

# The Techno-Cowboy Stole My Heart

by Pam Sherman

When Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City* found a man with all the right moves, she decided it was time to “take a luvah.” Now, I’ve done the same.

Mine is my computer guy, and it’s not even a secret. His wife schedules our meetings, and my husband approves. In fact, I think my husband has his own secret crush on him, too.

Shane is his name, and just like Shane from the classic western, he’s the strong, silent type. He even looks a little like the actor who played Shane, Alan Ladd. Shane services a need in our family that benefits us all. He prevents *me*, not just my computer, from melting down.

As my techno-luvah, he doesn’t even need to be here to satisfy. Shane installed a little icon on our computer that moves the mouse remotely. This is so much better than cybersex because at the end, your broken computer is fixed and you didn’t have to do a thing.

I know that I live in an age of technological wonder. I should be grateful for the benefits of the Internet, the power of gigabytes, the instant gratification of running hot water. I certainly take advantage of technology. I’m no Luddite. I do not type my columns on a typewriter or dial a rotary phone.

But I’m definitely missing the technology gene. I always fall short in understanding how the darn things work or, more importantly, why they fail. And when technology fails me, *I* break down.

I get all sweaty and freak out, yelling at everyone who happens to be close by. I bang on my computer, thinking that will help.

Apparently it’s a condition. There are all sorts of studies out there about people with technophobia. I am not unique. Unlike children who grow up technologically facile, I am what they’ve labeled a “technological immigrant” (is there a virtual Ellis Island out there somewhere?).

I always tell my kids that more has happened in the world technologically since their dad and I were born in the early 1960s than perhaps will happen in their lifetimes. While we haven’t reached *Jetsons* territory, we’re close. Who could have predicted microwaves—or microwave popcorn, for that matter? Tiny televisions and enormous flat-screen TVs? Incredible medical advances?

My parents set the stage for my techno-immigrant status. They embraced the consumer technological revolution with abandon, but always the wrong mode and always purchased too soon. Given a choice between VHS and Betamax, my poor father bought a Betamax for each television set in the house. Every family member had their own TV *with* antennas. When given the chance to buy some stock in a company called Apple, he turned it down as too cute a name. He was the first doctor with a cell phone. It was so big he had to store it in a suitcase, and when he brought it to the golf course, it practically made his golf cart list to one side.



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My mother was the gadget queen in the kitchen. She never learned how to use a knife because she had a different kind of chopper for every need. The Cuisinart for big chops; the Oscar for medium chops; and the Mini-Cuisinart for parsley. Yes, a parsley chopper. When my mother walked into a department store, the employees would fight over who would serve her. Every new technology was not only purchased for her own three kitchens (upstairs, downstairs and country house) but also for her two daughters, two daughters-in-law and gift recipients of various types (weddings, engagements, even bar mitzvahs—what 13-year-old boy *doesn't* need a parsley chopper?).

I begged her to stop giving these ridiculous gadgets to me. When I finally gave away the pastry cup maker she gave me one birthday, she vowed to cross me off her list. Then again, I will be forever grateful for the apple and potato peeler she bought me. It's amazing. You put the apple on a sharp nail and stick the blade in the top of the apple, turn on the power and it peels the apple (and your finger if you're not careful) in about two seconds! God forbid you have to peel the apple yourself. You know, with your hands and a knife.

Now, even my own widowed mother has embraced computers. She even knows what a hard drive is. Of course, she still uses dial-up and her computer is almost as slow as she is. And she mostly uses it to send me chain letters and bad jokes—and to find more bad gadgets on the Internet.

Like my parents before me, my husband and I also embraced technology early on in our marriage. Our first big purchase when we were newlyweds was not a car or a house but a computer, with DOS and floppy disks. This computer was the first in a long line of computers that made me wary of technology. It ate my husband's graduate thesis, which he had worked on for months. It would take about 20 minutes to "boot up" and it was the size of a piece of furniture, taking up precious space in our tiny apartment.

We were babysitting my nephew one day when he put his grubby 3-year-old fingers on our keyboard. From then on, he would repeat what he learned that day from his panick-stricken Aunt Pam: "'puters are very 'spensive—don't touch them."

How things had changed by the time

we had our own children. Computer programs for 3-year-olds were a requirement of parenthood. I *encouraged* my own darling 3-year old's grubby little hands to be all over the next incarnation of computer we owned, to give me a moment of peace.

I keep thinking my technical failings are somehow connected to my gender. (Hey, *I* can be sexist, but guys can't. Got it?) Yet many of the world's greatest technology companies are led by women, including the home-grown Xerox Corporation. Still, I've noticed how my 10-year-old daughter completely wigs out if she can't get the digital video recorder to work. Hopefully she was wiggling out because I erased *The Hannah Montana Show* she desperately wanted to see, not because of some genetic failing on her part.

He scanned. He deleted.

He worked miracles. Three hours later, the virus was gone and so was my heart.

I'm just not sure. One friend has four children, and she insists that her three girls are technologically impaired but her son is not. By age 2, my son knew how to use Game Boys and could fix the universal remote, which completely confounds everyone else. Now, in order to level the playing field for girls, Nintendo DS is targeting young girls with pink versions and computer games that simulate fashion design and babysitting. What's next, jewel-encrusted remote controls?

But it's good they're learning young because computers are everywhere. Even my washer/dryer is a computer. Digital is a verb, noun and adjective these days. Can I say I hate digital? I miss getting my film developed and touching the paper, even if at least half my pictures were out of focus. Now my pictures are stuck in my camera, never to be seen again. Or worse. We were in Australia and my daughter's new camera wasn't working at

the very moment we were seeing our first kangaroo. For some reason, she handed it to me to fix. Bad idea. To my horror, I promptly deleted 150 pictures, including the Hannah Montana concert she had gone to for her ninth birthday (maybe I just hate Hannah Montana). As I wept over her camera, *she* actually hugged *me* and said, "I forgive you, Mom."

I, however, was not so forgiving when my teenage niece and nephew decided to load a program on my computer to download music and completely crashed the "puter," which contained the play I had written and—well, my entire life.

It was then that I met Shane.

He arrived with a briefcase and his own computer. He smelled of cigarettes. He took his shoes off and left them in the hallway without my even asking and quieted my yippy dog like a snake charmer. Then he silently got to work. He scanned. He deleted. He worked miracles. Three hours later, the virus was gone and so was my heart.

I started confessing my love to others, including my husband, who ended up stealing him away for his office. I felt like Shane had cheated on me when a friend used him to help install their new flat-screen TV and program their remotes (I didn't even know he could do that sort of thing—he's the perfect man!).

Things did get a little ugly when my husband forgot to pay his bill and Shane couldn't work for me until we paid up. But I took care of it. My kids went without their lunch money that week so I could pay him. But we were talking about fixing our local area network here! Some things take priority.

I have to say, I've missed Shane since he installed that remote device. I call him now when my computer's acting up, and I watch as my cursor moves magically across the screen. Just like Shane in the movie, I know he will one day ride off into the sunset, leaving us poor homesteaders to fend for ourselves. But that's OK. I've learned a thing or two from watching him work, including the magic bullet: Turn the darn thing off.

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