

LYDIA & AUSTIN

EVIDENCE

She's not done when she hears the door open downstairs, in the vestibule; she still has maybe ten or fifteen left to print. A disappointment; she would have liked to have been able to show him the complete stack. But the sheaf she has now is sizeable. It makes the point. She gathers the pages together, raps them against her knees, and waits. Listens to the sound of his approach.

Austin climbs towards his door, carrying his guitar with him. It's around midnight; he's tired and a little bit drunk. He knows that Lydia is waiting for him, and the thought makes him smile—sure, there are times when he wishes she'd give him a little more room to breathe but he has to admit that there are times when it's nice just to have someone in your bed. A warm body waiting for you. He considers, once again, what it would be like, living with her. It would definitely have some plusses—he would have someone to pick up Craig's share of the rent, for one thing, and that would mean that he wouldn't need to move out come summer. But then there's Rose. He can't see himself living with Lydia feeling the way he does about Rose. Feeling—*devoted* to her. That's the word that he settles on, every time, even though he knows that it's insane to describe yourself as *devoted* to someone when you're spending almost every night with someone else, *sleeping* with someone else, for fuck's sake. Insane. And yet he can imagine this scene: himself in bed, in the dark, talking to Rose over the phone, saying *I am devoted to you. Completely.* The scene is so clear to him; the words he says in it feel so true. This why he's been sending Lydia away lately. When he does it, it feels like a marker of his devotion. Like a piece of evidence.

He expects that the door will be unlocked, and it is, and he enters the apartment, calling —Hello?

And he sees Lydia there, sitting at his computer, with a grave look that he has never seen on her face before, and pile of papers in her lap. She lifts the papers and thrusts them towards him.

—What the fuck is this? she says. And immediately he knows what has happened, what she's seen. He opens his mouth.

—What the fuck is this? she says again, louder. And then she screams it.

—Jesus, quiet down, he says. —My neighbors—

—You think I give a *fuck* about your *neighbors*? she says, in a low voice.

—We can talk about this, he says. —We can talk about this, but I need you to just *calm down*—

—Calm down? she says. —You want me to *calm down*? I'm sorry, but after reading eighty-nine *love letters* that you wrote to some fucking *whore* I just don't feel too fucking *calm*.

—It's not— he tries —It's not what it looks like—

—Not what it *looks like*? she says. She looks down at the pile. —I think about you every day, she reads. —All day. You are always—and here her voice begins to break—you are always close to my heart. How is that not what it *looks like*? Tell me. Tell me, Austin, I'm curious.

He doesn't answer and she shouts —Why don't you fucking *tell me* and she flings the pile at him and the air in the room explodes it; pages go everywhere.

—Hey, he says. —Hey. You have to stop.

—Tell me, she says, and she tries to print out another one; she moves the mouse in her hand but she can't tell what she's doing because she can't see the screen anymore because she's started to cry even though she promised herself promised herself *promised herself* that she wouldn't. She knocks the mouse off the desk. She pulls the keyboard off the desk and it hangs stupidly in the air, dangling from its cord. She grabs the monitor; she just wants to send everything down to the floor. But Austin's reached her, he grabs her wrists and pulls her away and she falls out of the chair onto the floor and Austin's down there with her saying *listen, listen*, but she doesn't want to listen, she doesn't want him to see her, snot and water are coming out of her face, she's embarrassed and she just can't stop sobbing.

—Why can't you just tell me? she says. She makes a fist and pounds it weakly on the floorboards. —Why can't you just tell me that you love me?

—I don't know, he mumbles.