

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

MIKE LUBOW

The waitress flirts with Art as all waitresses do. Gay guys do, too. Art's got this way about him. Caryn sits there and doesn't care. They've been at this for a long time. Art's got the martini now, and Caryn doesn't. She never drinks. Tonight she's got an iced tea. Not important what they're drinking. It's what they're saying that makes it an evening out.

And he's saying, 'I keep getting phone calls from dead people, and I don't like it.'

She says, 'I think my assistant director has it in for me. She really doesn't seem to like me. I can sense something.'

He says, 'It's the caller ID. My mom calls and I see my dad's name on the caller ID. He's been dead for, what five years now? Six? And the phone rings and it says in the little window that it's him on the line, him calling me. I don't like it. I mean, I wish it WAS him calling me, but, you know, my mother's phone account still keeps his name on the number. Weird.'

And Caryn says, 'You know, when I said Linda has it in for me, I wondered about that expression. *In for me*. I mean, wait a minute and I'll tell you why she has it in for me. But first, I just thought of something. *In for me* means the same as *out for me*. Like if I said, my assistant has it out for me, you'd know the same thing. She has it in for me. But in and out are exact opposites. How can opposites mean the same thing?'

And Art says, 'The other day your piano teacher called when you weren't home. I never pick up when she calls because I see the name on the caller ID. I know it's not for me and she'll leave a message. But it's not her name. It's her husband's name. Arthur something, whatever. But I recognise the last name and know it's her, your teacher. And I know she's a widow. I remember when

you told me he died on their vacation in Arizona or something. Maybe it was a cruise. Doesn't matter. What matters is that this dead guy's name shows up on the phone. Arthur is calling. For a second there, I read the name and then think, Arthur? And then it hits, the guy's dead, it's his wife calling. See, she never changed her phone number. Why would she? And it's in his name.'

And Caryn says, 'There's another expression where the words are opposite but mean the same thing, I'm trying to remember it, do you know what I'm talking about?'

And Art says, 'Don't turn around, but there's a guy with a you-know-what sitting to your left. Man, you gotta see it.'

And Caryn says, 'Let's see, it's two words like over and under or up and down. Come ON, I know there's a couple of these phrases that do this thing I'm talking about, this opposites-meaning-the-same-thing thing.'

And Art says, 'I don't get it, what are these guys thinking? And he's got a nice looking wife. She's really kind of pretty. Thin, too. Looks a lot younger than he does. And, see, she knows he's wearing that rug.'

Art's whispering this now, doesn't want to offend the people in case they might pick up a word coming out of the booth. That kind of thing happens to Art all the time, hearing words coming out of other people's booths.

And he says, 'He's got to be embarrassed, right? His pretty wife knowing he puts that flat, dead-looking thing on his head, that he combs his sides into it so it looks normal, but of course it DOESN'T.'

And Caryn says, 'What the hell does "under the weather" mean anyway? Why does it mean you're sick? I've got one of those little books at home. About funny phrases like that? Remind me to look it up.'

And Art says, 'You know, you may think you know why these toupees bug the crap out of me. I think you THINK you do, but you don't.'

And she says, 'You could say sign me UP or put my name DOWN, but that's not the same thing.'

She takes a sip of her iced tea and looks at the menu.

'I think I'll have halibut.'

(end of excerpt)