

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.

## 11 / THE RESULTS

Clark's at home, lying on her couch with a hot washcloth draped over her face, when she hears her phone start to play its tune. *Ugh*, she thinks. She had a long day at work putting the new issue to bed; she doesn't want to talk to anyone, especially not someone from Chicago Solidarity, which is who she guesses is probably calling her. They probably want her to give up the rest of her evening calling motherfuckers in Ohio, trying to get them out to the polls tomorrow. She braces herself against the jaunty ringtone, telling herself *just let it go*, but after a seconds she feels her resolve beginning to cave, and she feels around in the sprawl of cigarette packs and newspaper sections on the table until she manages to get her hands on the thing. She folds the washcloth away from her mouth and ear but leaves it laying across her eyes.

—Yeah, she says.

—Clark? She recognizes the voice; it's Oliver. This is the first time she's talked to him since shit went down on Wednesday.

—Hi, she says.

—Hi, he says.

—Look—, she begins, and then she breaks off, not really sure what she wants to say.

He gives the gap the opportunity to expand before speaking. —I'm calling to say I'm sorry. About Wednesday; that conversation—I wish it had gone differently.

—Yeah, Clark says. —Me too.

—And, I don't know, I could have handled it better, and I didn't, and I'm sorry.

—OK, says Clark.

—I want us to all be friends, Oliver says.

At this Clark takes the washcloth off of her face and sits up. She's going to need a cigarette. There are six packs on the table and she goes around shaking each one in turn, hoping to find one that isn't empty. While she's doing this she says: —I don't know. I don't know that you get to *have* that.

—But, Oliver says, —I think—I just think you and April would really get along. You guys actually have a lot in common.

—I'm sure, Clark says, dryly. She shakes the last pack: nothing. *Fuck*. Maybe up in the freezer although she seems to recall that there aren't any in there. She doesn't relish the idea

of having to put her shoes and socks and coat back on so she can run down to the gas station on the corner. —But I'm not all that interested, she says, walking towards the kitchen, —in *playing nice* with April Bell so that you can *feel better*, so that everything can go *smoothly* for you.

—It's not just me, Oliver says. —I want things to go smoothly for *all of us*.

—I just don't think that's going to happen, Clark says, staring into a freezer with no cigarettes in it. *Fuck*.

—It could, Oliver says, hopefully.

Clark rolls her eyes. —Sure, she says, not particularly interested in arguing out the hypotheticals. —Why not. She begins to pick through the ashtray, looking for a butt with at least one good drag left on it; she finds one, straightens it out, gets it between her lips.

—So—tomorrow night—I'm going to be going over to April's to watch the election results, the *Daily Show* is doing live coverage and she has cable—if you wanted to you could join us—

—Yeah, uh, no thanks, says Clark. She lights the cigarette bit and pulls on it ravenously; Good God is the feeling satisfying. She works her face into a grimace and exhales. — Frankly that sounds like it wouldn't be a very fun evening for any of us.

—I talked to April about it, Oliver says. —She says she’s fine with it—

—I *dare not ask* how you might *possibly* have phrased this request to her, Clark says. —*Hi, new girlfriend, thanks for inviting me over, oh, do you mind if this chick that I’ve been fucking for the past six months comes along?* I mean, seriously, are you on crack? And I don’t even want to *think* about what’s going on in her head when she *consents* to this scheme. If she’s really *fine with it* then I can tell you *one* thing—I don’t have as much in common with her as you think.

Oliver falls into a silence. Clark drags the cigarette all the way down to the filter and waits, rolling the smoke around in her mouth.

—I just—, he begins, —I just don’t want to lose you as a person in my life.

She exhales. —I don’t want that either, she admits. —But you have to *stop* and *look* at the way you’re acting.

—And how would that be? Oliver says, sullen.

—Like a fucking nimrod, Clark says.