

**An Assniation**  
**by**  
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2:30 in the morning and her phone was ringing. Nothing unusual in that. She seldom slept very well on Saturday nights anyway. Always anticipating *the* call.

She rolled over and reached for the phone on her nightstand.

As she spoke, she turned onto her left side and pulled her legs up in a loose fetal position. She toyed with her long hair.

“Hello? Hi there, I’m so glad you called. No, I’m alone, silly.”

Of course she was alone. She was always alone. In the eighteen months that they had been talking either online or over the phone, she had pretty much given up dating.

The calls always started the same way. He politely asked if she were alone and then let her barely get a word in for the first fifteen minutes of their conversation.

He used that time to tell her how much he cared for her and how he longed to hold her. Always with the same lyrical rhythm in his voice, but seemingly never the same words or thoughts.

Their initial conversations began online. There was a day when she had been in a chat room for a while when suddenly an instant message from him appeared. At first she ignored it. She never responded to people she didn’t know, but this was different.

There was something in his typing. He could spell for one thing. And he didn’t start the dialogue with “Hey, Baby”, detailed descriptions of his manhood, or questions about her breast size. He was polite, respectful, and articulate.

She responded, asking if she knew him. She found it unsettling to be chatting with someone previously unknown to her. He told her that she did not know him, but that he was impressed with the way she handled herself in the chat room. He told her that he hoped she would continue the conversation outside the chat room.

At first, it was daily online chats, mostly through IMs, sometimes in private rooms. He spoke to her in ways no other person, particularly a man, ever had. The email exchange with him had been brilliant, the prose flawless. As with his voice, his writing possessed a certain rhythm, the phrasing distinctly conversational.

And the things he said! Initially, she was convinced that he was copying material from some lover's blog or another web site. She pulled particular phrases from his email and ran them through a search engine, but never received a match.

She had asked him early on for a photo of himself so she could see who she was corresponding with. He refused. He had never asked her for a photo of herself. He told her that he feared that exchanging photos would "break the magic."

She assumed from the start that he was married. Why else would he only communicate in email or chat? What other reason could there be for his being so adamant about not exchanging photos?

Early on, during an online chat she finally asked him whether he was married. He told her that he wasn't and asked her if it would really matter if he were. Did she not enjoy their exchanges? She admitted to him that she did enjoy their correspondence. She told *herself* that she didn't want to see it end.

It was soon thereafter that he asked her if he could call her on Saturday nights. At first, she refused. At the time, she was in a relationship with someone and didn't want to

deal with the awkwardness of a call from someone for whom she had no plausible reason to be having a late-night conversation. Then, one Saturday when she knew she would be alone that night, she emailed him to let him know. She gave him her number and asked him to call.

That was when she heard the voice. His voice was as deep and soothing as any she had ever heard. The resonance touched her very being. She often found herself fantasizing about making love to him while he spoke softly in her ear.

Her regular relationship soon ended and the calls became a regular Saturday night event for her. For a time, she continued to casually date though she made certain that she was home and alone in time to take the call. After a few months of that, even the casual dating ended.

Any thoughts she had before of his stealing material from web sites were finally put to rest after the calls started. If she mentioned something...some small meaningless thing...he would pick up on it and begin speaking about it. Sometimes one or two hours of conversation on that one topic would ensue. In fact, most of their conversations often lasted until well after dawn.

They would discuss things that they had written one another in email over the past week. They talked about family or friends. The conversations often drifted to things they enjoyed doing or things they would enjoy sharing with the other if they ever met.

In the end, she felt certain that they would never meet. He made it clear from the start that there was little likelihood that they would ever meet. In a way it didn't really matter to her. Over time, she had come to understand that the weekly phone calls were

the breadth and depth of their relationship. The sum of all that they knew and enjoyed about one another was contained in those few hours of conversation every week.

She had never had a lot of success in relationships. There was the guy she dated and even lived with for a year. She had become suspicious that he was seeing someone and when she confronted him about it, he finally admitted that he was bi-sexual and had been seeing both men and women on the side. That had sent her to the doctor for STD testing month after month for nearly nine months.

Then there was the guy she was seeing when the calls started. He had been a lot of fun to be around, but there was little of what her friend, Maureen, referred to as “chemistry” between them. That limped along for a while until she lost interest.

She realized that she was probably at a stage in life where things were pretty much what they were.

She was at the far end of childbearing years. Not that it mattered; she had never really wanted children.

She had never been married, but she had stopped fretting over that many years before.

She had put on some extra pounds, but if she wasn't dating—who cared? Besides, she really enjoyed eating and hated exercise.

As she listened to him talk about a walk he had taken around a lake, she came to understand that she was actually quite content with things as they were.

He was telling her about being near a lake at dawn and witnessing thousands of blackbirds take wing from a milo field and fly west for the day. In her mind's eye she could see the wide black ribbon rise against the red sunrise and turn toward the west,

each bird following the exact path of the bird in front of it as the ribbon undulated across the sky, creating a black-topped highway one could virtually walk along.

In the next breath, he told her how much he had come to love her. He told her how he longed to hold her close to him. He described how his senses would reel taking in her scent as he stood behind her kissing along her neck and shoulders.

As he spoke, her hand moved down and over her bare hip and around to the smooth, soft flesh of her rear. She had recently made a comment to someone about her butt being the size of Ohio, but none of that mattered just then.

The words he spoke...the sound of his voice...her fingers against her skin – all of it became a swirling vortex of sensual being. Those extra pounds vanished. She was younger and so much wiser. She was lost in a reverie of what had been and what was still possible.

*It is what it is*, she told herself.