

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.

4 / OCTOBER ALREADY

Lydia and Anita walk down an aisle of hair products in a Walgreens near the building where they work. It's the lunch hour, and the aisles jostle with people. A Polish-looking woman shoulders past, gives Anita a pretty good bump, and keeps going without offering so much as an *excuse me*. Anita glares acidly at her back.

—What are we now, *animals*? she says to Lydia.

Lydia, busy inspecting the print on the back of a chunky tub of product, replies: —What? You live in a city. You're not used to people bumping into you by now?

Anita waits a beat. —You're in a mood, she says.

—I guess, Lydia says. —Have you tried this?

—Yeah, Anita says. —It's OK, but for your hair I wouldn't.

—I was afraid of that, she says. —I hate my hair; it just never seems to want to *do* anything.

—What about this? Anita says, holding up a tube. —I know people who have gotten very good results from this.

—Yeah, Lydia says, not really working up much enthusiasm. —You know what—forget it. I'll pick something up later. It's already five after; we should be getting back.

—You going to buy those? asks Anita, pointing to a pack of three scrubber sponges in Lydia's basket.

—I'm not waiting in that line, Lydia says. She crams the sponges into an empty slot between bottles of gel and they head out into the blustery street.

—Damn, Lydia says, pulling her thin sweater tight around her shoulders. —It got *cold*.

—It *is* October, you know, Anita says, huddling near the revolving door to get her cigarette lit.

—I can't even fucking believe that, says Lydia. —I mean, it seems like it was *summer* just yesterday.

—It was a warm September, Anita says, dryly.

—That's not what I mean, Lydia says. —I mean, don't you get that feeling? That time is *speeding up* on you?

Anita indicates that she's thinking this over by squinting while she drags.

—It's like my life is a *blur*. It's like—OK, I want to do something with this stupid hair, right? Now the last haircut I got that I was really happy with I got from my old roommate, Paul—it seems like it shouldn't be that hard for me to drop him a line, get together with him, have him do my hair again, right? But he works nights, and I work days, and he's seeing this guy, and you play phone tag for a while, and then the next thing you know it's like *months* have gone by and I haven't seen him. It's like—where the hell does the time all *go*? I've been at Delphi for four *years* now. I never intended to be here for *four years*. When I took this job I was like *this is a good first job to take in Chicago. This will cover me until I get organized to do what I really want to do.*

—What is it you really want to do? says Anita.

—I don't even know anymore, says Lydia. —I mean, it's stupid—when I first got here it was *radio*—I was really enamored of *This American Life* and I wanted to work for WBEZ and, you know, have Ira Glass be my boyfriend and all that. But I realized pretty quick that they weren't going to want someone like me—some twenty-one-year-old *girl* with like a stupid bachelor's degree in stupid *Communications*—

They're standing out in front of the building now. Anita's on the final drags of her cigarette. Light peels off of the windows fronting the building across the way. A Dunkin Donuts cup performs a tiny spinout at their feet.

—So, yeah, Lydia continues, —I don't know. I mean, there's these Master's programs in Documentary out there, and I keep thinking about applying but just the idea of trying to complete all those *steps* just wears me *out*. I mean even something *simple*—like say I want to lose ten pounds—

—Don't even go there, says Anita.

—I mean it just starts to seem *impossible*. I mean I *know how to do it* but it's like I go *well I could join a gym* but then you have to do research about, you know, which are the gyms that are close by, and which are the ones that you can afford, and then you have to figure out a time when you can go, and you have to rearrange your schedule—

—Or you can say *well I could try to eat better*—

—right, right—I could bring a healthy lunch every day instead of eating the fucking chicken sandwich at the *Wendy's*—but then it's like you have to find time to go to the store, and you have to figure out recipes, and you have to buy some stupid thing, some, I don't even know what you'd call it, some kind of *lunch bag* to schlep your Tupperware to and from work, and it's just—everything has so many *steps* now and there doesn't seem to be any *time*.

—It doesn't get easier, Anita says, flicking her cigarette butt out into the gutter.

—No?

—No, Anita says. —As you get older it only seems to go faster and faster. I mean—I look back at things and I think *I was married*. I was married for three years; I've been divorced now for four. Four and a half. Divorced now for longer than I was married. And yet I still wake up some mornings and the first thing I think is *where is my husband? Why isn't he here?* And sometimes it seems like everything since the divorce—all the *life* that I've fit into those four and a half years— has just all been like some kind of *dream*. None of it seems real.

She pauses for a minute. —What time is it? she asks.

Lydia starts, wangles her phone out of her purse. —It's, uh, 12:16.

—We should go in, Anita says.

—Yeah, Lydia says. —I guess so.