

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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—So, wow, Clark says, when she enters the apartment and sees two stacks of taped boxes in the living room. —You’re really coming along.

—Oh those? Fletcher says. —I packed those like two weeks ago. You know, just to get a good false sense of security going? Now that I’m telling myself *the move’s really coming along* I probably won’t pack anything else until like the 30th.

—I’ve been there, Clark says. —Every time I move—at first I’m really good about packing everything really carefully, and labelling the boxes really clearly, and I get to feel all smart and good about myself, like—*this time, this time I’m actually going to move effectively*—but always, inevitably, I get to this point where I’m just chucking everything randomly into like a sack. Books, dishes, tools—

—Yeah, Fletcher says, walking down the hallway, into the kitchen. —That’s usually the way it goes. But I’ve worked out a good solution.

—What’s that? Clark calls to him.

—Never move.

—And yet—

—Yeah, well—what can I say? I'm a sucker.

—Sucker indeed.

—I'm getting myself a beer, Fletcher says. —Do you want anything?

—Just a water, Clark says.

—Tap alright?

—Sure.

—I can put some ice in it if you want—

—Great, Clark says.

She studies the spines of his books waiting for him to come back. Traces their length with her fingertip.

—Here you go, says Fletcher, when he returns. He puts the glass in her hand. He then collapses into the couch and pops the top on his beer.

—Thanks, she says. —So, she says, still looking at the books, —any more thoughts on what you're going to be doing for work once you're in Lancaster?

—Mm, Fletcher says, as he rolls beer around in his mouth. After swallowing, he says: —I think we've got something figured out. We've been crunching the numbers a bit—
Cassandra's been paying to have Leander in a day care, you know, and that's expensive, and the day care isn't really very good, so it's looking like once I get out there we're going to take him out of the day care and I'm going to take care of him after school. Which should—
should—offset the extra costs of having me around as another mouth to feed and all that. So, basically, I'll going to be spending the day working on the book, and afternoons with Leander earning my keep, and then in the evenings we'll all be, I don't know, one big happy family, I guess.

—Man, Clark says. —That sounds great. It's been so long since I really had *time* to work on any writing—

—It'll be good, I think, Fletcher says. —I mean—there are still some things that are kind of *odd* about it—

—Don't tell me, Clark says. —You're not caught up in some whole *I want to be the provider* kind of thing—

—No, Fletcher says. —God, no. I’m a poet—I gave up any hope of actually *providing for a family* long ago. I’m thinking more stuff about, I don’t know, health insurance, which I won’t have—

—You guys just need to get married, Clark says. —Then you could get on her insurance.
No?

—Romantic, right? Fletcher says. —No, I mean, yeah, marriage is still kind of the plan. Although to call it a *plan* is to overlook its fundamental, uh, *abstraction*, I guess. We haven’t exactly *picked a date* or anything. I think both of us sort of want to *see how it goes* once I’m out there.

—You think it’ll go well? Clark asks.

—I do, Fletcher says. He sips from his beer and makes a thoughtful face. —Yeah, he says.

—I do. I’m probably setting myself up for some big disappointment—

—I don’t know, says Clark. She looks at him and she sees something in the wistful smile that he has on his face; she can tell, just from looking at him, that he loves Cassandra, and that he loves Leander, and she’s jealous, a bit, because that love seems so uncomplicated, she can see it coming through him with an inherent purity that she doesn’t recognize in herself, and, seeing that, she’s filled with an uncharacteristic optimism: she believes, or wants to believe, that that pure uncomplicated love is going to be enough to just *cut through* all the bullshit of daily life, the worries about health insurance, the little daily conflicts that

inevitably arise when people live together; she can imagine a world where those things just don't *matter* in the face of love, and she almost feels like that world is the one that they are in.

—I think you're going to be all right, she says.

—I hope so, Fletcher says.

—Me too, says Clark. And she means it.