

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.

31 / COFFEE AND BOOZE

—Can we maybe meet for dinner tonight, Clark said in her voicemail, —instead of going out to the bar? Fletcher saw no reason not to comply, although he found the request slightly curious, so as they're waiting for their curry, he asks.

Clark makes a certain embarrassed smile. —Um, yeah, she says, —Oliver and I are trying this detox thing; we're trying to cut out alcohol, caffeine, and sugar for six weeks.

—Holy crap, says Fletcher. —How far are you into it?

—Eight days, Clark says.

—Wow, Fletcher says. —So do you feel great?

—No, Clark says. —I feel like shit.

—See, Fletcher says, —this is why I never do anything like that. I figure if I'm going to feel like shit either way I at least want to be able to have coffee and booze.

Clark, in the process of tearing up her napkin, shrugs. —We've been doing some yoga, too.

—Yoga? Fletcher says. —Really?

—Yeah, she says. —I got a DVD and everything.

—What's it like?

—Well, Clark says, —it's, um, very California. And if I'm *really* going to turn on the critical apparatus I have to say that it's appropriative in all the wrong ways—like it takes this ancient Eastern discipline and kind of retools it into something completely American? Something that's basically another safety valve for capitalism—you know, thirty minutes of yoga in the evening and you'll feel revitalized enough to work twice as hard tomorrow? But I have to say, my body really *does* feel better after I do it.

—Wow, Fletcher says, —I can't believe it. I turn around for five minutes and suddenly you've gotten all *wellness* on me.

Clark attempts to strike a glamorous pose.

—It's kind of freaking me out, actually, Fletcher says. —*Please* tell me you're at least still having nihilistic, self-destructive sex—?

—Well, Clark says, —without *alcohol*—

—Look, Fletcher says, —if you’re going to tell me that the sex has become *wholesome* and *life-affirming* you can stop right there, and tell me what you’ve done with Clark.

—No, Clark says, —I wouldn’t say *life-affirming* exactly—

—Whew, says Fletcher.

—It’s *hard*, frankly, Clark says, and Fletcher knows that he should shut up and start listening.

—Without booze. I think both of Oliver and I have some pretty complicated complexes surrounding sex, and alcohol is pretty good at taking those complexes and, you know, *obliterating* them—? But in the long term that’s probably not the *best* strategy.

—I’d imagine not, Fletcher says.

—In the long term, Clark says, —you have to *respect* your complexes—I’m not saying you have to *give in to them*, exactly, but you have to kind of, I don’t know, work with them? Collaborate?

—You can get them to compromise, says Fletcher.

—Yeah, Clark says, —exactly. And that just seems to work so much better than just trying to use booze to sort of pulverize them; cause that’s just going to fuck you up in the long term.

—*Tell* me about it, Fletcher says.