

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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It's a Thursday night, and Tim's stuck at Tympanum, reshelving discs and trying to avoid making eye contact with any customers that might want his help finding something. He's mentally replaying his most recent episode with Eliza, over at Sean's place. Sean had gone into his room, with Lauren, and it was clear that they weren't coming out for a while, so it was like Tim and Eliza had free reign. OK, not *exactly* free reign—Sean has three roommates, and although they weren't around right then it was pretty well understood that they could be coming back any time, nobody knew where they were, so it wasn't like Tim could just pull off his clothes and just start *going at it* with Eliza right there on the couch. Tim tried to coerce her into one of the bedrooms—at least in there they'd have a fucking *door* that they could lock—but she was afraid that they'd choose the wrong room, the one of whichever roommate was just now on his way home, and who would try the doorknob the second things started getting good. And then there'd be the whole humiliating business of *slinking out of the room* after having gotten caught—no way, she wasn't having it. *There's plenty we can do right here*, she said, and so they stayed on the couch and pulled a blanket over the two of them and she undid his jeans and worked her hand there, a little hastily, the two of them sort of half-expecting to hear someone coming in at any moment. When he was about to shoot, she must have been able to tell somehow, because right then she stuck her head down into his lap and put her mouth around him, and *bang*, he was done. This is what he's

thinking about, now, as he's walking around, reshelving CDs. The very memory makes him feel a little lightheaded, brings a certain distant grin to his face.

Man, he thinks, *I have to think about getting my own place*. Or at least a place where he actually has his own room. He can't very well bring Eliza back to Freya's place and just bring her into the fucking *office* where he has his fucking *sleeping bag* set up on the floor. *This shit needs to end*, he thinks. *I want to get laid*. He's eighteen now—the fact that he's never fucked a girl is starting to get embarrassing, especially when he has to listen to Sean, who claims to have fucked, like, twenty girls. Tim knows that that's bullshit but it'd still be nice to at least be able to claim *one*.

Moving is the answer. But the idea of *moving* seems so unattainable right now. He's making \$7.00 an hour here at Tympanum, and Freya and Jakob are letting him stay with them rent-free, which is pretty awesome, but he's still only managed to get a couple of hundred dollars in the bank, so getting his own place is pretty much out of the question. He could maybe join up with people who were looking for a roommate, but he doesn't just want to go in with a bunch of strangers, who could all be dicks or whatever, he wants to go in with people he knows. But nobody he knows is looking for a roommate. Sean's situation is taken care of, and Matt and Nick are off on whatever stupid trip it is they're off on. Eliza and Lauren both live out in Schaumburg with their parents still.

Thinking this reminds him about the weekend—Lauren's parents are going to be away Saturday night, and so she's going to have the house to herself, so she's invited everybody to come over. Tim figures that this is going to be a good time that he doesn't want to miss.

But of course he fucking has to *work*—the store doesn't close until *ten* and then it takes usually another *hour* to finish cleaning and counting up the take and all that happy horseshit. He still hasn't figured out how he's going to get out there, either—he could maybe coerce Lauren to come out and pick him up, she's the one with the car, but he doubts that she's going to want to drive into the city at *eleven* to pick *his* sorry ass up. There's a Metra train that goes out there—he could catch the last one of the evening—but then he's basically got to commit to not getting out there until like one am. Like *one-thirty*. Fucking bullshit. He tried to get that twat Dennis to cover his shift and Dennis said he'd *think about it* but then tonight said *no*.

Still. He's going to get out there. Even if he has to go the whole way on his fucking skateboard.