

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.

37 / TAKING BREAKS

Sometimes Janine wonders whether Perihelion will ever make any money at all. She was hired on to do a print ad campaign, and within the first two weeks she was told by David, her boss, that they really weren't planning to run any ads until summertime. In the meantime they'll have her prepare some mock-ups; Jean-Pierre, their primary investor, will pay for some focus groups to come in and take a look at them, but even that won't be for another few months. So for now, Janine finds herself written into the budget, with a tidy salary (although a bit less than she was making before), forty hours a week to fill, and not much to do.

Half feeling like she should be honest, and half afraid that she'd be caught slacking off, she asked David about what, exactly, she should be working on. He asked her if she knew how to use Macromedia Flash; *not really*, she answered. He pulled a copy out of a storage cabinet, installed it on her machine, and told her to spend some time playing around with it. So for the past month she's been spending her mornings drinking espresso and reading graphic design magazines, then spending her afternoon teaching herself Flash on the company's dime. *Jean-Pierre likes our team members to maximize their skillset*, David had said. She makes abstract animations, horizontal lines rising and receding on a green field.

Hey. It's not a bad way to spend her time. But one can find moving lines on a screen interesting for only so long. She's committed to sitting in this building for eight hours a day, regardless of whether or not she's actually working, and sometimes the dullness of not

needing to do anything begins to get to her. At these times she finds herself missing the deadlines of her old job, the days where she and Lee would need to sit down for twelve hours straight and crank out hackwork. At least at the end of it all you had a pile of stuff that proved you'd done something.

Here there are days that are so boring and formless that she'll get up and wander around just for the sake of wandering. Like today. She finds Clark and Paul in the kitchen, sitting around the table drinking Diet Cokes. Some curried Thai dish is revolving in the microwave, filling the room with tangy scent. They exchange greetings, and Janine sits down and joins them.

—We were just talking about guys, Paul says.

—Guys, Clark says. Her most recent relationship came to an end just recently.

—Hmph. I'm taking a break from guys; they're nothing but trouble. I'm going back to girls.

—Would that I had that option, Paul says.

Clark's comment makes Janine raise her eyebrows. She had wondered, before, about the exact nature of Clark's sexuality. She has found herself slightly drawn to the plain pale beauty of Clark's makeupless face; she has found herself, at odd hours, envisioning the slightly crooked incisor in Clark's mouth.

—We can find you a guy, Clark says. —We're going to make that a top priority.

—Guys are easy, Janine adds.

Clark tears a sheet off of the pad affixed to the front of the refrigerator, and she writes TO DO at the top of it. Underneath that, she writes *find guy for Paul*.

She was being slightly glib when she said she was going back to girls. Fact is, she has never been in a bisexual relationship, not really. She experimented around a bit in high school, kissing her friend Doris just to see what it was all about; they spent a few afternoons

that way, but it never went much beyond kissing and when Doris began to talk about the relationship between the two of them as if it were, well, a relationship, Clark quickly (and, it seems now in retrospect, cruelly) put an end to those illusions. Since then, Clark has halfheartedly identified as bisexual, more for political reasons than out of actual bisexual practice. But she said what she said just now not for any political reason but because she wanted to see how Janine would react. That interested-looking eyebrow-raise was not lost on her.

She shows her To Do note to Paul. —Okay, Clark says. —I'm going to go hang this up at my desk. And you're going to see results!

—Well, Paul says. —Let me tell you. I can't wait.

The microwave dings.

—That's me, says Clark.

