

How dare you?

by Stephen Stark

Damn it. She couldn't resist calling him.

Who the *fuck* was that?

She he'd know it was her before he clicked on, but he didn't say anything like, Hi, Ann, or some variation of that. Just, Hello, like there was no such thing as caller ID or speed dial or anything.

Who the *fuck* was that? (Which she actually didn't say until he'd said his banal insipid little hello.)

I'm sorry?, he said.

She had no way of knowing that he knew she would call, or the hours he had spent thinking about what to say. Neither, of course, could she have known that there was a Bob, nor, therefore, that Robert could call Bob back.

Bob said, As an attorney, the thing I always tell my clients is never to say more than is necessary. If you lie, you'll fuck yourself up. It's a tangled web, as the bard said. If you say too much, it can be used against you. Remember, Robert, she served *you* with papers. You don't owe her an explanation. But, if she could prove that you had been sleeping with someone else, that, in Virginia would be grounds. (It was actually, at that moment, that Robert discovered that Bob was a family law attorney.)

For divorce.

Yes. So if you don't want a divorce, don't sleep with anyone.

I haven't. I don't.

So, you're good. The best thing to do, I've found, is to try to turn it. Respond to a question with a question.

Right, Robert had said to Bob. When he thought about it, this is what lawyers did all the time, or spoke very few words, or spoke a lot of words that said absolutely nothing. He hated that.

Ann tried to get hold of herself. The wet, metallic hangover clung to her and she was way too grumpy

Ann here: I was not grumpy. I was seriously, furiously pissed.

to be having this conversation.

She took a deep breath. Last night, she said, Who was the woman?

If the circumstance had been different, if Ann had served him with papers and there had been no Bob and no Mia, this would have been a good thing. But now he was on the phone with her—something he desperately wanted to be/do—and all he wanted to do was hang up. That was how nervous he was.

The woman, he said, because his mind was complete blankness.

Yes, she said, The one you were with last night.

Actually, he said, surprising himself, Maybe you can answer a question for me. You were out celebrating your, um, how would you put it? Your what, freedom? With Bonnie and Claire? That must have been quite the party.

That's not what I was doing. It's not.

She had not expected this, and even if she was sitting, it left her flatfooted.

It's certainly what it seemed like, he said coolly.

Oh, if you only knew how wrong you are, she said. He could tell she was furious, and he was glad of it. If she was going to do this, then she deserved her share of anguish.

Ann, he started, but she was gone. And then he felt desolate. If this was a tennis match, he'd won the point. But if this was a tennis match, there'd be another point, and another, and who knew where it would end.

