

LYDIA

## SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

—So, says Anita, —have you seen the new guy in Human Resources?

—Who? That guy? What's-his-name? Greg?

—*Yeah*, Greg. Unless there's some other Human Resources hottie that I don't know about.

—Uh, Lydia says. She's trying to spear the last crouton out of her bowl.  
—You think Greg is hot?

—Well, duh, Anita says.

Duh? Lydia pictures the guy: on the pudgy side, goatee, short dishwater hair worn spiked, fancy glasses with rectangular frames. Nothing too special.

—I never really noticed, I guess? Lydia says. She pushes with her fork and the crouton detonates.

Anita raises her eyebrows. —A fine specimen like that and you didn't notice? she says. —I'm surprised.

—Well, Lydia says. —It's not exactly like I'm *looking*. I mean, I'm seeing this guy—

—Oh, sure, Anita says. —But just because you're seeing a guy doesn't mean that you stop *looking*. I mean, do you think that *guys* stop looking?

—Uh, Lydia says. —I don't know.

—I was *married* for three *years*, Anita says. —And so I can tell you: even when they're married, guys *look*.

—Uh huh, Lydia says.

She has trouble, actually, thinking of Austin looking at other women. She thinks about where Austin's attention goes when it's not on her, and the things that come to mind are his guitar, his records, his cat. At times, she has felt each of these things eclipse her, but not other women.

Lydia might feel *better*, actually, if Austin showed attention to other women. It might reassure her that he has an appetite for them. Sometimes it seems like Austin would rather spend time with Darren than with her. It's suspicious. She's heard him talk a lot about his old bands but he doesn't talk much about his ex-girlfriends—she's only ever heard him mention one, Rose somebody. She keeps meaning to talk to Paul about this—she figures he'll have some insight—but she hardly ever sees Paul anymore. That's part of why she started going out to lunch with Anita more often. Just to have someone to talk to.

Lydia checks her watch. She's due back at the office in five minutes.

—I guess we should head out, Lydia says.

—In a rush to get back? Anita says.

—Well, yeah, our break's just about over, Lydia says.

—You think anyone cares? I mean, does anyone check to make sure that you're back at exactly the time you said you'd be back?

—Uh, Lydia says, —I don't know. I mean, people call—

—Honey, Anita says, —that's what voicemail is *for*. You're *away from your desk*. That's the ultimate cover. If anyone asks, say you were making photocopies. Or going to the bathroom. Or whatever. Nobody *cares*.

Lydia listens.

—I take like an extra twenty minutes on my break *every day*, Anita says. —I stop off at the Walgreen's; I go look at shoes; I stand out in the plaza and check out the buff little bods of the bike messengers. You know how often anybody has said anything to me about it?

—How often?

Anita puts her thumb and forefinger together to make a zero. She looks intently at Lydia through its center.

—That's the big secret of this place, Anita says. —Nobody cares what anybody else does. You learn that, you'll have *plenty of time* to check out the boys. And then we'll have something to talk about, you and me.

—Right, Lydia says.