

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.

27 / A VERY SHORT CONVERSATION

It's after dark, and it's a night when Paul's not working the late shift, so he's in bed, with Scott, under the warm blue vellux blanket. He won't be tired for hours—his circadian schedule usually has him wanting to go to sleep around five am—so he's sitting up, reading Scott's copy of *The Lathe of Heaven*. Scott's lying next to him, propped on his side, quietly watching, sleepy-eyed, while Paul reads.

—You know who we haven't seen for a while? Scott says, eventually.

—Who's that, says Paul automatically, without taking his attention away from the book.

—Your friend Lydia, Scott says.

Hearing her name disrupts the stride of his reading. He frowns. —Yes, he says, putting the book down in his lap. —That's true.

—I liked her, says Scott. —How's she doing these days?

—I don't really know, says Paul. —We're not really in as good of touch as we once were.

—Do you think that’s because of her depression? Scott asks. —I remember you talking before about her being depressed?

—I think maybe that’s part of it? Paul says. —I mean, last I talked to her she *was* feeling pretty depressed. I don’t know if that’s still the case, though—I remember she was starting on anti-depressants but I didn’t really get a read on whether they were working out for her or not.

—Hm, Scott says.

—But, I don’t know, I don’t want to lay the blame on her. I probably owe *her* a call, not the other way around. And I feel really *bad* about that, especially because we used to be pretty tight. I was like a person she could turn to to talk about stuff? And I keep thinking, *oh you should just call her*—but I really want it to do it when we might have *time* to get caught up, you know? But then you have the whole scheduling issue—

—Yeah, Scott says, —you can’t exactly call her when you get home from work—

—No, Paul says, —and then the nights I *do* have off I want to spend with you—and I don’t want to take time out of *our* time spent together—

—Well, Scott says, —you’re sweet, of course, and I appreciate that—but, you don’t need to worry about me. Really—if you felt like you wanted to call her some night I’m sure I could entertain myself for an hour or so. I do have *some* inner resources.

—What would you do? says Paul, teasingly.

—I don't know, says Scott. —I could watch something on the TiVo—

—There's still an *Antiques Roadshow* on there that you haven't watched.

—I'm *savoring* it, Scott says. —So, let me see, what else could I do—I could take a *bath*, or—
he runs his hand up Paul's chest—I could get in *bed* and wait for you—

—No, no, no, says Paul, taking Scott's hand in his own. —If I knew you were in bed *waiting*
for me, it would be a very short conversation.