

Computers are easier to fix than people.

# Mac vs. PC



Fletcher DeLancey

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# DEDICATION

To my favorite wife.

# CHAPTER 1

ANNA WAS A CREATURE OF habit. Every Saturday morning, sometime between nine and eleven a.m., she packed up her laptop in its case and walked to the Bean Grinder for her double caramel mocha and chocolate cherry scone—a travesty of sugar and empty calories, but one she simply could not live without. Though she always wished she could lose those last ten pounds, giving up her mochas and scones was too high a price to pay. She had compromised by limiting indulgences to once a week, and even that loss had been painful.

The two-mile walk to the Bean Grinder enabled the happy delusion that she was burning off those calories before she even imbibed them. She did try to extend the walk somewhat by not taking the direct route, but Corvallis was a small town and there was only so far she could deviate before ending up in either the river on the east side or the state highway on the west. Today she was opting for the river route, which had the advantage of good bird-watching potential and the disadvantage of high skateboarder or rollerblader collision potential. Of course, if she

made this walk two or three hours earlier, there would be more birds and fewer kids on various-sized wheels. But that would require getting up earlier. She worked the seven-to-four shift five days a week, and she'd be damned if she'd sacrifice a moment of sleep on her precious weekends.

She swung along, her legs eating up more ground than most people expected of someone her height. For some reason, it never seemed to occur to them that shorter legs could move more quickly than longer ones. With every step her computer bag bumped her hip, its presence comforting as always. As long as she had the laptop and an Internet connection, she wasn't alone.

A group of kids whizzed by on their rollerblades, laughing and gossiping as they went. Anna smiled, watching as they sped around the curve of the river path and vanished from sight. She'd once been part of a group like that, a few hundred years ago. But that was back in her hometown, and it never seemed to be as easy to find social groups as an adult—at least not groups where everyone shared the same history, background, goals, and aspirations. Except her group hadn't really shared the same aspirations. She was the only one who had left.

Rounding the curve, she took the next right turn off the path and within a block was back in the business district. Two more blocks and a left turn and there it was, her favorite coffee

shop in the whole world. With a gustatory tingle of anticipation, she opened the door and went straight to the counter.

“Hi, Kyung. Are you ready for that chem test?” She pulled the laptop case over her head and deposited it on the floor at her feet.

“Hi, Ms. Petrowski. Yeah, I’m ready. It’s not chem that worries me; it’s biology. Chemistry makes sense. Biology, you just have to memorize everything. The usual?”

“Please.” She watched as he pulled a small covered plate out from under the counter, winking at her as he did so.

“Saved it for you,” he said in a near-whisper. “We had a run on ’em half an hour ago. I could tell they were going to vanish.”

Indeed, the space in the glass display reserved for her favorite pastry was empty.

“You are a god among students and men,” she said, happily drawing the scone closer to her body. “Now if we could only get you to call me Anna, you’d be perfect.”

He smiled, his teeth flashing white against his dark face as he pulled a mug from the stack. “No can do. Someday you’ll quit trying.”

“That would mean giving up, and I never give up.” It was an old game between them, and she was probably never going to win. Kyung had been raised by a fiercely polite mother, whom Anna knew through her IT work on campus. Mrs. Choi was a tiny woman, making Anna

look like a Viking by comparison, but her force of personality was such that people's spines unconsciously straightened around her. Anna could only imagine what it had been like to grow up under her watchful eye.

Kyung efficiently whipped up her caramel mocha and set it on the counter. "There you go. One double shot of caffeine, with sugar drip. Would you like an IV with that?"

She laughed as she handed over a five-dollar bill. "If only I could. Keep the dollar, Kyung."

"Thanks, Ms. Petrowski."

"Call me Anna and that tip could be a lot more."

He looked wounded. "Now you're resorting to bribery?"

"Would it work?"

"No."

"Then I guess I'm not resorting to it." She settled the laptop case over her head again, picked up the coffee in one hand and the scone in the other, and turned to look for a table.

She was on the early end of her usual arrival time, which meant there were more tables available. Unfortunately, her favorite one in the corner was occupied by a woman peering intently at her laptop while sipping from an immense travel mug. Anna frowned, then walked to the next table over. Here she could still be by the windows, and the moment the other woman left, she would scoot into her favorite spot.



She sat down, opened her laptop, and began the next part of her Saturday routine: catching up on the pleasure reading she didn't have time for on weeknights. This was usually a two-hour process, and one she looked forward to. In the IT world, if you didn't keep up, you were soon obsolete. So she spent hours at work and afterwards reading about software updates, hardware advances, networking solutions, creative problem-solving techniques, and every other thing that kept her on top of her profession. But on the weekends, she didn't want anything to do with computers other than using hers as a reading platform. This was her time to catch up on world news, some politics—though her tolerance threshold for that was very low—a little entertainment gossip, and her favorite thing, travel blogs. She loved to read about faraway places and had a running list of the top ten locations she wanted to visit someday. On her salary, a few of those locations were probably out of the question, but she could still dream.

At the moment, she was reading obsessively about Portugal. One of her coworkers had recently returned from a European tour and raved about how Portugal was the last place in western Europe where one could travel without selling a kidney to finance the trip. Always alert for frugal traveling options, Anna had seized upon the idea and begun researching. What she'd read had piqued her interest, and at the

moment, Portugal was sitting at the top of her list. She also liked the fact that Spain could be easily added to the itinerary, and was giving serious thought to a quick side trip to Gibraltar. And from there—holy moly, she could hop a ferry to Tangier and actually set foot in Africa.

She was just checking out the ferry routes when a voice next to her said, “Shit!”

Anna raised her head and glanced over at the woman who had usurped her table. As their eyes met, the woman’s cheeks pinked. “Sorry,” she said in an embarrassed tone. “I didn’t mean to say that out loud.”

Nodding, Anna returned her attention to the ferry schedules. Hm, there was a shorter ferry route from Tarifa, Spain, to Tangier. But she really wanted to see Gibraltar. Maybe she could take a bus to Gibraltar, then return to Tarifa and hop the ferry from there? Would the fare difference be worth it?

“Are you kidding me? Dammit!”

Anna looked up in time to see the woman deliver a sharp smack to the side of her laptop’s screen.

“I hate these things,” she growled. This time when she met Anna’s eyes, her ire had clearly overtaken her embarrassment. “All I want is to finish this report and save the edits; is that so much to ask?”

“Given the computer you’re using, it probably is.” Anna smiled in spite of herself. She’d pegged the woman as a computer twit the moment

she'd seen the machine on her table. "Twit" was the slang term in her department for the high-powered people on campus who demanded the latest and most expensive computers despite having no actual need for them. They were a funding drain in every department's budget, but no one ever thought of cutting *their* equipment line item. Instead, it always seemed to be cut for the research assistants and admin assistants who actually needed the processing power.

A cool brown gaze rested on her. "This is supposed to be the best computer out there. How can I be asking too much of it?"

"Who told you to buy that model? Your admin?"

"No, my—" She paused, scratched the side of her forehead with a long finger, and finished, "My friend. Who, now that I think about it, doesn't know jack shit about these things, and I have no idea why I listened to her." Sharp eyes scanned Anna's computer and lifted to her face. "Apple? Are you one of those Mac bigots?"

It was insulting on the surface, but there was a trace of humor in the woman's face that allowed Anna to relax. "Guilty as charged. Worse, I'm a knowledgeable Mac bigot. That makes me dangerous."

"Knowledgeable, how?"

Damn. She hadn't meant to put herself in that corner. With a sigh, she said, "I work for the IT department on campus."

And there it was, the look she recognized so easily. The *you can save me* expression that meant she was about to face a choice: either be rude to salvage her morning, or be polite and give up her precious weekend time to do yet another computer intervention. In Anna's experience, computer techs had one thing in common with doctors and lawyers, and it wasn't the salary. It was that everyone thought her advice came free, even on weekends.

"Do you think you could—?" The woman stopped herself again. "I'm sorry. You're here trying to relax, aren't you? I shouldn't be horning in. By the way, I'm Elizabeth Markel." She leaned out of her chair and held out a hand.

Anna reached over to take it. "Anna Petrowski. Nice to meet you. And thanks for not asking me to fix your problem."

"Just because I'm working on a Saturday morning doesn't mean everyone should." She glanced at Anna's laptop again. "You're IT, but your personal computer is a Mac? I thought everyone in IT used PCs."

"Which IT department are you talking about? The one I work for wishes the whole campus would switch to Macs. It would make our lives a hell of a lot easier."

"Really? I guess I'm talking about my old IT department. I'm new here. Just came over from Michigan State."

"That's kind of a step down in size, isn't it?"

“In student body, yes. But it’s a step up for me personally. I’d hit the ceiling in Michigan.”

Anna nodded her understanding. It was a fact of university life that one often stood a better chance of promotion by leaving than by expecting recognition where one was. The IT world was a little different and somewhat immune to that rule, but she’d seen many campus acquaintances transfer out in order to advance. “Well, in that case, welcome to the land of the Beavers.”

“Thanks.” Elizabeth’s sudden smile was blinding. “And can I just tell you that your choice of mascot gave me serious pause? I wasn’t sure the promotion made up for going from being a Spartan to being a Beaver.”

“Could be worse. You could be a Duck,” said Anna, naming the mascot of their rival state university.

“Believe me, I know. What is it with Oregon mascots, anyway? Don’t you have bears here? Cougars? Wolves? Something a little more impressive?”

“Tons of bears, but how common is that? Montana, Missouri, Northern Colorado, the University of California system—there are bear mascots everywhere. We’d rather be original. The Cougars are Washington State. And ranchers shot the last of our wolves sometime before World War Two. Every now and then one wanders over from Idaho, and the whole eastern half of the

state wants to pick up their rifles and take care of it.”

“Yes, I’d heard this was still the Wild West.” Elizabeth’s eyebrows waggled a bit, and Anna couldn’t help but laugh.

“I hate to say this, but you’ve got Easterner stamped all over you.”

“Only someone on the West Coast would think that Michigan is ‘east.’ You do realize that there are several states between us and the Atlantic.”

“Yes, but you’re in the Eastern time zone,” Anna pointed out.

“Oh, for God’s sake. That’s how you determine who’s east?”

“Actually, no. We think anyone on the other side of the Rockies is an Easterner.”

Elizabeth, who had looked satisfied a moment earlier, now burst into laughter. “Well, that explains a lot.”

It was the laughter that decided her. Anna gestured toward the recalcitrant laptop and said, “Would you like me to take a look?”

“You don’t mind?”

“I wouldn’t offer if I did. I’d make you fill out a service request instead.”

“And that is universal no matter which campus you’re on.” Elizabeth scooted her chair aside to make room for Anna, who got up and slid into the chair next to her.

“Okay, let’s see what we’ve got here,” she said, angling the laptop for a better view. “Ah. Microsoft Word. Another bane in our lives.”

“And a big one in mine, too, believe me. But what other option is there?”

“Oh, please. For what you’re doing here? Practically any word-processing program. These charts aren’t even linked, are they?”

Elizabeth looked blank. “I don’t know what you just asked.”

“I mean, you don’t have them set to automatically update when the original Excel file is changed.”

“I can do that?”

Anna shook her head. “Oh boy. Yes, you can, but if you want me to teach you that, you *will* have to fill out a service request.” She scrolled up and down the page. “What exactly is the problem? It looks normal to me.”

“The problem is that the damn thing crashed, and when I reopened it, it was the old version. None of my changes were saved.”

Anna hid a smile. “They probably were; you just didn’t know where to look for them. Word does do autosaves, but the files are somewhat... difficult to find.” She opened up the file explorer window, clicked through several folders and subfolders, checked the modification date of a file, and then opened it. “Is that what you were looking for?” she asked, angling the computer back toward Elizabeth.

After quickly scanning up and down, Elizabeth smiled. “Yes! God, thank you! How’d you do that?”

“I just pulled it out of the temp directory. That’s one of the two places that Word automatically puts its autosave files.”

“Can you show me how to find them?”

“Sure.” Anna slid her chair a little closer so that they could both see the screen. “Go to documents and settings, then click on your user name, then click on local settings, and then click on the temp folder. The autosaved files are the ones with this .asd extension.”

Elizabeth scowled at the screen. “You must be joking. How am I supposed to remember all that? Why doesn’t Word save those files in a location where you don’t have to be an IT specialist to find them? And what the hell is an .asd file? I thought Word documents were .doc files. Well, .docx now.” She rolled her eyes. “Every time you get used to something, they change it.”

“Word documents are .docx files, yes. But Word doesn’t see this as a document; it sees it as a temporary file. It won’t be a document until you manually save it again. Ordinarily, you’d never even have to look for this, because Word is supposed to automatically bring up the most recent .asd file when it restarts after a crash.”

“But sometimes it doesn’t.”

“Right. And then you have to know where to look for it.”



“Arrrgh.” Elizabeth buried her face in her hands, rubbed briskly, then looked up again. “Where do I sign up for your class?”

Anna almost felt sorry for her. “I don’t teach one.”

“Why not? You should. I actually understood what you just told me, and that’s a first.”

“Well, thank you. But I don’t have nearly enough time to teach; I’m too busy saving the asses of people like you.”

Elizabeth let out a very unladylike snort. “Touché. And we’re grateful, I can assure you.”

Liking her more by the second, Anna said, “Tell you what. We’re going to set your Word program to put those autosave files somewhere a little more intuitive. If you were going to look for an autosave file, where do you think it should be?”

“Um.” Elizabeth clicked back into the file explorer and looked through the directories. “I think it should be right here in my main directory.”

“Okay. Then make it.” Anna sat back as Elizabeth created a new folder and named it. “Good. Now make a folder inside that one and call it Word.”

“Why? Can’t I just assume that any file in here is going to be the one I’m looking for?”

“That depends. Do you use any other programs besides Word that create autosave files?”

“Ah. Good point.” A moment later another new folder had been created and named.

“Perfect. Now go back to Word. All right, now click on tools in the menu. Now options. And now you want the file locations tab.” She pointed. “See where it says file types? Now click on autosave.”

“Jesus Christ,” muttered Elizabeth as she clicked. “Why do they make it so hard?”

“Is this a good time to tell you that it’s easier in just about any program written for a Mac?” Anna laughed at the glower that earned her. “Didn’t think so. All right, click on modify.”

“Aha. And this is where I tell it to go to the folder I just made.” Elizabeth was off and running. “There. Right?”

“Right. Now you’re set. The next time Word crashes and fails to bring up your temp file, you know right where to find it.”

Elizabeth looked over with an expression of true gratitude. “Thank you so much. You really did just save my ass.”

“No problem. I’m always glad to help demystify things that are supposed to be simple.” She rose from her chair. “Well, I’ll let you get back to your report.”

“Wait.” Elizabeth stopped her with a hand on her arm. “Can I buy you another coffee or whatever it is you’re drinking?”

“Thanks, but one a week is all I’m allowed. I appreciate the offer, though.”

“Will you take a rain check?”

Anna saw more than just courtesy in Elizabeth’s expression. And then it occurred

to her that this woman was new in town and probably looking for friends. She knew from her own experience that building a social circle from scratch was the hardest part of moving. Finding a decent mechanic or hairdresser was simple by comparison.

“I come here every Saturday morning,” she said. “How about next week?”

“Deal,” said Elizabeth. “Same time?”

Nodding, Anna said, “And same table.”

“Great. I look forward to it.”

They exchanged smiles before Anna stepped over to her own table. Her mocha had cooled a bit, but she didn’t mind. She was a sucker for a great smile, and Elizabeth’s definitely qualified.

*Okay, where was I? Right—the ferry to Tangier.*



## CHAPTER 2

AFTER A BUSY WEEK AT work, Anna had nearly forgotten about her Saturday appointment. She'd slept in a bit and was puttering around the house when her memory finally decided to kick in, reminding her that she needed to be at the Bean Grinder in about—she looked at the clock—ten minutes.

“Shit! Damn, damn, damn!” She hated being in a rush on her only relaxing mornings. Frantically she dashed about the house, dumping her breakfast dishes in the sink, trading her baggy sweatpants for some decent jeans, then running into the bathroom to brush her teeth. A hopeless case of bedhead defied all efforts to tame her much-too-curly blonde hair, and she had no time for a shower. Great. Nothing for it but a ponytail, then.

With her hair corralled into a scrunchie, she stopped in the hall long enough to slip on some shoes, then grabbed her keys and coat and went out the door. Though it killed her to drive, she didn't have enough time to walk. As it was, she pulled into a parking spot right on

time and hastened through the door, looking for a familiar face.

Elizabeth waved from the corner table, an open smile lighting her features. "Hi there," she said when Anna came within speaking distance. "Thanks for coming."

The in-a-hurry tension drained from Anna's body as she stopped next to the table. "I told you, I come every Saturday."

"Yes, but do you always come at this time?"

Was it that obvious? "Well, I do vary it a bit, depending on how long I sleep in."

"No doubt. I just got here, too, and haven't had a chance to order anything. Why don't you sit down, and I'll get our drinks?"

Anna turned and gazed at the display case. Though she couldn't distinguish the individual pastries from this distance, she could see the empty plate where her precious scones were supposed to be. "Can't do that," she said. "I have to get my chocolate cherry scone, and they're not in the case. Which means Kyung is holding one back, and he won't give it to anyone but me. At least he'd better not."

"Kyung. That charming young man working the front counter?"

"That's him. Double chemistry/biology major. Last week he was sweating a biology midterm; I want to hear how he did."

"I'll go with you, then." Elizabeth rose gracefully, and with a start Anna realized she'd

never seen the woman standing up. Elizabeth topped her by a good four inches, and a quick glance revealed that none of them were heels. Damn. She hated being short.

Together they walked to the counter, waiting patiently while Kyung put together what might have been the world's most complicated coffee order for a young student whose ears could hardly be seen for the piercings.

"I swear," Elizabeth said in a low tone, "every year the kids get younger. It's to the point now where I see the freshmen come in and I wonder how they can possibly have driver's licenses."

Anna smothered a chuckle. "I know," she murmured. "And have you noticed that the older you get, the more invisible you become?"

"Sadly, yes. It's like they're not programmed to recognize anyone over twenty-five unless the person is giving a lecture."

"And sometimes not even then."

Elizabeth laughed, earning a quizzical look from the young woman, who was just turning away with her drink. Anna stepped up and met Kyung's expectant grin.

"Hi, Ms. Petrowski."

"Ms. Petrowski?" echoed Elizabeth with a raised eyebrow.

"I've tried for two years to retrain him to call me Anna. This year I really had high hopes, but no."

Kyung's grin grew larger. "Keep trying. The usual, or are you going to amaze me today?"

"No shocks today. And she's buying." Anna pointed. "She's also going to give you a big tip for saving my scone. You did save my scone, right?"

With a flourish, he produced a covered plate from beneath the counter. "Of course. And what will you have, Ms. ...?"

"Elizabeth," said Elizabeth firmly. "And I'll have a latte with extra foam."

"Coming right up." Whistling, he pulled down two mugs and began the process of alchemy.

"So what's so special about this scone?"

Anna followed Elizabeth's gaze and pulled the plate a little closer. "It's the best pastry in this whole town, and they only bake them on Saturdays. I'm sure if you got a chance to taste one, you'd agree. Unfortunately, there's only the one."

Elizabeth smiled. "Message received. I'll keep my paws off."

"It's best that way. Kyung," Anna called over the sound of the steamer, "how'd the midterm go?"

He looked over his shoulder. "I don't know yet, but I felt good about it. Just had a moment of panic when I couldn't remember the difference between xylem and phloem." He faced forward again and began fine-tuning the foam in the milk he was steaming.

"Good Lord," said Anna. "I don't think I ever knew the difference between whosit and whatsit."



“Xylem and phloem,” Elizabeth said. “Vascular tissues in plants. Xylem circulates water from the roots through the stems and leaves, and phloem circulates sugars from the opposite direction. The sugars are the product of photosynthesis. Just remember that water goes up, and sugar comes down. Simplistic, but fairly accurate.”

“Well, it’s obvious where you work,” said Anna. “And it’s not in Technology Support Services. Forestry?”

“In a manner of speaking. I deal with forestry research.”

Kyung finished his alchemy and brought two mugs back to the counter. “Here you are, Elizabeth. One double caramel mocha and one latte with extra foam.”

“What?” Anna stared at him. “Elizabeth? Just like that?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know her last name.”

“And you’re not going to,” Elizabeth said. “What do I owe you?”

“Eight fifty, please.”

“But—wait a minute! That’s not fair, you already knew my last name from your mother!”

“Thank you, Kyung.” Elizabeth’s voice betrayed her amusement as she handed over a ten-dollar bill. “Keep the change.”

“Thank *you*, Elizabeth,” he said happily and rang up the sale.

“Did you two prearrange this?”

“Are you coming?” asked Elizabeth, already walking away.

“Enjoy your scone, Ms. Petrowski,” said Kyung, barely restraining a laugh.

Anna leveled a mock glare at him, but it was impossible to hold it in the face of his obvious delight. She shook her head and followed Elizabeth to their table. Dropping her laptop into one chair and sliding into another, she said, “I never had a chance. And now I’m envious. Just so you know, I had considered letting you sample my scone, but now I’ve changed my mind.”

“Well, how was I to know that? You just got finished intimating to me that you’d never share. Besides, how is any of this my fault?”

Having no answer to that one, Anna bit into her scone and moaned in bliss as the flavors burst across her tongue. “Mmm. I do love Saturdays.”

Elizabeth sipped her latte with considerably less drama, a smile hovering at the corners of her mouth. “Wow. I guess you do. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone look so—” She paused as a pink flush crept up her neck. “Happy while eating,” she finished.

“Go ahead, you can say it.” Anna picked off a chunk and noted the fat chocolate chip nestled inside. “Looks orgasmic, doesn’t it?” She popped the piece in her mouth and rolled her eyes back, mumbling, “Oh, yeah. So good.” By the time she looked at Elizabeth again, the pink had spread

up to her cheekbones. “Nice blush you have going there,” she observed. “I guess now we’re even.”

“Jesus.” Elizabeth fanned her face with a napkin. “Do you really look like that every time you have a scone, or is this just a show for revenge?”

“Well, I don’t actually know what I look like when I eat a scone. Never did it in front of a mirror.” She winked. “But I don’t usually do the ‘so good’ part.”

“That’s a relief. For a minute there I was flashing onto the restaurant scene in *When Harry Met Sally*.”

“I love that scene! When the waiter asks the woman in the back what she’d like to order, and—”

“And she says, ‘I’ll have what she’s having,’” Elizabeth finished as they both laughed. “I thought I’d pee my pants when I saw that in the theater.”

“Me too. The other one that killed me was the airplane scene, when Harry describes his dancing as the white man’s overbite...” Anna bit her lower lip and raised her fists to chin level as she imitated the awkward, jerky head movement.

“Yes, and it’s so true! How many guys have you seen who dance like that?”

“Every guy in my high school.”

“Exactly.” They snorted over this truism and then lapsed into silence while sipping their drinks. Before it could become awkward, Elizabeth asked, “I’m curious. If you’re not working on

weekends, why do you bring your laptop? You were studying it pretty hard last Saturday.”

“Oh, that wasn’t studying. That was research. For fun, I mean.”

“On what, if I can ask?”

“You can ask. I’m saving up for an overseas trip. And I’m seriously thinking about going to Portugal and Spain, with a quick side trip to Tangier just to set my feet in Africa.”

“Really? That sounds fantastic! I’ve dipped into northern Spain from France, but never got any farther south than that.”

“Where did you go?” Anna was instantly fascinated; the only thing better than reading about travel was talking to someone who’d done it.

“We did kind of a loop. Down through the Pyrenees to Barcelona, and then over to... Damn, I can’t remember the name of the city.” She frowned in thought.

“Hang on.” Anna set down her drink and pulled out her laptop. As she waited for it to boot, she said, “We’ll just find a map, and you can show me. Ah, here we go.” She typed in her password.

“It boots that quickly?”

“It’s a MacBook Pro,” Anna said. “They’re fast. And the operating system is fast, too. There’s a big advantage to having a lean, clean operating system versus one that’s been built layer upon layer upon big, heavy layer like Windows.”

“Mac bigot,” Elizabeth said with a smile. “Aren’t you supposed to be more open-minded when you’re working in IT?”

“I’m a Mac bigot *because* I work in IT. I have to deal with all the crap Windows creates on a daily basis, when people like you need something done and your computer gets in your way instead of helping you. Believe me, my distaste comes honestly. Besides, Macs are fun to work with. Here, watch.” With a keyboard shortcut, she activated the Google search in her launcher, typed in “Spain map,” and hit the enter key. Instantly, her browser launched, opening on the Google search results. She clicked on the best-looking image link and sat back as the map filled her screen, the entire exercise having taken all of four seconds. “How’s that?”

Elizabeth’s look of surprise was comical. “How did you do that? I didn’t even see half of it.”

“Do you really want me to show you?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Okay.” Anna quit the browser and went through the steps in slow motion, explaining what a launcher was as she typed. Even with explaining the process, it still took no time at all.

“Oh, I want one of these. Can you teach me how to do this on my computer?”

“Yes, but it won’t look the same. This is a launcher written for OS X. For your computer, we’d have to install a launcher written for Windows.” Anna activated her launcher again,

typed in the name of a program, and a moment later brought up a screenshot in a new tab. "This is the best one I know of."

Elizabeth examined it with a jaundiced eye. "I like yours better. It's cleaner and doesn't take up so much space on the screen."

"You can't have mine unless you buy a Mac. And if you buy a Mac because of me, I get a toaster."

"You what?" Elizabeth began to laugh. "I had no idea."

"We spread our perversion insidiously," Anna said in a low voice. "Converting innocents with the eye candy on our sleek silver machines, forcing them to enjoy their computers rather than fighting with them... Terrible, all of it."

Snorting, Elizabeth said, "And it is a sleek silver machine, I have to say. It's really gorgeous. I've never thought of any computer as being sexy, but this one is."

"Thank you." Anna patted her laptop. "I think so, too, and I will freely admit that sex appeal is part of the attraction for me. But the rest is much more pragmatic. The operating system is intuitive, which means that the average user can do a lot more on her own before having to give up and call me for help. It doesn't crash as often. It's much more secure. My God, if you knew how many trojans and worms and viruses and spyware I've had to take off the PCs on this campus... If everyone at OSU used Macs, the

time savings on security alone would probably free up three, maybe three and a half FTE for other things. Other, much more useful things.”

“You spend the equivalent of three full-time positions each year just pulling off spyware and viruses?”

“At least. It’s a big campus; there are a lot of PCs. And most of them are constantly online and constantly exposed, despite the university firewall. And then they share that crap with each other.”

“Anna, you’re talking about a lot of wasted money there.”

“Tell me about it.” Anna shrugged. “What can I do? People want what they’re used to. And the managers all think PCs are cheaper, so they never even consider Macs. But they’re basing their cost comparisons on an incomplete picture. And my department pays the price instead.”

“Hm.” Elizabeth seemed a little faraway for a moment, then refocused on the screen. “Show me what else this thing can do. Maybe you’ll earn a toaster. I’ll bet you’ve got a lot of them stashed at home.”

There was something about the way she said it that caught Anna’s attention. And when their eyes met, her suspicion was confirmed. Elizabeth understood the reference all too well—she was family.

The knowledge sent a tingle down Anna’s spine, and for a moment she was tongue-tied.

Interaction as a friend or as a computer geek was easy and second nature to her. Interaction with a possible romantic undertone was something entirely different, and she sucked at it.

Still looking at her, Elizabeth said, “Zaragoza.”  
“Wh-what?”

Mercifully, Elizabeth broke their gaze and gestured at the laptop. “May I?”

“Uh, sure.” Anna nudged her laptop over, happy to have something else to focus on.

Elizabeth clicked on the first tab in the browser, bringing up the forgotten map of Spain, and pointed. “Zaragoza. The city I couldn’t remember. We started in Toulouse and came down to Barcelona this way. It looks fairly straight, but believe me, it’s not. And then we took this route over to Zaragoza—really pretty countryside—and then to Tudela, here. Then we went north to Pamplona because I’ve always wanted to see it, and from Pamplona we zigged over to Irun and then up and around and back to Toulouse.”

“You skipped San Sebastian?”

“At that point we were more interested in the countryside and the smaller towns. Barcelona was big enough to satisfy any big-city cravings. We could have spent a week there and not seen half of it.” She ran a fingertip along the top edge of the laptop lid. “Now, I believe you were going to show off your sleek silver baby?”



“Not so fast. I want to hear more about this trip.” Anna smiled, some of her normal ease coming back to her. “And then I’ll show off my sleek silver baby.”

“Deal.”

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# ABOUT FLETCHER DELANCEY

Fletcher DeLancey is an Oregon expatriate who moved to Portugal to be with the love of her life. Now happily married for five years, Fletcher lives in the beautiful, sunny Algarve, where she devotes her spare time to learning the local birds and plants, and trying every regional Portuguese dish she can get her hands on. (There are many. It's going to take a while.)

The rest of the time, she teaches Pilates, gardens, bakes extremely good brownies, rides her road bike on narrow country lanes...and writes.

She is best known for her five-book *Star Trek: Voyager* epic, *The Past Imperfect Series*, and for her science fiction novel *Without A Front*. Currently, she is working on a prequel to *Without A Front* and as an editor for Ylva Publishing.

Website: [fletcherdelancey.com](http://fletcherdelancey.com)

Blog: [oregonexpat.wordpress.com](http://oregonexpat.wordpress.com)

E-mail: [fletcher@mailhaven.com](mailto:fletcher@mailhaven.com)