

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.

## 40 / NECESSARY PIECES

Lydia's sitting on a white bench looking out onto the parking lot of a church in Detroit, Michigan. Her old friend, Maria, has just gotten married, but it's going to be a little while yet before Maria and Dominck, the Husband, get to do their ceremonial drive over to the reception, they're still stuck in the church, working their way through the preliminary round of ritual congratulations. So Lydia's out here, basically killing time, waiting, which isn't that much more pleasant than milling around inside but at least she gets to be out in the sun, which has begun to feel warm again, a sign that spring is really almost here.

—Got a light? says someone. Lydia turns to look; it's a guy with curly brown hair, holding up an inert cigarette and giving her a kind of apologetic smile. He's tallish, which leaves his brown suit a little short in the sleeves, not enough that it looks comical, exactly, but enough that she can notice it.

—I don't smoke, Lydia says. —Sorry.

—It's cool, says the guy, —I'm trying to quit anyway. He turns the cigarette around in his hand as if not exactly sure what to do with it; eventually he returns it to its home in the pack.

—Do you— he says, —you mind if I have a seat here?

—No, Lydia says. —Go ahead. She moves over about a foot so he can join her.

—I'm Gary, he says, extending his hand.

—Lydia, says Lydia.

—Are you a friend of Dom's, or—

—No, Lydia says, —I'm a friend of Maria's.

—So—you live here in Detroit?

—Used to, says Lydia. —I mean, I grew up here; that's how her and I know one another—  
but I'm in Chicago now.

—Oh, really? says Gary. —I spent a year in Chicago a while back—it's a nice city.

—It's all right, Lydia says. —What were you doing out in Chicago?

—Um, Gary says. He screws up his face a little, as if seeking a diplomatic wording. —A  
girl, basically.

—Ah, Lydia says.

—I'll spare you the whole set of gory details, Gary says.

—I appreciate it, Lydia says.

—It was a long time ago, Gary says. —So what about you? What are you doing out in Chicago?

She begins to tell him. It's the *job* conversation, a conversation she's had at a million different parties and events; she's doing her part right now, explaining what Delphi does, and what she does for them, and in a minute she'll ask him what he does, and he'll do his part—it's the kind of conversation that she normally dreads having because of the way it encourages both parties to just run on autopilot. But today, frankly, she's grateful for the attention. She didn't intend to be here by herself. A month ago she asked Nate to come to this wedding with her, and he agreed, but over the last two weeks he's been really weird about her, even more weird than usual—he's always been squeamish about kissing her, but lately he's even been begging off from seeing her, canceling their plans at the last minute, stuff like that. As the wedding drew closer she kept waiting for him to confirm—sort of a test, she wanted to see how long it would take him—and he kept not mentioning it, and she kept not mentioning it, and finally she just decided *fuck it*, she'd go without him. She didn't even call to tell him.

She's not sure whether it's time to just admit that her relationship with Nate is flat-out *inviabile* or what. She keeps telling herself that if she's only *patient enough* with his basic, his whatever-you'd-call-it, his *retardedness*, that maybe he'd get it together and they could go on

and have, you know, like a *normal, pleasant relationship*. He seems like a sweet guy and he seems like he likes her enough; those seem like the *necessary pieces*, it seems like their stupid relationship *should work*. That's what makes the fact that nothing about it actually works so frustrating.

Gary's wrapping up telling her about the work he does as a custom framing shop in Ann Arbor. —I do some woodworking on the side, too, he says. —Building cabinets.

—Really? Lydia says.

—Yeah, Gary says. —It's kind of dorky, I know—

—I think it's cool, says Lydia.

—Well, Gary says, —thanks. He claps his hands down onto his thighs. —Listen, he says— I'm going to go in and wash up—but—you're going to the reception, right?

—Yeah, Lydia says.

—Maybe we'll be able to talk some more there, he says. —Do you like to dance?

She thinks this over for a second. —Yes, she says, definitively.

—OK, Gary says. —Well, save me a dance.

—OK, says Lydia.

—I hear the DJ's really good, says Gary, standing up. —We're going to have the Electric Slide—the Macarena—

—All the hits, says Lydia.

—That's the plan, anyway, says Gary.