

## JAKOB

## MAKING CONTACT

Jakob fishes a section of the *Tribune* of the disorganized pile of abandoned papers that lives in the employee lounge. He flips disinterestedly through the day's stories and then returns the section to the pile, preferring to stare at the mustard-colored walls. He's seven minutes through his fifteen minute afternoon break.

He smells the odor of simmering coffee and momentarily considers fixing himself another cup, but he still feels unsettled by the three he drank this morning. He hoped that the dry ham sandwich he downed at lunchtime would absorb the globe of acid that sloshes uneasily in his gut, but so far no luck. He eyes a package of Hostess cupcakes, slotted into a steel spiral, behind glass. He stands in front of the machine and begins to gather change from his pockets, but then the words *sugar crash* sound ominously in his mind, and he sits back down.

These piddly little fifteen-minute breaks really make him wish that he smoked. Then he could go stand out in the chilly wind with the rest of the huddled malcontents and psychos that work at this place. He supposes that there's nothing stopping him from going out there without a cigarette, but if he wasn't smoking he'd have to admit that he was doing it for the camaraderie, and there's something almost unbearably pathetic about admitting that he kind of enjoys listening to Marvin relate the latest Internet gossip about *Kill Bill*, an upcoming Quentin Tarantino movie that won't be out for at least another year, or—even worse—admitting that he's grown marginally interested in the twists and turns of the vampire role-playing campaign that Marvin's involved in. He doesn't need the human contact that bad.

Maybe he should call Freya. There's a pay phone right over there; he could call her and work out the plans on when they're going to get together next. When he wasn't working over the summer he was a lot more willing to take the two buses necessary to get from his place to hers. He'd head over there in the late afternoon, let himself in, visit with her in the evening over dinner. Then he'd stay over, sleep in a bit while she got ready for

work, get up around the time she left, wash whatever dishes they'd dirtied the night before, and then head out to get started on his own day. It was good. But now, after working all day, if he goes home after work he just wants to stay home. And she's not always thrilled about coming down to his place, either, even though she's got a car.

When his lease runs out in June he might move closer to where she is. But he likes his neighborhood, and what he really wishes is that she'd move closer to where he is. (He knows that she won't do this—she lives only a ten minute walk away from Tympanum, and she has no interest in adding time to her work commute.)

Sometimes he wonders if it isn't time for them to think about moving in together. They've been involved for a year and a half now and they still haven't discussed it. Jakob thinks about it a lot, and he wanted to bring it up before Freya renewed her lease, in August, but things were so crazy then with her dad and all, that there never seemed to be a good time to ask. It didn't help that his main argument for why they should do it hinged upon the good financial sense of splitting rent—back over the summer she'd tense up any time he mentioned anything having to do with saving money, since she was working, and he wasn't.

He counts out his change again: he has the fifty cents he'd need to make the call. But he can't remember Tympanum's phone number. 528 something. Fuck. He could maybe call Directory Assistance, but he can never remember if that's a free call or what, and he only has three minutes left before he has to get back to scanning documents. Fuck fuck. He feels stuck here in this room, in this building, surrounded by vending machines and storage media and girders and glass, and somewhere else in this city is a woman he wants to talk to, but he cannot find his way to her. He understands better now why people love their cell phones. He finds himself thinking that maybe they are worth what they cost after all.