

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, yeah, Fletcher says to Freya, —things here are going pretty well. I’m mostly unpacked, and I’ve got a little writing space set up at one corner of the room—we had to put some of my books in storage but I’ve got, you know, a shelf for like my *real books*, you know—?

—Sounds great, Freya says. —So are you getting any work done yet?

—Well, you know how I am, Fletcher says. —If there’s something I can do to avoid doing my real work, I’ll do it. So, yeah, mostly it’s like I sit down to write and instead I go *maybe this desk could be more organized*.

—Yeah, Freya says. —I get that. Isn’t there a toilet somewhere in this house that needs to be cleaned?

—Maybe these stamps should be organized by denomination, Fletcher says.

She grins, and then feels suddenly wistful. —I miss you, she says.

—I miss you, too, he says. And then there's a minute where there really isn't much to say either way.

Fletcher finally ventures out into the silence. —So, uh, he says, —how *are* you, anyway?

—Not bad, Freya says. —I just renewed the lease on this place, but I can't really afford it on my own, so I'm still thinking about getting a roommate, which, let me just tell you, does *not* sound appealing. But I think I can go for a while longer yet—I've cut back on some of, uh, I guess what you'd call *niceties*, so—I don't know. We'll see, I guess.

—I'm kind of sad, you know, that the idea of you and I as roommates didn't work out. I thought it would maybe have been fun.

—It would have been fun, Freya says. —But I think you're at a really good place right now. And I wouldn't have wanted to—oh, wait, can you hang on a second? I'm getting a call on the other line.

—Sure, Fletcher says.

—I'm really sorry, Freya says. —I hate call waiting, I always think it's so *rude*. It was Jakob's idea to get it on this line in the first place and I've just been too lazy to figure out how to cancel it—

—Go already, Fletcher says.

—OK, Freya says. —One sec—

She looks at the phone's keypad and takes a second to figure out which button to push.

—Hello? she says, finally.

—Hi, says Jakob, somewhat tentatively.

—Oh, Freya says. —Hi. How are you?

—I'm OK, Jakob says. —Um, is this a good time? You sound a little—

—I'm sorry, Freya says. —I just—uh—I wasn't expecting it to be you.

—Do you want me to—

—No, no, Freya says. —It's fine. Just—uh—just hang on a second, OK?

—Sure, Jakob says.

She switches back over. —Speak of the devil, she says.

—It's Jakob? Fletcher says.

—Yeah, believe it or not. Listen—I hate to cut this short, but I should probably take this.

—OK, says Fletcher. —Uh—tell him I said *hi*.

—I will, says Freya. —Take care, OK?

—I will, says Fletcher.

—Talk to you soon?

—Absolutely.

—OK, she says, —bye.

—Bye, Fletcher says, and she switches back over.

—Hi there, she says.

—Hi, Jakob says.

—Sorry about that—I was just on the other line, with Fletcher. He says *hi*, by the way.

—Oh, Jakob says. —Tell him—um—will you tell him I said *hi* back?

—Sure, Freya says. —Did you know that he moved to Pennsylvania?

—I think last time I talked to you you said he was thinking about going.

—Well, Freya says, —he went.

—Damn, Jakob says. —That's crazy.

—Something like that, Freya says.

—So, um, Jakob says. —I was just wondering what you were up to tonight.

—Well, Freya says. She shoots a glance towards the duffle bag, leaning, stuffed with clothes, against the door frame. —Actually—I was actually thinking about spending my evening down at the laundromat. Pretty hot plans for a Friday night, don't you think?

—Yeah, Jakob says, laughing a bit. —Um—well—far be it from me to interfere with getting your laundry done, but I was just wondering—I mean, it's been a while since we've— he stops here, flustered, and recalibrates something in his head before beginning again. —I guess what I want to ask is do you want to see me?

—Are you asking me if I want to come over? she asks.

—Um, he says. —I guess. Yes.

She thinks this through. —I'm not going to come over, she says, finally. —But if you want to meet me over at the SpinCycle you can.

—That might work for me, Jakob says. —I think I have some laundry that needs to be done. What time do you think you'll be getting there?

She looks at the clock. —Let's say eight.

—Okay, he says. —I might be a little late; to get over there I need to take a bus.

—That's fine, she says. —Should I wear a rose in my hair so you know it's me?

—No, Jakob says. —I remember. Unless you've changed that much.

—No, Freya says. —I haven't.