

FREYA

WHAT TO SAY

Last week, on Thanksgiving morning, Freya stood in the kitchen of her mom's place, helping get the dinner together, speaking cheerfully and pleasantly, determined to appear like a well-adjusted adult. She knows the importance of vigilantly defending this illusion. If any tear appears in the screen of her confidence, her mother will seize the edge of it and rip wide, trying to get to the fifteen-year-old Freya who lives back there, the Freya who can be manipulated, the Freya who wants to please but can't, the Freya who feels clumsy, awkward, inept, stupid, ugly, fat. The Freya that Freya wants to forget.

So she churned the stuffing and mashed the potatoes and even was brave enough to request a glass of wine, and when her mother said *I hope you're getting enough exercise* Freya pretended she didn't hear and instead she changed the subject, saying *How's Tim?* And when her mother started in on bemoaning Tim's slipping grades, lack of interest in school, and doubtful future, Freya muttered disapprovingly and shook her head, providing exactly the sympathetic response that she knew her mother would want. The response that would prove that Freya's priorities were in order.

—Tim has a *cell phone* now, Mom had said, rolling her eyes.

—Oh really? Freya had said.

—Really. You don't have one, do you?

—No.

—I don't really think it's good for kids to be spending so much time on the phone, she said. —But Tim just kept saying about how *all the other kids* had them, and I thought, well, if I *give in* on this, at least I'll be able to get in touch with him--because, you know, he goes *out* with these strange people, sometimes he's gone for *hours* and I don't know where he is, and I thought, well, this way I can at least call him up and, you know, *check in*. Cause Lord knows he won't do it on his *own* volition.

—Right, Freya said.

—Has he even been *down* here today?

—I think I saw him down here a little earlier.

—He should come down here. He gets to see his big sister only twice a year, you'd think he'd want to see you. You'd think a visit from his big sister would get him to come out of his room for a change. Would you go up there and get him?

—Sure, said Freya.

And so up she went. The door was open so she went in. Tim was lying in bed, perusing a skateboarding magazine that he had spread out on his pillow.

—Ew, Freya said. —It smells like farts in here.

Tim whirled around to glare at her. —*You* smell like farts, he said.

—Yeah? Freya said. She turned around, began backing her rear end towards him. —Look out, she said. —I feel one coming.

—No, Tim said, sliding across the bed.

—Here it comes, Freya said.

—No, Tim said, starting to laugh. He kept sliding away until he reached the bed's far edge. Displaced CDs slid down between the mattress and the wall. Freya sat down and punched him in the shoulder.

—Ow, Tim said. —Bitch.

—You're *my* bitch, Freya said.

—*You're my bitch*, Tim repeated, in a mincing, mimicking voice. Freya punched him again, harder, and he made as if to punch her back and she grabbed his wrist and pinned his arm.

—Listen, fartmonkey, she said. —Mom wants you downstairs.

—Mom can blow me, Tim said.

—Ew, Freya said.

She made sure, before they went downstairs, to ask for his cell phone number.

—Well, I *would* give it to you, he said, —Except this number is strictly for my mad bitches.

—Just give it to me, she said.

—What the hell are *you* gonna use it for?

—What the hell do you think?

He thought for a moment, and apparently no quip came to mind, because he finally said: —Get me a pen.

And now, one week later, Friday night, she sits in her apartment, drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette, looking out the window, watching snow fall through amber lamplight, and she thinks of Tim, and wonders what he's doing, and whether she should call him, and what she would say.