

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.

44 / EATING BETTER

Clark dumps a bunch of chopped peppers into her wok and smiles into the hiss. She made a decision, when the New Year kicked in, to try eating better, and she's been sticking to it. It's kind of amazing, actually, how hard it is to find the time to go to the *store* once a week to get fresh vegetables—it usually involves her getting off of the subway when she's emotionally exhausted and cranky after a day spent editing her fucking hotel-room magazine and schlepping down to the Dominick's (which is inevitably crowded with other people who are emotionally exhausted and cranky from their own days at work; 5:45 is pretty much the exact time when anyone who had an actual *flexible schedule* would want to stay as far away as possible). But it's good to have the ability to make good food. It helps her to feel better. And feeling better is important.

She has to believe that, because she doesn't really have time for that much else that she thinks of as *important* anymore. It takes her about an hour to make dinner, so if she gets home at 6:30-ish she doesn't finish eating until 7:30, sometimes 8:00—that leaves her only with about three hours until she needs to be in bed. One of those hours is eaten up by doing her yoga DVD, which she's been trying to do every night, and so that only leaves her, realistically, with two hours to read or to call her folks or Fletcher. Or to clean. Or to pay bills. (Or to write—she's only written about four or five poems since Perihelion shut down, and that was, what, two years ago now, two and a half.)

She lifts the lid on the rice and fluffs it with a fork; satisfied, she carries the pot into the living room and centers it on a blue ceramic tile on the coffee table. She's bringing the wok to set down next to it in when Oliver buzzes her door. It's Wednesday, he's coming from a meeting at Chicago Solidarity.

—Hey, she says when she lets him in. —Your timing is perfect; I just finished getting the dinner together. She gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.

—Great, he says. He struggles out of his leather jacket on the hook. —Can you believe this weather? he says. —It's getting gorgeous. I'm not going to need this jacket for much longer.

—Don't be so sure, Clark says. —April might still hold some nasty surprises.

—Ever the pessimist, says Oliver, grinning.

—Optimists are only setting themselves up for inevitable disappointment, Clark says.

—So you say.

—Prove me wrong, Clark says.

—Can I eat first?

—Sure, Clark says. They sit on the couch and load up their plates with food; Oliver makes the normal appreciative noises.

—So how was the meeting? Clark asks.

—You know, Oliver says. —The same. Various people who mostly want to rattle on about their own grandiose sense of self-importance.

Clark nods, remembering.

—It's not as much fun without you there, Oliver says. A faint expression of bitter displeasure crosses Clark's but Oliver either misses it or chooses to ignore it: —I mean it, you were like the *moral center* of that group. He waits another beat, then: —You should think about coming back.

—I can't go back, Clark says. —Number one, I don't have the time—

—You had the time, Oliver says. —Back before the election—

—Back before the election, Clark says, almost wistfully.

—Yeah— Oliver says. —So, I mean, I don't know, my intent here isn't to *twist your arm*, but—he shovels a forkful of rice and vegetables into his mouth.

—I don't know, Clark says. —I mean, I look back at that—that big push of *energy* and *attention* before the election?—I look back at that now and I go *what the fuck were we doing?* I mean—here I am—this person who likes to think of herself as a radical, and here I am, going out to stump for the *Democrats*—

—We were going out helping working-class people to *get registered to vote*, Oliver says. — That's important.

—Kind of, Clark says. —But—you know—what I want to see is a fucking *revolution*. And it's just—I mean—it just feels like it's finally gotten to the point where I can't see *any* connection between *that desire* and the things that the people at Chicago Solidarity are doing.

—A revolution's not going to happen overnight, Oliver says.

—Oh, don't get me wrong, Clark says. — I'm convinced that it's never going to happen. If the election taught me anything it's that most of the people in this country are masochists—people actually *want* things to get worse; they think they *deserve* it.

—Thank you, sir, may I have another?

—Yeah basically, Clark says. —And, yeah, there are people out there who still want to see, you know, the General Strike or the revolution or whatever—civil war—I know that, but every year they lower their expectations, and, you know, now they're at a point where

someone like *Kerry* looks like a knight in shining armor, and eventually all those people will, I don't know, *give up* or *die* or whatever, and basically capital will have won.

Oliver, silent, looks miserably at his plate, pushes a pea around with his fork.

—At least we eat well in the meantime, Clark says.

—It *is* delicious, Oliver admits.