

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.

## 52 / SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Freya pours a long stream of wine into the pan and as it boils down she takes a swig from the bottle. —One for the pan, one for me, she explains to Fletcher.

—Where's mine? he says.

—I poured you a glass, she says, waving one hand over her shoulder while she stirs the onions into the glaze.

—I have it, Fletcher says. —It's just that drinking from the bottle looked kind of fun.

—It is, Freya says, and she takes another draw. Afterwards she asks —Is Clark still on her *no-drinking* thing?

—I'm not sure, Fletcher says. —She said she was going to do it for six weeks; that was back in February, so—she's probably done now. I guess? I haven't really had much of a chance to see her lately; I got so *busy* there at the end of the semester.

—Is she still seeing that guy? What's-his-face?

—Oliver, Fletcher supplies.

—Yeah, him, Freya says.

—Yeah, I think so.

—Is it just me, Freya says, spooning glaze over the steaks, —or does their relationship seem kind of—I don't know what the word is here exactly—

—Fucked up?

—Yeah.

Fletcher shrugs. —Yeah, he says, —I guess? I don't know that it seems *that* much more fucked up than anybody else's relationship, though. I mean, they seem happy enough.

Freya moves her head from side to side, weighing this.

—You know what I think? Fletcher says. —I think she's just found someone who's fucked up in ways that are compatible with the ways that she's fucked up. You could make the argument that this is in fact what constitutes a *successful relationship*.

—At this point in my life, Freya says, —I don't think I'd make any argument about what constitutes a successful relationship. Come eat.

—You and Jakob still talking? Fletcher asks, taking a seat.

Freya shrugs, scowling a little. —Yeah, she says. —Although it's started to kind of get awkward—I think we're both starting to realize that we don't really *need* or even really *want* to keep one another updated on *every little thing* anymore. Like—that's part of what being *broken up* means, you know?

Fletcher, chewing a piece of steak, nods.

—So—I don't know, Freya says.

—Is he seeing anybody new?

—Not to my knowledge.

—How about you? Any *special someone* appearing on the horizon?

—Ugh, Freya says. —The whole *prospect* of dating just makes me *shudder*.

—I'll take that as a *no*.

—Well, Freya says—she holds up her fork for a second while she swallows—there's this girl at work, one of the shift supervisors? Anyway, she's having a birthday party and she asked

me if I wanted to DJ. So, I don't know, I might do that, I figure—you know—there'll be guys there, it might be a good opportunity to—

—Meet somebody?

—*Meet somebody*. Ugh. The very *phrase*. I need more wine.

—Hey, she says, after she refills her glass, —This whole conversation reminds me of something I've been meaning to ask you for a while, actually.

—I'm listening, Fletcher says.

—I was wondering what you'd think about the idea of getting a place together, Freya says.

—You and me? Fletcher says.

—Yeah, you and me, Freya says. —I mean—I know you don't know exactly what you're doing in the fall, but if you were going to be around—you're like the one person in this whole city who I know I can stand.

—I like this idea, Fletcher says. —Let me think about it.