

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.

## 19 / THAT WHICH IS HIDDEN

Denise sits on the couch in her living room, peering down at the sloppy pile of Uno cards on the coffee table. She has three cards in her hand. Johnny sits on the floor on the other side of the table, holding about a dozen cards.

—Draw Four, she says, making her play. —Green.

—Ah, crap, says Johnny. He takes the new cards and scowls. She watches him take a minute to rearrange his hand, and she finds herself experiencing a weird sort of time-slippage, where she can't quite tell exactly what age he is—she looks at the stubborn frown on his face and she can see that he wore the exact same frown when he was a boy, and seeing this makes it difficult to sort out the parts of him that are twenty-nine from the parts that are, say, six. And from there she can imagine him at eighty. It's like he's no longer one person but a series of people, running in parallel simultaneity. *Except for that's what a person is, really*, she thinks, *if we could see through time that's what a person would look like*, an infinite promenade of variants, forced to manifest anew each moment as a singularity because of the limitations forced onto perception by time. But if you can begin to train yourself to perceive outside of time you can begin to get a sense of that being's true dimension. She thinks of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase*. She watches Johnny and she sees an infinitely complex creature which she can't think of as anything other than an angel.

—Green, green, Johnny says. —Here you go— and he plays a green six on top of the pile.

It's not just Johnny, of course, it's everyone. She can sit on the subway and make a game of it, she can look at people who she'd normally find boring or repellent, and then something begins to shift in her head and suddenly they *open* somehow and she can perceive that they, too, are sublime, and that their hidden sublimity is inextricably linked to her own. And that's fucking *scary*, so that's when she stops playing and instead looks down at her hands.

It's scary because the only proper response to such a creature—the creatures that she's perceiving—is love. And you can't just go around loving everyone all the time, people will think you're an absolute psycho. Or, worse, somebody will find a way to exploit you—there are people out there who will rob you, rape you, kill you if they sense that your guard is down—although if it's true, what she's sensing, if it's true that at some fundamental level all these angelic beings are actually combined in one another, then she begins to wonder how much it would *matter*, exactly, if someone *did* kill her—on one level you could perceive it as the universe—God—resolving some aspect of itself, playing out in a way that looks tragic from the limited human perspective but which makes sense at some unavailable macro-scale. She's been reading a book on the lives of Christian martyrs that she bought for fifty cents at the thrift, and the stories are beginning to make sense to her in a way that they hadn't ever made sense before. But when she begins to realize what she's thinking she begins to feel like she might be losing her mind.

Hell—it's hard enough to love the people who are around her, let alone loving weird people on the train. It's hard enough to love Johnny, who is maybe the person in this life who she's

tried to love more than anyone else. She feels resentful for having to take care of him when he's drunk; resentful over all the things he's disrupted—her painting, her privacy, her *life*—almost every day she wishes that he was out of the apartment, gone. But then she thinks *maybe that's what I'm here for, to take care of him. His angel.* And maybe it's working: he seems to be trying to drink less, and there have been times over the last month where they've actually been able to do stuff that feels like fun.

She plays her green four. —Uno, she says.

—Fuck, Johnny says.