

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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Lydia takes Friday and Monday off so that she can take the train over to Ann Arbor and spend a long weekend with Gary. It's her second time out there visiting him since the wedding.

—And how many times has he been out here to visit you? Anita asks Lydia, on Tuesday, while they're having their normal lunch-and-coffee session.

—Two times, Lydia says. —So that's four visits total; five if you count the wedding.

—Four visits in—what?—four months?

—Basically, Lydia says.

—Is it weird? Anita asks. —The whole—long-distance thing?

—A little, says Lydia. —At first I thought it was going to be really hard. But it's actually been—well, let me put it this way—it's been a long time since I've been in a relationship that's made it to the four-month mark. So *something* must be working right.

—You think the long-distance aspect is actually helping?

—Sometimes I think it is, Lydia says. —I mean—it’s easier—for me, anyway—to be on like *good behavior* when it’s infrequent like that? If we’d been getting together every weekend through this whole time there’d inevitably have been some day by now where he’d have seen me at my worst—all PMS-y, or blood-sugar crashy, or depressed—I don’t know what. So he could have a totally different perspective on me—probably thinking *why the fuck did I get involved with this girl again?*

Anita smirks.

—But one weekend a month—? Lydia continues. —I can manage to be *pretty charming* for one weekend a month, as long as I’ve got the whole rest of the month to be all shitty and wrecked.

—He’s probably doing the same thing, Anita says. —Like when he knows you’re coming he probably *neatens up his apartment* and all that—

—Hides the porn—

—Yeah, totally, Anita says. —But if you were coming over every week eventually he’d start to slip and you’d see the way he *really* lives.

—His apartment hasn't actually been neat *at all* the two times I've been out visiting, Lydia says, slightly abashed.

—You should have seen it before you got there.

—Ugh, Lydia says, —you're probably right. She guides her straw into her mouth and sips, rolls iced coffee around in her mouth thoughtfully for a second, and swallows. —But I don't know. I don't think it's *just* the long-distance factor that's making it work. He's a really sweet guy and he really seems to care about me; he's funny; he's good in bed; he does this *awesome* woodworking stuff—so yeah, I mean, long-distance or no, I can tell you right off the bat that he's better than the last—what?—she starts to count them on her fingers but then abandons this project—*ten* guys I've dated.

—OK, says Anita. —Sounds great. But I can tell that there's something bugging you.

Lydia frowns, takes another sip of coffee, thinks. —Yeah, she says, —I guess. I mean—maybe it's too early for me to be thinking about this, but this past time I just really started wondering whether this relationship has a future.

—Hm, Anita says.

—I mean, I like him, Lydia says. —I like him a lot. And like I said, he seems to like me a lot. But it doesn't seem like he wants to leave Ann Arbor—he grew up there, and he's got this big network of friends, and he shares this studio space with another woodworker—it

seems like it'd be hard for him to find a good space like that here in Chicago. Also—he moved out to Chicago once before for a girl—this is years back now—but, anyway, it didn't go well, and I think that led him to sort of make up his mind that he wasn't going to do that kind of thing again.

—So what about you? Anita asks. —Would you move to Ann Arbor to be with him?

—I don't know, Lydia says. —I mean, I guess it'd be easier for me to go there than it would be for him to come here—I've been in Chicago for five years, which is kind of a long time, but I don't really have *roots* here, exactly—if anything my roots are more in Detroit, where Maria is, and my dad—being in Ann Arbor would put me closer to them; that'd be nice. And, you know, my job here is OK—I like working for George—but, I don't know, it's basically an office job, I could probably find one in Ann Arbor that would be no better or worse than this one.

—That's true, Anita says.

—But at the same time it seems *stupid* to think about tearing up my whole life to move to be with someone I've only been involved with for four months. And I've never wanted to be a woman who like moves somewhere *to be with a guy*. That seems like bad news—cause if something happens, the relationship goes sour, whatever—

—Then you're basically fucked, Anita says. —You gave up everything and now you're stuck in some weird city with nothing.

—Yeah, Lydia says.

—That was how it happened with Dave and I, you know, Anita says. —That was why I came to Chicago in the first place. I was living in Iowa City. So that whole *going sour* thing can happen. And, I mean, you can survive it, but—there was definitely a period in there where I felt like a real idiot.

Great, Lydia thinks.