

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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And so they sit there, at the table, and they each open a fresh bottle of beer, and they begin to work out a plan. Jakob agrees to move out on April 1st, and Freya will stay on at the place by herself for a while. She's been doing OK, financially-speaking, ever since they made her the manager at Tympanum, she has some money saved up, so if she wants to she can just hang out until the lease on this place runs out in September. After that she'll need to move into a smaller place or find a new roommate.

Neither option strikes her particularly pleasant, and the roommate one positively fills her with dread—she wonders, for what probably won't be the last time, whether she isn't making a horrible mistake. She's never really been the kind of person who gets along easily with other people, and Jakob—well, it's been hard to live with him, but at least she knows that *she can do it*, it's been almost two years, she knows that, on a daily basis, she can *tolerate him*—he's a *known quantity*. Stick her with someone new and she just doesn't know how it would go.

Maybe Fletcher, she thinks. He's someone who likes her, and he doesn't have a roommate. Plus every three weeks or so he spends a weekend out in Pennsylvania, with Cassandra, so she could have the place to herself. She thinks this through for a minute, trying to get a grasp on exactly what living with Fletcher would actually be like.

They talk more—Jakob starts finding that it's easier to talk to her, now, than it's been in a long time; it's as if though the space between them were suddenly flushed clean of whatever oppressive paste had been gumming it up. *We're going to get through this*, he thinks, *we're going to come out on the other side of this as friends*. As they talk, they drink, and as Jakob drinks he gets wearier, and the thought of bed crosses his mind.

—I'm tired, Jakob says.

—Me too, Freya responds.

—If you want, he says, — I'll sleep on the couch.

Freya smiles wryly. —No, she says, —I don't think that'll be necessary. Not yet, anyway.

—OK, says Jakob. —That's—thank you.

In bed, he puts his arms around her, rests his scratchy face against the softness of her shoulder. It's the closest they've been in a long time.

—Is this OK? he whispers.

—Yes, she answers.

Okay isn't exactly the way that she'd put it—it feels equal parts comfortable and strange, familiar and unfamiliar—and she begins to attempt picking apart these individual strands, as she lies there, in the dark, but then instead she just shelves the whole thing, thinking *I'll figure it out later*. And then, whump, she's asleep.