

## **INSTANT MESSAGES**

**By C J Nolan**

**Characters:**

Man – late 30's, married with child

Woman – 20, divorced with child

*MAN sits on a bench, reading a newspaper. He looks around from time to time anxious; waiting.*

*WOMAN enters and sees him. She tries to sneak up from behind.*

**MAN**

*(Turns and sees her. He stands) Hey!*

**WOMAN**

Hiya! *(Pause. Then they embrace.)*

**MAN**

How have you been?

**WOMAN**

Really good. Excellent, in fact.

**MAN**

You look great!

**WOMAN**

Thank you. You're not so bad yourself, old man. And how have you been?

**MAN**

All right. I've been all right. Busy, you know. Work's a bitch. But – okay. *(Pause)* I, um, I'm sorry I woke you.

**WOMAN**

Shit, I can't believe it's like almost noon. How long have you been here?

**MAN**

In town? About an hour. Well, the first half of that was spent lost.....

WOMAN

Oh, no! Where were you?

MAN

Um, lost. Out there someplace. But, surprisingly, I figured it out.

WOMAN

Good boy.

MAN

And then I spoke to Aaron about four times on the phone.....

WOMAN

Dammit! I have talked to him about picking up the phone!

MAN

Wait, wait! He was very good. He has very good phone manners. I kept asking him to get you but he didn't want to wake you up.

WOMAN

Really?

MAN

Oh, yeah! I got the impression he would look over at you and then think better of it. He's pretty smart.

WOMAN

That's my boy. He knows not to wake momma. But, honest, we never heard the phone ring.

MAN

I know. He was pretty fast on the draw. How old is he? Two? Three?

WOMAN

Almost three.

MAN

Huh. How is Mark with him?

WOMAN

Dude, Mark is great with him. They like each other a lot. Mark has all these paternal instincts all of a sudden. But Aaron can be a bit of a rat, you know....

MAN

Meaning....?

WOMAN

Well, the other night, Mark yelled at him for picking up the phone. And Aaron like yells, "Please don't hit me!" at the top of his lungs.

MAN

What?! Has he ever hit him?

WOMAN

No! Never! Mark loves him. That came out of nowhere. Mark was like totally freaked. It upset him for days.

MAN

Weird....

WOMAN

Well, Aaron challenges, you know. There hasn't really been a man around much, so..... I mean, it's not like his father sets any kind of example.

MAN

*(Pause)* Have you seen much of J.C. lately?

WOMAN

No. And when he does come around, he's usually fucked up, so I try to avoid that.

MAN

Yeah.....

WOMAN

Look, I really need some coffee. I'll be right back. *(Walks off)*

MAN

Sure. Go ahead. They just put that pot on..... I think.....

WOMAN

*(Returning)* They have the best coffee over there.

MAN

It's a nice little place. I remember you saying how much you loved it here.

WOMAN

Yep. This is home to me. Right here. *(Drinks)* Mmmmm – caffeine.

MAN

So, how is school?

WOMAN

Excellent. Ace-ing all my classes.

MAN

Great! Good to hear.

WOMAN

Well, it's not too hard. Most of them are gut courses just to fulfill the requirements. My math class is, like, "math for football players". I finish a test in 20 minutes and their still scratching their balls.

MAN

Of course. They're not as familiar with thinking as they are with their balls.

WOMAN

I like my government class, though. My teacher likes a good argument.

MAN

And I'm sure you give him plenty.

WOMAN

Well, that's the liberal in me. *(Pause)* I may not go back next semester.

MAN

Why? Come on, you know you need a degree. You're too smart for that.

WOMAN

I'll get it. Don't worry. I'll get it. But it is pretty hard taking care of a child AND working AND doing school, right? It's kind of wearing me out. I figure I'll just wait until Aaron's in school and then it will be easier.

MAN

Yeah, I can see your point. Just – just be sure to go back. It would be a damn shame if you didn't.

WOMAN

Don't worry about it. *(Pause)*

MAN

Look, um, ..... Thanks for seeing me.

WOMAN

Shit, dude. You're the one who drove two hundred miles to see **me**. I am flattered.

MAN

Well, it wasn't that hard, you know. And how often am I ever **that** close to you? I mean.....

WOMAN

*(smiling at him)* Oh, you silly men.

MAN

Huh? Oh....well, why not? You are my "mermaid on the rocks", right?

WOMAN

That's me, I guess. *(Pause)* So what do you want to do? I mean like..... you know we can't fuck or anything.

MAN

I know.

WOMAN

It wouldn't be right.

MAN

Sure! No. I didn't think....

WOMAN

Not that that wouldn't be, you know, wonderful and all.... But Mark's my bud and I don't want to do that to him.

MAN

No, really. I didn't even think that was possible. You..... I mean, well, of course my fantasies are a different matter.....

WOMAN

Uh huh.

MAN

But actually..... Actually I just wanted to see you again. Needed to see you again. Just to hang out and talk and..... And you look great. Gorgeous, as always.

WOMAN

Thank you.

MAN

And you seem happier than I've ever seen you. Mark.... He must be good for you.

WOMAN

He is. We've always been really good friends. When he came back to town a few months ago, it was like nothing had changed. And he loves Aaron which is like a plus for us twenty year old divorced single moms.

MAN

Sure. So..... do you think you'll marry him?

WOMAN

I told you, hon. I'm not getting married again. *(Pause)* With you, I might have. But I couldn't have you, so....

MAN

I know. I know.

WOMAN

There's no point to it anyway, dude. I think it just satisfies the government and causes unnecessary tensions. *(Pause)* Speaking of which, how's the family?

MAN

Um.... Great! Strangely enough. Things have been pretty smooth. Jean and I are getting along better than we have in years.

WOMAN

Really?

MAN

Yeah. Yeah, surprisingly. It's been gradual but we communicate better and busted up old habits – both mine and hers. And, of course, Kevin is terrific. More and more a smart-ass little Irishman....

WOMAN

Like his dad.

MAN

Like his dad. But that's what happens when they grow up.

WOMAN

Just the challenge you need. Plus he has lots he can learn from you.

MAN

Thanks. I hope so. *(Pause)* Look, let's.... How about I take you shopping again?

WOMAN

No.....

MAN

Come on. It's not a big deal.

WOMAN

No. You didn't drive all this way just to take me to a mall. Don't be silly.

MAN

Well – ok. Okay, why don't we go down to the bar and shoot pool for a while? Or I could take you to lunch. That sushi place? Or hell , just drive around and get stoned. I mean, whatever.

Whatever you want. Just for a while.

WOMAN

I promised Mark I wouldn't be long.

MAN

Oh.

WOMAN

You know - he understands.

MAN

Yeah.

WOMAN

But he's not like happy about it, you know?

MAN

Sure. No. Of course. I don't blame him.

WOMAN

*(Pause)* Listen. Dude, you have to stop emailing me.

MAN

Oh.

WOMAN

I don't think it's good for you. And I'm like hardly ever on-line anymore, anyway.

MAN

I know. I just....

WOMAN

I mean, I wouldn't mind hearing from you every now and then. But ... I can't give you the response you're looking for.

MAN

I know! I know. It's just....hard. I'm trying. I really am trying. Each day just... Taking those deep breathes. Checking my email less. Ten times a day rather than twenty. Trying to... I'll get there. Honest, I'll be able to pull back. Soon. But I have never been through this before! So..... thoroughly out of control. Really a blithering idiot. I alternate between emotions faster than I breathe. I don't have these skills! I can't hide them and I can't just shut them down.

WOMAN

I forget that sometimes.

MAN

This whole thing has been one insane, beautiful freak occurrence!

WOMAN

Oh, totally insane!

MAN

Just senseless. Like two freight trains slamming into each other..... and utterly, utterly doomed.

WOMAN

Yes.

MAN

It has been really hard to be rational about us.

WOMAN

I know.

MAN

And I'm trying. But I have never felt like this before or been in such a ..... joyous, painful situation. And I don't know the rules. *(Pause)* I miss you terribly. It has nothing to do with my wife. It never has. It was just about you. Honest.

WOMAN

*(Pause)* I do miss you sometimes.

MAN

Yeah?

WOMAN

Of course. We used to talk like everyday! It wasn't just because I was bored, you know. God, how crazy.

MAN

All those emails back and forth.

**WOMAN**

And the on-line conversations! Finding each other on-line in the afternoon. IM-ing each other little smiley faces.

**MAN**

Man, I wish I could have saved some of those.

**WOMAN**

You can print them.

**MAN**

You're kidding!

**WOMAN**

No, really. While it's still on the screen, the whole conversation can be printed! Yeah. I printed out a few of our "instant message" sessions. Some of the better ones. I'm not sure where they are now.

**MAN**

I don't know about this new technology. Sure, it kept us close. Email and IM's made the relationship possible, in a way. We could always be right there for each other. But I think words change on a computer screen. They lose context. You read fast but you can mistake what is being said. If you can't type fast, you're sunk! You're stuck with shorthand that may not mean what you wanted to say.

**WOMAN**

I don't think we were like that.

MAN

Sometimes. Sometimes I would look at the screen and didn't have much time and just went dumb. I mean – people used to write letters to each other. Write in the park. Write in bed. Take their time to say what they meant. And they could hold these letters in their hands and read them over and over again until they turned brown and brittle. Sleep with them under their pillows, you know? Then, years after they die, Random House makes a book out of them and those feelings live forever. The internet just turns it all to smoke. Everything vanishes.

WOMAN

*(Pause)* Do you think I'll vanish?

MAN

In some ways you have to, right?

WOMAN

I'm a very practical girl. I don't like being alone and I have a son to take care of. Each time you left hurt a lot.

MAN

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

And you haven't changed your decision, have you?

MAN

*(Pause)* No. No. I am a very responsible person, I guess. I have made a commitment, years ago, to another woman and a child who means the world to me. And I won't fuck up their lives.

WOMAN

And your happiness?

MAN

My happiness always rides in the back seat.....except when I'm with you.

WOMAN

But you can't be. So I have to make my own way.

MAN

God, I know this! I do. Intellectually. My heart, on the other hand, is a bit dysfunctional.....

WOMAN

Well...?

MAN

Wait, I..... One thing I really need to say, okay? That is I'm sorry. I'm sorry for putting you in this position. This whole "married man" situation. I should have known better and I.....

WOMAN

Oh, but you were so sweet! How could I resist?

MAN

Stop. Come on. You know what I'm trying to say.

WOMAN

*(smiling)* Listen, dude, if you hadn't made a move, I probably would have raped you! Look, I needed you. I would not have made it through last year without you. And I think you needed me. To grow up a little bit in some way you never thought of. You own a piece of my heart and I'm not asking for it back. *(Pause)* I have no regrets. Do you?

MAN

No. None. *(They kiss)*

WOMAN

I have to go. I promised I'd be back soon.

MAN

Yeah. Okay. I, um, picked up some coloring books for Aaron. There's one with airplanes and a "Blues Clues".

**WOMAN**

Cool! He loves coloring. He like calls it his "homework". So when I sit down to do mine, he sits with me.

**MAN**

Aaron's a cool kid. I liked him a lot.

**WOMAN**

Yeah. Me too.

**MAN**

Yeah.

**WOMAN**

Now, come over here and say goodbye.

**MAN**

*(They embrace)* I do love you, you know?

**WOMAN**

I know, babe.

**MAN**

Okay. Goodbye.

**WOMAN**

'Bye.

*(She walks off first, then he goes in the opposite direction.)*

**END**