

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.

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He gets an e-mail, from the LAMPO people, that says that Phill Niblock will coming back to town, his first Chicago performance since 2001. Thomas writes the date down onto a Post-it Note and sticks it on the edge of his monitor. It's been months since he's gone to see a show; ever since he let his website fall into decline there hasn't been much impetus to carve out time for live music, especially since most evenings he's either working or hanging out with Janine. But the show's on a Saturday, and Saturday's become the night which he keeps for himself: he's doing well enough, financially, that he doesn't need to work the busier weekend shifts at the Radisson, and ever since Janine started seeing Lana Saturday has kind of become their night. So most Saturdays Thomas enjoys a quiet dinner by himself, after which he puts on his headphones, sits on his futon, and drinks a cup of hot tea while a drone roils, complicated, in his mind. He's as happy doing this as he would be doing just about anything else, and so even though he likes Niblock and has fond memories of that 2001 show, he still isn't sure that he's going to go.

But on Saturday, he notices the Post-It, and so as he's eating his stir-fry he weighs the advantages of going, and he finally decides *why not*. He clears the table and calls a cab, which arrives only five minutes later, quicker than he expected. He hurriedly kicks his slippers off and struggles his boots on, and fifteen minutes later he's standing in the brittle cold outside

of 6Odum, with a couple of other early arrivals, stamping his feet and waiting for someone to come unlock the doors.

About a minute later another pair of people arrive, a guy and a girl, he doesn't recognize the girl at first but when he hears her ask *they letting anybody in yet* he recognizes her voice.

He's surprised to see her although he supposes he shouldn't be—if he were going to run into her anywhere he supposes it would be at this show. Their first date was here at 6Odum close to four years ago now, and the first time they kissed was at the 2001 Niblock show down at the U. of C.. Still: he hasn't seen her around in forever, and he'd basically come to assume that she'd moved away or something.

He looks at her—she hasn't noticed him yet—and he tries to figure out how she's doing. He wants her to be doing well. When he looks back at their relationship and sees how he treated her, he feels bad: she was dating him at a time when he was pretty retarded, emotionally-speaking. He just didn't really know what to do, at that time, with a woman who was interested in him. He's grateful all over again for Janine, for the way that she seemed (seems) so able to see *into* him and pull him out of his introspection. *Janine saved your life*, he thinks, as he has thought before, and even though this has no literal truth that he can make sense of, it still *feels* true somehow.

He looks at Lydia, and notes, with some satisfaction, that she seems happy. He can't really glean much from looking at her here on the street, of course, she's huddled up and gazing around, same as everybody else; there's just not that much information to extract. But he

can tell that she likes the guy she's with, that's obvious; she keeps reaching out to take hold of the cuff of his sleeve, to rub it between her gloved fingers for a moment. Thomas imagines that this guy is someone who's better for her than he was, and this gives him an obscure pleasure; it makes him feel as though the world is basically good, as though people can generally have the fortune to find what they want.

She looks up, directly at him, and a puzzled frown crosses her face until she places him, and then it gives way to a complicated expression: a mix he can't quite read. There's surprise in it, and a sort of suspicion, but also a distant fondness—or maybe he's just seeing what he wants to see. He raises his hand to her in greeting. She gives him a nod, almost imperceptibly, and then turns back to her companion. And then the doors are opened and everyone files in.