

**Love on the PC... a short story by Anne Nichols, ©1999**

Andi sighed as she looked at the screen before her... all those messages... and wondered, not for the first time, if she should ever have got onto the Internet.

The computer finished downloading the list... personal mail from friends and family... messages from colleagues in the same line of work... and finally the newsgroups...

Ah yes, the newsgroups... she smiled, lifting her coffee cup to her lips, she would start with those tonight... there was usually something in them that made her smile, and after the rough day she'd had Andi felt in need of cheering up.

One particular post caught her eye straight away... from a man called Clive, asking if Andi would contact him by e-mail to follow up some comment made in an earlier message. Andi frowned... she posted into the newsgroups anonymously just using her shortened forename, with no other identifying details... lots of odd people use the Internet and she didn't want to be on the receiving end of some of their stranger fantasies!

Pushing the request from Clive to the back of her mind Andi carried on reading the posts... there were a few good jokes today, some not so funny ones, and several that had caused offence to others, starting up a violent flame war in one newsgroup.

Several humorous chat up lines caught her eye too... one particular guy, Phil, seemed to have picked up one of Andi's posts and was making interested noises. "Mmmmmm" she thought... I'll have to check him out... He seems to have my sort of sense of humour. Logging back onto the Internet Andi found his web site and was delighted to see a photo of the man himself. "Nice... "she thought, "very nice... I will have to try and chat him up some more."

Phil lived about a hundred miles from Andi, so she knew that realistically that the chance of a meeting was a bit remote, but as the days passed and the messages between them in the newsgroup became more and more familiar, she felt that progress was being made.

Then, one evening as she checked her mailbox her heart thumped wildly... there was an e-mail from him. She had optimistically added a remote mailbox address to her last few posts, and at last it had paid off, he had responded.

Almost shaking with anticipation she clicked open the message and saw the words before her... "Andi... I have really enjoyed our exchanges in the newsgroup but I would really like to get to know you better," she read. "I know that there are risks involved in meeting strangers you contact via the Internet, but I would love

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to be able to talk to you properly. My phone number is below... won't you ring me and talk...? Please...? I promise you I'm not a weirdo or pervert of any kind, just someone who finds you funny and attractive and wants to know more."

Hardly able to believe what she had just read, she reached again for her coffee cup and took a long swallow. Should she ring him...? There was no question about it in her mind... whether or not she should, she was going to... right now!

Picking up the receiver she dialled the number that Phil had given her, and then waited, mouth dry and heart pounding, as the tone indicated the line was ringing. "Hello...?" said a male voice, and taking a deep breath, Andi spoke... "Hello, is that Phil...?" she asked, "This is Andi... you asked me to call you."

There was a brief pause, during which time all sorts of thoughts flashed through Andi's mind, then the male voice spoke again, "Hi Andi, I'm so glad you did, I've been wanting to talk to you for ages, but thought you were just flirting with me."

Laughing with relief, Andi said she had been at first, but that she too had felt a change in their exchanges and had hoped to be able to contact him somehow. They talked and talked on the phone for well over an hour on that first night, and every night afterwards for weeks, asking questions of each other, finding out where they lived, what they did, their hobbies and interests and families... everything was exchanged in those conversations.

Then one Sunday evening, Andi's phone rang and it was Phil, saying that his company were sending him to a meeting in a town about five miles from where Andi lived, and could they perhaps meet up? "Could they...!" she said, delightedly, and arranged to meet him at a restaurant in town for lunch in three days time. Those three days passed in a daze for Andi... she was so excited and yet so nervous at the prospect of actually meeting this man face to face at last. Would they hit it off, or would they take an instant dislike to each other?

After work each night she emptied the contents of the wardrobe onto the bed and tried on every outfit she owned, before she decided on what to wear for the lunch.

Andi had managed to arrange to have a day's leave on Wednesday... she wanted to spend as much time as possible getting ready for her big date... and not to have to arrive rushed and bothered from work. After taking a long soak in the bath, she dressed with great care, choosing a flattering v-necked dress in a soft azure fabric, which accentuated the blue of her eyes, and floated around her slim body

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as she moved. Her fair wavy hair framed her face, and having added a cool grey linen jacket and strappy sandals she was ready.

Her new Fiat Brava made short work of the journey into town, and she was lucky to find a parking space almost opposite the restaurant. As she was about ten minutes early she decided to sit in the car and wait, rather than enter the restaurant before Phil. From her parking space she had a good view of everyone who approached the building, and did not have long to wait before she recognised the tall figure walking towards the doorway.

Waiting until he had entered, she climbed out of her seat and having locked the car, crossed the road and pushed open the door to the restaurant to find Phil just inside... he had seen her approach and come to meet her. Grinning broadly in greeting, and taking her arm, led her gently to the table reserved for them.

Lunch was a delight... not only was the food good and the atmosphere pleasant, but she was enthralled by the reality of his presence. With a start she realised that it was almost three o'clock and the waiter was hovering hopefully in the background. "We'd better go," she commented, "I think they're waiting for us to finish."

Taking her bag and jacket from the seat beside her she stood up, and Phil reached out and took her hand. Together they walked out into the afternoon sunshine, still talking, and strolled along towards the riverbank where there were seats and a small park. They stood and watched the water tumble over the stones and the ducks playfully chasing each other, and laughed at their antics.

Suddenly Phil put his arm around Andi's waist and drew her to him, her body close, her face next to his... and bending his head his lips sought hers. She responded hungrily, feeling a glow inside her, which began in her stomach and spread throughout her body with great speed. They kissed for what seemed like hours, delighting in the feel of their lips and the closeness of their bodies, until Andi finally eased her mouth away from his, and put her hands either side of his face, looking into his eyes.

She spoke, her voice husky, "Oh Phil, I am so happy to be here with you," and his eyes and words told her he felt the same. "Who would have thought that something as simple as a message on a computer could have lead to this?" she asked, taking him by the hand and leading him back to where her car was parked, before driving back with him to her little flat, where they both knew that their relationship would develop into something else very very soon.