

This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (<http://www.imaginaryyear.com>) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

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The first thing Thomas realizes after he loses his virginity is that he doesn't feel any different. The second thing he realizes is how different he feels.

It is as though he has remembered that he has a body.

In the week that followed, he began to detect a line running through him. He can trace this force: it seems to begin in his skull, then flow down through his chest, down to a point below his navel but above his groin, a point which seems to have opened. Like a fist has relaxed in his body.

Thomas heads into the Loop, wearing waitersuit under overcoat. As the train roars and shakes through darkness he tries to remain aware of the way he held his body, aware of the way his spine met the plastic seat. Mindfulness.

That evening, at the hotel, Thomas puzzles over how to be a mindful waiter. It seems impossible: the only reason that he, normally shy, can be a waiter at all is because he doesn't need to think about it, he only needs to follow the script. He heads to the kitchen, pausing to check on the businessmen at Table Eight. They want more bread. *I'll have that right out for you. And you, sir? Another Heineken?*

A segment of breakroom shelf has been designated his by a strip of masking tape, on which the word WAKATAMI has been Sharpie'd. His overcoat, folded into a neat square, sits there, and, atop it, a copy of *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. This is a book he hadn't looked at in some years, but he drew it from his bookshelf tonight and read bits of it on the subway. The

chapter on "Centering" reminded him of how much of the practice is bodily. *Consider your essence as light rays rising from center to center up the vertebrae, and so rises **livingness** in you.*

He carries a heavy tray laden with plates of prime rib and corn. He feels his spine compress and torque. He tries to block it out. He has to get through the night somehow.

*Feel your substance, bones, flesh, blood, saturated with **cosmic essence**.*

He thinks about his practice; how it will progress differently, with Janine as a catalyst. He has only just begun. The idea makes him giddy, excited, as though he has made a breakthrough.

He feels grateful, and eager.

He has plans to head over to her place tonight after he gets done. *Blessed one, as senses are absorbed in heart, reach the **center** of the lotus.*