

FLETCHER &amp; FREYA

# THE WORDS HE IMAGINES FOR HER

Fletcher repeats the question. —Is it frustrating? he says. He tilts his head from side to side. —Yeah, he says, —I guess? I'd like to be able to see her more regularly? And I know that that's not *really* going to happen until she's comfortable with me meeting the kid, which she isn't still? But it's OK. I mean, I don't really mind the extra solitude. I'd rather have that than someone who's underfoot all the time. It gives me time to work on the book, to send some poems out. He shrugs. —So, yeah, I mean, I guess that's the bottom line—she's busy, but I'm busy too. So I'm OK with it. He takes a drink. —And you? How are you doing with your fella?

Freya rotates her beer bottle in the ring of its pooled condensation. She works her fingernail under the edge of the loosening label. —Ah, she says. —OK.

Fletcher suspects that there's more, so he waits.

—Actually, Freya says, —can I tell you something?

—Sure, Fletcher says. He watches her work up her face into a grimace as she attempts to work out the phrasing of whatever it is she has to say. While he waits for her words he automatically generates his familiar fantasy, in which she says something along the lines of *going out with Jakob was all a mistake, Fletcher, really the one I've wanted all along was you.*

What she actually says is —I slept with someone else, and even though he knew that his fantasy was only a fantasy, these words are so pointedly distinct from the ones that he had imagined for her that they jab him. Sharply, secretly.

—Uh, he says. —With who?

—Oh, Freya says, this guy from work. It was only once, about a month ago. The guy's kind of—eh, he's—he's just a twit, basically. (Here Fletcher thinks *you'd rather sleep with a guy who you think is a twit than sleep with me?* and he feels the jab again.) —But I just *wanted something*—I just needed, I don't know, a kind of *reminder*

that there's a world *outside* of my relationship with Jakob. Things had just gotten so—stuck-seeming. Do you know what I mean?

—I think so, says Fletcher. —So was it good?

—It *was*, Freya says. (Fletcher feels his jealousy take on a more precise form, develop nuance, depth.) —And the funny thing is that it's made things better in my relationship with Jakob, too. It broke up that stuck feeling. I mean, *it did what I wanted it to do*; how often do you get to say that?

—Better, Fletcher says.

—Yeah, says Freya. —*Way* better. I don't know if I told you this, but this spring, he and I basically stopped having sex. I'd sort of closed that part of myself off to him? But after this I was able to start things up again. It was like having sex with this other guy *reopened me* somehow. So yeah, things are good. We're even talking about him moving in when his lease runs out, at the end of the summer.

—Huh, Fletcher says. He sips his beer. —So does he know? That you slept with this other guy?

—Oh, God no, Freya says. —I can't tell him. That would be a fucking nightmare.

*She trusts me with a secret, he thinks. This is a confidence.*

He thinks of all the data that has passed between them over the years. Half-drunk, he imagines the this data as a network of tiny lights that teems in the space that separates them. This new information complexifies the air even further, makes it flourish. Their life together glows ever brighter. He loves her. He understands that she loves him. He orders another round and they drink. The night rolls on.