

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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On the fourth, when Tympanum is closed, he calls Freya.

—Hey, he says. —My street’s like all parties today. You want to come sit on the porch and watch the neighborhood kids blow off fireworks?

—Will there be beer? she asks.

—I’ve got like two dozen Coronas in the fridge.

—I’m there.

When she arrives he’s already out on his porch, wearing a pair of beat-up sandals and a ridiculous-looking fisherman’s hat.

—You know, she says, as she climbs the stairs, —to complete your look you really need like a parrot on your shoulder.

—Pet store was closed, he says, rooting in the cooler for a beer for her. He puts it in her hand as she sits.

—Thanks, she says, and they toast. In the street something explodes.

—So how is everything? Fletcher asks.

—Pretty good, she says. She takes a long slug from her beer and thinks about her answer, while Fletcher waits. —A little lonely, I guess. It's been hard, getting adjusted to not having Jakob around, harder than I'd like to admit, I guess.

—Do you feel like maybe you made the wrong decision? Fletcher asks.

—No, Freya says. —I mean, that's the funny thing—like—there are times when I miss him, times when I'd like to have him around—but all the memories of what's good are like *tied into* the memories of what was, you know, fucked up. And so, yeah, even as I'm missing him I'm sort of like *reconfirming* why the relationship had to end. It's just weird, though—you get used to someone kind of *being there*—

Fletcher nods.

—And now with *you* leaving, Freya continues, —I don't know. It's going to be rough.

—I've been getting that a lot lately, Fletcher says.

—Well, Freya says, stung by the light cruelty that seems embedded into this response. —
Aren't you just Mr. Popular.

—I don't mean it like that, Fletcher says. —It's just—I guess what I mean is—I've been
thinking about this plan, and I feel more and more like it's *selfish*.

—You love Cassandra, Freya says. —And you want to be with her. I get that. It's selfish
for *me* to try to make you feel bad about that. I mean—you have to follow what you love.

—I guess, Fletcher says, —I mean, yeah—that's what people say, but after a while it just
starts to seem like unbelievable *bullshit*. I mean, if I loved, I don't know, shooting kids with
automatic weapons, I don't know how many people would just write me a waiver to follow
what I love.

—That's a little different, Freya says.

—I guess what I'm saying is that I don't really believe that love really justifies selfishness. I
mean—he takes a sip of his beer while trying to think of the exact words—I guess what I
want is the ability to follow what I love without *also* having to like hurt people.

—It's okay, Freya says. —I'm tougher than you think.

—And it's further complicated by the fact that, like, it's ridiculous to say that I *only* love Cassandra. I mean, I also love you, and I love Clark, and so I can argue to myself that if I really want to follow what I love I should just—you know—stay here.

—But then you're still hurting people, Freya says. —Cause you've got Cassandra out there—

—And Leander—

—And Leander.

—See—Fletcher says, —this is my argument for why God doesn't love us.

—I beg your pardon? Freya says, after she nearly snorts beer through her nose.

—There's a kind of *scarcity* that's just *built into* the universe, Fletcher says. —I mean, things like food and resources and stuff like that are scarce, and you could probably make the argument that that's the fault of human beings, that people who are in power stockpile them to maintain power—I'm not going to blame that on God.

—I'm still having trouble seeing where—

—But attention— Fletcher says, —that scarcity of *attention*—that to give attention to one person or one thing means that you have to divert attention away from other things—that

just seems *totally unfair* to me. And that's just *built in* to human consciousness. And, you know, God had an *option*—he didn't need to limit us in that way. He could have made us all omniscient, but He didn't. He deliberately put us into a position of scarcity. Why would you do that if you didn't hate us?

—Maybe he wants us to make choices about where we put our attention, Freya says. —
Maybe it's the choices that are important.

—Maybe, Fletcher says. —But that sucks.