

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.

15 / GETTING IN

Tim wakes up with his head on an unfamiliar pillow, and his tongue all fucking glued to the roof of his mouth. Eliza sleeps next to him. He turns incrementally to get a look at her, and an awful pain begins orbiting inside his skull. A memory of finishing off a bottle of something—Southern Comfort—emerges from his raveled thoughts and he moans, finally pressing his face up against the soft surface of Eliza’s back to shield himself from the room’s terrible and oppressive light.

His face against her flesh. He tries to remember the details of last night—he thinks he remembers fucking her but everything’s kind of jumbled up. He remembers drinking that bottle—all four of them sitting on the floor trying to throw playing cards into a hat three feet away—Sean taking off Lauren’s shirt and starting to make out with her—Eliza leading him away from them, pushing him down a hallway, the two of them getting giggling about something, laughing so hard that they almost couldn’t walk—

He reaches down to adjust his dick and finds a condom still adhered to it, which is a little gross but at least gets him a little bit further towards piecing together what happened. He grimaces and rolls the thing off of him, holds it out for inspection. He frowns, puzzled, because it’s empty, which either means that he got it on but didn’t fuck her or he fucked her but didn’t come. He toggles between these two interpretations for a bit and then eventually decides he should at least take credit for getting in. Too bad he doesn’t remember more

about it. *Whatever*, he thinks, *it's not like you won't get another chance later*. Even as he thinks this, doubt curdles up within him—he has a good knack for fucking things up pretty quickly. But still. For now at least, there she is. He looks at her—it's so *wild*, to have like this *naked body* right there, right next to him, that he can just reach out and *touch* whenever he wants to.

What he wants to do right now, though, is take a piss—his bladder is signaling urgently to him, an uncomfortable series of throbs in his gut. He climbs out of bed, locates his jeans and pulls them on. In the mirror, his image is ornamented by a set of Lauren's things, stuck around the frame: a red Japanese fan, silk flowers, a pair of wax lips, a postcard with a picture of Marilyn Monroe's Playboy shot. Gazing at himself, he grins, makes a muscle.

He gets to the bathroom and there's all vomit in the bowl and all over the seat. *Fucking nasty*, he thinks, even though he's not entirely sure that he's not the one who's to blame. He splashes some cold water on his face, sticks his mouth under the tap and drinks, and he stays stationed at the sink while he pisses, cause he doesn't want to have to look at that puke in the john; he knows if he looks at it he'll probably puke himself; just the smell alone is making him feel slightly fever-mottled. He does press the handle and flush on the way out so at least if he has to come back later he won't have to look at it.

When he gets back to the room Eliza is awake and sitting up.

—Hey, she says.

—Hey, Tim says, crawling back in bed next to her.

—Where'd you go?

—I went to take a leak, he says. —Be warned, he adds, —if you're going to go, it's nasty in there.

—Did you see Lauren or Sean?

—No, Tim says.

—I wonder where they slept.

—I don't know, Tim says. —They're probably passed out in the living room.

Eliza makes a face like *probably*, and cuddles up to him, resting her head on his shoulder.

They sit like that for a while.

—Do you like me? she finally asks.

—What? Tim says. He has to take a second to sort of process the question. —Yeah, he says, finally, —of course I like you.

—What do you like about me? she asks.

—I don't know, Tim says. He screws up his face as he thinks. —You're funny—and—I don't know—it's hard to know how to put it, but—it's like—you're not all *fake*? I mean, there's like so many girls out there that just seem totally fake, you know? Like all *happy* and shit? And, I don't know, you just don't seem that way to me—I mean, not that you don't seem happy, but it seems like if something shitty were to happen you wouldn't be all like *oh, well, look on the bright side*—it seems like if something shitty were to happen you'd be like *that's shitty*. And, I don't know, I respect that, that seems real to me.

—Hm, Eliza says. Tim runs his hand through her hair.

—My father, she says, —my father thinks I'm a *stupid cunt*.

Tim blinks. Of all the things he might have imagined that she'd say he can't say that that one was anywhere on the list. He sifts rapidly through his stock of available responses, looking desperately for something that's going to fit. Groping for the words.

—Um, he says. —What's your mom think?

Eliza smirks.