make fun of her pussy farts, and she'll cry.
She complains that I treat her like shit.
Well, how else are you *supposed* to treat shit?

*I used to wish that I had a father that beat the shit out of me so that I could say,
"Look, I have the bruises..."*

—1:46 AM, Tuesday, Sept 2, 1997

Anne likes victims. She has an exaggerated sense of pathos. She's very defensive of the retarded, crippled, and the mentally or ethically fucked-up. She sees their infirmities as somehow virtuous. She tells me that her dream is to get a nice clean bed in a mental ward so she can be surrounded by people who are exactly like her.

The flip side of this fractured compassion is a resentment for anyone who doesn't seem fucked-up, who has it somehow together, who excels in any way...

...who makes her feel inferior in any way. Those are the bad people.

"You're so logical!" she screams at me during arguments, as if it's an insult.

"You're so normal!"

Anne wants to be a victim. She wants to have bruises she can show people. To prove that she isn't a bad person. To prove that she doesn't hurt people. To prove that she's the one who gets hurt.

With very little supporting evidence, she's certain she's suffered more than anyone in human history. No one had a worse childhood. No one has more severe psychological problems. No one has been hurt worse in love.

It doesn't take me long to start questioning the extent of her victimhood. None of her victimized situations seemed particularly foisted upon her.

Her traumatic childhood sexual "abuse" at the hands of another girl just seemed like Playing Doctor, with Anne in the submissive role.

And it was so sad that every one of her nearly three dozen male lovers was abusive toward her. Every fucking one of them. God, can you imagine the luck? If she didn't want to feel used by thirty-five guys in three years, maybe she shouldn't have thrown her pussy in their faces. Maybe she shouldn't have been showing naked pictures of herself in Texaco parking lots, performing fellatio on her boyfriends' dogs, walking around downtown with cum dried on her face, and exchanging blow jobs for heroin.

And if she didn't want her mom to throw her out of the house, harkening a tragic three-month "homeless" phase, maybe she shouldn't have assaulted mommy, called her a dyke, stolen money from her, and published mom's most embarrassing secrets in her zine.

When I mildly suggest that she played a role in her so-called victimization, she becomes livid and says she isn't going to fuck anyone who doesn't understand her.

I disagree.

I think she doesn't want to fuck anyone who understands her too well.

...You know, I joke around about it and stuff, but I really am sometimes, like especially now, I mean I swing back and forth, with being anti-feminist, and like, sometimes I get really extreme....I think that feminism needs to be reformed, and I don't think these women are strong enough.... Like the women that I consider to be feminists are like Sharon Stone in Basic Instinct or Lorena Bobbitt, ones that used violence, you know, and like beauty and power to seduce men and then, you know, take advantage of them and kill 'em.

—10:11 AM, Tuesday, September 16, 1997

Now I know why women have a hole between their legs. That's where they hide all their problems.

Anne hates her pussy. All her self-loathing has become localized in that well-worn Irish twat. She feels that her cunt is a repository for all the world's sewage. She's sure that her labia are too droopy and that her snatch is too stretched-out from all the cocks that have visited it.

A previous boyfriend had traumatized her by asking, "Uhh, can you squeeze your legs to make it a little tighter?"

She actually walks up to strangers on Portland streets, shows them a Polaroid of her bearded oyster, and asks them if there's anything wrong with it. When one guy says, "Yeah, it looks like someone just gave birth," she becomes furious. Not at him—at me, for lying and saying her cunt is fine.

She is particularly humiliated by vaginal flatulence. One time she pussy-farts while fucking me, immediately dismounts, punches me on the back as if it were my fault, and yells, "I TOLD you sexual trauma was for real!"

She isn't *Carrie*. She's *Queefie*.

Yet she knows how to use that farting slop-pit to her advantage.

In her more candid moments, she acknowledges that feminism is just a pastime for women who are between boyfriends. She admits that "sisters" such as herself will scratch each other's eyes out to snag "some asshole good-looking guy."

But she's extremely savvy about latter-day gender politics and knows how much sympathy (and cash) she can garner by playing the victim. She plans on writing a book called *Milking the System*, featuring a whole chapter devoted to how women can use false rape charges and domestic-violence scams to make money.

She's keen on making false rape accusations.

She faced criminal-mischief charges in 1995 after throwing a mortar block through windows in her first married boyfriend's car and house.

He had told her to leave. For good.

During her trial, she received probation instead of jail time after whispering "tell the judge I was raped" into her Public Defender's ear. "The system will believe a woman every time," she brags to me latter.

After cheating on her second married boyfriend with a pair of male gutterpunks—simultaneously—she excused it by saying, well, they raped her. When her boyfriend offered to call the cops, she quickly talked him out of it.

During her Fall 1997 semester at Portland Community College, she skips more than half of her classes because she's terrified of letting me out of her sight lest I cheat. As the semester nears its end and teachers are threatening to flunk her, she doefully explains to two different professors that she'd missed so many classes because she'd been victimized by an abusive boyfriend. Her English teacher gives her a 'C.' Her Women's Studies teacher—a woman—gives her an 'A,' wishing her wellness and plenty of safe places. When it comes time to pay her tuition she's broke, having frittered away her student loan on weed and trinkets. So she marches into the Women's Crisis Center, crying that her monstrously battering boyfriend—who has left the state—has ruined her life and rendered her penniless. The Crisis Center pays her tuition in full. Five minutes later she meets me in the cafeteria, laughing at how gullible they are.

In the Spring of '98, tired of her measly \$280-a-month General Assistance allowance, she goes for the big bucks—a Social Security Income check, topping 700 smackers monthly. She's going to claim that her disability is mental illness—not a far stretch—but she isn't going to take any chances. She requests that I give her a black eye so she'll look extra-daffy for her screening. So I consent to the punch. As we drive to a desolate patch of North Portland, she guzzles a whole bottle of champagne to lessen my fist's impact. We get out of the car, kiss, and I wallop her in the right temple, leaving a small knot but no black eye. Since she's crying from the pain, we decide not to push it further. She appears at her disability interview in piss-stained clothes she's been wearing for days. She gives purposely loopy answers to the psych-test questions. ("Q: What do trees and fruit have in common?" "A: Um, they're both outside?") Remarkably, they don't think she's crazy enough, and her S.S.I. check is denied.

JIM: I was talking to [Sean] Tejaratchi earlier tonight, before I even picked you up, and he asked me why did I think people like Debbie and you were attracted to me, and I couldn't say why. And he says he thinks it's because these are people who feel disgusting and nobody understands them, and I accept them. It's typical Tej.

ANNE: Do you think that's the truth?

JIM: Yeah, I think so.

ANNE: [unintelligible] You should be a motivational speaker or something.... You're a little shepherd.

JIM: Oh, Christ.

ANNE: You are! You're a protector. You're a shepherd of the mentally ill.

JIM: Yeah, they come to me.

ANNE: Yeah! It's true, though.

—Taped phone conversation, 9/97

Anne says she admires Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*.

She says she wishes our relationship could be like the movie *Misery*, where a star-struck woman holds a writer against his will.

She says she feels O.J. Simpson was guilty—but *justified*—because he loved Nicole so much, he murdered her when he found her with someone else.

She sends out Christmas cards implying we've gotten married.

She wants to bear my child so she can have a "piece" of me.

She tries to get PROPERTY OF JIM GOAD tattooed on her ass, but the guy at the tattoo parlor thinks it's too degrading.

When I tell her that the A.S.P.C.A. implants animals with biochips to track their whereabouts, she says she wants me implanted so she can always know where I am.

I feel very intimidated by you still, and I'm used to being the one in charge, and being in control, and being the smartest one, and you're smarter than me, you're stronger than me, and it's just—I don't like that.

—1:38 AM, Tuesday, Sept 2, 1997

Anne is attracted to my reputation and the long, dark shadow it casts. And she has a much more inflated image of me than I ever did of myself.

I always tell her I'm not all that. But she doesn't want to hear it.

She says she has to scrape to find things wrong with me. She tells me she has trouble looking in my eyes. She has an idealized notion of me as some impenetrable fortress. Something superhuman. Something not human at all.

In many ways, I feel like an object.

It begins creeping into my consciousness that her idolatry of me has very little to do with whatever sterling qualities I might possess and everything to do with her own obsessive needs.

Then one day she tells me how, as a girl, she used to carry her baby brother around as if he were a doll.

I feel scared.

I'm an idol. But an idol is a statue. A doll. It isn't real.

And if you carefully sculpt an idol, and that idol comes alive and starts walking away from you, then you have to find a way to smash it to pieces.

She doesn't like that I'm a rock, so she struggles to find a way to grind the rock into dust. She searches for a weakness.

She thinks she found a sore spot in the fact that I'd had a few hair transplants drilled into my dome fifteen years ago.

It doesn't bother me. In *BLOW Me!*, I'm going to call myself a "skull-stapled hatemonger."

She thinks I'll be embarrassed by a history of domestic violence.

Nope. I'm going to write an article called "To All the Girls I've Hit Before."

She thinks I'll be humiliated by a smattering of teenaged homo experiences.

Nuh-uh. I'm going to write an article called "I'm Not a Nazi, I'm Gay."

She thinks I'll freak if she alleges I'm not really white trash.

I don't. I help her write something called "Reasons He Ain't No Redneck."

Her usual power play of revealing someone's secrets, the one that had so enraged her mom and brothers, doesn't faze me in the least. I'm a jolly good sport about it all.

So since she can't crack my shell that way. She preys upon something much deeper.

My weakened will to live.

She often compares us to Kurt and Courtney, a love story that ended when Kurt creamed his own brains with a shotgun.

Later, she'll liken our "love" to the film *Titanic*, where the guy dies and the woman lives to be a wizened old hag.

She wants me, dead or alive.

All summer she's been encouraging me to have sex with Debbie. And when I finally do, she threatens to kill me.

...Oh, but it had nothing to do with revenge-it's just a coincidence that it was right after you hung up the goddamn phone with me, you know? I want to fucking castrate you, I want to stab you a million times all over your fucking ... So, I hate your guts, and I'm going to kill you, and I don't care what happens to you or your fucking wife, and I hope you die.

—1:02 PM, Wednesday, Sept. 3, 1997

September is a bad month. The beginning of the rainy season. The start of the long slide into darkness.

All summer Anne had been snorting and smoking crystal meth so she'd be happy and pleasant and bubbly for me. But the speed is scorching her brain. She decides to stop doing crank. And quit smoking cigarettes. And she's going to return to school. And give me the first full taste of exactly what she means when she calls herself psychotic.

What a sick time it is. A hundred yards from the hospital where Debbie is undergoing chemo, Anne's in a cheap motel, exorcising the crank demons from her body. My wife is getting chemicals pumped in her, while my mistress is trying to sweat the chemicals out of her. I drop Debbie off for treatment and drive over to Anne's motel. She opens the door, and the room smells like a thousand dead, bloody fish. A thick cloud of funk. Anne says she's been seeing little green doily patterns on the ceiling. Thick chunks of black gunk are oozing from her pussy. When we drive over to the local mall to try and cash her welfare check, she starts writhing uncontrollably on the parking-lot asphalt. She tells me she's certain it's demonic possession. It turns out she's had a tampon lodged way up her snatch for five or six days and is probably suffering the first stages of Toxic Shock Syndrome. Hence the smell.

Thick clots of bad blood ooze between us. I threaten to leave town. She sits in the rain at the bus stop, leaving message after message, begging me not to leave. I toy with her fear of abandonment. And she toys with my fear of death.

I hate your FUCKING guts and I want to RIP YOU APART and DESTROY every fucking living cell in your body. I want to CRUSH YOU and take tweezers and pull out your FUCKING NIPPLES, and cut you up into a million pieces and scratch out your eyes and I want to chop off your FUCKING HEAD.

—8:13 PM, Wednesday, September 24, 1997

It's always bad when a loved one is dying.

And when another one wishes you dead.

October crawls in like a chest cold. Grayer. Damper. Chillier.

Over the summer, Anne was evicted from her pillbox apartment and went back to live with her mom. In October, mom kicks her out after discovering that she'd used mom's computer to publish a zine highly insulting toward mom.

After mom throws her out, I sit in the car with Anne as she screams and thrashes and howls that she wants to kill herself for all the people she's hurt. That night Anne sleeps in my car right outside my house, about thirty feet from where Debbie and I are sleeping.

Anne soon moves into a new pack rat's den in North Portland. The garbage-filled, fruit-fly-ridden, moldy wood-framed house is owned by a janitor of questionable sexual motives who rents out rooms to skeezy younger folk. Anne has three roommates: a crank-addicted female gas pumper; a borderline-retarded ex-gang member; and a twenty-one-year-old girl who works at Kentucky Fried Chicken and has lost two of her kids to the Children's Services Division.

For month's I've had no income, waiting for my publisher to agree on my next book's theme. They've already shot down two ideas; I'm waiting for the verdict on a third. I've sold most of my clothes, CDs, cassettes, and just about anything else that isn't nailed down. To keep myself awash in vitamins and protein bars, I become a shoplifter's apprentice to Anne.

When a book company nixes my third proposal, I suffer a minor mental collapse. Dead marriage. Dead career. I stay in bed for three days and tell Debbie I'm going to kill myself.

I want to die.

Anne wants to die. She wants me dead, too.

And Debbie's dying.

Death, death, death.

Debbie has finished her chemotherapy. The cancer is temporarily at bay. And she's getting more and more suspicious of my nightly "rides." I come home every night, and she'll be working on some silly little clip-art collage. Or watching another video with cute house pets in starring roles. Or telling me about the giant spider in the basement and how I wasn't there to protect her.

All alone. Except for the dog. And cats. And spiders.

I handle my guilt in the worst possible way—by being meaner and meaner to her. I become furious when she asks too many questions. And I use my anger as an excuse to go out for another ride.

After nearly five months of high-profile aesthetic terrorism with Anne, it seems as if Debbie's the only Portlander who doesn't know about the affair. One afternoon Debbie and I are watching Portland Cable Access, and who should appear on the screen but Anne, talking about her zines as part of some local documentary.

"That's the girl from the zine night," Debbie says to me.

Uhh, yeah....

The stress of leading a double life is starting to crack my shaven canary skull. I'm getting only three or four hours of sleep daily. Relentless exercise and an anorexic's diet have caused me to drop about forty pounds since I started seeing Anne.

I tell my sister I'm in bad shape, and she offers to fly out from Philly and give whatever support she can muster. The day after she arrives, she lends me some gas money so I can drive her and Debbie out to the lonesome Oregon coast. She snaps pictures of me and Debbie at the beach: Debbie pale and eyebrowless with her wig half hanging off her head, and me the guilty philanderer, making inappropriately goofy faces for the camera.

I bring my sister back to her motel at around 10 PM and check my voicemail from her room. Anne has left a message saying I have to call her immediately—it's an emergency. I call her. She refuses to tell me the news over the phone. She has to tell me in person. But she's sure I'm going to kill her when she tells me.

I hang up and tell Sis I have to go. As I leave, she says, "That girl sounds very dangerous and manipulative."

I pull up to Anne's house. She gets in the car. It's obvious she's been crying. Well, what's the news? She won't tell me—I'll get too angry. I start to get angry that she won't tell me. Finally, she drops the bombshell: While riding around with her black girlfriend earlier in the day, she pointed at some guy and called him cute.

That's it? That's the emergency? That's why I'm going to kill you?

"Yeah."

Anne felt so guilty after calling the guy cute, she immediately asked her girlfriend to drive her home. She cried salty rivers to all her roommates about her "betrayal." She phone a mutual friend of ours, and after an hour and a half, her persuaded her to stop sobbing. Everyone thought she was overreacting.

As do I. Hell, I think plenty of girls are cute. I've even been seeing a couple of them on the sly.

She says she didn't even think the guy was cute—she just said it to impress her girlfriend. And that's when I get angry. Her girlfriend has talked shit about me in the past. She's caused Anne to be late for more than one date with me. She's obviously tugging Anne around on a leash, just like the girl who'd made Anne lick her pussy when they were both five years old. In the past when I'd allege that Anne was being dominated by the bucktoothed Negress, Anne always denied it. I call Anne a guilty little white girl from the 'burbs trying to score points with her soul sister from the 'hood. I tell her to get out of the car.

She doesn't. She pounces on me and wraps her arms around my waist.

Let go of me.

She doesn't.

I grab her keys and toss them out the window, figuring it'll make her leave.

Get out.

"No."

If you don't let go of me, I'm going to hit you.

She doesn't let go.

I hit her.

A punch to the face.

She still doesn't let go.

I slam on the accelerator and start driving around North Portland's industrial shadowlands, screaming and screaming. She's crying. I throw her out of the car along a desolate, rain-slicked highway. Five minutes later I come back and open her door, yelling at her to get in. She's still crying. She had plucked a dandelion from the roadside. She holds it out to me.

I take it.

We make up.

But violence changes everything. Permanently.

I'm extremely upset the next morning. I hadn't hit Debbie in two years. I figured I was past it. But hitting Anne brings back the sickness.

I'm sitting the basement staring at the computer when I hear Debbie scream as if being assaulted. I run upstairs. She's wearing a fuzzy blue nightgown, and her bald chemo head is wrinkled in agony.

"You BASTARD! You're SO mean to me! You can't blame me for everything! It's *not* all my fault!"

No immediate action of mine has provoked her outburst. It's just all caught up with her. Eleven years of my screaming.

It's the first time she's screamed at me. Ever.

During the months of surgery and chemotherapy, I figured she was too weak to hear about the affair. I thought the news would kill her. But if she's strong enough to scream at me...

Sit down. I have something to tell you. Remember that girl Anne from the zine reading? Well, every night for the past five months when I told you I was going out for a "ride," I was seeing her.

Debbie stares at me intently, as if she doesn't want to believe what she's hearing. Like a sponge trying not to soak up the dirty puddle on the floor.

We're silent for a while. I leave the house and drive over to Anne's.

I walk around back and tap on her bedroom window. She slides open the window and looks out, half-awake. Her eye is puffy from last night's punch.

"What's up?"

I told Debbie about us.

"Oh...so I guess it's over for us, huh?"

No.

I crawl in through her window and into bed with her.

The next morning I take my sister to Portland Saturday Market. I return home in the afternoon to find Debbie in the bedroom, sprawled out with her head at the foot of the bed, zonked on four Klonopin and who knows how much wine. It's as if a giant shoe has descended from the heavens and squashed her, so evident is her pain.

That night she wakes me up at around 3 AM, screaming, "I want a divorce!"

I start looking for a new apartment.

Anne once told me she liked the relative safety of being a mistress—at least you know your man isn't lying to you. But I'm getting divorced. She's no longer the other woman. She's the *main* woman. Now *she* has to worry about the other woman.

I initially find her jealousy flattering...then protective...then suffocating...then frightening.

She thinks every woman I encounter wants to fall to her knees and give me a hummer. Of the women who actually *do* express interest, Anne either threatens or physically attacks every one of them.

When a girl calls me her "secret boyfriend" on the Internet, Anne posts a message threatening to take a bus to San Francisco and "beat you to a bloody pulp with my bare fists."

When another 'net gal innocently inquires about an essay ~d written, Anne posts a message saying, "Stay the fuck away from my man unless you want to worship him (but not sexually)."

When a woman phones me asking if I'd like to have a beer with her sometime, Anne marches into the bookstore where the woman works and threatens to beat her up in front of horrified patrons.

In the same bookstore, Anne peruses a zine compilation wherein a girl writes that she's in New Mexico, "Thinking about Jim Goad." Upon seeing this, Anne takes a black magic marker and Xes out my face on the cover of *The Redneck Manifesto*, running away from me and out of the store.

For the Table of Contents to *BLOW Me!*, she proposes listing the names of girls who'd better stay away from me if they don't want Anne to kick their asses.

Her jealousy isn't confined to women whom I have a reasonable chance of snagging.

I tell her that a year ago, I jerked off to an Internet photo of an allegedly naked Sheryl Crow. Thereafter, Anne becomes enraged at the mere mention of Crow's name. When we drive past a billboard featuring Sheryl's face, Anne becomes livid with me.

She also goes ballistic whenever a Tammy Wynette song comes on the radio, for I'd once let it slip that I thought Tammy was sexy.

I phone the Susan Powter radio show, and Powter makes an innocuous comment about me having a seductive voice. Anne goes from being a fan of Powter's to wishing "the bitch was dead."

She doesn't want me to see the movie *Boogie Nights*, because she can't bear the thought of me looking at another woman's knockers.

Even a tiny cartoon silhouette of a bare-breasted woman I'd included on a CD of mine makes her jealous. A fucking cartoon. She wants to kill a cartoon.

She often bemoans the fact that I don't seem to care whether *she* cheats, and she's right. To try and make me jealous, she'll say things such as, "I'll fuck a black guy...um, I'll fuck Waylon Jennings," to no avail. I don't care *whom* she fucks. It's getting so hairy between us, I'd be *glad* if some 6'5" mullethead came and swept her away.

Less than two weeks after I tell Debbie about the affair, Anne and I have an argument in her school's parking lot. I say I'm breaking up with her. "It's all because you told Debbie!" she spits, slamming the car door shut and stomping away.

That night, just to rub it in Anne's face that I can live just fine without her, I phone a female weed dealer and tell her I need a place to stay. A few hours later, the girl leaves a voicemail message inviting me to drop by her condo the next morning. She's a red-headed chubster with big taters and a missing front tooth, an ex-stripper from Spokane who's packed on some poundage since her naked heyday. I arrive at her place the next morning with some free books, one of my CDs, and a small bag of crank. We eat breakfast, buy some peyote, and head for the coast.

She originally asks her landlord for a kitchen knife, but she settles for an axe handle. An old, splintery slab of wood without the axehead attached. Later that night she shows up at the redhead's condo, crying crocodile tears that she's pregnant with my child and is looking for me. The redhead grudgingly lets her in and graciously offers to smoke some weed with Anne. While the redhead's turning her back to fill a bong, Anne whips the axe handle out of her purse and smashes her in the back of the skull with it.

The redhead turns around and deflects another blow from the blunt instrument. Wrestling. Scratching. Kicks. The redhead eventually overpowers Anne and throws her out of the condo.

Anne tells me how excited she was to see red rivulets flowing down the redhead's neck. She proudly poses for pictures with the axe handle. She hangs it up as a trophy on her bedroom wall. She brags to almost everyone in town about what she'd done. She animatedly gloats about her deed to a four-hundred-fifty-pound junkie guitarist, himself no stranger to extremes of human behavior. As she bobs up and down laughing about how much blood she'd drawn and how she wanted to kill the bitch, Fat Boy's jaw hangs open. "I don't want to hear anymore," he says. "This is Manson Family stuff."

He later tells police detectives about Anne's confession, as do several other witnesses to whom she'd boasted. The redhead required stitches in her head from the attack and had notified police. She identified Anne in a photo throwdown. There's plenty of evidence.

But Anne is never charged.

After all, she's a girl.

Anne tells me what she yelled at the redhead while swinging the axe handle at her noggin:

"BITCH! You're fucking with a cancer patient!"

This, supposedly, because the redhead had slept with the cancer patient's husband for one night. This at a time when the axe-wielder had slept with the cancer patient's husband almost every day for half a year.

In swinging that axe handle, Anne was trying to pour all of her guilt into the redhead's body. The club was a magic wand of guilt-projection.

My infidelity swung an axe handle to Anne's mind. She makes a small mural on her bedroom door with a picture of my head pasted upside-down over the phrase, "Is this the end?" When she learns that Debbie had known all along that I'd been with the redhead but had initially covered for me, she says, "I hope the bitch dies of cancer." And she leaves me a voicemail message saying that ever since I cheated, she's been having flashes of murdering me.

A few nights later in her stuffy dark bedroom, we argue about the redhead again. I say I'm leaving. As I stand up, she lunges at me from behind, wrapping her arms around my chest and refusing to let go.

Get the fuck off me!

"Please, Jim, don't leave!"

If you don't let go, I'll hit you!

Then, whispering seductively in my ear:

"Hit me. Just don't leave."

I hit her. And she jumps on me again. And I hit her again. And then I leave.

She's proud of that black eye. She thinks it proves I care. She shows it off to a horrified girlfriend. Flaunts it in front of a coffee shop clerk. Dances up and down a city street, trilling, "My guyyyyy...gave me a blaaaaaack eye!"

Debbie sees Anne's shiner and is amazed she's so nonchalant about it. November is an odd smear of psychic ectoplasm. I'm getting divorced but still live with Debbie, splitting my time between her house and Anne's. All three of us hang out together, which is surreal.

One bright November morning, we watch a man die. Ambulance-chasers that we all are, our attention is drawn by fire trucks and general hubbub outside a restaurant on Martin Luther King Boulevard. Paramedics are trying to resuscitate a shirtless man lying on his back in a parking lot. After ten minutes of our crouching and gawking, he heaves his last, with blood splurting up into his clear oxygen mask.

Dead.

A week or so later, I move into a new apartment.

A week after that, I get paranoid that Debbie has killed herself.

With divorce piled on top of cancer, she's been threatening to pull the plug if things don't get better quickly. And she has plenty of pills to do it.

At around 9 am one morning I call her to announce that Anne and I will be delivering some items to her. No answer. 11 am—no answer. 1 pm—still no answer. I grow worried and decide that we'll drive up to her place to see what the problem is.

We arrive at her house, a weather-beaten mint-green cottage with peeling Astroturf on the front porch. I notice that the screen door has been almost entirely ripped from its hinges. Strange. And when I try inserting my key in the lock, it doesn't fit anymore. Stranger. When I knock repeatedly on the door and am only answered with the sound of the dog barking, my heart begins thumping. I walk around to the side of my house, straining to see if anything is visible through the windows. At this the neighbor, a female Rotunda of indeterminate racial origin, waddles out of the house next door. I ask her if she's seen Debbie, and she says no. Very strange.

I drive to a supermarket two blocks away and call police from a pay phone:

Listen, I don't mean to alarm you, but I think we may have a suicide in North Portland.

A squad car soon arrives containing the police—a dumb female and a dumber male.

Hey, my wife has been threatening suicide and has hundreds of pills, so you have to knock down the door while there's still time to save her.

The male cop says he isn't authorized to break in, but if I've paid rent on the place in the past, I can kick down the door. So I begin kicking—loudly—but although the wood starts cracking a bit, the door doesn't bust open. At all the noise, the fatso neighbor who'd initially denied knowledge of Debbie's whereabouts jiggles over and says that Debbie's downtown, filing a Restraining Order against me. I shout that it would've been nice if she'd told me this fifteen minutes ago, before I called the cops and started kicking down the door. She just turns around and walks away, her ample fat flapping in the icy grayness.

A few hours later I call Debbie, who accuses me of trying to burglarize her house while she was gone. I try asking her why the fuck anyone would call the COPS to come and witness a burglary, but she won't let me talk.

"You LIED!" she fumes. "You LIED! You LIED! You lie about everything!" A male policeman gets on the phone and asks me where I am. He arranges to meet me and serve the Restraining Order.

On the legal papers, Debbie claims I've been beating her daily while she had cancer.

She LIED!

If I'd been hitting her daily—or even weekly—someone would have seen signs of abuse, especially in her weakened, easily bruised condition. I've been taking Debbie for daily rides, and someone—whether her doctors, nurses, my sister, or the hipsters at the coffee shops and bookstores we've been frequenting—would've spotted a bruise somewhere. But if Debbie had told the truth, which is that I haven't been violent with her in over two years, she couldn't have gotten a Restraining Order. There has to have been physical abuse within the preceding six months for the judge to grant a Restraining Order. The judge told her this. So when he asked her when

there had been physical abuse within the preceding six months, Debbie shrugged and said, "Daily."

When Anne and I see the Restraining Order, we laugh at Debbie's hysterical allegations. I wonder why Debbie feels the need for police protection—I've moved out of the house quietly and haven't threatened or menaced her in any way. Fuck, the girl has cancer. There's already enough pain to go around. I think about contesting the Restraining Order, but I don't want to cause Debbie any more stress. With police detectives showing up on her front porch to ask if she knows anything about an axe-handle incident, I realize that my crazy life isn't the healthiest thing for her. If she feels safer with a Restraining Order, I'll give her what she wants.

When I later come to retrieve my belongings from Debbie's house—escorted by a policeman—Debbie has scrawled, "JIM GOAD IS DEAD!" on the basement blackboard.

A few days later, Anne physically attacks me.

We had argued. And just to be a bitch, she called Debbie up and told her that not only had I cheated on Debbie with Anne and two other girls—there were six girls in all.

So just to be a prick, I tell Anne that I'd lied when I said I couldn't get it up with the redhead. I had shot my wad, even if it was in her hand. And the redhead came, too, even if it was by my finger.

Pause. A psychotic glint in her eye as she sits in the passenger's seat. And then she pounces at me like a bobcat, scratching at my eyes. I'm able to wrestle her out of the car and onto the grass. She sits there, sobbing.

"Why are you doing this to me?"

Because I like being an asshole.

More violence less than a week later.

On the last day of November, as we're driving over to her mom's house to do laundry, we argue about money. About the fact that she doesn't have any, and I'm paying for everything.

The argument escalates.

I pull over to the roadside.

GET OUT.

"No. You're taking me to mom's."

GET THE FUCK OUT.

"NO!"

So I get out instead. Pop the trunk. Start piling all her clothes, schoolbooks, and *BLOW Me!* notes on the roadside.

She gets out. Grabs a rock. I assume a defensive position. She drops the rock and lunges at me, screaming full-blast and punching me with both fists. I deflect her shoes with my forearms but don't hit back.

Frustrated, she turns and runs down the highway about a hundred and fifty yards and begins scaling a steep, muddy hillside, caterwauling all the while. Fearing she'll do something drastic, I follow her up the hill and into gnarled, bony thickets. She lifts a bowling-ball-sized rock and prepares to fling it at me. I jump toward her. She drops the rock. I punch her in the gut.

Just then I hear the loud BLOOP! of a police car. And then a second bloop. Two squad cars, lights flashing, at the bottom of the hill. I walk down first. Anne follows a minute later.

Someone must have seen her hitting me on the roadside and called the cops.

The female cop takes her story. The male cop takes mine.
Just a little argument, officer. No, there was no violence.
I look over at Anne, whose face is wet with tears. She silently mouths, "I love you."

The cops leave. We walk back to my car. Someone has stolen all of Anne's clothes. All of her schoolbooks. And all of our *BLOW Me!* notes, six months' worth of work. The chronicles of our six months together are gone.

Anne runs away, screaming, "RAPE!"

I get in the car. Go to the bank. Withdraw all my money. Drive to my apartment. Pack everything I own into my car. Fill the gas tank. Head east for Chicago, where a friend has offered me sanctuary.

I sleep that night in Boise. The next morning I make it as far east as Mountain Home, Idaho, five hundred miles from Portland. I pull into a gravelly, grease-sparkled trucker's diner for breakfast, the kind of place with phones right in your booth. I check my voicemail messages in between mouthfuls of undercooked flapjacks. Anne has left a dozen or so frenzied entreaties for me to come back home. Or at least stay wherever I am, and she'll take the next Greyhound to meet me. One message, lasting the entire five-minute time limit, is nothing more than her begging me to turn around:

"Turn around, Jim. Jim, turn around. Please turn around. Just turn around, Jim. We can make it work. So turn around, Jim...."

Five solid minutes of that. She's tortured by the idea that my back is turned. That I'm pulling away from her.

I sit for a minute, maple-slathered pancakes swimming in my stomach acids. The previous night as I was heading east, I passed The Dalles, the town where I "fell" in "love" with Anne earlier in the summer. And then as I was traversing Eastern Oregon's mountains in total blackness, feeling like a flea skirting across God's back, the song "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden" floated out of the staticky radio. That song title was also the title of a book and movie about a mentally ill woman.

I feel bad for Anne again. And also for Debbie. There are two women in Portland who need me. It would be cowardly to abandon them.

I turn around.

I zoom five hundred miles in one straight shot, stopping only for gas and dinner. I valiantly rescue Anne from her apartment near midnight.

We go to my place. Kiss. Fuck. Say we love each other. Fall asleep.

The next morning as we sit on my living-room floor smoking weed, she begins yelling at me for having the audacity to seriously consider leaving her. She grabs my half-ounce weed baggie, bites into it, and spits green buds all over the floor. As I stand up to retrieve the weed nuggets, she bites into my leg like a it bull.

There are kicks. Punches. Scratches. More bites. Both of us are bleeding. Mutual combat.

I'm sure the landlord heard us.

Alright, don't panic. Fuck, I've only been here ten days. He's going to evict me. Most of my shit is still packed in the car.

Look, Anne, things are too hot in Portland. Come with me. We'll start fresh somewhere else.

We drive to her apartment. I tell her to fetch the few items she still owns. As she's getting out of the car, I say I need to find something in the glove compartment. When she's a safe distance away, I burn rubber at top speed.

I drive east again. I begin noticing that my foot hurts whenever I press the accelerator. I make it as far as Troutdale, Oregon, only a few miles out of Portland. As I head into another trucker's lard-hole for breakfast, my right foot is pulsating with pain. I remove my boot. My big toe is swollen and purple from our little violent *tête-à-tête*. I'm limping. I'm not going anywhere.

I turn around again.

I make up with Anne again.

That night we go to the emergency room in the same hospital where Debbie had undergone surgery and chemo. The same place where Anne had been hospitalized for teenaged suicide attempts. They X-ray my big toe. It's broken. I'll have to use crutches for six weeks.

Anne and I agree that we'd better tone down the high drama and bloodletting.

Anne moves in with me.

Into every inch of my space.

Every minute of my time.

Throughout December, I'm not out of her sight for ten minutes. Literally. We bathe together. Sleep together. Shoplift together. Ride around together. Fuck, fuck, fuck together. We don't use protection. I shoot my fishies straight up her gully, trying to impregnate her as part of some warped, desperate life instinct.

She has me just where she wants me. I'm the crippled writer; she's the obsessive fangirl. It's an incarnation of the movie *Misery*, just what she'd been hoping for all along.

The New Year creeps in with Anne and I all alone together.

And Debbie all alone in that house, cursing her ex-husband.

The coldest, rainiest, darkest time of year.

And then one night while I'm lifting weights, all the rottenness crashes down on my head at once. A sappy love song from the early 80s wafts out of my boom box. I picture Debbie in her club days, a year or two before she met me, made up all pretty and blithely unaware of what the future would hold. She's happy in this little vision of mine. And I wish that she could be frozen in time like that. Not sucked-up and ancient-looking from cancer. Not betrayed and abandoned. Not bitter at the man to whom she'd pledged her life, in sickness and in health. Not all alone and stuffing her face with junk food while I'm pumping iron and fucking.

I start crying.

And I really don't stop crying for two weeks. Maybe an hour here and there. Crying so hard, I can *hear* the tears falling on my jeans. Crying so hard, I seriously think I'll die from it.

I have to make right with Debbie, or I'll kill myself.

I visit two different state-sponsored emergency mental-health clinics, sobbing and gasping and saying I'll commit suicide if I can't make amends with my ex-wife. And both of them turn me away because I admit I smoke weed. There's some Oregon law forbidding free mental-health treatment to reefer maniacs.

Anne calls Debbie and tells her I'm in bad shape. Debbie agrees to talk to me.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Oh, my God, I'm so, so sorry. I'll kill myself if you don't forgive me. *You* deserve to live, not me.

Debbie says she'll forgive me.

I tell Anne she has to find someplace else to live. What we're doing is too foul. It's hurting Debbie too much. Anne agrees with me. She can be very empathetic and

cool sometimes. She calls her mom, who's willing to take her back for a few weeks. As I'm driving over to mom's house, we see a group of revelrous hipsters walking on a downtown sidewalk, toting a JUST MARRIED! Sign. Anne looks at me and bursts into tears. She realizes it's never going to happen with us.

By the time we reach her mom's house, both of us are crying. We say goodbye, although it's hard.

I tell Debbie I've broken up with Anne.

And the next night, I start seeing Anne again. She agrees not to tell Debbie we're still together.

Throughout the winter and spring, I'm sweet and gentle to Debbie. Every Saturday I take her for rides and buy her dinner. And I lie to her that I haven't seen nor heard from Anne. I think it would hurt her too much to know that every night I'm plunging myself into the girl who helped destroy our marriage.

Anne finds another shoe-closet apartment ten minutes away from my place. A damp, dark, moldy room. She no longer has me to herself. She becomes the other woman again, and I'm not even married anymore. And she knows that in the summer, I'm going on a three-month coast-to-coast road trip as research for a book contract I've signed.

I'll be leaving town. Without her. I'm pulling away. For good.

And the sickness, threats, and violence come back. For good.

Hi, it's me, and I was just saying it might be necessary, ASAP, for you to take out some restraining order against me. Seriously, Jim, I'm infected with you...I don't know any other way to describe it. I can't get over this, I can't wash it off me, I'm insane, that's all I can think about, I am so obsessed and possessive of you...I'll go to extreme lengths to capture you, you better restrain me, and we both know what I'm capable of. I mean you've threatened to call the police many times, so let's get this filthy rotten piece of garbage out of your life once and for all.

—10:13 AM, February 6, 1998

I don't intend to hurt Anne by pulling away from her. I'm trying to assert and protect myself, to prove there's a part of me she hasn't gobbled up entirely. But she interprets my gradual withdrawal as a total rejection of her, as an aggressive act rather than a defensive one. She's so self-absorbed, she takes it as a personal affront. She can't conceive that it has anything to do with me or what I need. It's all about her.

Earlier in the year, I had trouble distinguishing emotional death from the literal kind. Now she's the one who can't make the distinction.

To Anne, it's a literal act of murder for me to infer that I have any sort of life apart from her. I'm just another one in a long line of people who want her to leave.

But this time, it'll be over her dead body.

Or mine.

To prove that she's serious, she drinks a half-bottle of cleaning fluid in front of me. She sends me an e-mail titled I HATE MYSELF AND WANT TO DIE. She begins reading the book *Final Exit* in search of suicide tips. All over town she tells people, "I'll kill him or myself if he ever breaks up with me."

I had run into her arms to get away from death.

And now those arms are slowly starting to strangle me.

James, I'm on my way over to your place of residence, and if you're recording this for police, I really don't care, although I would like to talk this over very civilly, if

you're willing to do that, LOVER...I'll see you in a bit. Probably twenty minutes? Have the police waiting, please! They'll want to get two squad cars....

—March 4, 1998

The only "control" I wield over Anne is a prolonged effort not to be controlled by her. That's all. I never dictate her actions. Never tell her how to feel or think. Any subservient behavior she displays toward me is purely volunteer work.

She has simultaneous desires to be controlled by me and to control me. To be handcuffed during sex and to implant me with a remote-controlled biochip so she'll always know where I am.

Early on, she told me that she can be a real flamin' bitch, and I said I'd never stand for that.

I think my reply turned her on.

I think part of her yearns for me to tame the shrew inside her.

At one point, she complains to her mom that I'd hit her. Anne tells me that mom's reply was, "Finally you've found someone unafraid to discipline you."

I'm probably the first person ever to give shit back to this snake-bitten little bitch. And for that, she both admires and despises me.

She always acts as if it's erotic that I'm so forceful with her. The sex is always better after violent incidents. We fuck with scratches and bruises all over our bodies.

For Valentine's Day she gives me a card written in her blood.

Love and blood. We can't tell the difference.

Why do you have to be such a stud? I just wish you were ugly and I could tell you to fuck off, that I wasn't in love with you...Jim... [snarling sounds] I put a curse on yoooouuuu! [More evil snarling and squealing] You naughty little boy. Bye.

—11:16 AM, February 6, 1998

It's like a one-way street, and, um, of course you're not in love with me like I am you....Of course, when I have nothing left in this whole fucking world except for you, I'm going to want to try to destroy you when you destroy me!

—March /6, 1998

I don't want to harm her. Don't want to destroy her. Don't want to spend the rest of my life with her, either. My feelings toward her don't run that extreme in either direction.

Can't say the same about her regarding me.

When March rolls around we both have jobs, me as a graphic designer and her as a stripper again. And after one of our forty-five billion arguments, I dump her at home and return to my place. She calls and asks if I'm still going to give her a ride to the strip joint.

Fuck no.

She pauses. "Prepare to have your life destroyed," she says, hanging up.

She then leaves a slew of messages saying that she's "out for the blood," that "ya fucked with me, now it's a must that I fuck with you, nigga," that she's going to terrorize me at home and at work—oh, ho, ho, ho, she has big plans for fucking up my life.

A few days later, my boss receives an anonymous letter containing two printouts downloaded from the Internet. The first is an interview with me where I say

things such as how groovy the Ebola virus is; a sticky note is attached that says "FYI regarding your new employee." The second printout is a transcription of "Let's Hear it for Violence Toward Women!" with a sticky note saying "Sample from Goad's magazine." Anne never admits to sending it, but it had to be her—no one else knows where I work.

The next time I see her, she has erected a Jim Goad Hate Shrine in her apartment. She's torn several pictures of me into tiny pieces and taped them around her mirror. On the mirror she's scrawled **THUS HE IS AN ENEMY** in blood-red lipstick, along with dates she thinks I cheated on her.

All because I refused to give her a ride.

At the bottom of the mirror she's taped a list titled **PEOPLE HE'S HURT**, a litany of all the shrinkin' violets I've supposedly harmed in my life.

The list includes the redhead whose skull she'd whacked with an axe handle. Talk about guilt-projection.

[Tight, sneering voice] Hi, lovey-dovey who always wants to be near me and would never cheat on me, you fucking asshole. You better be there in 20 minutes, or a fucking rock is going through your landlord's fucking window. And if you ain't there, I don't care. If your landlord lets me in, I'm throwing away, every hour that you're gone, I'm throwing away all your ANSWER Me! magazines, all your letters, destroying your house, and this ain't gonna be a fun night for you, boy, cause I'm not in a good mood. And I'm destroying everything you fuckin' own. So you can even have the cops there, because I'm not gonna play quiet when you're not there, in 20 minutes. You're having a rock through your fucking window. And if your fucking landlord doesn't answer the phone, or lets me in, then I'm destroying every single possession you own. So be there in 20 minutes or get FUCKED!

—7:39 PM, March 22, 1998

The pattern of violence between us is always the same:

I tell her to leave and she refuses; or

I try to leave and she won't let me.

And she's the first physical aggressor every fucking time.

My parents used to hit me. I don't like being hit. Or bitten. Or having someone try to scratch out my eyes. It makes me angry.

She doesn't just slap me, like you see women doing to men in the movies.

She's trying to do damage. And if I throw her off me, she comes charging back.

And she always winds up getting the worst of it. You'd think that after the first or second black eye, she'd search for another mode of conflict resolution. She knows I'll hit her back. So by making a conscious choice to attack me, over and over and over, I can only conclude one thing:

She deserves those black eyes. She asked for them.

As a friend would later say, "I understand why you hit her. I just don't understand why you went out with her."

One morning in March I tell her to leave, and she won't. I threaten to call 911. She dares me. So I dial 911, but she rips the phone cord out of the wall.

She lunges at me. We struggle. I fall backward onto the couch. She jumps on me. We lock arms. I restrain her as she's chomping her teeth, trying to bite me. I threaten to punch her if she doesn't stop.

She doesn't stop.

I punch her.
In the nose.
Blood starts dripping from her nose. She's *still* trying to bite me.
Stop it...

"No!"
WHAM!

Hard enough to cause a black eye. She finally dismounts.
The cops arrive.

Oh, sorry, I meant to dial 411, not 911. I was calling information, not the police.

One April morning we have another bitch-fest as I'm driving her home. While the car's moving, she lunges at me, scratching my face, pulling my hair, and reaching for the stick shift to try and make her crash.

I slam the brakes in the middle of the road less than a block from her apartment building. It takes a half-hour to get her out of the car.

There's another time in April when I try leaving her apartment and she pounces on me. I push her off. She keeps jumping on me, and I keep pushing her off. All the way out the back entrance, past the garbage cans, down the block, and finally to where my car is parked.

Did she come by and pick you up? How sweet! Listen, Goad, I know for a fact that you're not home. I've just been all around your fucking house, the whole perimeter, I've surveyed it, the inside, and out, and I couldn't get on your roof but I rang the chimes, I know for a fucking fact that you're not there, buddy, the game is up, so get your stuff, have her drop you off, cause I ain't leaving the premises.

—8:44 PM, April 11, 1998

There's only one thing consistent about Anne: Whenever she says she knows something for a fact, she's wrong.

She knows for a fact that I hate black people.

She knows for a fact that I'm trying to destroy her.

She knows for a fact that those cuts on my face and that blood from my nose is self-inflicted.

And she knows for a fact that I'm not home tonight.

Fact is, I *am* home. Sleeping. I had worked late and got home exhausted, crashing into bed at around 7 pm. I wake up three hours later and check my messages. Anne has left a dozen or so of them, saying it was awfully sly of me to park my car outside my apartment as a decoy and have "the bitch" pick me up. Saying she's going to kill me and the bitch when we get back to my place. I've listened to three or four messages when I hear a rock hit the window. Then another.

I put on my robe and go down to the front door. There she is.

"Uh, hi, J.G. I love you. Sorry about those messages. Let me in—please?"

I'll be at the 99¢ store buying Brillo pads. Or at the Laundromat. Or visiting Debbie. Or working late. Or sleeping. And she knows for a fact that I'm out fucking some bitch.

On the nights that Anne and I don't sleep together, she almost always takes the MAX train over to my neighborhood and checks up on me. She leaves items on my car windshield. One morning she leaves a drawing of herself wiping sweat from her brow with the caption, "Whew, J.G.! Thanks for staying faithful!" Another time

she leaves cut-out photos of our faces pasted onto the bodies of happy families in domestic situations. She shows me a sheet of notebook paper with the heading "Times to Check up on Him." On the left, it lists 11 pm. 1 am. 3 am. 5 am. And on the right is a series of disjointed words and phrases such as MURDER, MAYHEM, LIVE APPEARANCES, BUY A GUN, and PRISON. She's drawn a happy face inside the "O" in "PRISON." She explains that she'll do anything necessary—even if it means going to prison—to ensure I'm not cheating on her.

At work they ask me how my weekend went and I say,

Well, I didn't get arrested.

One Friday afternoon while leaving work, I tell another employee about a crazy girlfriend who's stalking me. I cross the street just as a bus pulls up. As the bus chugs away, I see that Anne is crossing the street over to my workplace. I run to my car, hoping she hasn't seen me. I get stuck at a red light two blocks away. She spots my car and starts running toward it. I screech away when the light turns green. When I arrive home about five minutes later, she's already left a cluster of threatening phone messages, saying she's headed to my house and I'd better fucking be there.

I run down to my car and high-tail it away from my apartment. When I get back home a few hours later, Anne has left a sobbing phone message saying that she realizes her behavior is driving me away instead of making me love her. She also says that she had seen me leaving my workplace and that I'd looked happy being by myself, happier than she'd seen me in a long time.

It's a rare flash of insight on her part.

And one that won't last.

You will WILL be killed.

—e-mail message, 4/98

Over the year, Anne has gradually moved from groupie to lover to stalker. She keeps talking about buying a gun or hiring a hit man to kill me. I'll come home from work and check the bushes outside my apartment to make sure she isn't crouching there with a pistol. I take her threats seriously, but I'm not sure how to handle them. I complain to friends that I don't know how to get out of it peacefully.

And I don't want to show her any fear. I say that if she shoots me, she'd better hit me the first time or suffer the consequences.

One night Anne and I drop by a Portland coffee shop to meet some out-of-town zinester associates, and Anne does her little comedy routine about how fun it had been to thwack the redhead's dome with an axe handle. They sit there stunned, grinning nervously.

The next morning, a friend takes the out-of-towners to breakfast and asks them what they think about Jim Goad's girlfriend. They look at each other, then down at the table, and are silent for a moment.

One of them finally speaks: "She's going to murder him someday."

Darling, where are we at, the Farmhouse? Ah darling, you know what? I ain't gonna wait for that olive branch, cause I don't want it. You know what I was hoping for? That it would be you. But it's not, and you have destroyed my dreams.... You are going to dispose of me... and you're not going to be able to get rid of me so easy. There's going to be... somebody's going to wind up dead, whether it's me or you. And don't think, [laughs] that I won't find a way. Don't think, for even a second, that you can get away. And I wouldn't be very sloppy about it, believe me. If you hurt me

bad enough, you will be fuckin' blown to fuckin' pieces. You will be assassinated. And there is no way, unless you never want to make a public appearance again, that that's going to...ah...uh, I'm going to follow you, I'm going to find out where-you are a fuckin' famous personality. I'm going to find out where you are, and I'm going to blow your brains to fuckin' smither-fuckin'-reens!...Your head-it's going to be out of this fucking universe. Your head's going to be blown to fucking shreds. You better pick up the fucking phone.

—8:29 PM, April 13, 1998

Anne's biggest flaw is that she doesn't want to be admired for her high-octane freakiness or her tremendous skills of psychological manipulation.

She wants to be loved.

She wants to be normal.

She wants to be anybody but who she is.

She's coming off thirty-five guys and wants commitment. I'm coming off eleven years with the same woman and want to mess around. There's bound to be a collision.

When two different girls approach Anne and infer that they'd like to have threesomes with us, Anne declines. "You know, J.G., a year ago I would've done it," she tells me, "but you made me a one-man woman, and I'm into monogamy and white-picket fences now."

Inwardly I curse whatever unintentionally domesticating influence I'd had on her. Can't she wait *another* year to get normal?

The same thing had happened with Debbie—after acting wild with me for a few months, she wanted to settle down and nest.

The female bird always wants to make a nest. But the male bird wants to fly around.

Despite all the interplanetary psychosis that had transpired between us, Anne's delusional enough to believe that one day we'll live in a ranch house with rainbows and babies. She thinks we'll eventually metamorphose into Stan 'n' Barb Taylor, our comic alter egos. I tell her we're both way too damaged to have something normal. Which doesn't mean we can't be happy. But we'll never be Stan 'n' Barb.

She won't listen. She wants life in a dollhouse.

I only have one happy memory from our last six months together.

It's a Sunday afternoon in April. We attend an all-you-can-eat spaghetti dinner in the basement of a Catholic church.

We both dress conservatively. Anne even looks sort of sweet, if you can imagine that. We almost fit in with everyone else. All the blue-haired, leisure-suit-wearing Catholic ladies who sit at our table probably think we're just another cute couple from the parish.

For a moment, we're Stan 'n' Barb Taylor, and nobody can tell we're insane.

Nobody can see the bite marks or bruises.

Nobody knows about cancer.

Or the Rape Issue, the White House Shooter, and the British Suicide Kids.

Nobody knows about her death threats.

Or my lonely forays to pick up hillbilly barfly girls.

Or Debbie's death wish.

Or mine.

Or Anne's.
God, we're compatible in so many ways. No one makes me laugh harder or
cum harder.
If she wasn't so suffocating.
If she could just leave when I ask her to, trusting that I'll want to see her again.
If she didn't threaten to destroy me every time she gets angry.
If we hadn't met under such impossible circumstances...
For a minute we're Stan 'n' Barb, and then it's gone.
Forever.
A sweet, sunny Sunday morning early in May. I need to write. I tell her it's
time to leave. She refuses. Lunges for my face but winds up scratching my neck. I
grab her. She bites my shoulder. I punch her in the mouth. More wrestling. And
scratching. And screaming.
The landlord yells from downstairs. "Knock it off right now!"
But Russ, I'm just trying to make her leave.
"One of you has to leave. NOW."
She gives me the finger. "I ain't leaving."
Then I'm calling the cops.
I dash toward the phone. She kicks it off the hook. My seven-week-old
Chihuahua puppy, the size of a hot dog bun, is frantically scampering around,
yipping for his life. I pick him up and run downstairs. Anne follows, punching me on
the on the back and shoulders.
I knock on the landlord's door.
Russ, please call the cops.
She's still punching me. And screaming incoherently: "His wife has cancer!
He's written about rape! He's evil!"
The landlord pries her off me. Takes her upstairs. She begins tearing up my
books. Throwing my CDs around. Screaming, screaming. Russ finally persuades her
to leave. As she's leaving, she punches me in the back of the head one last time.
Russ, I'm sorry. This is really embarrassing. But at least she's gone.
A LOUD crashing sound.
I look out the window. She's smashed my car windshield with a shovel.
Russ, PLEASE call the cops.
I run outside. Ann sees me. Drops the shovel. Tries to run.
I catch her.
Alright, dumbass, now you fucked up. The cops are coming.
"Is there something wrong with my pussy, Jim?"
Yeah—it's deformed.
She rips open my T-shirt. Plants her teeth right in my chest as hard as she can
bite.
Starts screaming "RAPE! RAPE!" in the middle of the empty Sunday-morning
street.
A neighbor runs up, thinking he's witnessing a rape.
She continues biting me, hanging off my chest like a pit bull.
Look, man, I'm not attacking her—she's attacking me. Look at my fucking
windshield.
She tells them I raped her. Ten minutes later, she recants.
Thank fucking Christ. We had fucked this morning. My sperm is still sloshing
around inside her. She could have nailed me on a false rape charge.

They snap Polaroids of us. Blood on her lip. Scratches on her back. Scratches on my forehead and neck. Blood all over my torn shirt. Bite marks on my chest and shoulder. Cops tell a witness that the bite on my chest is the worst human bite mark they'd ever seen. They're calling her "Lady Dracula."

The police report quotes Anne: "I wanted to hit him! It feels good! He deserves it!"

It cites my landlord: "He thought Anne was the aggressor."

It quotes my neighbor: "He said that he did not see Goad as the aggressor."

From the investigative report, quoting my landlord:

He said we went upstairs to make an attempt to get Anne to leave and found her tearing up items in Mr. Goad's apartment and throwing things around randomly. He described Anne as 'out of it' and said she 'seemed insane.' He stated Anne finally came downstairs to his apartment and 'started beating the crap out of [Goad]. He said Mr. Goad did not once strike Anne nor become physical in an attempt to defend himself. He described Mr. Goad's reaction as a 'solely defensive position.' He went on to state that Anne, after assaulting Mr. Goad, went outside and took a shovel to the windshield of Mr. Goad's car, doing considerable damage.

Regardless, cops take both of us to jail.

I can't believe it.

Fuck, I was the one who told the landlord to *call* you guys. Why are you taking *me* to jail?

Because, as I will soon learn, this is Oregon. And in this P.C. Wonderland, males are never innocent in domestic disputes.

At the police station, I can hear Anne crying through my holding cell's solid steel door. I laugh out loud.

"FUCK you, Jim!" she screams.

And I say,

At least I'm free of you now.

Even in jail, wearing handcuffs, I feel free. As long as there's a wall between us.

I bail out that day. She stays overnight. Tries calling me from jail. Writes "I LOVE JIM GOAD FOREVER" on her jail bunk. Tells her cellmate about how good I am in bed.

I call my lawyer friend in Oklahoma City. He says he's tempted to fly out to Portland and kick the shit out of me. "You stick your dick in her again, and you'll deserve everything that happens to you," he warns. "You're an intellectual terrorist; she's just a criminal. But she's lucky; you're not."

The next day, the D.A.'s office drops all charges against both of us. I phone them, incredulous.

She bit me on the shoulder. On the chest. Smashed my windshield. Filed a false rape charge. And you're just gonna let her walk away?

"Yes."

Why?

"Because, as we see it, this was a mutual fight."

How the fuck is smashing someone's windshield evidence of mutual combat? What, did my car attack her?

"The case is closed, Mr. Goad."

Thanks, Mr. Government.

The next morning I take my car to a glass shop to have the windshield replaced. While straining to see the road through shattered glass, with sunlight refracted in a million directions through a spider web of hanging shards, I think, This must be what it's like to see the world through her mind.

Even after all she'd done, after all the malice, threats, and even a false fucking rape charge, I feel bad for her.

But despite my overwrought, misguided compassion, I don't quite feel like getting murdered. So after dropping my car off, I head downtown to the county courthouse and file a Restraining Order against her. I really don't want to do it. She pushed me really far for me to take such a step. I'm no fan of cops, lawyers, or the prison-industrial complex, especially when they start meddling in something as private as romance. But concern for my safety—and hers—overrides such reservations.

I fill out the paperwork:

DATE AND LOCATION OF ABUSE:

5/3/98...Home

HOW DID RESPONDENT HURT OR THREATEN YOU?

Bit at chest and shoulder, clawed at eyes.

DESCRIBE OTHER INCIDENTS...IN THE PAST 180 DAYS?

E-mail threats; phone threats; respondent becomes murderously jealous when I tell her I want to see other women.

I AM IN IMMEDIATE AND PRESENT DANGER BECAUSE:

She has repeatedly threatened to kill me and/or herself when I broke up with her. I fear what would happen to her if I were forced to act in self-defense.

The courtroom contains three dozen women with shiners...and me. I show the judge some of Anne's threatening e-mails. I show him the Polaroids of my bite marks and scratches. He grants me the Restraining Order without an argument. I feel a little safer, although my lawyer friend says that filing a Restraining Order is usually the first step to getting killed.

[Crying] You are going to hurt me so bad, Jim...you're just going to kill me. I think you want me to die...This always happens in life...it always fuckin' ends up like this....Anybody I've ever loved or cared about leaves me...

—7:19 PM , May 5, 1998

Anne sends me an e-mail saying she wants to kill herself. That I destroyed her. That I sunk her battleship. That our love was the Titanic, and we're sinking. That she's the little dog running around scared. That I'd better bring the Chihuahua with me and visit her on our one-year anniversary.

I awake in the middle of the night. Somehow I know she's been by my apartment. I just *know* she left something on my windshield. I throw on my robe and walk outside barefoot. Yep. Three items: a rose, the torn-off cover of a book called *Women Who Love Too Much*, and a Polaroid of her pussy.

She calls me the next night and asks what I'm doing. I say I'm waiting for the cops to serve her my Restraining Order. "Oh," she says, a sad little squeak in her voice. "OK, goodbye."

Again, I feel bad for her. I call her back.

Look, I don't want you to go to jail. I really don't. I don't think you're a criminal, I think you're mentally tortured. But I don't think you're aware of how dangerous this is getting between us.

She seems glad I called her. We talk a bit more. I look down at my crotch, and I'm as hard as an elephant's tusk. A pearly drop of pre-cum oozes from my blowhole. It's the sound of her voice. The smell of raisins and wine. The thought of love mixed with danger. I'm embarrassingly erect. I tell her about it. She giggles. The connection is still there.

But I tell her I'm not going to rescind the Restraining Order. I need to breathe. Need for things to simmer down. Need to feel safe. Maybe we'll get together again if we're able to flush all the insanity out of our systems. If she could just stay away and obey the Restraining Order, if she could just respect my wishes for a while, maybe there's hope for us.

Silly little boy.

I am such a masochist-I really want to go to jail, so please hand this tape over to the police and tell them I'm calling you, I'm violating the restraining order, it's 10:15pm and I really really really need to go to jail. So, have them over here as soon as possible, 'cause I'm ready to go back, 'cause I have nothing to do on the outside. So, if you could do that for me, love of my FUCKING life, I would really appreciate it. I really want to go back there. And that way you could just fuck your brains out and have no problem, you know, with what's going on, even though I'm working on your goddamned BIRTHDAY present right now. I can't stay away from you, I'm gonna have to be behind bars, so go ahead, and do what you will, Jim Goad.

—10:18 PM, May 6, 1998

An hour after she's served the Restraining Order, she sends me an e-mail that says "Your laws don't affect me" and that she isn't going to stay away.

Reluctantly, I call the police. After all we'd been through, it depresses me that she pushed it to this point. I show the police her e-mailing and tell them to arrest her. It's a drizzly Friday afternoon at around 4 pm. The cops say they'll bust her sometime this weekend, depending on how busy they are.

Over the next few hours, the Sympathy Angels begin nibbling at my insides. I figure that will all the cancer and violence and pain, everyone has suffered enough. I don't want her to go to jail.

Anne is so certain I wish her harm. If that had been the case—ever—I would have just let her kill herself. And I'd let the cops arrest her tonight.

Instead, I rush over to her place around 8 pm. When she opens the door, she looks as if she's been crying all week.

Let's go. I called the police. They're coming to arrest you. I tried dropping my complaint, but the cops who have the paperwork are already on their beat. If you don't come with me, you're going to jail.

She comes with me.

We drive up to Skyline Boulevard, to the hills where we'd fucked and fucked and fucked that previous summer when I was still married to Debbie. When everything seemed almost innocent. I say that I care about her, but I'm confused. I don't want either of us to die.

What I don't tell her is that I feel safer by her side than I do knowing she's out there lurking. They wouldn't have held her in jail very long for a Restraining Order violation, anyway. And if they spring her loose after a few days of lockdown, she'll come headhunting. It's a case where I'm keeping my friends close, but my enemies closer.

I'm not trying to fuck with her head. I just sense an explosion coming, and I want to avoid it.

My darling stalker spends the night with me. We fuck, but of course. And we fall asleep curled up together.

At around 4 am she wakes me up by saying, "I don't love you."

Huh?

"I don't love you."

Oh, really? This is the thanks I get for saving your ass from jail? Well, that's OK. I don't need you, anyway. I'll just call this chick in San Francisco I've been talking to.

"WHAT chick in San Francisco?"

I tell her about the Israeli college girl in the Bay Area.

And Anne's stripper friend who'd called me.

And the girl with pink hair at the coffee shop.

And the wigged-out bitch from Long Island.

And the one who dialed me from a pay phone in Oklahoma.

Bonnie and Linda from the karaoke bar.

And Mieko from the Farmhouse.

Lots of girls.

Lots of reasons I don't need Anne to survive.

She sits on the floor, melting into the carpet like the Wicked Witch of the

West.

Suddenly she bolts up and runs into the bathroom. I follow her.

She grabs a pair of scissors and begins hacking at her shoulder-length hair.

Chops it all down short and spiky. Fat clumps of black hair all over the bathroom floor. She picks up a cigarette lighter and tries burning the rest of her hair down to the scalp.

Hey, girl, I still have a Restraining Order against you. If you don't calm the fuck down, I'm calling the cops.

She runs past me into the living room.

Picks up a Chihuahua turd.

Puts it in her mouth.

Starts chewing.

Spits pieces of puppy poop in my face.

Says, "That's how much you've hurt me."

Wow. I must have hurt her bad.

Again I feel sorry for her. I ask her to kiss me, even with her teeth stained brown from dog shit.

She starts crying instead.

So she must have been telling a lie when she woke me up. She *has* to love me.

You can't chop off all your hair and eat dog shit if you don't love someone.

You don't love me, you don't worship my pussy the way that I worship your cock.

You don't worship my features, anything about me.... I really gave so much power to you at the beginning, and I really said, "I'm a piece of shit and you're the greatest

thing that ever lived, and do what you will with me." And, um, even though we spent so much time together, you were still seeing other women, and you still want to see other women....

—6:01 PM, May 19, 1998

It's cold and rainy almost every day in May. And Anne isn't taking her medication. She looks about ten years older than she did when I met her. Her new "haircut" frames her face in Frankensteinian derangement. We're both skinny, pale, and pockmarked from our year of chasing Death around in circles.

And yet we continue seeing each other. I figure that with the Restraining Order in place, maybe it'll work. Maybe she'll be afraid of going to jail. Maybe she'll leave when I ask her to. Maybe she won't attack me anymore.

Maybe I'm a moron.

One morning in mid-May, I'm dropping her off at her apartment before I go to work. Naturally, we argue. And predictably, she lunges at me. I grab her wrists. I bend one wrist back until she squeals with pain. She agrees to leave. I take her apartment key off her key ring and give it back to her. It's over.

She starts walking away in the rain.

Anne!

She turns around.

I still love you, baby.

She walks to the car and hands me her key back.

Together again.

One night while over at my place she's reading "Women Who Love Too Much" (minus the cover) and flashes me a cartoon she'd scribbled on one of its pages. It's a drawing of her in a bridal gown, tears streaming down her face, with a cartoon balloon saying, "MARRY ME!"

On May 26th we celebrate our one-year anniversary. I buy her some irises in honor of Iris the Teenaged Prostitute from *Taxi Driver*. She wears a pretty gold dress her friend had made. She gives me a card signed, "With all my love, sex, bite marks, and bruises—your ex-mistress." We rent a hot tub. I harpoon her with the dick in the steamy, bubbly suds. We stand naked in the dressing-room mirror, preening and laughing.

The next afternoon as I'm driving on my lunch break, a motorist runs a stop sign and totals my Ford Probe. The car in which we'd traipsed around Portland all year is dead. Smashed beyond recognition.

As I crawl out of my mangled auto, I scream, "Like my life isn't fucking complicated enough!"

I call a friend in L.A. and tell him what happened. He comments about how bad my luck has been in Portland. I say I'm going to stick around just to spite the town.

Debbie says the car crash is karma.

Anne says, "What a bitch!" and comes over to spend the night with me.

MY LAST DAY WITH ANNE

It seems like a nice day. The clouds which had constipated the sky for months are finally gone. The virgin sun holds a mild promise of hope.

In the morning I call my Okie lawyer friend to ask him some insurance questions about my crushed 'n' impotent automobile. He asks me is I'm still seeing Anne.

Yeah. In fact, she's sleeping in the other room.

"Well," he sighs, "I'll wear a black suit to your funeral."

I'm taking the day off from work. I have to file an accident report downtown with the Department of Motor Vehicles. I also have to get screened at the health clinic to make sure I didn't suffer a concussion when my forehead bonked against the windshield yesterday.

I put the Chihuahua in his small plastic carrier and bring him along with us.

I don't want him to be all alone.

Same reason I've hung out with Debbie after the divorce. I don't want her to be all alone.

It's one of the reasons I'm still with Anne. I don't want her to be all alone.

And I don't want to be alone, either.

We have a minor argument at the DMV office. As we wait outside for a bus to the health clinic, she says we should break up if I still want to see other girls.

I smile at her. No skin off my ass. She isn't the only tuna-fish sandwich in the cafeteria.

The clinic is only four blocks from Debbie's house. Anne sits outside with the puppy while a wrinkly male physician flashes a light in my pupils.

No concussion.

We both have more errands to run. We hop on another bus. A big-assed mulatto broad with bushy black hair sits across the aisle from us.

"That's what I picture the Israeli girl from San Francisco looking like," she snaps at me.

I don't respond. She's picking another fight.

"Maybe when we get down to the Rose Quarter, we should split off and do our chores separately," she suggests.

I'm surprised. I thought we had planned to do everything together. But maybe she wants to be alone. So I shrug and say OK>

With that, she stands up and walks to the back of the bus. She grabs the hand railing, looking furious.

Do you want to tell me what the fuck this is all about?

She just stares straight ahead, nostrils flaring.

Five minutes later she sits down next to me again. "I'm not going to be with anyone who treats their dog better than they treat me," she growls.

I stare out the window and say nothing. She continues pissing and moaning and whimpering.

I can't believe she's starting an argument for no reason. It's not bad enough that my cars totaled—now I have to deal with this. Oh, what an annoying little gnat. A fat-faced, soul-sucking slug. I treat the dog better than you because he *is* better

than you. Because he doesn't bite me. Or threaten to kill me. Because when he gives me affection, he doesn't demand my life in return. If I could teach him how to suck dick, I wouldn't need you for anything. Isn't it obvious?

Finally, I turn to her and calmly say,

You're not the one.

"WHAT did you say?"

You're not the one for me. You never were. So let's just end it.

Her face starts shaking like water ready to boil.

She begins walloping me with both fists. Maybe a dozen times.

I look her straight in the eye and say,

Hitting me isn't going to make you the one.

She stands up to get better leverage and resumes punching my face. Socking my skull. Grabbing my hair.

I beg for someone to pull her off me.

"I'm not touching her," says one woman. "She seems crazy!"

Seems?

Anne bites into my elbow as hard as she can, trying to rip out a chunk of flesh with her doggie teeth.

"Girl, you better stop!" someone shouts at her.

"But he's given me ten black eyes!" Anne howls. "He's very abusive!"

"Well, we see who's hitting who now!" says a middle-aged woman, clutching onto her bags for safety.

Everyone on the bus is watching. And laughing. It's always funny when a woman hits a man, even when she's giving him scars. Someone suggests that we go on the Jerry Springer show.

When the bus pulls into the Rose Quarter, Anne's one of the first to get off, separated from me by a wall of sweaty bodies. As I exit, an older, Uncle Remus-looking black man shakes my hand.

"You kept your cool," he says, nodding appreciatively. "I admire that."

Gosh, thanks. But I'm not gonna let her get away with it.

Anne's sprinting away from the bus as fast as she can. I give chase, swinging the Chihuahua in his carrier. He squeals every time my boots hit the concrete. Poor baby. But I'm not gonna let the bitch get away.

I catch up with her. She trips and falls against a cement wall, landing on her ass. She stays on the ground, staring into the distance as if smelling something foul. It looks as if all her inner rot has finally sprouted on her face. Invisible fumes of ugliness roll off her body. She's a pink-skinned garbage bag filled with human waste. A crumpled ball of shit-smearred toilet paper sprawled on a city sidewalk.

Standing over her, I say,

Everyone was laughing at you. You're pathetic. I win, you lose. And don't ever forget it.

I begin walking back home with a huge open gash on my right elbow from where she'd bitten me.

I filed the restraining order only three weeks ago. And this is already the second time she's attacked me since it was filed.

I don't want the cops showing up at my apartment again, so I walk two blocks away to an ice-cream parlor and call them from a pay phone.

Yeah, I have a restraining order against this girl. Yeah, she hit me again. Hey, I want you to arrest her. Yeah, I'm at this ice-cream parlor on NE Weidler Street. Yeah, I'll wait for you.

While waiting, I call Anne's number to see if she's made it home yet. No answer. But a minute later the pay phone rings. She had dialed Star 69 and called me back.

Hello?

"What are you doing, asshole?"

I'm waiting for the cops to come. You violated the restraining order by hitting me.

"Fuck you! You're just trying to stall me so they can bust me!"

She hangs up before I can answer. She doesn't pick up when I call back. She probably fled her apartment to avoid the cops.

I stare at the phone. Sending to jail would only make her a tragic martyr in her sick game of love. After all, she begged me to send her to jail more than once. Why give her what she wants?

I call the police again and tell them to forget about it.

I've made a lot of mistakes in my life. That right there is the biggest one.

I walk back to my place and dial Anne's mom. The more time I spend with Anne, the greater becomes her mom's apparent sainthood. She'd had to deal with Anne's tantrums for far longer than I had. And she's stuck with Anne for life.

Anne had once griped to her mom that I wasn't suffering in our romance like she was. "If he's been with you for all this time," came mom's response, "I'm sure he's done his share of suffering."

A wise woman.

I tell her about the bus attack. I ask her to tell Anne that the cops aren't looking for her and that she can return to her apartment. I also ask her to tell Anne to stay away from me. Her mom says the whole thing isn't healthy for either of us and that we should stay away from one another. She says Anne had come to her countless times saying we'd broken up for good, only to return the next day saying we were together again. I tell her about all the times Anne had stolen cash from her wallet and bragged about it to me. And the times she'd taken money from mom for eyeglasses or schoolbooks and used it to buy weed. She says she knows Anne does things like that, but her attitude is stoic. "Well, yeah, what can I do? She's high-maintenance, but she's my daughter."

Anne, the Ultravictim, at least has one parent who gives her the unconditional love no one has ever given me.

What a phony.

I call the poseur and leave a voicemail message. Don't worry, the cops aren't coming. But stay the fuck away. I see through you and your little pious ballerina act. You're the least ethical person I've ever known. The only one who can feel morally outraged when a weed dealer won't front you pot. Or when the asthmatic zinester fanboy whom you've been squeezing for money doesn't send you a second check quickly enough. I'm better looking than you, I'm smarter than you, more talented than you, and I'll be more famous than you. I don't need to send you to jail. My revenge is in being superior. So stick *that* in your sloppy pussy. Nyah, nyah, nyah.

Feeling triumphant, I walk a few blocks to a car-rental agency so I'll have some wheels with which to cruise the hillbilly bars for toothless snatches. Ominously, the half-retarded ex-gang member who used to be Anne's roommate is now a car-

rental clerk there. He's a chunky, slow-lidded white boy who looks like Barney Rubble. We exchange dull, thudding, wary pleasantries. Within minutes I'm cruising P-Town's streets in a new-vinyl-smelling Ford Escort.

When I arrive home, Anne has left a string of snotty voicemail messages. The first lasts five minutes, all the way up to the beep which warns that time is about to expire. After the beep, she tosses in this charming nugget:

"And I wish you had died in that car accident yesterday."

It's the first of five times she'll directly allude to my death today—four times on phone messages, and once on the Internet.

ANNE ATTACKS:

I told your wife not to trust you, and that you're going to talk shit behind her back up until the day she dies and after she dies and before she dies....And just like I said on the bus, I kinda woke up and just punched you in the face about ten times because you deserved it, you fucking prick....Your karma is going to come back to you tenfold, man. You've got so much shit coming to you....your ego is through the roof, and the day that your wife dies is going to be a cold day in hell for you, buddy. And you know what else, too? I'm going to stick around on this earth just like I decided for my father, because I'm fourteen, fifteen fucking years younger than you, and no matter what I'm going to take care of myself, too, man, I'm going to outlive you, man, and I'm going to dance on your fucking grave.

--3:59pm

Better-looking than I am? Oh, my God, have I told you about what I really think about your looks? Let's bring out the truth here, because you're starting to make me sick over the past couple of weeks.... You have zits all over your face, you have a hook nose, you look like a lizard, your skin is disgusting, your breath stank today, and you're disgusting.

--4:02pm

...More and more you repulse me. But mostly it's your inside, and your attitude, and you remind me of my father in a lot of ways. You're just sick. I can't wait 'til the day you die. I feel nothing for you.

--4:04pm

Um, you can do everything you want by the way and it still won't shut me up. You ain't going to shut me up, no matter what. And I'm going to do tons of zines about you....You can send me to jail, and I'll get out, and I'll still do my zines, and you are going to be humiliated...you're UGLY on the inside-out and your karma's gonna come back and you're gonna age, you're gonna wither away, you're gonna die in the ground.

--4:06pm

I COUNTERATTACK:

Jesus, Anne, you know, do whatever you want. Your obsession with me is just going to prove you love me.... You're skinny as a rail, you just look psychotic, you look like an ugly, drowned rat with your hair cut off...You cut your hair off for me, I never would for you. Write all you fucking want, I got the proof, dumbshit....And when I

said you're not the one, that's why you freaked out. Go ahead and write whatever you want-I got everything on my side.

--4:37pm

Oh, God, what does it feel like to lose? Just to have everything crushed? All your hopes of marriage and babies, all the hopes that I never had. You say you want to talk about me? That all fucking comes out. And like I said, I got the evidence. You don't have shit on me. I never pledged devotion or worshiped your body or left any message saying those things. Because let's face it, I fucking don't. You're the one who wanted the eternal life with me, I never wanted it with you. I was never in love with you. Oh well....Otherwise, hey-you have a pleasant life.

--4:38pm

Oh yeah, I kept color Xeroxes of your vagina pictures. And yeah, since we're getting everything out in the open, I always did find it disgusting. The lips really are too big, and they hang too much. And it does have an unpleasant odor...you might want to check into that...Your tits are really kind of small, and your face is pretty ugly. I mean, it really is. I guess you made up for it in attitude, but you do have an ugly face. The things you said about my looks, look, I could give a fuck. I'm not as body-obsessed as you are. I do alright, as you know, and as you know I've got about twelve hours of tapes of you saying how much you love me more than I love you, how big my dick is, how great-looking I am....You might want to comb your archives looking for me saying anything remotely similar about you. ...Never loved you, fucked around behind-ah, there are still women I haven't told you about. ...The one I'm going out with tonight has a much better body. And I will be thinking of you while I'm ramming it into her.

--4:53pm

Ugly little skank girl, trying to prove she's not a dyke, and it's so obvious she is. Because you really are unattractive. What else...hair transplants...big fucking deal, I really don't care about that. But you do care about your cunt, that's why you asked for the pictures back. Good thing I made copies, huh? But again, I really don't care about you that much to do something like that. I will say some things in my defense if you come out talking shit...And you know what? You look about forty-five in the morning light. I think it's all catching up with you, Anne.

--4:57pm

You know what else? Your father won. Because you're still pissed at him, and he doesn't care about you. Oh, by the way, last couple months, too, whenever I was fucking you? I had to think of somebody else to get into it. Cheers!

--5:12pm

Yeah, in a year, maybe five, I don't know if I'll be in Portland, but I'll be somewhere, and I'll have some beautiful, much more womanly--'cause let's face it, you look like a fuckin' boy--more buxom, bigger tits, nice firm ass--woman with me. We'll be walking somewhere arm in arm, and I'll step over some crabby, crusty, skanky-looking little homeless girl, it'll be you. You'll ask for change, realize it's me. And I'll look over to her and go, "It lives!"

--5:27pm

Yeah, I never read "Men Who Love Too Much." And whatever happens from now on, both you and I know that.

--5:38pm

What a goofy pair o' spaced-out lovebirds we are, eh?

I drop off the keys to my totaled car at the body shop. The mechanic asks me about the gash on my elbow. I tell him I got it from "my asshole girlfriend."

I drive to Debbie's. Take her out for Vietnamese food. We smoke a little weed, go for a little drive. She says she has a hunch that Anne and I will get together again. And I say no, it's over.

But it isn't. Not quite.

Part of me is a romantic sap.

Part of me can close my eyes and pretend I'm not really crashing into a wall.

Part of me wants everyone to be happy.

Part of me should worry about my own happiness.

I never understood why you had to hate someone to break up with them. I can't look at things as all good or all bad. I get fixated on gray areas. And that's why breakups are difficult for me. Why they're confusing. Because, as bad as it gets, I have trouble blocking out the good times.

I don't want another bitter ending. Another breakup. Another failure. Another death.

So, puppy in tow, I knock on Anne's apartment door at around 7:30 PM. No answer. She was never gone this long. I start getting nervous. Maybe she killed herself. Or maybe she's out somewhere, plotting to kill me.

I go home and doody myself up for a skag-saloon cunt hunt. I wash my nuts and armpits. Throw on my typical pussy-snatchin' outfit: black denim jeans, black denim button-down shirt, black denim jacket, black engineer boots. And that burning look in my steely gray eyes. Johnny Cash as a serial killer.

First I hit an internet café for a hot mug of black thunder and a peek at my e-mail. I also check Anne's e-mail. There's a message from earlier in the evening. It confirms her registration with a service enabling her to post public messages on Usenet. I know exactly what that means.

Fucking whore. At the same time I'd dropped by her apartment with the puppy, trying to make amends, she was at a computer keyboard, broadening the theater of war from private voicemail to a public electro-forum. She was always escalating things.

I drive to a cum-bucket karaoke bar where I'd had luck with female life forms in the past. But it's a Thursday night. Zero action. All the low-rent honky-tonk honeys must be at home, burning the crabs off their muffs with blowtorches.

I dial Anne from a pay phone situated between the bathrooms and the Chinese kitchen. The smell of greasy egg rolls swirls together with that of mentholated urinal cakes. I yell into the phone receiver over the loudly pumping karaoke music:

Saw your DejaNews posting registration thing...If you want to go on alt.zines or wherever talking shit about me I would fucking welcome it because I'm a master at that type of shit, and I would destroy you in a fucking war. I have so much shit on you, it's hilarious. Every phone call, every pathetic, pleading thing is going to be out there for millions to see. Dumb, ugly bitch...

I drive to a fifties-themed rock 'n' roll bar hoping to bag some middle-aged housewife with raccoon mascara and a husky ashtray voice. But this place is even deader than the last. They're sweeping up the floors at 11 PM. I call Anne again. This time she answers.

"Hello?"

Hi.

"WHAT do YOU want?"

I love you.

"FUCK off!" [click]

Restless and frantic, I head downtown and call her from another pay phone. She says her landlord had left a note demanding she see him immediately. She was sure I must have caused a scene or done some damage when I'd dropped by her apartment earlier.

I try telling her I hadn't. She screams "BULLSHIT!" and hangs up the phone again.

I call back, but her line goes to voicemail. I say I had come by with the puppy trying to make up, and that was it. I say I'll call back in five minutes after she listens to the message.

Instead of calling back, I drive over to her building. I knock on her door. When she opens it, she's crying.

"Jim, please, you have to leave! If the landlord sees you here, he'll evict me!"

OK. Can I call you from the phone up the street?

"Yeah, yeah..." Her face is most and swollen from crying. When I call, she's still crying. She agrees to meet me up the street. And she's still crying when she gets there.

"Jim, I know that part of us loves each other, but if we keep going one this way, one of us is going to kill the other."

Does it *have* to end like that?

"Remember last summer when we said we were going to hell for what we did to Debbie? Well, I think we're on our way."

I ask her what she posted on the Internet. Two things: One about my hair transplants, the other about my nose job.

Oh, God, *why* did you do *that*?

"It's because you're a rock. I was never able to break you. You hurt me so *bad* romantically, and I couldn't hurt you that way, so I had to find another way to do it. What are you worried about, anyway? Nobody will believe me. I have *zero* credibility."

I feel deflated. What is this thing with love and destruction? My parents said they loved me, yet they wanted me destroyed. They knew I was smarter than them, but they didn't want to see me rise above them. Same with Debbie.

And Anne. Her biggest fear is of being publicly humiliated like *Carrie*. And here she is, pulling a *Carrie* on me. She says that she stopped after the second post because she realized she was starting to look bitter and desperate.

When I got divorced, Debbie did Internet postings and magazine interviews depicting me as a monster. She called up every friend, relative, and business associate of mine, telling them I'm a violent lump of phlegm. And even though I had evidence to disprove several of her allegations, as well as plenty of things which

would have made her look stupid, I didn't want to be drawn into an ugly public feud with a cancer patient. I felt that if I had any moral edge on Debbie, it was that I never went public with our breakup.

I tell Anne that despite my threat earlier in the evening to wage a public war with her, I won't do it. People *imagining* you in pain is one thing; *watching* you in pain is another. Everyone has embarrassing secrets, and if I didn't respond to Anne's barbs, people would begin to empathize with me. I tell her that she can continue shouting all alone on a bare stage, and eventually she'll look pathetic. Despite all the damaging evidence I have on her, I'll maintain the upper hand if I refuse to lock horns.

I give her the key to her apartment and start walking away. She heads in the other direction.

Fuck that. I'm not going to slink off like a wounded lamb.

I run up behind her and poke her in the back of the neck. She spins around, frightened. We circle each other warily.

What's this? I've never seen you so scared before. No, don't scream—I ain't through wit you. Let's go talk some more.

We sit on some cement steps in front of a jewelry store. Tomorrow night, Anne's going to start a job as a caregiver which requires her to stay at a handicapped person's house from Friday night to Sunday night. She's sure that I'm going to cheat on her. Earlier in the day, news broke that comedian Phil Hartman's wife had killed him and herself because he planned to leave her. Anne calls it justifiable homicide.

Mostly we're silent. At one point while we're sitting, she sidles over to me and holds my hand. And I let her.

We're sick.

I check the clock in the jewelry-store window. It's close to 2 AM. I have to wake up at 7 AM for work. I'd better get home. We start walking. I'm a few feet behind her. Just as she's about to enter her building, I hold out my hand to her.

Come with me.

She places a hand over her chest and gasps, like, "Be still my beating heart—he still cares."

She asks me why I want her to come with me.

Because we're sick and I love you.

I suggest we head to the east side of town to an all-night diner for breakfast. We drive past the print shop where I work.

"J.G., if you broke up with me," she says, smiling, "I was planning on buying a gun and blowing you away when you walked out of work."

Ahh, you would have found a way to fuck it up. You're the world's dumbest criminal.

And we laugh about it. I'm actually chuckling at a death threat which is utterly serious.

I *told* you we're sick.

I order an omelet. She has garlic bread. She seems happy we've made up.

We get back to my place a little after 3 AM, because Howard Stern is just coming on the radio. As we sit on the carpet smoking a joint, she says that we're funnier than Howard. She tells me her dream is for us to live in a Manhattan penthouse and have our own radio show.

Even now, she has hope for a future together with me.

As I shove my cock inside her, this odd infantile voice leaks out of her, not faked at all but coming from some personality buried deep within:

"Love me, love me, please love me! I'm just a little girl, and no one has ever loved me!"

I never heard this voice before. Then she says, in her normal voice, "Ha, ha, you know me, and that I like to have sex a lot, and that I can't really help it."

As I'm pushing and pushing inside her, she asks if I want to have threesomes with other girls.

Rather than saying yes, I ask,

Is that what you want?

"No, but I want whatever will keep you happy."

What about you? Do you want other dicks in you?

"No, I just want you, and I want to hold onto you."

As we're falling asleep, I say it would be funny if she went on the Internet claiming that the "Anne" who posted those things about my plastic surgery wasn't the real Anne. It would become a war of Dueling Annes, with people struggling to figure out which is the real one. After all, I've been trying to figure out the same thing for a year.

Right before we pass out, I mention that Debbie has a premonition that she'll suffer a major cancer relapse by Christmas.

"Oh, God," she says quietly.

I close my eyes and fall asleep.

Love and death have always been intertwined in my life, and I could never untie the knots quickly enough.

There was one night shortly after I met Anne when I told her that everything is hopeless. That everyone dies. That there are no happy endings. That love never lasts.

She cried and cried. Was I sure?

Yeah.

I didn't want it to be true, but it was.

She asked me if we could at least pretend it was some other way. And so we tried pretending for a while.

About a year after I met Anne, I decided I was going to separate from Debbie. I filled out an application to rent a trailer about eighty miles east of Portland. I then drove up a remote mountain road covered in snow, even though it was June. A road sign pointed to a natural ice cave buried deep in the forest. A series of creaky wooden stairs led down into the cave's mouth. It was cold and dark down there, with the merest hint of a howling wind. I didn't like being down there. It felt like death, and I wasn't ready to die. But I knew that when I did, it would feel something like this—chilly and lightless and alone. And the "alone" part was what scared me the most. I rushed up the stairs and back into my car. As I was coasting down an idyllic mountain road, past simple wooden homes with plastic flowers planted in the front yard, I spotted a graying old couple holding hands and walking by the roadside.

They were near death, but they weren't alone.

I drove straight back home to Debbie and made up with her.

And I guess this is why I kept coming back to Anne. Even if she killed me, I wouldn't die alone. At least she'd be there, pulling the trigger.

I was asleep for less than two hours. I'm not sure if I dreamed or what floated through my mind, but I wake up feeling very angry with Anne. I have the feeling that I've been sleeping next to a human hand grenade.

You can't build a mansion atop a toxic waste dump.

You can't paint the Mona Lisa with a handful of shit.

Was I crazy thinking this would work?

She makes it impossible to get along with her. If I show any strength, I'm an egotistical asshole. If I display any weakness, she uses it against me.

I throw on my clothes in half a minute.

Get up.

"Huh? What?"

Get the fuck out of bed. I'm taking you home. It's over.

"No, Jim, please don't do this. Let's go back to sleep. I'll leave in the morning."

You can walk home, or I'll drive you home. What'll it be?

She gets up and is soon dressed.

There's been too much damage. There's no trust between us. I'm tired of the mood swings. The attacks. The threats. The jealousy. The insanity. It wasn't *what* you posted on the Internet. It was your *intent*. You'll do anything to try and hurt me.

Debbie acted as if she forgave me for cheating on her, but she never did. You acted as if you forgave me for sleeping with the redhead, but you never did. I'm the only honest one out of the three of us—I can't forgive you for this. So let's go.

She doesn't say a word the whole way over to her place.

As I drive, I say something like:

Yeah, you and Debbie are real feminists. Real credits to your gender. She's so full of self-pity, she has to exaggerate her victimization to get the sympathy she needs. And you're the rottenest human being I've ever met. You're violent, you're a liar, an egomaniac, a scam artist, a user of people, someone who rips off her own mother—you're *not* a feminist.

I also say this:

Between you and me, whatever is said or done in the future, and whatever you try to do to me, just remember that I didn't love the little girl who needed love.