

# ATTACHMENTS





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Rainbow Rowell



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*For Kai, who's better than fiction*



## CHAPTER 1

**From:** Jennifer Scribner-Snyder  
**To:** Beth Fremont  
**Sent:** Wed, 08/18/1999 9:06 AM  
**Subject:** Where are you?

Would it kill you to get here before noon? I'm sitting here among the shards of my life as I know it, and you . . . if I know you, you just woke up. You're probably eating oatmeal and watching *Sally Jessy Raphael*. E-mail me when you get in, before you do anything else. Don't even read the comics.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> Okay, I'm putting you before the comics, but make it quick. I've got an ongoing argument with Derek about whether *For Better or For Worse* is set in Canada, and today might be the day they prove me right.

<<Jennifer to Beth>> I think I'm pregnant.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> What? Why do you think you're pregnant?

<<Jennifer to Beth>> I had three drinks last Saturday.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> I think we need to have a little talk about the birds and the bees. That's not exactly how it happens.

<<Jennifer to Beth>> Whenever I have too much to drink, I start to feel pregnant. I think it's because I never drink, and it

would just figure that the *one time* I decide to loosen up, I get pregnant. Three hours of weakness, and now I'm going to spend the rest of my life wrestling with the special needs of a fetal alcoholic.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> I don't think they call them that.

<<Jennifer to Beth>> Its little eyes will be too far apart, and everyone will look at me in the grocery store and whisper, "Look at that horrible lush. She couldn't part with her Zima for nine months. It's tragic."

<<Beth to Jennifer>> You drink Zima?

<<Jennifer to Beth>> It's really quite refreshing.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> You're not pregnant.

<<Jennifer to Beth>> I am.

Normally, two days before my period, my face is broken out, and I get pre-cramps cramping. But my skin is as clear as a baby's bottom. And instead of cramps, I feel this strangeness in my womb region. Almost a presence.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> I dare you to call Ask-A-Nurse and tell them that you've got a presence in your womb region.

<<Jennifer to Beth>> Given: This is not my first pregnancy scare. I will acknowledge that thinking I'm pregnant is practically a part of my monthly premenstrual regimen. But I'm telling you, *this is different*. I feel different. It's like my body is telling me, "It has Begun."

I can't stop worrying about what happens next. First I get sick. And then I get fat. And then I die of an aneurysm in the delivery room.

<<Beth to Jennifer>> OR . . . and then you give birth to a beautiful child. (See how you've tricked me into playing along with your pregnancy fiction?)

<<Jennifer to Beth>> OR . . . and then I give birth to a beautiful child, whom I never see because he spends all his waking hours at the day-care center with some minimum-wage slave he thinks is his



mother. Mitch and I try to eat dinner together after the baby's in bed, but we're both so tired all the time. I start to doze off while he tells me about his day; he's relieved because he wasn't up to talking anyway. He eats his sloppy joe in silence and thinks about the shapely new consumer-science teacher at the high school. She wears black pumps and nude panty hose and rayon skirts that shimmy up her thighs whenever she sits down.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> What does Mitch think? (About the Presence in your womb. Not the new consumer-science teacher.)

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> He thinks I should take a pregnancy test.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> Good man. Perhaps a common-sensical kind of guy like Mitch would have been better off with that home ec teacher. (She'd never make sloppy joes for dinner.) But I guess he's stuck with you, especially now that there's a special-needs child on the way.

## CHAPTER 2

“LINCOLN, YOU LOOK terrible.”

“Thanks, Mom.” He’d have to take her word for it. He hadn’t looked in a mirror today. Or yesterday. Lincoln rubbed his eyes and ran his fingers through his hair, trying to smooth it down . . . or maybe just over. Maybe he should have combed it when he got out of the shower last night.

“Seriously, look at you. And look at the clock. It’s noon. Did you just wake up?”

“Mom, I don’t get off work until one A.M.”

She frowned, then handed him a spoon. “Here,” she said, “stir these beans.” She turned on the mixer and half shouted over it. “I still don’t understand what you do in that place that can’t be done in daylight. . . . No, honey, not like that, you’re just petting them. Really *stir*.”

Lincoln stirred harder. The whole kitchen smelled like ham and onions and something else, something sweet. His stomach was growling. “I told you,” he said, trying to be heard, “somebody has to be there. In case there’s a computer problem, and . . . I don’t know . . .”

“What don’t you know?” She turned off the mixer and looked at him.

“I think maybe they want me to work at night so that I don’t get close to anyone else.”

“What?”

“Well, if I got to know people,” he said, “I might . . .”

“Stir. Talk and stir.”

“If I got to know people”—he stirred—“I might not feel so impartial when I’m enforcing the rules.”

“I still don’t like that you read other people’s mail. Especially at night, in an empty building. That shouldn’t be someone’s job.” She tasted whatever she was mixing with her finger, then held the bowl out to him. “Here, taste this . . . What kind of world do we live in, where that’s a career?”

He ran his finger around the edge of the bowl and tasted it. Icing.

“Can you taste the maple syrup?”

He nodded. “The building isn’t really empty,” he said. “There are people working up in the newsroom.”

“Do you talk to them?”

“No. But I read their e-mail.”

“It’s not right. How can people express themselves in a place like that? Knowing someone’s lurking in their thoughts.”

“I’m not in their thoughts. I’m in their computers, in the company’s computers. Everyone knows it’s happening . . .” It was hopeless trying to explain it to her. She’d never even seen e-mail.

“Give me that spoon,” she sighed. “You’ll ruin the whole batch.” He gave her the spoon and sat down at the kitchen table, next to a plate of steaming corn bread. “We had a mailman once,” she said. “Remember? He’d read our postcards? And he’d always make these knowing comments. ‘Your friend is having a good time in South Carolina, I see.’ Or, ‘I’ve never been to Mount Rushmore myself.’ They must all read postcards, all those mailmen. Mail people. It’s a repetitive job. But this one was almost proud of it—gloaty. I think he told the neighbors that I subscribed to *Ms*.”

“It’s not like that,” Lincoln said, rubbing his eyes again. “I only read enough to see if they’re breaking a rule. It’s not like I’m reading their diaries or something.”

His mother wasn’t listening.

“Are you hungry? You look hungry. You look deficient, if you want to know the truth. Here, honey, hand me that plate.” He got up and handed her a plate, and she caught him by the wrist. “Lincoln . . . What’s wrong with your hands?”

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“Look at your fingers—they’re gray.”

“It’s ink.”

“What?”

“*Ink.*”

WHEN LINCOLN WORKED at McDonald’s in high school, the cooking oil got into everything. When he came home at night, he felt all over the way your hands feel when you get done eating French fries. The oil would get into his skin and his hair. The next day, he would sweat it out into his school clothes.

At *The Courier*, it was ink. A gray film over everything, no matter how much anyone cleaned. A gray stain on the textured walls and the acoustic ceiling tiles.

The night copy editors actually handled the papers, every edition, hot off the presses. They left gray fingerprints on their keyboards and desks. They reminded Lincoln of moles. Serious people with thick glasses and gray skin. *That might just be the lighting*, he thought. Maybe he wouldn’t recognize them in the sunshine. In full color.

They surely wouldn’t recognize him. Lincoln spent most of his time at work in the information technology office downstairs. It had been a darkroom about five years and two dozen fluorescent lights ago, and with all of the lights and the computer servers, it was like sitting inside a headache.

Lincoln liked getting called up to the newsroom, to reboot a machine or sort out a printer. The newsroom was wide and open, with a long wall of windows, and it was never completely empty. The nightside editors worked as late as he did. They sat in a clump at one end of the room, under a bank of televisions. There were two, who sat together, right next to the printer, who were young and pretty. (Yes, Lincoln had decided, you *could* be both pretty and molelike.) He wondered if people who worked nights went on dates during the day.

## CHAPTER 3

**From:** Beth Fremont  
**To:** Jennifer Scribner-Snyder  
**Sent:** Fri, 08/20/1999 10:38 AM  
**Subject:** I sort of hate to ask, but . . .

Are we done pretending that you're pregnant?

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Not for 40 weeks. Maybe 38 by now . . .

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> Does that mean we can't talk about other things?

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> No, it means we *should* talk about other things. I'm trying not to dwell on it.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> Good plan.

Okay. So. Last night, I got a call from my little sister. She's getting married.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Doesn't her husband mind?

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> My other little sister. Kiley. You met her boyfriend . . . *fiancé*, Brian, at my parents' house on Memorial Day. Remember? We were making fun of the Sigma Chi tattoo on his ankle . . .

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Right, Brian. I remember. We like him, right?

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> We love him. He's great. He's just the kind of guy you hope your daughter will meet someday at an upside-down-margarita party.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Is that a fetal-alcoholic joke?

This wedding is your parents' fault. They named her Kiley. She was doomed from birth to marry a hunky, fratty premed major.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> Pre-law. But Kiley thinks he'll end up running his dad's plumbing supply company.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Could be worse.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> It could hardly be better.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Oh. I'm sorry. I just now got that this wasn't good news. What did Chris say?

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> The usual. That Brian's a tool. That Kiley listens to too much Dave Matthews. Also, he said, "I've got practice tonight, so don't wait up, hey, hand me those Zig-Zags, would you, are you in the wedding? Cool, at least I'll get to see you in another one of those Scarlett O'Hara dresses. You're a hot bridesmaid, come here. Did you listen to that tape I left for you? Danny says I'm playing all over his bass line, but Jesus, I'm doing him a favor."

And then he proposed. In Bizarro World.

In the real world, Chris is never going to propose. And I can't decide if that makes him a jerk—or if maybe I'm the jerk for wanting it so bad. And I can't even talk to him about it, about marriage, because he would say that he *does* want it. Soon. When he's got some momentum going. When the band is back on track. That he doesn't want to be a drag on me, he doesn't want me to have to support him . . .

Please don't point out that I already support him—because that's only mostly true.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Mostly? You pay his rent.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> I pay *the* rent. I would have to pay rent anyway . . . I would have to pay the gas bill and the cable bill and everything else if I lived alone. I wouldn't save a nickel if he moved out.

Besides, I don't mind paying most of the bills now, and I won't mind doing it after we're married. (My dad has always paid my mom's bills, and no one calls her a parasite.)

It isn't the who-pays-the-bills issue that's a problem. It's the acting-like-an-adult issue. It's acceptable in Chris's world for a guy to live with his girlfriend while he works on a demo. It's not as cool to chase your guitar fantasy while your wife's at work.

If you have a wife, you're an adult. That's not who Chris wants to be. Maybe that's not who I want him to be.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Who do you want him to be?

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> Most days? I think I want the wild-haired music man. The guy who wakes you up at 2 a.m. to read you the poem he just wrote on your stomach. I want the boy with kaleidoscope eyes.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> There would very likely be no more 2 a.m. tummy poems if Chris got a real job.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> That's true.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> So you're okay?

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> No. I'm about to get fitted for another bridesmaid dress. Strapless. Kiley's already picked it out. I'm dog years away being from okay. But I don't think I can complain, can I? I want him. And he wants to wait. And I still want him. So I can't complain.

<<**Jennifer to Beth**>> Of course you can complain. That's unalienable. On the bright side, at least you're not pregnant.

<<**Beth to Jennifer**>> Neither are you. Take a pregnancy test.

## CHAPTER 4

JUST FOR THE record—his own internal record—Lincoln never would have applied for this job if the classified ad had said, “Wanted: someone to read other people’s e-mail. Swing shift.”

*The Courier* ad had said, “Full-time opportunity for Internet security officer. \$40K+ Health, dental.”

Internet security officer. Lincoln had pictured himself building firewalls and protecting the newspaper from dangerous hackers—not sending out memos every time somebody in Accounting forwarded an off-color joke to the person in the next cubicle.

*The Courier* was probably the last newspaper in America to give its reporters Internet access. At least that’s what Greg said. Greg was Lincoln’s boss, the head of the IT office. Greg could still remember when the reporters used electric typewriters. “And I can remember,” he said, “because it wasn’t that long ago—1992. We switched to computers because we couldn’t order the ribbon anymore, I shit you not.”

This whole online thing was happening against management’s will, Greg said. As far as the publisher was concerned, giving employees Internet access was like giving them the option to work if they felt like it, look at porn if they didn’t.

But not having the Internet was getting ridiculous.

When the newspaper launched its Web site last year, the reporters couldn’t even go online to read their stories. And most readers wanted to e-mail in their letters to the editor these days, even third-graders and World War II veterans.



By the time Lincoln started working at *The Courier*, the Internet experiment was in its third month. All employees had internal e-mail now. Key employees, and pretty much everyone in the news division, had some access to the World Wide Web.

If you asked Greg, it was all going pretty well.

If you asked anyone in upper management, it was chaos.

People were shopping and gossiping; they were joining online forums and fantasy football leagues. There was some gambling going on. And some dirty stuff. “But that isn’t such a bad thing,” Greg argued. “It helps us weed out the sickos.”

The worst thing about the Internet, as far as Greg’s bosses were concerned, was that it was now impossible to distinguish a roomful of people working diligently from a room full of people taking the What-Kind-of-Dog-Am-I? online personality quiz.

And thus . . . Lincoln.

On his very first night, Lincoln helped Greg load a new program called WebFence on to the network. WebFence would monitor everything everyone was doing on the Internet and the Intranet. Every e-mail. Every Web site. Every word.

And Lincoln would monitor WebFence.

An especially filthy-minded person (maybe Greg) had defined the program’s mail filters. There was a whole list of red flags: nasty words, racial slurs, supervisors’ names, words like “secret” and “classified.”

That last one, “classified,” beached the entire network during WebFence’s first hour by flagging and storing each and every e-mail sent to or from the Classified Advertising department.

The software also flagged large attachments, suspiciously long messages, suspiciously frequent messages. . . . Every day, hundreds of possibly illicit e-mails were sent to a secure mailbox, and it was Lincoln’s job to follow up on every one. That meant reading them, so he read them. But he didn’t enjoy it.

He couldn’t admit this to his mother, but it *did* feel wrong, what he was doing, like eavesdropping. Maybe if he were the sort of person who liked that sort of thing . . . His girlfriend Sam—his ex-girlfriend—always used to peek in other people’s medicine cabinets. “Robitussin,” she’d

report in the car on the way home. “And generic Band-Aids. And something that looked like a garlic press.”

Lincoln didn't even like *using* other people's bathrooms.

There was a whole complicated process he was supposed to follow if he caught someone actually breaking *The Courier's* rules. But most offenses called for just a written warning, and most offenders got the message after that.

In fact, the first round of warnings worked so well, Lincoln started to run out of things to do. WebFence kept flagging e-mails, a few dozen a day, but they were almost all false alarms. Greg didn't seem to care. “Don't worry,” he said to Lincoln on the first day that WebFence didn't snag a single legitimate violator. “You won't get fired. The men upstairs love what you're doing.”

“I'm not doing anything,” Lincoln said.

“Sure, you are. You're the guy who reads their e-mail. They're all scared of you.”

“Who's scared? Who's they?”

“Everybody. Are you kidding? This whole building is talking about you.”

“They're not scared of me. They're scared of getting caught.”

“Getting caught by *you*. Just knowing that you're snooping around their Sent folders every night is enough to keep them following the rules.”

“But I'm not snooping around.”

“You could,” Greg said.

“I could?”

Greg went back to what he was doing, some sort of laptop autopsy. “Look, Lincoln, I've told you. Somebody has to be here at night anyway. Somebody has to answer the phone and say, ‘Help desk.’ You're just sitting around, I know. You don't have enough work, I know. I don't care. Do the crossword. Learn a foreign language. We had a gal who used to crochet . . .”

Lincoln didn't crochet.

He read the newspaper. He brought in comic books and magazines and paperback novels. He called his sister sometimes, if it wasn't too late and if he felt lonely.

Mostly, he surfed the Net.