

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.

24 / MISSED CONNECTIONS

A few weeks ago, pre-Christmas, there was a cute guy on the subway who smiled at her and waved, and she got a little charge out of it, sure, it buoyed her confidence for about thirty seconds, after which she made a little memory of it, filed it away somewhere, and moved on. She hasn't had much call to revisit that memory since—it may have been a full year now since she last got laid, and, yes, that's the longest she's ever gone between lovers, which has her feeling a little concerned, but she's not at a point where she needs to make a *fetish* of every crumb of male attention that comes her way. So when she rides the subway to and from work she's not exactly *looking* to spot him again; in fact she's basically forgotten about the whole thing until one Monday when she looks up from her magazine and sees him sitting a few rows ahead of her, reading a newspaper, folded into quarters, same as last time.

It takes her a minute to place him, actually; she has to think *who is that guy, he looks familiar* and frown for a couple of seconds before the correct memory activates. When it finally does, she gets a funny, spinny feeling and the part of her brain that provides commentary says *you have a subway crush*.

There are worse fates, she supposes—it's been a while since she's had a crush on anyone. Wasn't exactly *in the mood* for crushes while she was trying to get out from under the fucking

black weight of depression this past summer and fall. But now that her dosage is adjusted and the depression has begun to leaven somewhat she's feeling more ready to say *okay maybe*.

She sends him a telepathic command and, to her amazement, he responds, looking up from his paper and casting a quizzical gaze around the subway car. Suddenly self-conscious, Lydia blushes, looks down, hoping that he won't spot her after all. This resolve lasts for maybe a second before curiosity gets the best of her and she looks up—then, pow, they're looking at one another. He grins and she knows that he remembers her, too.

She looks away again. This feels so stupid—there's only so much interaction two strangers can have in a crowded subway car. Until one person is willing to take the initiative to get up, go over, and actually start a conversation you're sort of stuck with a repertoire of stupid *come-on expressions*: eye contact, smiles, little waves. She looks up again to see if he's still watching; he is—

He still looks cute to her; she's glad for that.

She's still trying to work up her nerve to get up and move closer when they arrive at the Clark / Lake stop. Subway Guy gets up from his seat and gives her a little shrug, as if to say *I'm interested, but—duty calls*. She holds up her palms in a *c'est la vie* kind of gesture to show him that she's not too ripped up about it.

But when she gets to the office fifteen minutes later or so almost the first thing she does is fire up Craigslist Chicago and look at the Missed Connections section. Every once in a while

when work gets boring she looks around in this section—it's entertaining to see what kind of random run-ins people try to spin into relationships. She can't say that she ever really imagined herself as *the cute girl on the Blue Line* that people are sometimes inquiring after, but suddenly, today, it seems possible that maybe she'll show up in that capacity. Anybody in Chicago who's worth dating knows about Craigslist, she figures, so maybe—

You could post, looking for him, she thinks. Maybe he's sitting at his computer right now doing the same thing you're doing.

Doubtful, she thinks. She takes a sip from her cup of coffee and clicks Refresh.