

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.

20 / NICE TO SEE YOU

Jakob puts his key in the lock and stands there in front of the door for a second, listening. He can hear two voices inside the apartment. One is Freya, but the other one isn't Tim, it's someone else, who he can't quite place. The thought of *someone over* makes him feel irritated—he spent all day interviewing candidates for an administrative assistant position at Fieldhammer and he's feeling kind of *socialed out*. Inside the apartment, Freya laughs. Somehow this irritates him even more.

He turns the key and heads in and sees that it's Fletcher sitting there, on the couch, drinking a beer. Freya's in the armchair in the other corner. Jakob feels a small instinctive satisfaction when he notes that there's some distance between them—he's never really forgotten that he once saw them kiss, and he's never really shaken his suspicion that Fletcher thinks of himself as the one who Freya really should have ended up with. Fletcher's supposedly in a stable relationship now, with that woman, what's-her-name with the kid, and you know, *that's great and all that*, but Jakob still doesn't fully trust him, not around Freya. Chalk it up to a feeling.

—Hey, guys, he says, smiling. He slides his briefcase into its spot.

—Hey, Jakob, says Fletcher, rising from the couch and reaching out to shake Jakob’s hand.

—Nice to see you.

—Nice to see you, too, Jakob says. —It’s been a while. How’s DuSable been treating you?

—Oh, good, Fletcher says. —I just turned in my grades earlier today, so I’m officially on break now.

—Sounds great, says Jakob.

—And you? How’s the private sector?

—You know, Jakob says. —Normal.

Fletcher nods and settles back onto the couch.

—We’re just having some beers, Freya says. —to sort of *kick off* the weekend—you want to join us?

—Maybe in a minute, Jakob says. —I need to—you know—he flaps a hand over his face—wash up and—just sort of *take a minute*—

—Sure, Fletcher says.

—Well, Freya says, —if you decide you want to join us in a bit, we'll be here.

—OK, Jakob says. He starts heading off towards the bathroom and then pauses for a second, looks back. —What are we doing for dinner tonight?

—I don't know, Freya says. —Fletcher and I were talking about going out, maybe grabbing some Ethiopian—you interested?

—I'm not really feeling much like Ethiopian tonight, he says. —I'll probably just heat up some of that turkey chili—is there any of that left?

—I think so, Freya says. —You might want to make sure that Tim didn't finish it off.

—He better not've, Jakob says. —I still haven't forgiven him for eating all of my Chunky Monkey that time.

—I *know*, I *know*; it's become like the Chunky Monkey *Incident* of 2004.

—Hey—you mess with a man's ice cream, you ought to be prepared to face the consequences, Jakob says.

—Uh huh, Freya says. —Oh—she snaps her fingers—one other thing—Melissa *Flaum* called for you.

—Oh yeah?

—Yeah—the message is still on the phone—something about wanting to work out a time to see you when you're in Ohio for Christmas.

—OK, cool, says Jakob. He thinks for a second. —I think—I should actually call her back right now, so it might be a minute before I join you for those beers—is that—

—That's fine, says Freya.

—Who's Melissa Flaum? Fletcher says, after Jakob disappears into the bathroom.

—I don't really know, Freya says. —Some chick.