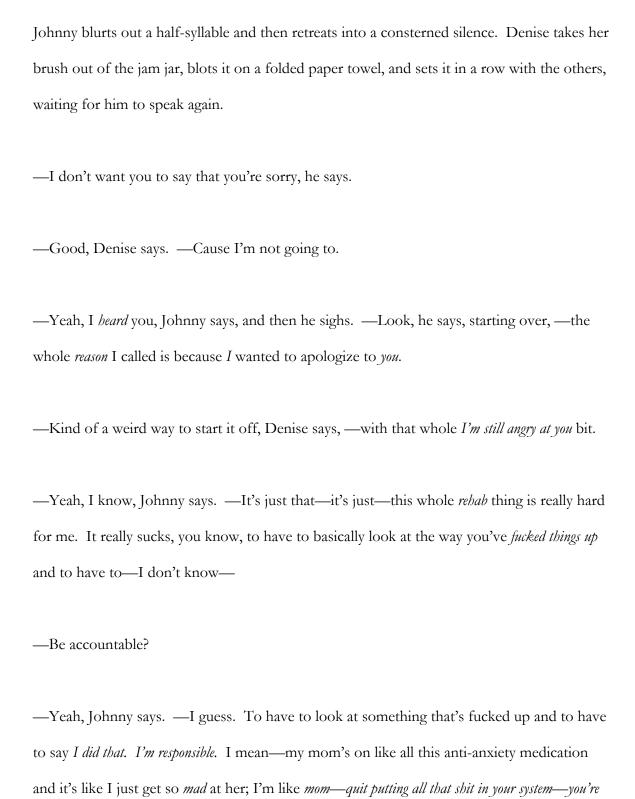
This is an excerpt from *Imaginary Year*, a work of serial fiction by Jeremy P. Bushnell. Visit the *Imaginary Year* website (http://www.ImaginaryYear.com) on Mondays and Fridays for new updates.

## **68 / YOU ARE BAD**

—I'm still angry with you, Johnny says, through the phone. —I want you to know that.
—I'd probably be angry too, says Denise, —if our positions were reversed. She watches the water go muddy as she swirls her painbrush around in it.
—The thing that bothers me is that you went behind my back to do it. I just—I just wish you'd talked to me about it.
—That wasn't really an option, says Denise. —I don't know if you noticed, but we hadn't really been talking about <i>anything</i> for the past year.
—That's exactly what I'm—
—And you know what? she says. —That's not my fault. That was your fault. That was
because every time we were at home together you were either already drunk, or on your way
towards drunk. So—like—I get that you're angry—? I get that you feel like when I called
your parents I went behind your back—? But if you want me to say I'm sorry then you're shit
out of luck cause I'm not going to say that.



*like a fucking pill addict*—but then I have to look at it, and I have to be like, shit, man, why

do you think she's so fucking anxious in the first place? And it's like: it's because of you. It's because you are bad.

Denise closes her eyes. —It's not that you're bad, she says.

A long silence on the other end of the line. Then: —No. It's not because I'm bad. That's what everyone keeps telling me. It's because I have a disease. It's a disease, that's what everybody says, it's not you that's bad, it's the disease. Disease, disease, disease. Those people don't know what the fuck they're talking about. Okay? I'm just here to say that. I didn't drink because I had a fucking disease. I drank because I fucking hate myself. Do you understand? Can you possibly, for a minute, understand what that feels like?

—Yes, Denise says.

Johnny is silent; and in this his silence she can hear his blown-up anger collapsing, a crumpling paper dragon. She can hear that he believes her.

—So how do you deal with it? he asks, finally. —How do you just—get through?

—I don't know, Denise says. —You just wake up and there's this day. And—just—you just try to make *hating yourself* take up as small a portion of that day as possible. You try to let the bigger portion be *anything else*.

—I'm not sure that I know how to do that, Johnny says.

—Me either, says Denise. —But you have to try.