

Keeping Track
by Terri Mullholland

I have been tracking your thoughts for some time: monitoring you. Your habits and idiosyncrasies, all mapped out in lines of data on my colour-coded spreadsheets.

It shows up some interesting patterns. You regularly think about death, your own and other people's, particularly around four o'clock in the afternoon. These thoughts generally last for approximately an hour and are then replaced with visions of beer and food. You think about sex pretty consistently in the early hours of the morning, apart from when you have insomnia and your mind spools through a repeated loop of self-loathing. Sometimes you wake up happy and it makes me smile.

I fell in love with your thought patterns without even knowing what you look like. We don't photograph our subjects. All I have are the data codes for your vital statistics. I know you are male, single, thirty-two years old, six feet tall. Everything else about you, I have gathered from your thoughts. You seem educated, liberal-minded, you love cats, and you agonise for ages before asking a woman out on a date.

Your thoughts aren't even that unique. There are far more likely candidates on our database with whom I could have developed similar levels of obsession. The one who had such an optimistic view of the world it bordered on delusional, or the one who made me laugh. How many people can tell a good joke with their brain waves?

And, believe me, your life doesn't have anything like the drama of some of our subjects. There are several we always log on to first on a Monday morning to find out the latest instalment and to check they are still alive.

But there is something about you that makes me want only you. Every day I stalk your mind. I keep your file up in the background while I work, flipping back and forth between the official report I am writing and my unauthorised tracking of you.

At first, I just wanted you to be my friend, nothing more. It's hard to make friends in this job and even harder to find a romantic partner. I don't know what to do when I can't read their minds; when I don't have the reassurance of a spreadsheet telling me they love me.

I resisted the urge to manipulate your thoughts, really I did. But it was only a matter of time. I inserted pictures of myself into your dreams and, once we had reached a certain level of intimacy, I gave you directions to my house.

You thought about coming last night, but your confidence failed you at the last moment. Plus it was raining, and I know you don't like the rain. Tonight though, the sky is clear, I've added a new line of code to fix your confidence, and I'll be waiting for you.

END

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