



"I love this book. It's inspired and funny and poignant."

—A.J. JACOBS, author, *The Year of Living Biblically*



"For the record: I hate you = I love you. I said it a lot. I still do. Hate you."

DEAR LOLD LOVE

*Anonymous Notes to Former Crushes,
Sweethearts, Husbands, Wives
& Ones That Got Away*



"I'm consoled by the fact that the two of you will have very hairy children."



COMPILED BY ANDY SELSBERG



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WORKMAN PUBLISHING • NEW YORK

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eISBN 978-0-7611-5825-7

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Cover design by Robb Allen

Hand with Quill Pen, Courtesy of the
New York State Museum, Albany, N.Y. 12230.

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Workman Publishing Company, Inc.

225 Varick Street

New York, NY 10014-4381

www.workman.com

INTRODUCTION

I got married recently. Commitment can be fun, but all our connections to past loves don't evaporate upon taking a vow. Part of me is still fifteen, riding go-carts with a girl I wanted to kiss. I continue to berate myself for moments in relationships when I should have been more considerate—deodorant for her birthday? Idiot! And I'll wonder: Is there a statute of limitations on flowers? Here I am in the shower, trying to finish off quarrels that ended years ago. Or, I'll picture someone I admired, and think how we could've had a fiery affair, if only I'd spoken up. I rue times when I didn't kiss back, times when I didn't appreciate what I was getting, times when she didn't appreciate what I was giving.

As a way to settle into marriage, I wanted to reconcile all this extra desire, fondness, anger, and regret. I can't sing or play guitar, and direct communication is too sticky and impractical, if not impossible. I needed a bottle for all this, and a sea to throw it into: out there, but not headed anywhere. Luckily, that's what the Internet is for. And I figured if I had a bunch of old love business to take care of, the rest of the world would too, so I started the Dear Old Love project.

Dear Old Love began as a website: dearoldlove.com. There, people can send messages to former flames and objects of affection—all anonymously. I edit and post what I think are the funniest, the saddest, the sweetest, the smartest, the most illuminating, and, sometimes, the most spiteful. A good Dear Old Love note is the long, sloppy story of a heart, condensed to a line.

In the future there may be many more arms to the Dear Old Love project: coffee mugs, pinball machines, charter schools, a perfume that smells like a breakup conversation in an autumn garden. But for now we'll start with a book—this book—which is what I envisioned from the beginning. A book because ruminations on love are best digested at the speed of literature, with ink on paper. A book because you can't really *give* someone a website: "Happy anniversary, darling. Check out this link!" And a book because the best books are beguiling and enduring, like memories of our best and dearest old loves.

Here we are reaching out to the ones that got away, and the ones we held onto for years. This is a collection of notes from the world, to the world. And they all begin, "Dear Old Love..."

—Andy Selsberg

Dear Old Love...

HAPPY ENDING

I'm so glad it didn't work out the way I wanted it to.

ADVICE

Mother told me, "Don't buy the first coat you try on." So I broke up with you. But in retrospect, I think she was talking about coats. Sorry.

PELTED

I'm consoled by the fact that the two of you will have very hairy children.

IT'S NOT YOU

Yes, we had good sex. I have good sex with everyone. That's me.

BLUE RULES

Putting ketchup in a bowl, no drinking from cans because you'll cut your lip, special slippers for guests. Being at your mom's house was like those crazy laws from the 1800s that say you can't walk a duck on a leash in Pennsylvania.

BIG SOLO

When I play air guitar, you're my air audience.

BOWLED OVER

I can't believe I miss hearing you yell "Now that's what I'm talking about!" after bowel movements you were particularly proud of.

U OF YOU

You were the only worthwhile thing I studied in college.

TONIGHT'S SPECIAL

I never tired of looking at you over the tops of menus.

DOPPIO

Since you left, I still make two cups of coffee in the morning. I drink both of them.

FLAKE

*I'm dreading the first snowfall, because I'll have to remember a Sunday, white sheets,
and pillow creases on your face.*

—◆—
XMAS

The earrings were nice. But what I really wanted was an orgasm.

—◆—
HEY BABY

***If all I cared about was producing a genetic masterpiece, I would've stayed
with you.***

—◆—
LAB WORK

*You taught me how long I can handle a relationship based solely on sexual chemistry.
Seven months.*

—◆—
SHHHH

*I would have been happy with our secret love affair forever. We could have secretly
moved to California and had secret jobs on a secret vineyard.*

—◆—
LOVE IN THE TIME OF LUNESTA

They set us up because we both have trouble sleeping. That should have been a sign.

—◆—
PET PEEVED

***I don't care that you miss my dog. When you cheated on
me, you cheated on him, too.***

—◆—
GO BALD ALREADY

*I hate the idea of you keeping all your hair and me not being able to touch it whenever
I want.*

—◆—
CLASS NOTES

*You should publish an alumni newsletter for everyone you've dated. I'd like to see
what my colleagues are up to. We're a good group.*

—◆—
MISSING MISS

Your maiden name lives on hard in my fantasy world.

—◆—
MRS. HIM

***I still use your last name when I doodle my future
signature.***

IS THIS YOUR FLOOR?

I smelled your perfume on an elevator and it took me back ten years. An old woman dressed like a teenager was wearing it.

MEGAPIXEL REGRET

I wish we'd invested in a better camera. And used it.

UNSUBSCRIBED

A woman called for you yesterday. I started to tell her off, but she was just selling subscriptions to The Chronicle.

SO CLOSE BUT YET

Why are you my best friend, and not my best husband?

MAGINOT LINING

Remember in tenth grade when I said we should meet at Victoria's Secret, and you showed up with your friends? I was giving you a visa to the land of adult sexuality, and you tried to smuggle three doofuses across the border.

OVERBLOWN

You blew me all out of proportion.

LUCKY STRIKE

I have to believe our relationship continues to play out in all those particles of cigarette smoke we exhaled together.

REST IN PEACE

I always preferred your pillow. Now that it's mine I don't like it so much.

RIBBED

I wish we'd been close enough for you to go on the pill.

TIED UP

Your penchant for neck scarves makes me want to autoerotically asphyxiate myself by way of tribute.

MOMENT OF CLARITIN

***I discovered the hard way that I'm allergic to your cat,
your laundry detergent, and your deepest beliefs.***

—◆—
PAGING MR. SNOTBORG

I let you go because I couldn't stand your last name.

—◆—
IN MY LEAGUE, BRIEFLY

***Your laughter was music. Your eyes were jewels. Even your farts smelled
like Shalimar. Thank you for rebounding off me.***

—◆—
IDIOCRACY

I still say you're an idiot for not falling in love with me.

—◆—
MEASUREMENT

*Even though we broke up five years ago, I still rate the way I feel about someone new
on a scale that goes from Zero to You.*

—◆—
CLASSIFIED

***I ran that Missed Connection notice looking for you for so long it became a
regular feature, like those beret ads in the back of The New Yorker.***

—◆—
TRADING DOWN

*You gave the impression that being with me was settling, which I was fine with, but
then you didn't settle.*

—◆—
SHAKE

I could only get so stoned on the stems, seeds, and resin of your affection.

—◆—
LAMENT

It's so hard to cyberstalk a technophobe.

—◆—
BALANCE

*I do not miss your drunken rages. I do not miss paying for everything. I absolutely do
not miss your insane family, and I do not miss uncovering your many lies. However, I
think of you often while masturbating.*

—◆—
TOUGH JOB

***Every morning my boss asks if I'm all right. Every
morning I lie.***

1-2-3-4-5

Please change your e-mail password. I'm addicted.

DRESS CODE

You taught me: If he dresses like a douchebag, he's probably a douchebag.

ONE NOTE

I stopped talking to everyone who grew tired of hearing me talk about you. So now I don't really talk to anyone.

TOUCHDOWN

I root for the Giants because of you. My husband has no idea.

IS THIS THING ON?

I realized later on that our blowjob-centric sex belied deep issues about your experiences with intercourse. You were telling me you had problems and I didn't listen, even though you were speaking right into the mic.

AS GOOD AS I GET

You made me want to be a lesser man.

COME BACK KID

Come back from Tanzania. I want to get a cabin in a ski town and have babies with you.

LOCATION, LOCATION, RELATION

I could live in the same small town my whole life if you were there, too.

REMEMBER HOMEROOM!

You signed my ninth grade yearbook, "We could've used a girl like you at the Alamo." I've had a thing for you ever since.

SOUR INVESTMENT

You operated an emotional Ponzi scheme with many, many women, and I was the last to cash out.

NUMBERS GAME

I'm glad you were my fourth.

WUV BITES

You thought the way I pronounced certain words was cute. Now I feel like I have a speech impediment.

BLESS YOU

I'm still searching for someone with a stranger and more endearing sneeze than yours.

MINUS ONE

I'm still in love with you, and you're in love with every woman except me.

SCOTCHED

I was afraid if you got close, you'd see the Scotch tape holding me together.

UNHAPPY ENDING

Then again, if you hadn't been a full-service masseuse, we never would have met in the first place.

JUST FOR LUCK

I wish I'd saved a few pairs of your underwear, to seal in a jar and keep on a shelf high in the pantry. Is that the sort of thing that makes you miss me, or glad it's over?

SCRATCH THAT

If I'd known I was only going to get one shot, I would have left more marks.

E-LOVE BUT NOT IN LOVE

"I love you" doesn't count if you can only say it in e-mail.

SNOW LEOPARD IS NEXT

When I said you were the only boy I called Puppy, I lied. I'd been calling my boyfriends that since high school. I feel so guilty about it that I've switched to Tiger.

SPELLING CUMULUS WITHOUT US

You made all the clouds look sad.

HELLO DARKNESS MY OLD FRIEND

I held out hope that you'd come rushing into the temple, tear down the chuppah, and declare your love for me right up until the moment I smashed the glass.

EVEN I GET THE BLUES

I kept all your Tom Robbins books.

FORCING IT

Ours was an Obi-Wan relationship. We struck it down, but then it became more powerful than we could possibly imagine.

AT MY MIDDLE

You never saw me at my best. Now I'm worried that maybe there is no such thing.

TELL ME MORE

I love how you always chewed gum when we had sex. It was like doing it with a '50s carhop.

WAS I WRONG? DEPENDS.

Because your father vowed to do everything in his power to break us up, and he did, I enrolled him in NAMBLA and flooded his mailbox with hairpiece catalogs and coupons for adult diapers.

LOST AND FOUND

I miss flea-marketing with you. You had a way of turning old junk into slightly less junky junk.

BEAUTY SCHOOL DROPOUT

I'm sorry I didn't trust you to cut my hair.

CAMP SWEETHEART

I know you only gave me a backrub because you happened to be standing behind me when the music stopped, but to me, at fourteen, it felt like fate.

LINKED IN

I held onto the jade cufflinks you gave me for the prom, forty-nine years ago. I just gave them to my son.

BETTER LOVING THROUGH METAPHOR

***Dear Old Love,
Our relationship was like...***

- my singing voice—way better in my head.
- a jam band. It went on far too long and only made sense on drugs. Fun at the time, though.

- a thriller that you can never read again because you already know the grisly ending.
- a perfect pair of jeans that gets irreversibly cut off at the knees one hot summer day.
- a great song that gets played so often you can no longer hear what made it great.
- the idea for a National Service Corps—way too much personal sacrifice involved.
- an inflatable guest bed—handy to have around, but yielded mostly restless nights.
- single-malt scotch. Now, I could appreciate it.
- a coin-op ride outside the supermarket—underwhelming and vaguely sticky. But still, the world would be sadder without it.
- Times Square—better when it was worse.
- a fireplace video. It crackled, and looked convincing, but provided no actual warmth.
- a Rubik’s Cube. I smashed it on the ground so I wouldn’t waste any more time with it.
- an old episode of *Seinfeld*. I can’t imagine a late night where I wouldn’t be happy to revisit it for 22 minutes.
- a possible no-hitter. We were obliged not to mention the lack of scoring until it was over.
- a banned insecticide. It worked amazingly well, but probably would have killed us.
- the core of a star—too hot not to cool down.

—◆—
RUN BACK

If only I’d thought to bottle the way your neck smelled after a jog along the river.

—◆—
SWITCHEROO

I have replaced you with a body pillow.

—◆—
SILVER FOX

Couldn’t you just consolidate and work off your credit card debt instead of going to Belize with that old man?

—◆—
WHY MATTERS

I think you came back because I asked you, not because you wanted to.

MY MISTRESS' EYES ARE NOTHING LIKE THE SUN

You are assless and have stick-out ribs, but you are tubby, too. You've read Proust in French but live in West Texas. You think a lot about clothes but wear pajamas most of the time. Your feet smell awful. All of this I loved.

WRAPPED

My love for you is like a mummy—carefully preserved, with the brains yanked out.

UNPRECEDENTED

When we first got together and you asked how many women I'd slept with, I thought you were worried about STDs. Now I'm pretty sure it was my sexual technique that made you ask.

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

I've gone through three phones since we last spoke. How many more before I stop transferring your number?

SOHO SAD

I was there for those first paintings, and now I don't get to go to your openings.

MISSED SOME SPOTS

Wish I could've saved some of your freckles, somehow.

BEEN BAD

You turned and said, "Spank me. I give you permission." But I couldn't bring myself to hurt you. I sure would like to take you up on it now, though.

IN THE FOLD

I still make those paper cranes and dollar bill rings you showed me. For my daughters.

APPLE OF MINE

I was more than ready to give you a shot, but I could never be with someone who considers chucking an apple core an unforgivable act of littering.

HOW'S SPOT?

When I see you, what I really want to ask about is your vagina. It'd be like asking about a beloved dog. "How's the vagina? What's it up to? Any adorable mischief lately? Give it a pat for me!"

FAIR TRADE

You broke my heart, but refined my grammar and sense of style.

DAY OFF

Could we take a one-day vacation from our lives and spend it wandering around an old amusement park at the edge of summer?

DOWNTURN

I should've hoarded you for the lean times.

EYE-TALIAN

I resent it when people compliment the glasses you got for me in Milan, because it's like they're praising you. But I do look great in them.

HEMLINING

I regret not being able to see you dressed in all the fashions that have come and gone since we split.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR HALFWAY

It's okay that we never made it to the top.

MAY DAY

Five-foot-nothing. Thirty-seven. Red hair past your ass. Five cats. White convertible with overdue payments. Unblended lipliner. Playboy tattoo. Day tripper. You had more red flags than Mother Russia.

ROCKY ROAD

I got fat after we broke up, but don't let that swell your head. It was more because I was working at the ice cream store.

WILLIAM'S PENN

When I get a hard-on, it points towards Philadelphia. It thinks you're still there.

FIFTEEN MINUTES OF LAME

You left me for someone who doesn't know who Andy Warhol is.

SQUASHED

We would have stayed together longer if you weren't such a militant vegan. But I will always remember the summer when I ate only sides. By August I

saw you as a talking pork chop.

ITTIGI LITTIGUV YITTIGOU

Thank you for teaching me how to say “I love you” in gibberish.

THE COUPLE THAT HATES TOGETHER

We had contempt for all the same things and people, and I still can’t believe that that wasn’t enough.

SHOELESS JILL

In my book, being the Girl Who Walked Around Campus Barefoot means you’ll always be a celebrity worthy of desire, even if you’ve long since shod yourself.

OPPOSITE DAYS

For the record: I hate you = I love you. I said it a lot. I still do. Hate you.

FINAL TALLY

You are the only person I ever enjoyed kissing.

AFTER FONDUE

It was a miracle that we ended up in a private room at that hostel in Paris. I’m still sad I was too shy to crawl into your bed because you kept talking about your boyfriend back home. Boyfriend? We were 20! In Paris!

KAME-KAME-HA

I miss the ninja yells while you tickled me to tears.

TYPIST

I hate when people ask me what my “type” is. Because I always end up describing you.

BOYS MATURE SLOWER

I needed ten years to catch up with you.

EXTRA, EXTRA

My Times subscription is still in your name. Either you never look at your credit card statement, or you want to stay in my life by providing me with a hard copy of the news.

GRADE A

You are a gigantic ass. And not the good kind of gigantic ass, like my ass.

HEY LADYSMITH

I thought your “sixy” South African accent made up for the extra weight, but try telling that to my friends.

LATE FEE

I asked for my DVDs back, but what I really wanted was for you to return all the love I gave you.

CHICAGO HOPELESS

I accept the fact that I supported you through medical school. I don’t think it’s wrong of me to expect free health advice and prescriptions on demand for life.

STYLE POINTS

I keep trying to get my hair back to exactly the way it was when you loved me.

MARLBORO FIGHTS

I thought it was sweet the way you smoked a pack every time we had a big argument.

CYBER SUMMARY

Online: you were perfect. Then: disaster.

I’VE TRIED

All this would be so much easier if I hated you.

ALL ABOUT YU

I studied enough Italian to have conversations with your parents, but you only learned enough Cantonese to count to ten.

NO-NAME DROPPING

I still talk about you all the time. You’re my brilliant, nameless “friend.”

PABLO, HONEY

I practice Borges and Neruda aloud so I can read them to you in the mother tongue

someday.

PSYCHIATRIC HELP 5¢

It's nice you went to therapy after we broke up. I wish you'd gone while we were still together.

THE NOTHINGTON POST

Found your secret blog. It's so boring!

NOTHING GOLDSCHLÄGER CAN STAY

I was drunker than I'd ever been. You tasted like cinnamon. Is your name really Paco? Because no one believes me.

HERSUTE

I hope you didn't go through those hair-removal procedures for me. I like my women mammals.

KILLJOY

How were you against holding hands? That's like hating springtime, or being anti-kitten.

THE REAL DEAL

I'm sorry I accused you of pretending to be gay.

WINONA AND FRIENDS FOREVER

I don't regret getting a tattoo of your name. I just watered it down by adding a bunch of other lovers.

HAVAIANAS NIGHTS

Your shoes were terrible; I wish we'd dated during flip-flop season.

A MORE CIVILIZED AGE

It both cheers and saddens me to think that glow-in-the-dark condoms plus lightsaber sound effects comprised the high point of our relationship.

NEAR MISS

I wish I missed you, so I could do that instead of just feeling empty.

GO FIGARO

Thanks to the tragedy of our breakup, I now love opera. But I can't find anyone who will go with me.

NO VIBRATIONS

It kills me that we were too young, shy, and oblivious to use toys.

FUN SCALE

Being with you was fun, but fantasizing about you is funner.

OLD STYLE

I started collecting vintage erotica because they have bodies and hair like yours.

WELL, DUH

I miss that stupid face you made during sex.

I, SPECTATOR

I may have exaggerated my devotion to sports to win you, but my love of sitting, eating, and watching things was genuine.

MULLIGAN

Can I have a do-over?

CURSES

You couldn't dress up like an elf and pretend I was a wizard that cast a sex spell on you? You are not a dreamer like me.

TIMING MACHINE

I wish we'd met when we were sixteen.

FRESHEN UP

Do me this favor. Next time you're in bed with a girl you're not serious about, and she says she'll be right back from the bathroom, don't whisper, "I'll miss you."

THE REAL ENDING

*Dear Old Love,
I knew it was over when...*

- the back rubs tapered off to one every three years.
- you got back into the car with all that beef jerky.
- you used the recession as an excuse to stop going to the movies.
- you said the secret to a long marriage was freedom.
- you got the call about your father. I'm not good with bad times.
- you started secretly making copies of my recipes.
- you claimed to have outgrown dirty limericks.
- you no longer looked me in the eyes on video chat.
- you quit straining the pulp from my orange juice.
- I saw his silver Audi in front of your place. Good-bye, and thanks for slumming.
- you gave up cunnilingus for Lent.
- your mom yelled at me for not knowing who Rebecca from the Bible was. With the way she was talking I thought this Rebecca was a neighbor of yours.
- you had a second kid. Through marriage and kid #1, I figured I still had a shot.
- you stopped being real and started being polite.
- I started living vicariously through your infidelities.
- you didn't pay for my dinner. For the two-hundred-and-fiftieth time.
- you stopped hoisting me up onto your shoulders at outdoor concerts. And, we stopped going to concerts.
- you quit wanting to coordinate our Halloween costumes.
- you wept and said you no longer loved me.

SLEAZE LIKE US

Crawl back into the hole you came out of. And take me with you.

BOOK HIM

I finally finished my novel. It's nothing like the early drafts you read. The character based on you kills himself because he's a jackass and everybody hates him. Especially me.

LOW FIDELITY

I put on the mixes you made for me just to hear everyone complain about how terrible they are.

DARN IT

You like the club scene. I like to knit. You said that wouldn't matter. It did.

INDECENT PROPOSAL

I didn't want to say yes. It's just that it's very hard to say no when someone whips out a ring on top of Table Mountain and his family is at the bottom waiting to celebrate the "good news."

AN AMERICAN CLASSIC

I liked your roommate better.

PRETTY COLD, HUH?

I had so much small talk prepared for when I saw you, but when you appeared, I couldn't say anything.

WILD WEST

When I think about you living alone in that cabin, I ache to bring you coffee, a horse, and a fiddle.

CAST IRONY

I left because you threw the frying pan at my head, and now the thing I miss most is your cheesy eggs.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Inverted nipple canyons and wild, bumpy areolae, like relief maps of Antarctica and Madagascar. I felt like Vasco da Gama. I hope they're appreciated now.

INKING ABOUT YOUR BODY

I heard you got an ass tattoo, as if there were any other kind.

SUSPENDED

I feel like we issued each other irrevocable make-out licenses, good anytime, anywhere. It's always a sad shock to realize this isn't the case.

29

You were too old to be a pothead.

INDEPENDENT WOMEN PART 1

I started listening to Cat Power for you, but screw that—I'm going back to Beyoncé.

BED RINGERS

Being an identical twin does not mean I'm