

"I can't take this fucking job anymore." I remember calling him one particularly grim morning. "This guy I work for seems to get off on fucking with me. It's like his hobby or something. I'm going to punch the son of a bitch. I'm serious."

"I figured you were just whining the past couple months," Alex laughed. "The guy must be a serious dick."

"I wish he were a dick. In fact, it's his nondickishness that makes him so fucking irritating. Does that make any sense?"

"Totally. You always know where dicks are coming from. If you've got to be fucked with, being fucked with by a dick is a luxury."

"Exactly. You can fight with a dick. It's all out in the open. This guy's passive-aggressive. Nitpicking, needling, it's all back-handed, nonconfrontational shit."

"Sounds like a douchebag."

"Nah. Not enough ego. He's just always giving me the fifth degree. Out of the blue, he'll just start cross-examining me."

"Better you than me. I'd have already killed an asshole like that."

"He's not an asshole, though. It's more a personal thing, just directed at me."

"How's that not an asshole?"

"Assholes are dicks to everyone, 'universal douchebags.'"

"You mean 'universal dicks.'"

"What's a 'universal dick'?"

"An asshole."

"Yeah, but like I said, you can't really call him an asshole."

"I'm not. You just said assholes are universal douchebags, but you meant universal dicks. 'Universal douchebag' is redundant. It's like 'white Caucasian.' Hold on a second. I have to grab this call real quick."

As Alex clicked over to his other line, Dennis walked past my office, looking in for a moment, then turning and continuing on toward the reception area. Thank God I was on the phone. It offended Dennis, I think, to compete with anything else for my attention, even for the second it took me to hang up or tell him I'd find him when the call was over.

"Sorry about that." Alex clicked back onto the line.

"Hey, if I suddenly start throwing around litigation terms or say 'Okay. Fine, then,' and hang up, it means the prick is outside my doorway."

"What does this guy look like? Is he effeminate?"

"I wouldn't say he's a lumberjack. What does that matter?"

"Pricks tend to be fancy." As Alex was talking, Dennis glanced into my doorway again, saw I was still on the phone and continued on toward his office. I knew that when he got back to his office he'd call me and ask me to come down to discuss something. "Sort of like male birches."

"What's a male cunt?"

"A scumbag."

"A cunt and scumbag are not the same thing."

"Have you ever called a woman a scumbag? No. Nobody says. You're a real scumbag, Mary? When a chick does something sleazy and vicious, she's a cunt."

"Or a bitch."

"A 'bitch' is emotional, irrational. A cunt's cold, like a scumbag, doing something shitty on purpose."

"Even under the British usage?"

"It's pretty much the same meaning. Unless your boss dicks you on a bonus or lies about something, he can't be a British cunt."

"No. The guy's real honest. It's just like, every time I talk to him, I never know whether he's going to be friendly or suddenly start fucking with me."

"There's some bipolar chick on the other side of my floor like that. They put her on pills. Now she just stares a lot."

"No, he's generally predictable. He'll show up in my office and start asking me all kinds of shit, and if I don't answer he suddenly erupts into an asshole, asking me about other cases and pointing out how I'm not managing them properly. It's like a 'sudden asshole disease,' or something like that."

"Syndrome."

"What?"

"'Sudden Asshole Syndrome.' That's better."

"Hold on a second." The red light went off on my phone.

"Hello?"

"Can you please come down to my office?" It was Dennis.

"Yes, just give me one second. I'm finishing up a call."

"On a case?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"It's some research I'm getting from a friend, in the, uh, Stratton case."

"What issue?"

"Several. Let me get back on with him. He's waiting."

"I'd like to know where we stand on the Kroger motion. I haven't seen your draft of the brief yet. I'd like you to bring that with you." He just kept talking, as though my other call didn't matter.

"Got it."

"I have to take a conference call and I don't have much time, so I'd prefer we talk shortly."

"Yeah, I got it. I'll be down in a couple minutes." *Shit. Here we go again.* Dennis would read over my initial draft and start picking apart the language. I'd tell him it was still a raw document, that I hadn't known he wanted to see it that day and was still working out the kinks. He'd gloss over that excuse by