

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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A few weeks after the scene at the restaurant went down, Clark made a New Year's resolution: to break off her relationship with Elliot if things did not improve.

He is over at her apartment now. He is sitting at the dining room table, paging through one of his notebooks, while Clark fixes a new bobbin into her sewing machine. When she's done she takes a sip of her tea, and she looks at him, as though taking measure.

The two of them quietly sitting. There is a domestic delicacy to this moment that she is unaccustomed to, a calm that her previous relationships never seemed to find. Most of the boys she's dated were full of restless energy: she imagines them here in this still room, leaping up, pacing back and forth, needing to toss off a few games of something on the Playstation, to go out to the noise and jostle of a bar—to find *stimulation*, somehow, anywhere. But Elliot—he sits. His hand rests loosely around his teacup. He flips a page in his notes. Clark watches him, and thinks about how this is a new kind of evening for her, one she does not necessarily find unpleasant. She has learned something from this relationship, perhaps, only not exactly what she had expected to learn.

They have stopped having the kind of political conversations that they had when the relationship started. They seemed unable to find a way to disagree without getting angry.

They have not had sex in a long time.

Clark thinks about these things, and she sees the future of their relationship as a succession of these sorts of evenings, silent, polite, and suddenly she feels like an animal in a cage. She feels surprised that she stuck with it for this long.

Perhaps the relationship is already over, and all that remains is the need to speak that truth.

He must feel her eyes upon him, for he looks up at her. Their eyes meet. He smiles, as though pleased to find that she is here. Neither of them say anything.

She thinks about Vonda.

Vonda is a friend of Clark's, who now lives out in San Francisco, in a lesbian collective house. Over Christmas she was back in town; she stayed with Clark for a night. They sat on cushions on the living room floor and passed a bottle of wine back and forth. *So I'm going out with this guy who's an economics student, Clark had said. If you can believe that.* Vonda lit up, began talking enthusiastically about the queer theory's critiques of political economy, recommending authors and articles. They pursued these points for close to an hour. The ideas poured so smoothly between them.

She tries. —So, she says to Eliot. —Are you at all familiar with the work of J. K. Gibson-Graham? This is one of the names that Vonda gave her.

Elliot frowns, looks puzzled. —No, he says.

—She's an economic critic, Clark says. —She's in favor of creating a queer economics.

Elliot looks skeptical. —What on earth do you mean?

—Um, Clark says. (She hasn't read any of Gibson-Graham's works; she is basing her paraphrase on the paraphrase that Vonda gave her.) —I mean that capitalism is conceived of as heterosexual and masculine. You know: it penetrates other economies, but is resistant to,

uh, *being* penetrated? A more *fluid* conception of capitalism might help to create a space within which non-capitalist activities could more easily survive.

Elliot looks troubled. He knits his brow, lifts his pen and presses it against the bridge of his nose.

—I don't get it, he says. —I mean, I don't necessarily object to the *conceptualizing*, but I don't see the practical value. In order for the space that you're talking about to exist, to actually *be created* (and here he taps the pen on his notebook), who is supposed to hold this conception? Academics? Economists? Merchants? Shoppers? It would really have to be all of the above, and, I don't know, I just don't see that happening.

Clark shuts up. And she understands, suddenly, why ideas fail to flow between her and Elliot: it is because he values pragmatism over idealism. He is more interested in the way the world exists than in the way the world *could* exist. For Clark, there is value in imaginary spaces: they highlight the way the spaces of the world-as-it-is fail us, they show us what we still need. They contain hope, and so they are beautiful.

This is what sex is about for her, too: the attempt to break through into a better, more ecstatic world. Pragmatic sex is never good sex.

She thinks it again: the relationship is already over. All that remains is the need to speak that truth.

—Elliot, she says. —I need to talk to you about something.