

JAKOB, THOMAS & FREYA

LOLA

Thomas' MiniDisc recorder sits on Jakob's coffee table, among magazines. A wire connects it to the stereo. Jakob and Thomas sit on the couch and listen to recordings they made a few weeks ago. They frown in concentration and look at empty corners of the room. A power tool buzzes distantly. Feet move through fallen leaves, making a sound like static.

At around ten Freya shows up. Jakob kisses her on the cheek at the door. Thomas gathers up his stuff, pulls on his fleece-lined hunter's cap.

—You don't need to go just because I showed up, Freya says.

—Oh, I don't want to intrude, Thomas says.

—I'm the one who's intruding, Freya says.

Jakob sighs. —Nobody's *intruding*, he says.

Freya suggests a bar and a cautious agreement emerges. They suit up and head out.

In the dark booth, Jakob peels the label off of his beer bottle and talks about his temp assignment. —It may be the worst job I've ever had, he says. He plasters the label down onto the tabletop, smoothes out the wrinkles with the edge of his hand.

There's a pool game happening not far from where they're sitting. Freya hears the gunshot-sound of a precise break. She looks over at what she can see of the table, slices of green visible between the shapes of men. Smoke hovers beneath the light in loose layers. She used to be pretty good, but she hasn't played a game now in, what, three years. She unwraps a new pack of cigarettes, assents to another round.

Thomas leans forwards and beer spills over the rim of his pint glass. —So that girl, Lola, he says. —What's her deal?

Freya drags on her cigarette and a line appears between her eyebrows.
–Who's Lola? she says.

–You know, Thomas says. –She works with you. Blond girl?

–Denise? Freya asks.

–No, Thomas says. He has to shout to be heard over Black Sabbath's "Paranoid." –Lola. You know. Wears sunglasses all the time?

–That's Denise, Freya says.

Thomas drinks. He could have sworn that she said her name was Lola, that day in the park when they talked. But whatever. –OK, he says. –So, yeah, what's her story?

–I don't know, Freya says, shaking her head with distaste.

–She's interesting, Thomas says.

–I don't really see the appeal, Freya says. –I mean I just don't *get* it, what's so *special* about her that every guy is like, ready to cream their *jeans* over her. She's just like, I don't know, she's a bitch.

–She seems nice to me, Thomas says.

–Yeah, well, she's not, Freya says. She smashes her cigarette down into the ashtray.

A look of puzzlement crosses Jakob's face. He rifles through the slim collection of facts he knows about Thomas; something doesn't add up.
–Don't you have a girlfriend? he asks.

Thomas drinks. –It's complicated, he says.