

DOT PITCH DREAM

A short story by AmandaK

I slip into the chair at my desk and wait for the computer to finish booting up. It takes several minutes before the auxiliary programs are loaded, and when the machine is done I stare in amazement at the image that decorates my desktop. The screen no longer shows the familiar holiday sunset picture from last summer's vacation. Instead, lodged between the icons which provide shortcuts to Netscape, Word and the Instant Messenger, sits a man. Or rather, his reflection.

Steely blue eyes gaze back at me from the two dimensions of the monitor. Dark curls, cropped close to his skull, give way to a high forehead and a strong jaw. Did I install this picture as my wallpaper? I don't think I did.

Then again, it's easy to hit the wrong button when web surfing. Besides, I don't mind. The sunset was beginning to bore me and this man is pleasing to look at.

Outside, the wind howls around the corners of the apartment building and rain splatters against the windows. I shiver, and am glad I don't have to go out. Not today, anyway. I hate winter. I detest the cold, the icy rains and the rainy snows that seem to dictate this year's December weather.

My gaze turns away from the world outside and back to the screen. I heave a sigh; it looks much more pleasant in the picture, where my mystery wallpaper guy is lounging in a bronze velvet Chesterfield. He's dressed in a tan sweater, snug around his chest, and pants of the same hue. His shoulders are broad, and behind him I can make out some of the room. Browns and copper colors reign supreme, and the image radiates warmth.

Oh yes, it definitely looks much nicer there.

I keep staring at the image, mesmerized and daydreaming about warmer pastures. I should check my e-mail, or see if there are any new messages posted on the various boards that I frequent. And I most definitely should finish that story that has been occupying far too many bytes on my hard disk for far too long. That's why I started up the computer in the first place.

But I can't bring myself to move. I keep looking at the photo of the man. He seems familiar, and I have a sense I know him.

His mouth curls in a faint smile, and the blue eyes sparkle with merriment as if he knows my thoughts, can see my inertia. One hand rests on his thigh, the other is raised as if ready to reach out to me.

I blink.

Did his finger just twitch?

I peer closer, then bark an uncomfortable laugh at my own expense. Silly girl. Of course the guy on the monitor screen didn't move - he is, after all, a two-dimensional display composed of thousands of tiny dots.

Still, it does not take much imagination to see that powerful chest rise and fall in regular breathing beneath the shirt. I imagine I can hear his heartbeat over the sound of raindrops hitting the roof overhead.

I shake my head as if to disperse the insane thoughts.

There!

"I saw that," I mutter below my breath. This time I am certain. The corners of his mouth quivered. And there's definitely a smile lighting up his handsome features now.

I pretend to look outside where the rain keeps slashing at the window. As soon as my eyes leave the screen, I whip my head back. I laugh and ignore the note of hysteria in my voice. "Gotcha!" His teeth, white and even, are bared now. And the raised hand has lowered somewhat, moved further forward, ready to be held out.

"Impossible!" my brain screams at me. I don't know what to do. Call for help? Run away? Shut down the computer? My finger hovers over the off-button.

I know that if I shut down, it will all be over. No more handsome mystery man to smile at me.

More curious than afraid I withdraw my hand. "What do you want?" I ask. My voice is loud in the small room and I give a start. "Who are you?"

The smile breaks fully now and he blinks, as if waking from a long sleep. He pushes up from the chair and I can see that he is tall. Taller than average. He must be taller than I am.

He doesn't answer my questions.

"I have been watching you," he says. His voice holds the hint of an accent and I feel I should recognize it but I don't.

"I've been reading your stories."

My stories? Color rushes to my cheeks. "All of them?" I gasp, dismayed. Sure, I write a lot. Fanfiction mainly. Not all of it gets published, though. And certainly not under my own name!

He grins mischievously and nods. "Every single story you ever wrote. Even the rough drafts."

"Oh." It's all I know to say.

His eyes soften as he notices my discomfort. "I like your stories," he says quietly and an uncertain smile forms around my lips.

"Really?"

"Really," he nods. "Especially the ones about my-" He pauses. "Alter egos."

Suddenly, the way lightning strikes without warning, I recognize him. "It's you," I whisper. How could I not have known whom this man was that was looking at me from inside the monitor?

His smile widens. "Close enough," he says. "I am not real. I am merely another... incarnation of him. Another figment of your imagination." He moves to offer me a hand and despite my curiosity I shrink away from the fingers that suddenly jut from the screen. They shimmer a bit, the way computer images do.

"Please," he says. "Take my hand. I would like to show you around in some of the worlds you have created. And I want to thank you."

I shake my head, hesitant. "I can't," I murmur.

"Sure you can," he assures me. "You can do whatever you want. You're a writer, aren't you?"

Well, yes but... My eyes flicker toward the world outside. It's growing dark. And it's only mid-afternoon! Oh, how I hate winter!

I look back at the screen. He crooks a finger at me and cocks his head in a way that I find irresistible.

"Oh, what the hell," I mutter and take his hand.

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