

THOMAS & DENISE

## OUTSIDE OF THE PATTERN

On his way to the park he goes into a little bakery that he's never been in before. The warmth of the space feels comforting after the chilliness of the walk over. He looks at the bread stacked in cloth-lined baskets, marvels at the different textures and colors, and remembers why it is important to occasionally get outside of the pattern of your days. He feels like everything in the world has a nourishing energy within it, and that when a thing becomes familiar, this energy gets obscured, goes inaccessible. At those times it is important to look at something new. These loaves. Each one is different. Each one has been made by human hands.

He buys a few sun-dried tomato rolls and a coffee and heads into the park to inspect the ruins of summer. He sits on the edge of a dry fountain and tries to get his coffee down to a drinkable temperature by blowing through the hole punched in the plastic lid.

He eats most of a roll, throwing a few shreds to a small group of gurgling pigeons. He has fed them most of his second roll when he hears a voice say: –Having fun?

He looks up. It's that girl from Typanum, the one who always wears sunglasses. He's embarrassed that she's seen him feeding the birds—it seems kind of like an old man thing to do. He sticks the roll back in his bag.

–I guess, he says.

–I like the pigeons, she says.

In fact she herself has spent many lunch hours feeding the pigeons in this park. She enjoys seeing animals, here in the city. Any kind of animals. Pigeons, squirrels, even the rats. She finds them all beautiful. Look at

these pigeons: the iridescence at this one's throat. The gray of this one, almost blue. This white one with occasional patches of toast-color. How could you hate them? And yet people do. She's seen guys try to kick them. A world that contains such unprovoked acts of malice seems to her, sometimes, like a world that cannot be redeemed. A world that needs to burn.

—Me too, Thomas says. —I guess. After a minute, he says: —My name's Thomas.

—I know, she says. —You put CDs on hold sometimes.

—Yeah, Thomas says. —I didn't know if you'd remember. I'm sure you guys must have a lot of regulars.

—I remember, she says.

—What's your name? he asks.

—Lola, she says.

—Well, hi, he says. —It's nice to meet you. For real, I mean.

She immediately feels guilty about her lie. —Hi, she says.

—Can I ask you a question? he asks.

She shrugs. —Sure, she says.

It is something he has wondered about for a long time, but has never wanted to ask. He fully expects that she may scowl, or say *none of your business*. But he figures today is a day all about breaking out of routines.

—Why do you wear sunglasses all the time?

—I don't, she says. —Not *all* the time.

And she takes them off. Stands there blinking in the wan light. She looks at him.

—See? she says.

He looks. He thinks she's very beautiful. And she can tell. She puts them back on.

—So there you go, she says.