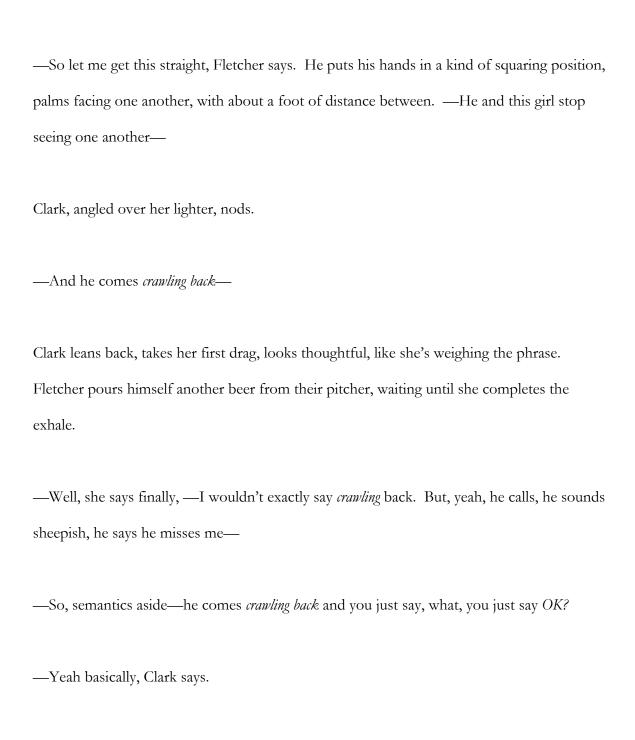
This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (http://www.ImaginaryYear.com) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

## 18 / PRETTY FUCKED UP



—I have to admit, Fletcher says, —I'm a little surprised. I mean, I talked to you after that
whole thing went down and you seemed pretty—I don't know, I mean, I've seen you pretty
unhappy about a lot of things over the years—
—And here I've always prided myself on being a barrel of laughs, Clark says.
—Well, yeah, sure, that too—but a month ago it seemed like you'd been fucked up pretty
bad over this Oliver thing. Fucked up to a degree that I don't usually associate with you.
So, I don't know, maybe it's none of my business, but I sort of want to like caution you about
getting back into it—
—Well, yeah, Clark says, —OK—I was feeling pretty fucked up about a month ago, that's
totally true. She drags again on the cigarette, buying time to compose her justification. —
But two things. One—that wasn't just because of Oliver: I mean, don't forget what else
happened about a month ago—
—I take it you're referring to Bush's mandate?
—Don't use that word, Clark cautions. —Because I will punch you.
—You're all talk, Fletcher says.
—Try me, Clark says.

Fletcher gives her an assessing look. —I don't think I will, actually.
—Wise choice. So anyway—two—it's not really like I just said OK.
—That's good, Fletcher says. —Cause if you let someone just like ditch you and then pick
you up later, when it's like convenient for them to do so—it seems like you're setting some
kind of bad precedent there.
—Yeah, Clark says, —yeah, I guess, but you know what? I'm thirty-three years old. And
one thing that I've noticed is that as you get older it gets like harder and harder to make
friends.
—You get pickier, Fletcher acknowledges.
—You do get pickier. And it takes longer to get to the point where you feel like someone's
even starting to understand you. And so by the time I get to that point with someone, they have
like this incredibly long leash with me—it's like I don't want to just trash it all cause I can
barely stand the thought of having to start from scratch with somebody else—so it gets to the
point where when a person fucks up, or makes a mistake, or hurts me, I'm pretty
predisposed to just forgive them.

