

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.

## 74 / WHERE EACH OF THEM ARE

They sit there at the laundromat, side by side in plastic chairs. They're both kind of zoned out, tired from a long week, and at this point they've gotten caught up on all the little details of where each of them is in their life right now, and neither one of them is sure of what exactly what to say next. Instead they sit quietly and watch clothes, turning in dryers.

—It's good to see you again, Jakob ventures, finally.

—Thanks, Freya says. Jakob waits a minute for her to say something reciprocal but instead she just sips from her can of Diet Coke and goes back to staring at the line of spinning clothes.

—You know— Jakob says, —Part of the reason I called you is because—

Freya shoots him a sidelong glance that's all skepticism and he breaks off, waiting for a sign from her that will let him know he can proceed. It doesn't come, and so finally he says — Forget it.

—I'm sorry, says Freya. She cracks a slightly bitter grin. —I just—no, seriously, I'm sorry. What were you going to say?

—Nothing, Jakob says.

—Aw come on, Freya says, trying to draw Jakob back out. —Look, she says, after a minute.

—I know I'm not always the easiest person to talk to.

—No, Jakob says, —you're not.

—Yeah, OK, Freya says. —We've established that. But, you know, I am *trying*. I don't *like* being so shitty all the time. So it's like—you try and say something, I respond in some way you don't like, you sulk, then I'm mad at you for sulking—this is the way it always goes with us.

*That's true*, Jakob thinks.

—I'd like to try and *get past* that, Freya says. —So, like, I gave you a look back there—I recognize this—but, you know, I caught myself, I said *hey, I'm sorry, go on*. So do you think you could maybe forgo the sulk? Just to, you know, *see how it goes?*

—Okay, Jakob says, after a bit of consideration.

—So you were about to say something, she says.

—I was going to say that I wanted to apologize for a couple of things, Jakob says. —Cause, you know, I recognize that I haven't always been the easiest person to talk to either.

—Well, Freya says, —I'd like to console you here, but—

—Yeah, Jakob says. —I know. I think back over some conversations we had and I just think, *man, I was really an asshole.*

—You had your moments, said Freya. —Everybody does.

—You think that's true? Jakob says.

—Of course it's true, Freya says.

—You don't think there are people who are just—good all the time?

—What are you, Freya says, —on crack?