To have and to hold from this day forward . . . till death do us part.

**Five**

**SEXUAL PREDATORS**

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" resonates with popular caricatures of the female temperament. Rudyard Kipling proclaimed that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male." The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche asserted, "In revenge and in love woman is more barbarous than man." As we've just seen overwhelmingly in the previous chapter, however, Nietzsche was way off the mark. Men are much more murderous. In our FBI database of 429,729 homicides, for example, 378,161 were committed by men, versus 51,567 by women. When women do turn murderous, there are specific adaptive reasons, and these differ markedly from those that motivate men.

In contemplating how different women’s motives for killing are from those of men, consider this statistic. Among the men who entertained thoughts of murdering their mates, fully 54 percent were triggered by the woman’s ending the relationship. In contrast, among the women who contemplated
killing their mates, getting dumped accounted for only 13 percent. Nonetheless, of the roughly thirty-two thousand homicides committed by women between 1976 and 1994, fully 43 percent of them were cases in which a woman killed a husband, ex-husband, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend. As with men, mating and murder are closely linked among women killers. However, a quite different set of circumstances have governed the evolution of women's psychology of murder and when it gets activated.

INTIMATE SEXUAL PREDATORS

Chilling accounts of women's fantasies of murder from our study highlight the kinds of specific issues that are involved in motivating women to kill their mates.

CASE #P2308, female, age 18. [Who did you think about killing?] An ex-boyfriend, Jeffrey. I met him through friends in high school; he's 21 years old. Throughout our relationship, my ex would verbally abuse me. Telling me that I was fat and would never amount to anything in my life. He would follow me places and not allow me to interact with my friends. He would also make me do things that I didn't feel comfortable doing, such as forcing me to have sex and making me do sexually degrading things. [How did you think about killing him?] Back in high school I knew some of the biggest gangsters and had dreamed that they had beat my ex up until he was dead. [What would have pushed you over the edge to killing him?] I'm not one to kill a person, unless my life or my family's life is in danger. So, if I had felt that he was really going to hurt me or my family I would really consider it.

Her boyfriend cut off her relationships with friends. He forced her into sex she did not want. He constantly undermined her self-esteem, and derogated one of the core dimensions on which women evaluate their own desirability, physical appearance. Although she managed to extricate herself from the relationship without resorting to murder, killing as a solution to the problems with her mate occurred to her, as it did to many women in our study.

CASE #P96, female, age 19. [Who do you think about killing?] Michael, my ex-boyfriend. I think the feeling occurred because of a year and a half of events, not just one single event. The things he did to make me think about killing him were as follows: try to control who I saw, what I did, where I went, when I went. He tried to control every aspect of my life once we came to college together. He would say mean things, call me names, make me feel worthless or like I couldn't find anyone else (even though I knew this was untrue, it still made me feel like I couldn't find anyone better). There were two main events that triggered my thought—1) he got in a huge fight with my mom, 2) he called me a whore. [How would you kill?] I never actually planned out how I would kill him. I just remember the feelings of wanting him dead (not necessarily by my hands) being much more intense than the others. [What prevented you from killing him?] I would never consider actually killing someone. I have morals and I am a Christian and don't believe that it is my right to take someone's life. I think that it only helps imagining someone is being hurt or killed that hurt you. [What might have pushed you over the edge to kill him?] Nothing... Well, actually, if he would have ever hit me or started physically hurting me I would have considered it seriously.

Again, we hear about the boyfriend undermining her self-esteem, making her believe that no one else would want her, and denying her access to the outside world. Despite her Christian values, and despite initially indicating that nothing would push her over the edge to kill, she concluded that physical abuse might have pushed the fantasy into a higher probability of reality. Interestingly, her homicidal thoughts reveal a fundamental sex difference throughout our scientific studies—women were far more likely than men simply to want the partner dead, often not wishing to do the killing
THE MURDERER NEXT DOOR

themselves. But this is not always true. Some women do envision specific methods of killing abusive mates, as illustrated by the following case.

CASE #5483, female, age 43. [Who do you think about killing?] My boyfriend, who was 47. I used to be a very cheerful and easy going lady. My easy going nature made me encounter this man who was being introduced by my friend. At first, things went well, but later I came to realize that I was under his control—it could be the black magic. I became very cowardly and he did not want me to mingle around anymore. At times, when I went back to see my relatives, my brother and sisters, he would throw big temper at me, throwing my clothes down from my flat, yelling and shouting at me in the public, hit and slapped me at times. There is even one day when he caught me with my elder brother, he raised his fist at him and they turned into a fight. He even threatened my brother that he will come back for more. From that day, I hated him more. [How did you think of killing him?] When working, my thoughts ran wild. I had this vision of putting poison in his food. My imagination started from the moment when he is back home, and went for his bath. I would put the dinner on the table and take out 2 separate bowls for the soup. One bowl of his will contain rat poison. Without suspicion he will finish the soup. Then I visualize him suffering stomach pain, then white bubbles come out of his mouth, and the next thing he collapses. [What prevented you from killing him?] I was afraid of being jailed. [What would have pushed you over the edge to kill him?] If he hurt my brother.

This case highlights several important aspects of why, and how, women kill. One is that, in addition to damage to self-esteem, women, far more than men, mention damage to their genetic kin as a motive for murder. In this case, her mate insulted and threatened the woman's brother. In the prior case, the woman mentioned the boyfriend's fight with her mother. In many other cases that prompt thoughts of killing, the mate inflicts costs on a woman's children.

SEXUAL PREDATORS

Another striking difference between men and women that this case points to is the methods of killing that are contemplated. Men are larger and stronger than women on average, so women must use different means of killing, and even in their fantasies—where one would presume they could do whatever they wanted—they conjure up different means. This woman, like many women in our sample, thought of poisoning the food of her partner. Among the means of actual murders, women are far more likely than men to use poison. In fact, only one man in our sample of more than five thousand study participants mentioned poison in his homicidal fantasies.

The following case, from a systematic study of killings of mates in Australia, illustrates just how closely mate killing by women follows the pattern of a man who becomes desperate and sees defection by his wife as a real possibility:

"Sue and Don had been married for fourteen years and had two children. Apparently, the marriage had experienced difficulties in the past few years due to financial hardships. Don had also become quite abusive, verbally and physically. The latter included many types of humiliation, and being hit across the head regularly, being threatened with death, being locked in a closet, and being forced to sit looking in a mirror while Don made derogatory comments about her. On the night of the killing, Don held a knife to Sue's throat while threatening to kill her. He had also both locked her in a closet and urinated in her face. Later that night, after Don had gone to sleep, ... Sue struck him with an axe to the side of the neck about three times. She then stabbed him in the stomach about six times with a large carving knife. Sue did not recollect the sequence of these actions clearly and was clearly emotionally distraught, requiring sedation, when the police arrived."³

Financial difficulties, in this case Don's failing to bring in sufficient money, are a potent statistical predictor of women's leaving a relationship. This accords with the evolutionary logic of what women look for in their
mates. In order to prevent her departure, Don resorted to increasingly desperate measures of mate guarding—belittling her appearance to lower her perceptions of her own desirability, humiliating her by urinating on her face, beating her up, and literally locking her up. Don had become a type of sexual predator.

The following case, from our study of Michigan murders, also indicates the special circumstances in which women’s homicidal switches get tripped. A woman in her late twenties had finally had enough. She had endured several years of beatings by her diabetic husband, and every time she tried to leave, it got worse. She finally decided that she had to act. Interestingly, she asked a boyfriend she had on the side to help her. Over a period of several months, she discussed the situation with her boyfriend, and decided that killing was the only way out. They secured a lethal dose of high-grade heroin. On the day of the murder, she hesitated at first and didn’t want to go through with it. Her husband chose that day to backhand her across the face. She made up her mind. It would be easy. She would simply mix the heroin with her husband’s regular shot of insulin, and it would look like a heart attack. She killed her husband to escape the abuse.

The fact that so many abused women stay with their abusive mates is utterly perplexing, and even infuriating to the families and friends of abused women. But if we examine the appalling methods employed by abusive men, and consider the underlying psychological dynamics of long-term mate ships, we can understand why so many abused women stay, and also why some of them eventually resort to murder.

In being dumped, men get cast out into uncertain mating waters, and risk flailing around frantically to find another woman. As a consequence of these costs, they often resort to desperate measures to prevent being dumped, clinging to a woman to forestall the ominous consequences that will follow from her departure. Psychological and physical abuse, paradoxically, are designed to hold on to long-term love.

The quaint phrase “domestic violence” and its typical analysis by psychologists fail to capture the cloaked reasons why men beat up their mates. Wife beating is usually attributed to pathology, cultural values of macho men, or patriarchal societies in which men are united in their interests with other men to oppress all women. These explanations cannot be correct, for they utterly violate the logic of how evolution by selection designs men’s psychology. Men cannot be united with other men in their interests of oppression, even in principle, for the simple reason that men are primarily in competition with other men. Men do not desire to oppress all women, for they have sisters, mothers, daughters, and nieces whom they desire to protect and defend. Men do have adaptations to control and manipulate their own mates, and therein lies the horrifying bridge to abuse.

Men abuse their mates as a means of solving a specific adaptive problem. Abuse acts to damage a woman’s self-esteem. Self-esteem, in turn, is a woman’s internal tracking device, monitoring her perceptions of how desirable she is in the mating market. When it’s low, she feels that she’s worthless and ugly, that no man would want her. By undermining a mate’s self-esteem, a man may convince a woman that she is profoundly fortunate to have the man she’s with. No other man would deign to look at her, much less entertain her as a mating possibility. In their obsessive and possessive efforts to prevent partners from leaving, men typically attempt to cut off their mates’ social ties to their families and friends, thereby curtailing social access to other potential mates. This effectively deprives women of access to counter-vailing information that could bolster their artificially damaged self-esteem.

Abuse, intense mate guarding, and sequestering all serve the diabolical function of tethering women to damaging relationships.

Women are not, however, simply passive pawns in a male game of control. Even if abuse all too often works to maintain a man’s control over his mate, evolution has created defenses in women that serve to protect them. Their first line of defense is to strive to maintain contact with family and friends. Women will also solicit flirtations from additional prospective mates as a means of accurately evaluating whether men find them desirable. And if the abuse becomes too costly, women will resort to desperate measures to extricate themselves. Sometimes they resort to murder. The psychological logic of killing in such an abusive situation has given legitimacy to the battered-woman-syndrome defense, which is more and more successful over time.

Women who kill in self-defense while their husbands are violently
attacking them are increasingly able to avoid jail time. The problem, however, is that women are typically weaker and smaller than their mates, and have difficulty defending themselves in the midst of a violent attack. As a consequence, many abused and battered women choose a time to kill when their partner is more vulnerable, such as when he is drunk or asleep. Because the laws typically state that a person's life has to be in imminent danger to invoke self-defense, defense lawyers often have a difficult time convincing juries that a battered woman who waited until her husband fell asleep was actually acting in self-defense. The majority of such women end up being convicted, typically receiving sentences that range from four to twenty-five years.

The case of Sue and Don described above is a perfect example. Sue received a prison sentence of five years for killing her husband. The judge levied this sentence by invoking what a "reasonable man" would do under similar circumstances. The reasonable man standard—a fixture of legal doctrines throughout the modern Western world—is geared toward determining what an "average person" would have done in similar circumstances. According to one summary of the "reasonable man," "he is not impotent and he is not normally drunk. He does not lose his self-control on hearing a mere confession of adultery, but he becomes unbalanced at the sight of adultery, provided, of course, that he is married to the adulteress."

Unfortunately, the law fails to recognize that "reasonable women" and "reasonable men" face profoundly different adaptive problems, which call for different adaptive solutions. Because of differences in size and strength, a man abused by his wife does not face the same level or probability of physical threat or forced sequestering. Men can more easily walk out the door. Women sometimes cannot, as in the case of Sheila Bellush at the start of this book. Thanks in part to research on the battered-woman's syndrome, the laws are gradually changing to recognize that there is no such thing as a generic "reasonable person" when it comes to murder.

That defense did not help, however, in the case of Susan Wright, who was convicted of killing her husband. Her case highlights a specific trigger that most often motivates women to kill—a desperate attempt to escape from a husband who had, in essence, become a sexual predator.

Susan Wright, an attractive blonde twenty-seven-year-old, stabbed her thirty-four-year-old husband 193 times in their Houston, Texas, home with a hunting knife on January 13, 2003, and buried his body in a hole in their backyard. Jeffrey Wright's murder stunned the state of Texas. Court TV nationally televised the trial, gripping millions of American viewers. Jeff was a charming and extroverted man, well liked by friends, family, and admiring women. He worked as a successful carpet salesman, and from all outward appearances, they had a happy middle-class marriage with two attractive children. This outward show, however, masked a much darker side of Jeff.

The couple met on a beach in Galveston, Texas, when Susan worked as a waitress. Just as Jeff had no trouble meeting women, Susan had no trouble meeting men. Earlier, she had worked in a strip club. Her beauty earned her high marks with the customers, but she quit after two months, not finding the work to her liking. The courtship of Susan and Jeff started out storybook-style. Jeff frequently bought Susan flowers and showered her with surprise gifts. He wanted what many want—a house, a nice car, a family, and a dog. But all was not as it seemed underneath the smooth façade of the happy marriage. Jeff continued to frequent strip bars, had affairs with other women, and, according to Susan, gave her herpes as a result of one of the affairs. Then everything changed.

After the birth of their first son, Bradley, Jeff became obsessively controlling. He called her multiple times each day to check up on her. He required Susan to notify him of her whereabouts day and night. He allowed her to leave home only for brief periods. If she stayed even a few minutes extra when visiting her parents or made an unreported stop at a store, he would fly into a jealous rage and accuse her of cheating. He insisted that the house be spotless, and yelled at her for the slightest departure from domestic perfection. Jeff began abusing cocaine, and his outbursts grew most violent when under the drug's influence. Several times he pushed Susan against the wall and then punched her in the chest. Susan's sister began noticing bruises on her arms and legs. Twice Susan showed up with black eyes. The intense mate guarding got worse after the birth of their second child, a daughter named Kaily.

On January 13, 2003, the abuse took a terrible turn. After returning
from a boxing lesson, Jeff began hitting his son. Bradley went crying to Susan, and for the first time, according to her testimony, she decided that she could not live any longer with the violence against her or her son. Jeffrey's abuse compelled her to make a decision. She gave him an ultimatum—either he had to deal with the drugs and stop the violence or she would be forced to leave him. Her thoughts of leaving Jeff may have been partly fueled by economic factors—Jeff's cocaine abuse was leaving their family behind on bills, he started borrowing money from others to support his drug habit, and his work became sporadic. But the most likely motive was self-defense and a fear of what he would do if she dumped him. “I couldn't go on and I was afraid of him. I knew if I left him he would kill me. But I had to ask him to get help. And that was my big mistake.”

According to Susan's testimony, Jeff exploded in a rage, pushed her onto the floor, and began kicking her in the stomach. After repeated kicks, he dragged her up onto the bed and raped her—something he had done repeatedly in the past. Then, when she opened her eyes, she heard him say, “Die, bitch,” and she realized that he held a hunting knife in his hand. In desperation, for preservation, and motivated by the added fuel of maternal protection, Susan kneed him in the groin and grabbed the knife as he doubled over in pain, according to her testimony. “I was terrified because he was gonna kill me,” says Susan. “I knew the second that I stopped he was gonna get the knife back and then I was gonna be the one that would be dead.” She stabbed him repeatedly, stopped momentarily when Bradley knocked on the bedroom door, then, after assuring Bradley that everything was OK, closed the door and continued stabbing her husband, inflicting 193 separate wounds. “I stabbed him in the head and I stabbed him in the neck and I stabbed him in the chest and I stabbed him in the stomach, and I stabbed him in the leg for all the times he kicked me, and I stabbed him in the penis for all the times he made me have sex when I didn't want to.”

Susan's sister Cindy confirmed this, testifying that she “understood why she stabbed him so many times. She said she stabbed Jeff for all the times he punched her in the chest. And she stabbed him in the penis for all the times he raped her in the middle of the night.”

Although she dragged Jeff's body to the hole in the back yard and put dirt on top, she still felt terrified that he would rise up and kill her. Five days later, she told her mother what had happened. They contacted an attorney and brought in the police, who found the knife in a flower pot and the tip of the knife lodged in Jeff Wright's skull.

The prosecution argued for premeditated murder in cold blood. They contended that Susan was driven not by self-defense or to escape from a repeatedly abusing cokehead husband, but, rather, by greed. Jeffrey had a two-hundred-thousand-dollar life-insurance policy. The prosecution argued that Susan had lured Jeff into the bedroom with the promise of kinky sex, tied his arms and legs to the bedpost, and then viciously stabbed him to death. They argued that Susan was a devious manipulator, playing well the role of a wife frightened by an enraged husband. Susan claimed that she had no knowledge of the insurance benefit, and indeed Jeff kept her in the dark about many matters. In contrast, she became worried when Jeff decided that he wanted to take out a life-insurance policy on her. Several witnesses—Jeff’s party buddies, Susan’s sister, Susan’s hairdresser, and the next-door neighbor—all corroborated her testimony about Jeff’s cocaine abuse, Jeff’s drug-induced violence, and the bruises and black eyes Susan suffered. In fact, he had previously been convicted of assaulting another woman, a stripper with whom he had carried on an affair on the side. In contrast, Susan, by all accounts, was a loving mother and had no prior history of crime or violence of any sort.

After five hours of intense deliberation, the jury returned their verdict on March 2, 2004. They felt that the 193 stab wounds, the pause in the killing while she attended to her son, and the intentional burial of the body in the back yard indicated premeditation, the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and the workings of a rational mind. The jury found Susan guilty of murder in the first degree. She received a twenty-five-year sentence, and will be eligible for parole after serving twelve. Susan Wright is currently appealing the conviction.

This case vividly illustrates how the design of the murdering mind differs between the sexes. Repeated physical, sexual, and psychological abuse are by far the most common triggers of women’s homicidal fantasies, and
also the leading predictors of when women kill their mates. Abuse of their children is an additional trigger, feeding fuel to the homicidal fire. And Susan's fear that her life would be in danger if she left Jeff highlights the danger women face when they decide to leave an abusive relationship. Although we don't usually think of husbands as sexual predators, an abusive husband who sequesters his wife, obsessively controls her sexuality, and rapes her has indeed become a type of sexual predator.

The main motives for murders committed by women, in short, are self-defense and a desperate desire to escape a dangerous marriage. Women who find themselves in such abusive relationships are not mistaken about the degree of danger they are in. Many women in similar circumstances who attempt to leave their mates are not as lucky as Susan Wright: at least she got away with her life.

WOMEN'S HOMICIDAL FANTASIES

That doesn't mean that no women are capable of wanting to kill their mates, or ex-mates, because they've been dumped. Such blows to status do come into play for women too, but not nearly as often. Other issues are probably also involved, as the following account of a vivid homicidal fantasy by one woman in our study points to.

CASE #F1, female, age 38. My ex-boyfriend. He's a liar, a cheat, and a sponger. (1) found condoms in his drawer; (2) three weeks later I met him in the street with his wife and daughter (this was about 350 miles away from where he said he was). [How did you envision killing him?] I hired an explosives specialist to blow him up in his car; the car exploded, blowing him up. [What prevented you from killing him?] It would be wrong and I could not afford it. [What would have pushed you over the edge to kill him?] Winning the lottery. [Over what duration did you think of killing him?] More than 270 days. [What did you actually do?] I reported him to Internal Revenue Service and arranged to have his property damaged.

Notice that in this case it's not merely the infidelity that has provoked such intense anger. His deception fans the flames. And the fact that he's spending the precious commodity of time with another woman and her child seems especially vexing. Since she lacked the resources to hire a killer, she extracted her revenge in the place where it often hurts men most—his financial resources.

As our study of homicidal ideation showed, the average cognitive effort men allocated to thinking about killing women who rejected them was a great deal more intense than that devoted by women. During the temporal course of the fantasy, these men devoted nearly fifteen minutes per day to thinking about killing, often over periods of time that stretched to weeks and months. By way of contrast, women who thought about killing partners who had dumped them devoted only four minutes per day.

One indication of how infuriated both sexes feel when romantically rejected, however, comes from an analysis of whether torture was part of the fantasy. On this index, getting rejected and discovering a partner's sexual infidelity proves to be about equal for women and men, with 57 percent of the victims of each experiencing torture fantasies. Here are a couple of examples:

CASE #3217, female, age 21. I wanted to make it as painful and degrading as possible; I wanted to expose him naked to the world and then hit him hard to finish him off.

CASE #5507, female, age 28. [Who do you think about killing?] Ex-boyfriend, my lover. He jilted me and broke my heart. I felt very dejected, like my life had no meaning anymore. [How did you think about killing him?] Ask him out as a friend. Go to bed with him to do sex. Stab him at the midst of doing sex. [What prevented you from killing him?] I still love him. [What would push you over the edge to kill him?] If I saw him with another girl.

The key difference between the sexes is not so much in having homicidal fantasies about mates who have left them but, rather, in the likelihood of acting on them. Whereas men kill mates who have dumped them, women
kill mates who sequester, abuse, and threaten them so heavily that they see killing as the only way out.

STALKERS AS SEXUAL PREDATORS

One of the main reasons women may feel they have no other option is that so many men who are scorned become stalkers—a different type of sexual predator. In the movie Fatal Attraction, the character played by Glenn Close stalked the character played by Michael Douglas. She left tape-recorded voice messages in his car. She spied on his family. She feigned pregnancy and claimed that it was his child. She boiled the family’s pet rabbit. After Fatal Attraction became a big hit, it was rumored that there was an unusual increase in sexual fidelity among married men. Contrary to the Hollywood take, however, the overwhelming majority of persistent and dangerous stalkers are men, not women.

Although stalking is now illegal in all states in America and in most countries throughout Europe, our research has revealed that it’s a surprisingly common strategy of human mating. It emerged as an issue with astonishing frequency in our study of homicidal ideation about ex-mates.

Stalking is an unusual crime in that it is legally defined by the psychological impact it has on the victim. It consists of repeated forms of behavior—such as following, phoning, e-mailing, leaving gifts, threatening, or dropping by work—that evoke fear in the victim. If these behaviors do not evoke fear, they do not legally qualify as stalking. Many of the behaviors are ordinary tactics of courtship, such as sending flowers, leaving notes, phoning, dropping by. If the overtures are welcome, it’s courtship. If they are unwelcome and elicit alarm, they qualify as stalking.

The strange thing about stalking is that it sometimes works. Consider the following case from our study.

CASE #3998, female, age 21. Stalker, ex-boyfriend. I broke up with him and he couldn’t handle it. He felt like he owned me or con-

trouled me and when I made decisions such as this [breaking up with him], he would just snap. I could not date anyone because he would get so mad and he would try to fight that other guy.

In this case, the woman reported that her ex-boyfriend would show up and threaten to beat up every man that she dated. All men withdrew, telling her that they really liked her but she should give them a call once she got rid of her stalker. After six months, she started dating her ex-boyfriend again, because she said that there were no other men around—he had scared them all away! In our studies of stalking, we found that 15 percent of victims of stalkers ended up dating their stalkers, and 6 percent ended up having sex with their stalkers. 14

Stalking as a male mating strategy has a diabolically double-edged effectiveness. First, it inflicts costs on any man who approaches his ex-partner, often making it prohibitively dangerous to go out with her. Men sometimes fear ex-boyfriends precisely because they apprehend the level of rage and possessiveness stalkers feel about “their” romantic partners, even in the aftermath of a breakup. In the face of this kind of uncertainty, people tend to avoid the risk-prone options. They often stop their romantic overtures, which is precisely the stalker’s intended effect.

Second, stalking inflicts costs on the ex for any attempts to get romantically involved with others. The stalker makes it seem hazardous to be seen with anyone who remotely conveys romantic interest. Victims of stalkers often respond by backing off, curtailing their social lives, and terminating their romantic lives. Stalking ex-mates, in short, drives a wedge that prevents them from remating. The severe damage that stalkers inflict on their ex-mates creates a profound adaptive problem for the victims. Some women try to reason with their exes, a notoriously ineffective tactic. Some try to avoid their exes by changing phone numbers, relocating, or altering their normal routines. In a few cases, victims of ex-mate stalkers are forced to change their names and move to a new city or country. So severe is the disruption to the victim’s psychology and physical health, work productivity, and romantic life that some begin contemplating murder, as in the case below.
CASE #P2372, female, age 20. Victim, male, age 23. [Who do you think about killing?] My ex-boyfriend. [How did you know this person?] We met through a mutual friend. [What caused you to want to kill him?] I met him in April and we dated through the summer. I broke up with him because he wanted to get married and I didn’t. I thought things were going too fast. I had just moved into a new apartment with my friend at the beginning of the summer. So I couldn’t bail out, nor did I want to. So, after I broke up with him, he moved into my apartment complex—just two doors down! After this, he began stalking me. He would watch my apartment and go outside EVERY TIME my roommate or I would leave. He left notes on my car and door. He would stand in his upstairs window at night and watch for me to drive up. Then he would come outside and try to talk to me. I started to hate him because he had made me a prisoner in my own home.

[How would you kill?] It started out as a dream. I dreamt that he came outside one night when I drove up, and tried to talk to me. I told him to leave me alone because I didn’t want to talk to him anymore. And he wouldn’t leave. He wouldn’t even let me get out of the car. And I just couldn’t take it anymore. I have no idea where I got it, but I had a gun in my backpack. I pulled it out and shot him. First in the stomach. And when he stumbled backwards, I shot him three more times. All in the torso area. I woke up when he hit the ground. After this, I thought about it two more times.

[What prevented you from killing him?] I am a Christian person. It took me a very long time to get past the hatred I felt for him. Even though I thought of it, I don’t think I could actually kill a person unless they were about to inflict physical harm upon me, a family member or a friend. [What could have pushed you over the edge to kill?] Same as above.

This woman is not alone in her contemplation of murdering a stalking ex.

CASE #P22, female, age 20. [Who do you think about killing?] My ex-boyfriend. [What caused you to want to kill him?] I dated him for 2½ years. He was jealous and obsessive and the longer we were together the worse he got. When I broke up with him, he went crazy. He acted like he was going to kill himself and anyone who ever came in contact with me. Even three years after we broke up, he still stalked me and the guys I dated. [What method did you think about using to kill him?] I never thought about how I would do it, I just wanted him out of my life. I didn’t really want to hurt him. So, probably poison or for him an accidental car wreck would have been the most realistic. [What prevented you from killing him?] I didn’t want to hurt him. I’d rather he had gone to prison. [What could have pushed you over the edge to kill him?] If he would have actually hurt someone who was close to me, because he did threaten even my best friends. The odd thing is that he never threatened to kill or hurt me.

The woman above had not even thought deeply about a method for murder. She clearly just wanted her ex to disappear. Some women, however, have more vivid homicidal ideation, working through detailed scenarios of how they would kill.

CASE #PS, female, age 24. [Who do you think about killing?] Ex-boyfriend. We started dating and became boyfriend and girlfriend. Slowly I started to find out that he had been lying to me about different situations and he had stole from me. I finally broke up with him. He would not stop calling me. He would do things like keep in touch with my cousins, brother and sister so he could keep tabs on me. He had found out that I was dating someone else and started spreading ugly rumors. He would anonymously call me, and came by my job. This went on 3 years after I broke up with him.

[What method did you think about using to kill him?] I figured one day I would catch him coming to my job, and have someone follow him from my job and do a drive-by. Since I know some people who are known for doing such things as drive-bys. The one thought I harped on was simply asking my cousins, since he constantly calls and talks usually with them. They got information on where he lives.
and works. Then I would scope him out and see what he does from
day to day. Then when I realize there is a time he is by himself, come
to him and act like I want him back, then lure him out of town and
shoot him, dump the body.

[What prevented you from killing him?] My conscience for the
most part. Aside from that, if they ever found the body I would
probably easily become a suspect because people know I can't stand
him up to this day. [What could have pushed you over the edge?] If
he would have continued to be overly aggressive in pursuing me after
we broke up. At first he was but then he mellowed out but he contin-
ued to pursue me.

Although suffering through three years of stalking may seem like a lot,
that length of time is merely a year over average: stalking by ex-mates can
last as little as a few days or as long as a decade, and the average, according
to our studies, is twenty-four months.17

Women have good reason to fear ex-mates who stalk. Among women
ekilled by a partner they have separated from, a full 88 percent had been
stalked prior to being killed. In one of our interviews with policemen, an
officer recounted arresting a man who had stalked his girlfriend for eight-
teen months. The man said he was obsessed with his ex and hated her dat-
ing. He finally shot her with a handgun. “She was my girl and I won't let
anyone else have her,” he told the arresting officer. Although most stalkers
do not kill their victims, most mate-killing men do stalk their victims.
Stalking is one sign of danger that women should not ignore.

RAPISTS AS SEXUAL PREDATORS

There are other sexual predators who inflict great costs on women—male
friends, acquaintances, dates, and strangers who turn into rapists. Indeed, a
major trigger of homicidal fantasies for women, though much less fre-
quently translated into actual murders, is having been raped. Many of
those fantasies were recurrent and quite violent, vivid evidence of the
tremendous damage rapists inflict on women. The stunning prevalence of
sexual abuse of women was attested to in vivid terms in our study of homic-
didal fantasies in which the long-term and haunting effects of these attacks
were made painfully clear.

CASE #86, female, age 18. [Who did you think about killing?] A
rapist. I met him at a fraternity party. It was the last day of finals of
the fall semester. My girlfriends and I went to our guy friend's dorm
to drink and party, since finals were over. I knew all of the guys and
liked to hang out with all of them. About an hour later, the guy that
I had thoughts of killing walked in and I had a weird instinctive
uneasy feeling about him. Don’t ask me why but I did. Anyway, as
the night went on I had a couple of beers, I would say about three. I
know my drinking limit and three beers is definitely not enough to
make me black out. The attempted rapist had given me a drink
which I think might have been drugged because about 30 minutes
later after having that drink I cannot recall anything. With the
amount of alcohol I had I should not have just blacked out, and out
of all the times I have been drunk this was the only time that I can-
not remember anything from that night.

I woke up the next morning completely topless next to a guy I
knew that was his fraternity brother, not him. I asked the friend to
take me home immediately and did not ask questions. About two
days later a girlfriend of mine called me up and asked me what had
happened that night. I said I didn’t remember but did wake up top-
less at another guy’s apartment. She told me that the guy who sup-
posedly had sex with me told all of his friends that “he had sex with
a virgin” and word got back to my girlfriend and she told me. I was
extremely upset not only because of the fact that he said this but also
because I was a virgin. What also really bothers me is that I have no
idea if this event actually happened or not. The gynecologist said
there were no signs of trauma or bruising, but there is never any clo-
sure for me because I don’t know what went on. I told my father and
my father called him. I talked to him but did not press any charges
because he moved out of town, I didn't plan out his death or how I would kill him. I just wished he hadn't ever existed. I wanted him dead only in the fact that I didn't want him to do this to other girls. . . . I am very cautious around guys now and my trust is gone in all of them. [What might have pushed you over the edge to actually kill him?] If he tried to do this again.

The woman in Case #86 was obviously psychologically devastated enough to describe this as her most vivid homicidal thought. However, the intensity of her homicidal rage is pallid compared with that of most women who have been sexually victimized, as the following case illustrates.

CASE #120: I met a guy at a party. I was very young (13 yrs) and he was probably about 18. I was very drunk and he took advantage of me at a party even as I said no and demanded that he stop. Afterwards I was humiliated and very angry. Many people found out about the situation. I had to go to school with him the following semester and saw him often. It was terrifying and humiliating. I was so angry I always thought of killing him. . . . I would humiliate him and beat him severely. I wanted to beat him to a pulp and make him suffer. Sometimes I would think of shooting him. . . . I had a lot of built up anger. I would have dreams of encounters I would have with him where I would tell him everything I ever wanted to say or would become violent with him and beat him . . . punching, kicking, with a bat, shooting him with a gun. . . . [What would have pushed you over the edge to actually kill him?] Probably if he or other people had really tortured me about it, like confronting me about it at school or teasing me about it.

These are merely two among dozens of cases in our study that attest to the horrible frequency of rape and the enormity of psychological damage it causes. The psychological scars can devastate victims' lives. One woman, age twenty-one, thought about killing her grandfather:

He had been sexually perverted with me, coming on to me, trying to watch me dress, biding in my room or bathroom, and touching me. I had just moved in with him and my grandmother. I was so terrified, since I was only a 15 year old girl. I felt disgusted with myself. I felt it was somehow my own fault. This continued over a period of more than a year, and I became severely depressed. I lost all ambition and gained 30 pounds to make myself unattractive. Then I totally lost it. The last straw was over an encounter where he wanted me to perform oral sex on him for money. I lost it and told him that if he ever touched me again I'd kill him and go to the police. I didn't care about living anymore. I already felt dead.

The magnitude of psychological devastation that is inflicted on women by rape attests powerfully, I believe, to the underlying female psychology designed to protect their reproductively valuable resources. Women fear rape to an intense degree because rape has been a recurrent threat over human evolutionary history. In fact, the frequency of women's fears of being raped is one of the most striking of the findings to come out of our study of homicidal fantasies. Just as with stalking, women's fears are well founded. Although estimates vary tremendously because of the differing definitions of rape and the tremendous number of rapes that go unreported, an estimated 13 to 25 percent of all women are raped at some point during their lifetimes. Social class is no barrier. In one study of a representative sample of Los Angeles women under the age of forty, an astonishing 22 percent reported that they had been raped or sexually molested.

One cause of women's fears of being raped is the fear of being killed by their attacker. This was a consistent theme in our study. Perhaps the media have contributed to some degree to the perception that rapists kill. Rape-murders are frequently played out in the movies and on TV, and many of the rapes that are reported in the media are cases in which the women were killed. But one of the strange truths about rape is that, in fact, very few rapists kill the women they attack. According to the FBI database Crime in the United States, only one woman out of every 1,596 reported rape victims
are killed by the rapists. Michael Ghiglieri estimates that if unreported rapes are put into the equation rapists actually kill fewer than one out of ten thousand rape victims in the United States. The actual number of rape-murders, however, is difficult to determine, because in some cases the crime is merely reported and classified as a homicide without any notice of the relevant rape component. Nonetheless, all experts agree that the numbers are extremely low, most likely accounting for fewer than 2 percent of all murders. In most of those cases, the motive for murder was quite clear—to leave no witness to the crime.

One perfect example occurred in our study of Michigan murderers. A twenty-seven-year-old man broke into his next-door neighbor’s house with the goal of simple robbery. While robbing the house, he heard noises from the other room. He became quite startled, but was relieved to find that it was only the neighbor’s wife, who he’d been attracted to for some time. Things escalated. On impulse, he raped her. And then, realizing what he’d done, he killed her to prevent being caught. What started out as a simple robbery turned into a rape-murder.

Another paradox about women’s fears of rape that we found in our study is that the vast majority of women expressed the fear of being raped by a stranger. Yet many more rapes are committed by men that women know—stepfathers, sisters’ boyfriends, acquaintances, and dates—than by total strangers. Interestingly, only 9 percent of the women in our study who expressed a fear of being raped and murdered worried that this would happen at the hands of someone they knew. A full 91 percent focused on strangers.

There are at least two plausible explanations for women’s heightened sense of being in danger of murder by a stranger rapist. First, it is probable that stranger rape-murders were more prevalent in our evolutionary past than they are today. For thousands of years, rape of women by conquering warriors was the norm. Over the past century alone, thousands of women have been raped and killed in warfare contexts, as documented amply in Susan Brownmiller’s classic Against Our Will, and more recently in The Rape of Nanking, which documented the rapes and murders of Chinese women by invading Japanese men during World War II, and Rape Warfare, which documented the rapes and murders of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia during the 1992–95 wars.

If being raped and then killed by strangers was a recurrent feature of women’s evolutionary past, then women’s fears of rape-murder may reflect an evolved defense mechanism designed to avoid strangers. This defense mechanism, adaptive in the past, has been transplanted into the modern environment. In the context of large-city living and geographical mobility, the modern world creates daily encounters with strangers of a volume and at a frequency unprecedented in the human past. As a consequence, women’s anti-rape-murder defenses, so perfectly adaptive in the past, are somewhat hyperactivated in the modern world.

A second possible evolutionary explanation is that women’s fears of rape-murder by strangers reveal what is called an “adaptive bias.” Recall that evolution favors avoiding the most costly of possible errors. In this case, there are two ways to err. A woman can err in believing that a stranger does not have designs to rape and murder her when he actually does. In that case, she is at grave risk of death. Or she can err by overattributing rape-murder intent to strangers, when in fact for many of them no such intent exists. Clearly, the first kind of error is vastly more costly. The second error, what I refer to as “adaptive paranoid bias,” only results in the relatively trivial costs of avoiding strangers in lots of instances when it’s unnecessary to do so. Even if women are wrong in attributing a rape-murder intention to strangers 999 times out of a thousand, evolution will favor the adaptive paranoid bias if it motivates women to avoid strangers and hence save their own lives in the one out of a thousand instances in which their lives truly are in danger.

These two explanations are not, of course, incompatible. Both factors may well be at play. Women may have evolved an adaptive bias to overinfer the rape-murder intentions of strange men, and this defense gets hyperactivated in the modern world, when women encounter many more strange men than they ever did in the past.

When uncertain about the intentions of an attacker, women sometimes assume the worst possible outcome from being attacked—murder. Unfortunately, some men exploit this adaptive bias in women’s thinking order to facilitate the act of rape. They do this through convincing threats to kill a
woman if she doesn’t go along with him and then promising to let her live if she does. Indeed, many rape victims believe that they will be killed if they don’t go along with the demands of the rapist. Ironically, this runs counter to the evidence on rape. Most rapists give up on attempting a rape without harming the victim if she puts up a huge fight. However, even if murder occurred in only a small percentage of the cases in which women resisted being raped over our evolutionary history, selection could have shaped women’s antihomicide defenses to opt for the lesser of two evils in a lose-lose situation—to choose being raped over being murdered.

The rage that so many women feel after being raped comes through loud and clear in this quote from one of our interviews: “I was date raped at a party. I was a virgin. I have been affected so much. He actually came to my college last year, stayed with a guy two doors down in the dorm, and started saying bad stuff about me…. I thought about leading him up to a bed, pretending like I was going to have sex with him, and then shooting him in the balls.”

Rape is the source of such rage not only for the women who have been attacked, but also for their mates, family members, and both male friends and girlfriends. We found that the people close to a rape victim also often report fantasies of killing the rapist.

One man who took part in our study wanted to kill his roommate and longtime friend because the “friend” tried to molest his girlfriend while she was asleep. Another wanted to kill the uncle of his ex-girlfriend, since she had been sexually abused by him earlier in life on several occasions, resulting in her attempting suicide. He wanted to “shoot him in the genitals,” and said that he would have gone through with it if the uncle had abused her in front of his own eyes.

Here is an excerpt from the interview with a man contemplating killing someone who raped his female friend:

**CASE #P2207, male, age 18.** [Who do you think about killing?] A 25 year old ex-army guy who was also a student. He raped a friend of mine. My girlfriend called me and told me in detail how our mutual friend had just been raped. Neither my friend nor the rapist,

were under the influence of any substances. She was just walking him home when he raped her. Then he just drove her home as if nothing had happened. [How did you envision killing him?] I went to his apartment with some friends. We beat the shit out of him. Then we tied him up and waited for him to regain consciousness. When he did come to, I asked him why he thought what he did was okay. I shot him in his left knee. I asked him how he liked being treated as if he wasn’t a person. I shot him in his right knee. I told him to think about what he had done and pray to his God for forgiveness. Finally, I shot him twice in the stomach and left him to die. [What prevented you from killing him?] 1. My friend is filing a lawsuit against him anyway. If I killed him it would only make things harder on her. 2. He has a family somewhere who is innocent, I have no right to take him from them. 3. I am hoping he gets arrested and goes to prison so he can experience first hand how much he enjoys rape when he is on the receiving end.

Another man, age twenty-one, fantasized about killing a man who had raped his female friend:

He gave her rohypnol, a date-rape drug, and then called her and bragged about it to her and his friends. I thought about pinning him on the ground as I put my knee on his throat, crushing his throat. My friend asked me not to hurt him, so I promised her I wouldn’t. If he went unpunished he would probably rape again and by doing so would have pushed me over the edge to kill him.

Women friends of rape victims also experience vivid thoughts of killing sexual predators who prey on their female friends:

**CASE #227, female, age 23.** [Who do you think about killing?] My best friend’s father. Actually, he wasn’t her real father, but he was her step-father. He molested my best friend for years. I saw him touch her, and it made me very angry. He looked at me the same way that
be looked at her, and I remember thinking that he would do it to me if I didn’t kill him. This started when I was in 7th grade, my best friend told me that her step-father had made her have sex with him since she was 8 years old, and that she couldn’t tell her mom, because she thought that he would be mad. We slept with a knife every night from then on when we would have sleepovers. I just hoped and prayed that we could kill him. [How did you think about killing him?] He would come in during the night, and he would try to get her to go with him, but I would jump up out of the bed and stab him and then she would get up and help me. [What would have pushed you over the edge to actually kill him?] If he had ever come into that room in the middle of the night, I think I would have stabbed him out of fright more than anything else.

Several important themes emerge from this woman’s homicidal fantasy. First, she took actual steps to avoid becoming a victim of her best friend’s father—she obtained a knife and slept with it when she felt at risk. Second, the psychological scars of her friend’s victimization and her terror of becoming a victim herself remain with her in adulthood. Third, stepfathers are far more likely to molest and rape their stepdaughters than are men who are the actual biological fathers of their daughters. Although most stepfathers, of course, do not sexually molest their stepdaughters, having a stepfather in the home nonetheless increases the risk tenfold.

Although it is intuitively obvious to most people that sexual predators inflict severe damage on rape victims, the reasons it is such a devastating kind of attack for those who are not killed, and is considered one of the great violations of our social rules, are worth closer examination. From an evolutionary perspective, the costs of rape are enormous. The core element of women’s mating strategies is the free exercise of choice of a mating partner. Recall that, because women invest so heavily in children, and can bear only a small number in their lifetimes, evolution has crafted a female psychology that puts great stock in the process of choosing a high quality mate. The repertoire of women’s choice criteria includes an elaborate menu

of mate preferences, close scrutiny over extended time of the qualities of potential candidates, and a deep evaluation of love and commitment.

In one brutal moment, a rapist shatters the sophisticated strategies women have evolved to select, attract, and retain precisely the right mate. A raped woman risks an unwanted and untimely pregnancy with a man she has not chosen—a man who imposes himself against her will, and a man who is almost invariably lower in mate value than she desires.

To compound the circumvention of female choice, a raped woman risks being blamed, punished, or abandoned by her regular mate, friends, and even family. Some may erroneously suspect that she was complicit, that the forced sex might somehow have been consensual, or that she had done something to bring the rape on herself. Indeed, many men whose partners have been raped express the feeling that they are now left with “damaged goods.” They report that they cannot bear the thought of remaining with a woman who has been sexually violated by another man. According to one study, more than 80 percent of couples in which the woman was raped during their relationship end up breaking up.

When we fully comprehend the staggering costs a sexual predator inflicts on his victim, her partners, and her kin—the malevolent interference with women’s evolved strategy of exercising mate choice, the damage to her social reputation, the tarnishing of her mate value, the disruption and erosion of her mateship, the shunning by her kin—we can appreciate that evolution would fashion a powerful psychology to motivate killing as one solution to the complex adaptive problems posed by rape. Over the long span of human evolutionary history, women, their kin, and their mates had to defend against the manifold costs of sexual victimization on their own. In our evolutionary past, there were no laws, police, judges, juries, or jails. Justice remained in the hands of the victims, their partners, their friends, and their kin.

It would be shocking if evolution had not equipped women with defenses and counterstrategies to avoid incurring the costs of sexual predation, and to manage the costs in its aftermath. The pervasive fear of being raped is one of these defenses. Another is choosing “special friends”—that
is, opposite-sex friends who care enough about a woman to protect and defend her, or whose presence deters potential rapists. A third defense women use is to surround themselves with kin who act as deterrents. A fourth is choosing men as mates who essentially act as “bodyguards,” protecting them against sexually aggressive men. Resorting to homicide is, of course, also one of these evolved defenses.

Homicidal psychology—thoughts about killing, threats of killing, and the actual killing of sexual predators—serves several key adaptive functions for women. First, such mechanisms motivate women to avoid circumstances in which they are at risk of rape. Second, they prompt women to arm themselves with weapons, as in the case of the girl who slept with a knife under her pillow when sleeping over at her friend’s house. Third, they motivate women to enlist the aid of friends and family. Fourth, threats of death sometimes succeed in warding off a sexual predator, as in the case of the grandfather who finally stopped molesting his teenage granddaughter when she threatened to kill him. Fifth, killing rapists terminates ongoing sexual victimization. Sixth, it sends a strong signal to other males that the woman is not sexually exploitable and will not tolerate sexual trespass without violent retribution. Seventh, in principle, it helps to preserve her desirability in the mating market.

As with most instances of homicidal fantasies, few thoughts are translated into deeds. Most people work through cost-benefit calculations, figure out alternative means of solving the problem, and decide that the costs of killing are too high. Thoughts of murdering sexual predators, however, would not be so prevalent if women weren’t prepared to follow through on them sometimes.

An illustrative case comes from our study of Michigan murders. Clarice, age twenty-four, with a high-school degree, was hanging out with a friend named Mark one evening in her apartment. At one point, Mark asked her for sex. She agreed at first. They lay on the couch, with him between her legs: “He was rubbing his penis against my vagina trying to get an erection. He was taking a long time. I was getting tired, and he was getting heavy, and it was irritating my vagina. So I asked him to stop.” He refused, saying, “You are going to lay here and give me this pussy.” She tried to push him off again, but he pinned her down. “I was trying to get him off me and get away from him. I finally pushed him off and jumped up. I was asking him, ‘Mark, why are you doing this?’ In the past, he would always stop when I asked him to stop. He’d say ‘damn’ or get upset but this night he did not want to stop. I don’t know why, it just scared me. I saw a knife on the counter. He grabbed me and we started to wrestle. I turned around and started stabbing him. When I poked him I had to poke him a couple of times because he was still fighting and the more he was fighting the more I was poking him. He fell to the floor, and finally said ‘I can’t take it no more.’ That’s when I stopped.” An autopsy revealed eleven stab wounds. According to the forensic examiner, Clarice was considered average in intelligence, did not suffer from any disorder of thought or mood at the time of the alleged offense, and had the capacity to distinguish right from wrong. She did not meet the criteria for the diminished capacity of legal insanity. She used enough force to prevent being raped, and ended up killing a sexual predator.

Clarice is not alone in using murder to stop a rapist. In July 2002, in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, a woman who wishes to go by the pseudonym of “Mira” awoke at 1:30 a.m. to find a man straddled on top of her. He had a flashlight focused on her face and a gun pointed at her chest. The man, Michael Magirl, fifty-one years old, had done this before. Indeed, he was a convicted sexual predator, having been convicted eighteen years earlier of criminal sexual penetration. He’s listed on the New Mexico Web site of convicted sex offenders. This time, he preyed on a woman who showed great bravery. Mira was a single mom around thirty years old. She later said that she “acted only on instinct, and was driven by the desire to survive.” Mira thrust the gun away from her chest, but he threatened her life: “Do you want to die?” Something in her mind snapped, and she later described her condition then as “a dream state.” She suddenly lunged and managed to wrestle the .38-caliber gun from her assailant, push him onto the floor, and fire three shots into his prone body. Two met their mark, embedding themselves in his chest. Not knowing if he was dead or alive, she ripped the pantyhose mask from his face so she could later ID him, ran to a neighbor’s house, and called the police. By the time the cops arrived, Magirl was
dead. Mira killed to prevent being raped, and permanently stopped a serial sexual predator. The killing was judged to be self-defense, and Mira was not charged with a crime.

On November 18, 1998, a man wearing gloves and a mask, hunting knife in hand, broke into an apartment housing a University of North Carolina teenage college student. His name was Adrian Cathey, and he had done this before. He prodded her with his hunting knife to awaken her, held a knife to her neck, and then prepared to rape her. Thinking quickly as he fumbled with his pants, she reached into her nightstand drawer and silently slipped a pistol into her hand. Her aim was true, and soon Adrian Cathey lay dead in a pool of his own blood. Subsequent DNA tests revealed that he was a sexual predator who had been linked with violent sexual assaults on four other students.

Farther south, in Pasco County, Florida, Maria Pittaras’s story unfolded in a similar fashion. Maria awoke late one night in her own home to find a stranger sitting astride her body, his face concealed beneath a black mask. While he held a knife to her throat, she managed to pull a gun from her nightstand and shoot Robert Metz to death. The emergency center recorded her terrified call: “I just shot a man. A man was just in my house and tried raping me...” Police found Metz’s inert body, a bullet hole in his neck, the knife still clenched in his fist.

In all of these cases, the young women could be considered fortunate, yet they all have to live with the terrible memory of their violent defensive acts. Killing their assailants prevented them from being raped, possibly saving their lives, and they were not charged with a crime. Véronique Akobe, a twenty-three-year-old immigrant from the Ivory Coast working in Nice, France, was not so lucky. Ms. Akobe worked as an underpaid maid, putting up with small wages because she lacked working papers. Her wealthy boss, sixty-three-year-old Georges Scharf, and his son, twenty-two-year-old Thierry Scharf, raped her repeatedly. Véronique described them as holding her by the neck and cupping a hand over her mouth to prevent her from screaming. As one held her down, the other would rape or sodomize her. Father and son took turns. Her options were limited. After the third brutal attack, she decided to take action. She secured a knife and stabbed both father and son, wounding one and killing the other. Medical examination of Véronique revealed lesions consistent with forced anal sex. She told others: “They killed something in me, something of my true personality. I killed to wash my honor.” Without funds for a lawyer, she was represented by a court-appointed attorney who failed to base her defense on the repeated acts of rape that had been committed against her. Véronique Akobe was sentenced to twenty years in prison. After serving over nine years, she was officially pardoned.

It may seem unconventional to consider physically abusive boyfriends, sexually abusive husbands, stalkers, and rapists in a chapter entitled “Sexual Predators.” But they are all tied together with a common thread—the use of violence to gain or maintain sexual access to a woman. Men use physical abuse to control and coerce their partners, preventing them from leaving, and thereby maintaining exclusive access to their sexual resources. Men who rape their wives use ruthless aggression to force them into unwanted and unconsenting sex. Stalkers, the spurned lovers who refuse to give up, relentlessly pursue their female victims in an effort to interfere with their former partner’s new romances and regain the sexual access they once had. Rapists, whether strangers, acquaintances, dates, or even husbands, hunt their victims and brutally force themselves on women whose lives are forever changed.

Although many of the women who kill do so to defend themselves against men who turn into sexual predators, they may kill for other reasons as well, which we will explore along the way in subsequent chapters. One other kind occurs in the case of mate poachers—someone stealing away a romantic partner—which, as we will see in the next chapter, is a vexing problem looming over the evolutionary competition of the mating game.