

# CAN THIS BE

# LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

**Know thy opponent:  
How to fight with the passive-aggressor, the prosecutor,  
the sulker, the exaggerator,  
even the hit-and-run  
artist—and win!**

Fighting is never pleasant. Nobody likes having to tell a loved one, "You are a miserable human being and a blight on the face of the earth," even if it's for his own good. Nobody enjoys finding out how selfish, unreasonable and abysmally wrong the person she loves can be about a particular issue. But perhaps the most awful thing about fights is the way they turn some men into fugitives from a horror movie. Loving, affectionate teddy bears can become as responsive as week-old cadavers or as menacing as bats. Not only are such metamorphoses frightening, they put you at a disadvantage where the fight is concerned, since it's hard to know how to deal effectively with a total stranger. That is why I've codified some of the monsters you're likely to meet in your own living room some stormy night, along with the best ways—short of a stake through the heart—to combat them.

**THE PASSIVE AGGRESSOR.** With this person, you're never sure whether you're having a fight or not. He tells you he's not angry, even as he pulls the gear shift in the car as if it were the lever of a guillotine. "Nothing's wrong," he says from between clenched teeth, timing his entrance into an elevator so that the door nearly closes on your face.

With the Passive Aggressor, it's up to you to force the issue. Point out how white his knuckles are as they curl around the evening paper. Hide a tape recorder in the room and then play back to him the sound of his own teeth grinding. Anything to make him aware of his anger. Then let him have it with yours.

**THE HIT-AND-RUN FIGHTER.** Living with this man is rather like sharing your home with the Viet Cong. He'll attack from out of nowhere and then, before you can retaliate, disappear into the night. He may literally disappear, slamming the door to the apartment behind him, or just figuratively vanish, saying, "I don't wish to discuss it anymore," and retreat behind a book—where he sits playing Mr. Cool while you burn.

You've got to make it clear to this character that you find jungle warfare inappropriate in a garden apartment, that in a fair fight you get to abuse him as vilely as he gets to abuse you.

If he won't see reason, buy a pair of handcuffs and, at his first outburst, shackle yourself right to him. That way, he'll have to listen to your side of things.

**THE PSYCHOLOGIST.** According to this opponent, in any argument you're not merely wrong, you're sick. He is more likely to address himself to a diagnosis of your (as he sees them) mental aberrations than to the subject at hand, whether that be (a) his flirtatious behavior to every woman but you at a party, or (b) his announcement that you are going to his mother's for your birthday. To him, the issue is either your insecurity (in the case of a), or your selfishness (in the case of b), never his own wretched actions or ideas.

This man needs a dose of his own medicine. When he accuses you of being insecure about other women, lean back in your chair, clasp your hands under your chin, and ask him whether he's heard of the Don Juan complex. When he accuses you of being selfish for not wanting to spend your birthday at his mother's, shake your head and worry about his Oedipal fixation.

**THE EXAGGERATOR.** For the exaggerator, no fight is small. It's not simply a question of, say, your lukewarm reaction to his suggestion that you spend your vacation together taking a two-week course in wilderness survival. In his estimation, what's really at issue is the fact that "You never want to do anything I want to do."

With the Exaggerator, it's a good idea to keep notes, perhaps a diary, of your relationship. That way, when he makes a sweeping statement like, "You never go out with my friends," you can go through your log and list when, where, and with which of the pathetic mediocrities he calls his friends you have spent time.

**THE PROSECUTOR.** Fighting with this man is less like fighting than it is like being on trial. You don't know why it is, exactly, but in the middle of an argument with him you may begin to hallucinate that you are Jean Harris. He remembers every word and deed that could incriminate you in the present situation and tends to ask questions like, "Didn't you tell me when we first met that you really liked to iron?"

Here the trick is learning not to get caught up in your own defense. Look around and reassure yourself that you are in your own bedroom and not the D.A.'s office. Then let him know that you think his question is irrelevant and immaterial, and that nobody cares if his running shorts are wrinkled.

**THE SULKER.** When you have a difference of opinion with this man, he tends to look at you the way he used to look at his mother when she said, "That will be quite enough peanuts for one afternoon, Martin!" His sulking may be accompanied by an eerily maintained silence, broken only by the sound of his lower lip quivering.

Don't try to cope with a Sulker yourself. Have his mother come over and tell him, "That will be quite enough of that, Martin!"

Finally, remember this: The first principle of all combat is KNOW THY OPPONENT. The second principle, of course, is BREAK HIS NOSE.

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