

MY BOYFRIEND WAS A LUNATIC

by Karen Karlitz

I was a senior in high school during the sixties, and madly in love with a boy a year older than me. Had I scoured all five boroughs of New York I couldn't have found a more perfect imperfect object for my affections. Morgan was crazy as a loon, with the common sense of a mackerel and the emotional stability of a canary. But believing love could conquer all (and spurred on by songs like "Somebody to Love" and "He's Not a Rebel" blasting from my transistor radio), I ignored his limitations. Instead I focused on his movie star handsomeness, extraordinary SAT scores, magical kisses, and that he said he loved me too.

One afternoon after getting home from school, the telephone rang. "Debbie Kramer?" an unknown voice asked.

"That's me."

"This is Nurse Reynolds at Elmhurst General Hospital. I've been authorized by Dr. Alfred Eisner to give you clearance to visit Morgan Larchinson."

I had to think for a minute; no one ever used Morgan's last name. He was always just Morgan, like Cher or Twiggy.

"When should I come?"

"Visiting is between two and six. Today is fine."

I was excited. I hadn't seen Morgan in six months, not since he "went away." In my mind there was nothing more romantic than visiting your boyfriend in a mental hospital.

I must admit I did have some trepidation as I rode on the subway, then walked the four long blocks to the hospital. I'd never been inside a mental institution, though I'd seen many in the movies. Instead of my usual all black, I wore a yellow sweater and navy

pantsuit. I fretted over not dressing properly for the occasion, but then bigger and better anxieties began swirling in my gray matter.

Would he be different than before? Would he act like the psychos in the movies? Would the hospital staff bear uncanny resemblances to Jack Palance and Joan Crawford? Would there be a bunch of lunatics running around? My mind was awash in worry as I approached the intimidating, solemn brick building, but there wasn't much time to ponder. As soon as I stepped off the elevator onto the seventh floor, Morgan leaped out from the right side and landed squarely in front of me. Evidently, he'd been waiting for my arrival to pounce.

"You scared me to death," I said, panting with fear.

"Just doing an imitation of a mental patient." He laughed manically. "Hey, let's go out for a while. Alfred said we can."

We went down in the elevator, sparing me from seeing the ward, but Morgan was awfully jumpy, nothing like he used to be. I was starting to think it was a mistake to come. We exited the hospital.

"Grand! This is grand!" He looked up, flinging his open arms to the bright blue sky, then turned to me. "It's grand to be alive, aye Deb."

I was speechless. How was I to deal with this pale, crazy stranger? If I took off, I'd hurt his feelings, possibly plunge him into a psychotic fit. I thought of how I might fake a sudden and serious illness, and wondered how all the girls I knew had had the sense to steer clear of him.

"Let's get a Coke. Do you have money? Alfred won't let us have any. He thinks if we have money, we'll try to escape." He blinked a lot and now spoke with a Southern accent. *Creep-y.*

"Okay," I said, without enthusiasm.

"You're always so nice," he drawled. He sounded more and more like a mental patient every minute. I felt like making a run for it.

He stopped walking and stared at me: "You know, you're pretty." His voice grew louder, and people looked in our direction. "And you have a great ass." *Oh, my God!*

"You know something?" He walked behind me and leered. "I should have porked you before they put me in here."

An elderly man passing by snickered; the woman he was with put her hand over her mouth.

I finally had to face the facts: Morgan was mentally sautéed, disqualifying him from the good husband material pool, which at the time was of considerable import. Not playing with a full deck to begin with, he had taken one too many LSD trips. And while he wasn't flying off roofs yet, even if he didn't swallow another tab, the damage was done. His problems wouldn't go away. So I did. I never saw him again.

Years passed when a rumor circulated that Morgan was stabbed in the stomach with a kitchen knife while saving a nurse from an attack by a fellow patient. Surviving serious injury, he was put on permanent disability and achieved hero status in the ward. Most of those who knew him felt the story was pure fabrication. Decades later, I still choose to believe it was true.

THE END

