

This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (<http://www.ImaginaryYear.com>) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

MISSED CONNECTIONS [II]

—Oh my God, says Lydia, and she snaps her fingers. —I totally forgot to tell you.

Somebody responded to the Missed Connections thing I put up on Craigslist.

Anita raises her eyebrows. —What? she says. —Your subway boyfriend saw your ad?

—No, Lydia says, —not him—

—Not him? says Anita, light suspicion in her voice.

—No, Lydia says. —Somebody else. It's this guy; his name's Nate something. He wrote me this cute little note— She checks the skeptical expression on Anita's face and trails off, trying to figure out how to frame this in the most positive light.

Anita sip from her latte. —So what did it say?

—Um— Lydia starts, —it said—well, it started off by saying right away that he wasn't the subway guy. And he said—basically—that he wanted to know if I'd gotten any response to the ad. He says he reads the Missed Connections at Craigslist pretty often and always

wonders whether the people writing them found the people they were looking for, and he said that in my case he decided to ask.

—Oh my God, says Anita. —Oh my God. You're getting hit on by some guy who cruises Craigslist.

Lydia smiles and raises her palms in a *yeah, but what are you gonna do* gesture. (She's disappointed, however, that Anita has chosen to characterize it in this way: she felt kind of flattered when she got the message from this guy, as though he'd selected her especially. She genuinely believed—and still believes, although less firmly now that Anita has spoken—that this was the first time that this guy had contacted anybody this way. She doesn't like the characterization of him as a *cruiser*, which suggests that he's done this before: that makes her feel like any interest this guy has shown isn't about *her* but is just a symptom of an unsavory habit. It feels shitty, and Lydia feels a momentary flash of anger; she realizes, for a second, that Anita is maybe a *shitty friend*—after all, when Anita talks about some guy who's interested in *her*, Lydia doesn't make *insinuations* that devalue the interest that guy has shown. She says *hey, that sounds great*. She says *I'm excited for you*.)

—Did you write him back? Anita asks, and Lydia files this knot of resentment away to be picked apart later, answering: —Yeah, I did. This morning.

—What did you say?

—I said that the subway guy hadn't responded, and that I was kind of disappointed but I didn't really have high expectations.

Anita nods, while Lydia takes another mouthful of cooling coffee and gauges whether to tell her the rest.

—Then, she says, —I asked *him* if *he'd* ever put in a Missed Connections ad, and if he hadn't, I asked whether he'd ever *thought about it*—I figure everybody's thought about it at least once. Then I asked him to tell me the details.

—So you're attempting to continue the conversation, Anita says. —Wild.

—The guy seemed sweet to me, Lydia says.

—Yeah, says Anita, in a tone of voice that implies that she doesn't actually agree. —Yeah, but you know—I don't really trust how people seem over the Internet.

Lydia finds herself feeling, again, that Anita maybe thinks of her as lightly brain-damaged or something. —I'm not saying that I'm *in love with the guy*, she says, letting the annoyance come through a little more forcefully. —I'm just *flirting*. It's a way to give myself something to *do* while I'm at work. I mean, now I'm actually *looking forward* to going back to the office so I can see if I got an e-mail from this guy. Maybe it'll be interesting; maybe it won't; I'm not particularly hanging any *high hopes* on this; but at least it's something to *think about*.

—Yeah, says Anita. — I can see the appeal there. You ready to go?

—Yeah, says Lydia, frowning, trying to get over her annoyance. Maybe she's over-reacting?

She takes a last sip from her mug, but the coffee at the bottom is brackish and cold. She

makes a face and pushes it away across the table. —Yeah, she says, —let's get out of here.