

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.

68 / FORGOTTEN DOCUMENTS

It's Monday, and Clark starts off her workweek by rallying against the piles of paper that have slowly been conquering the territory of her desk. This papermass was manageable, once, back when there were only a few piles, each one thematically distinguished from the others. But then something came along, some document didn't sensibly fit with any of the existing piles, so a new pile had to be made, and then something else came along, and then something else—soon the number of piles had outgrown the amount of available desk space. So she began to stack. The beginning of the end. Now she finds herself confronted by a huge stratified history of the year, and there is no way of knowing where one layer ends and another begins. She has begun to think that torching the whole thing with a flamethrower may be a viable option.

But instead she picks along, diligent bee, freeing documents from the heap. She finds books of poetry; she finds memos that remind her to do things that she never did. She finds outlines of Chordworld quests; she finds color xeroxes of the liner notes of CDs that she burned off of David. For every piece she examines, she makes a snap decision to place it in one of three categories: Keep It, Trash It, or Deal With It Then Trash It. If it needs to be kept she makes a spot for it. She files it in the cabinet or puts it in her bag to take home. If it needs to be dealt with she tries to deal with it right away. She pays the bills; she looks over forms and offers that she intended to look over a long time ago; she copies contact

information down into her Rolodex and thus eliminates an entire tiny galaxy of scraps bearing scribbled phone numbers.

The mass is slowly diminishing. Then she pulls out a piece of paper and feels her stomach drop.

It's a printout of a racy e-mail that Janine sent her a few weeks ago, when things were better between them. Clark skims the words. *I want to feel your fingertips moving up my thighs.* She'd deleted the original message—she has a faint suspicion that David monitors the company e-mail—but kept the printout nearby. For a while she was opening it at various points in the day, just to read a few lines and feel the flush of pleasure rise in her. Then it got lost in the shuffle.

She reads it, and finds herself touching her mouth absently. Then she shakes her head and puts the note down.

For a moment she thinks about throwing it away. Instead she folds it in half and tucks it inside a book she's freed from the pile, Medbh McGuckian's *Captain Lavender*, and she puts both in her bag to take home.

She cleans for a while more.

She sees the corner of a sheet of yellow legal paper, and she tugs on it until the note comes free. It says *TO DO* at the top of it, and then, underneath that, *find guy for Paul*. She can dimly remember writing this down, months ago, and promising that he would see the results of her diligence. She can't say that she's exactly made good on this promise.

This isn't the only To Do note she's found forgotten in the pile. She's been consolidating them all into a single master list. She amends *find guy for Paul* to *talk to Paul about guys*, and copies it down. She wads up the original note and pitches it into the recycling bin.

She looks the task over again. She wants to be good, to find a way to remember the needs and the desires of people she cares about. It isn't always easy. Half the time she feels too used up to even take her own desires and needs into account. The world exhausts people who care about things, about anything.

She reads the words. *Talk to Paul about guys.* She underlines them. Then she underlines them again, and enters a compact star next to their left. *Remember.*