

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.

17 / GOOD ON A REGULAR BASIS

Lydia's sitting in front of her computer, at home, an accordion file open on her lap. She's working from home today, turning six months of bi-weekly reports into a set of charts which will eventually find a home in a larger document.

This is the first really big thing that she's had to do for George, the guy whose assistant she is now. He took her on about a month ago, after his old assistant moved to take up a position with the Dallas branch. It's basically a promotion, although she's not getting paid any more, and she has to do more work. But still. It's nice to be answerable to only one person: she spent the last four years at the beck and call of an entire department. She is glad to see that part of her life come to an end. Trying to juggle the needs of twenty different people—each with their own individual set of neuroses and peeves, each trying to use you as a pawn in the power struggle they're carrying around in their head—it can wear you out pretty quick. And George is a cool guy. Plus he seems to trust her: the fact that he offered to let her work on this project at home surprised her, but pleased her, made her, for once, feel like she might actually be competent. He's even promised to look into getting her a laptop. *Something with a wireless card—then you could spend the day working out at a café or something,* was the way he put it. As if it would be no big deal for her to spend the day out at a café. To her this is like unimaginable luxury.

She gets up to go pour herself a second cup of coffee and she takes a minute, while over at the counter, to pause and gaze with satisfaction at the sink, which is totally empty and scrubbed down. Since she didn't have to run around all morning struggling to make herself look presentable for the office she actually had the time to eat something (an orange and a thing of yogurt) and then do all the dishes. For once she can look around in her kitchen without feeling a rising sense of despair. The antidepressants probably have something to do with this—it took a couple of tweaks, but she and her doctor seem to have finally discovered a workable mix—but she hopes that it isn't *just* the antidepressants, she hopes that maybe things are actually improving, that maybe she can trust that soon she'll start feeling good again, good on a regular basis. Then she could get rid of the pills—

She hears her IM client ping and she carries her coffee mug back to the computer, to see who's spotted her. It's Maria, her old friend from Detroit—now living in Ann Arbor with her fiancée Dominick.

> *hey what are you doing on here?* reads the message, and then a second later a new message comes through: > *I thought they didn't let you IM at work*

> I'm working from home today, Lydia writes. Send.

> They let you do work at home now? That's new

> Part of my "promotion"

> woo hoo!!

> yeah I'm really "making it" now

> yeah totally

> Plans for the wedding coming along? Lydia types.

> Yeah, Maria responds. > We've almost got the reception hall finalized

> Nice

> You're still planning on coming? > March 12?

> Yeah, Lydia types. > It's already in my calendar

> Bringing anyone?

Lydia frowns.

> I don't know, she types. > Nobody in the picture at the moment

> :(

> I'm working on it, Lydia types.