

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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They're on their second round now.

—So how was working for your dad this summer? Freya asks.

—Let's not speak of it, Fletcher says.

—OK, Freya says. —How about teaching? You ready to go back for another year?

Fletcher makes a face. —Let's not speak of that, either.

—OK, Freya says. She makes as though she's going to gather her things and head out. —Well, bye! she says, mock-cheerful.

—Sorry, Fletcher says. —It's just that, well, work... it's, well, work.

—I know what you mean, Freya says. She's sick of working at the record store. Sick of not getting credit for what she does there. Don, her manager, just hides in the back room all day, gabs on the phone to his friends, monitors eBay auctions. She's taken on all the duties that he shirks: if she quit, the place would fall into total disrepair. At times she's tempted to do it, just to watch Don crash and burn. But the prospect of starting over fresh somewhere else is too dismal to contemplate.

—I think about work enough when I'm working, Fletcher says. —I don't want to think about it when I'm getting drunk, as well.

—Amen, Freya says.

They both drink, and they look at each other and grin, and then they drink again.

—So are you writing? Freya asks.

—Yes, Fletcher says. —The writing is actually going well. For the first time in a long time.

—What are you working on?

—I'm working on a long poem called *Everything*, Fletcher says.

—*Everything*?

—Yep, Fletcher says.

—I hesitate to ask what it's about.

—Go ahead, ask.

—Is the answer obvious?

—Yep, Fletcher says.

—It's really about—everything?

—Inasmuch as it's about anything, Fletcher says.

—Ambitious.

—True, Fletcher says.

—So how's it coming? Freya says.

—Pretty well. See, I had gotten on this tip where I was digging through the Internet for language. You know, I'd start browsing and I'd end up on the Weather Channel's website, reading pollen count data, and I'd be like *this is great!* and I'd copy the shit down, only then I'd end up writing a poem about pollen and mold. And I don't really want to write a poem about pollen and mold. I want to be writing a poem about all of it, you know, all of it together. About the way that all of this language connects together.

—You think it does?

—Yeah, says Fletcher, —I think so. I mean—try to think about it this way. As an observer moves through the world they pass through these different, I don't know, *language*

spaces, and as a result the *head*, I mean the literal *head* of the dude moving through the world, becomes kind of this place where *everything connects to everything else*. You know? Like the radio comes on in the morning and they're talking about, I don't know, today there was this thing on about state quarters, and then you're eating breakfast and the Honey Nut Cheerios box has this write-up about some fantasy school where there's no classes, only recess, like where the kids are all in charge, this kind of *anarchy school*, and there's no link between the quarters and the Cheerios school except for the link of the experiencing subjectivity, which experiences one, then experiences the other, and there's like a linear thing between them, a kind of—he claps his hands together—*unh!* you follow me?

—I think so, Freya says.

—So I was just like *fuck it*, Fletcher says. —For a long time I was trying to keep the linguistic material discrete, or organize it with other stuff that was related somehow, related in some sort of *artful* way. But I've come to believe that you can't sit any two things next to one another without *some* sort of relationship emerging. The head makes relationships. So the poem just moves the reader between things. Like it could connect... I don't know... *this beer* to, say, the parts of a crab.

—The parts of a crab? Freya asks.

Fletcher closes his eyes.

—The antennules, he says. —The lateral spines. The cheliped. The pleopods.