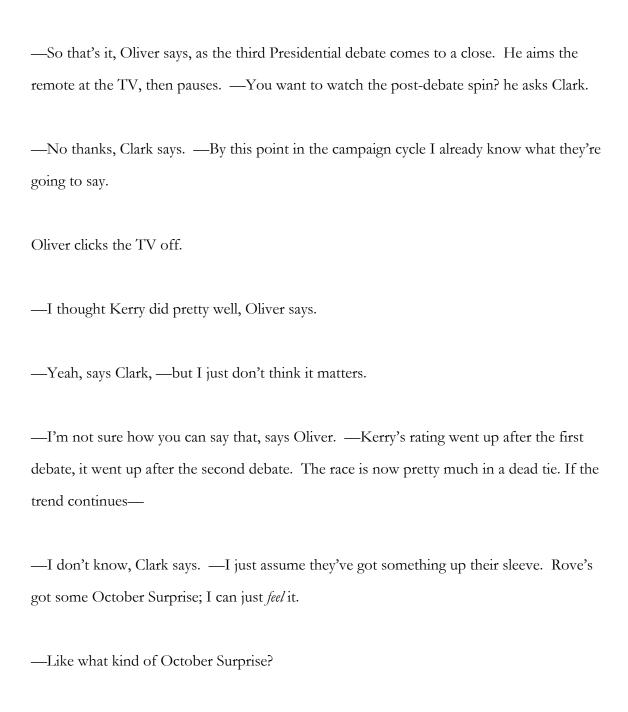
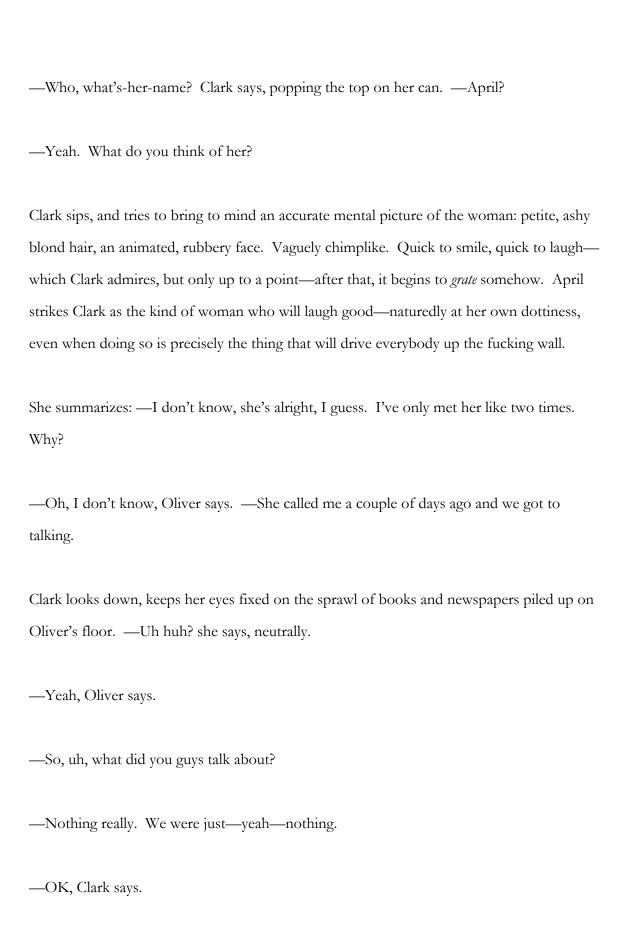
This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (http://www.ImaginaryYear.com) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

6 / SPEAKING OF PHONES



—I bet they've got Osama bin Laden in a cage somewhere. That's the ace in the hole. I bet
they caught him years ago and just said hmm, well now wait a second, let's hang on to this. They
pop him out like a week before the election: Bush's approval rating surges. Kerry's
response? Helpless fumbling. End of story.
—I never really took you for much of a conspiracy theorist, says Oliver.
—Hey—I don't put anything past these people, says Clark. —You wait. Two weeks from
now I'm going to be all I told you so.
—I'll take that bet, Oliver says.
—Even without the October Surprise, Clark says, —Bush's numbers are still ahead in the
polls—
—Yeah, Oliver says, —but only by like a <i>razor-thin margin</i> . And besides, the polls are skewed
because of this whole <i>cell phone</i> thing—have you heard this? The polls are being conducted
over land lines so there's this whole demographic of people who aren't getting polled, people
who don't have landlines, and they're, you know, mostly young, and so more likely to skew
to the left—?
—Yeah, Clark says, —I heard that. But I'm just not going to get my hopes up. If I start
thinking that Kerry's actually going to win I'm only setting myself up to have my hopes
dashed. I reallly can't take that right now.
—Hm, says Oliver, heading into the kitchen for more beer. On his way back, he says: —
Speaking of cell phones. That reminds me. You know that new girl at Chicago Solidarity?



Oliver nods, and lets the nod trail off into a blank look.
—Anything more you want to say about it? Clark says.
—What? says Oliver, looking mildly startled, as though he's already forgotten what they were
talking about. —Oh—no. He shakes his head with his face fixed in what strikes Clark as a
very bad impression of sincerity.
—Great, says Clark. —Then—let's talk about something else.
—OK, says Oliver. And both of them look around, at the curtains, the Latin American
history books arranged on the bookshelf, the empty Pabst cans arrayed on the table in front
of them, as if casting around for something, anything, to say.