

FREYA

MINOR EVENINGS

Freya sits in the back room at Tympanum, and she holds a pencil in her fist and pushes against its point with her thumb. There's a window in this room that looks out onto the floor. A minute ago, Freya looked up at the exactly *wrong* moment and through this window she watched Joshua back Denise up against the counter and do something to her neck with his mouth: kiss it, or bite it, or something, Freya couldn't tell, and she doesn't want to know.

She presses harder on the pencil, and it snaps in the middle. She flings the two halves down at the desk and throws her head back and exhales at the crummy ducts above her and tries to figure out why she feels bad. She's not jealous; it can't be that. Joshua is a twit; she wouldn't want him if she had him. She doesn't want him. She's never really wanted him. Besides, she has Jakob.

Oh how she has Jakob. Lately she has more of Jakob than ever. As though he is making a point of his devotion. She finds herself missing the days when he was still in grad school, working on his thesis—back when he would *disappear* every once in a while. She can remember him cloistering up for a month at a time, researching, taking himself out of the picture for days and days—and then some morning she'd come out of the back room and there he'd be, emerged from his burrow, standing at the counter, ruffled-looking, hair standing straight up, blinking uncertainly at the posters and shelves as though these trappings were fantastically new. Some feeling inside her would rise. This is what she gradually learned to identify as love.

But his absences then allowed her to feel like she had a life of her own, and it still felt like in that life *anything could happen*. She could drag her drums out of her parents' basement and get back into a band. She could quit her job. She could find some guy with tattoos and a motorcycle, seduce him, fuck him, kick him out of bed the next morning and leave him crying for more.

Now she feels like she's traded in that life for this one, with Jakob. A life of minor evenings. They have dinner. They air their complaints to one another (Jakob's involve the small-minded pettiness of office life; hers involve the new clerks she's hired, who seem to become more unreliable and shifty each day). They sit on the couch, and watch the latest footage from Iraq in silence. They go to bed and do not have sex.

Last night, in a small voice, Jakob said: —I think we need to work on some things. And she thought *so my life has come to this*. A place where things are complicated. Where they need to be *worked out* through *talking* and respecting the other person's *feelings* and all that phenomenal horseshit. It was late. She could pretend to be asleep.

—Freya? he'd said.

She remembers her last boyfriend, Mike, remembers the way things ended with him. His red face coming across the room at her. She thought *if he gets his hands on me he will kill me*, and as he began to lunge she hit him across the bridge of his nose with his own baseball bat. It made a sound that reminded her of kicking in a jack-o'-lantern. Shock made his eyes go unfocused; a curtain of black blood rolled down his face. He dropped to his knees and she cracked him above the ear: at the last second she suddenly had an involuntary fear that the blow might permanently deafen him, and she pulled back, still connecting hard enough to knock him over. His head hit the floor and bounced. Ultimately, there was nothing that needed to be *worked out*.