

Boyfriends

by Shelagh Power-Chopra



The guy in the background is the type you meet at a dusty pawn shop or Hungarian animation festival, the one you think is delightfully eccentric—chock full of dry humor and colorful, fanciful thoughts. He wears ugly, wool hats in drab yellows even in the summer and carries random things around in his jacket pockets: fountain pens, defunct old cameras or the 18th century hunting manual he's always poring over. He rambles on endlessly about Tyutchev and other obscure authors you've never heard of, doodles on paper napkins and has odd facial tics you find amusing.

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I had the perfect archetype of such a boyfriend. The night I met him, he wore thick sport socks pulled up to his knees (no, this was not the seventies) and small, white tennis shorts. He was thin—not quite junkyesque, but still an annoying thinness, his thighs seemingly barely larger than my forearms. His hair was tousled and dirty, sloppy curls falling everywhere. Clunky, brown glasses perched over his simple, strong face. One friend said he resembled a young Mick Jagger, she was right—his lips were full and sensuous, eyes kind of sexy in a doughy way but he was still a nerd—his own physicality foreign to him, disposable, carelessly draped over his frame as an afterthought.

The night I met him he brought a crystal garden with him—those glass tanks where miniature colored stalagmite grow—it provided a shrewd forewarning of his character to come, the unforeseen quirks that would creep out like weeds burrowing out from cement cracks. The terrible habits: peeing in the kitchen sink while drunk or violently arguing with himself—yes himself, the showers he seldom took, the collection of bugs covered in latex he kept in his basement, the photograph of the '70s star taped to the ceiling over his bed. Later after he left that night, my friend said, You're going to go out with him, Yeah right, I said, and I did of course, it lasted for a few years, a sporadic, strange relationship that had no real definition.

The other guy—the one in the foreground—repels you, leaves you with that taste of bile in the back of your throat but then little by little, he ropes you in—his slippery self comes round your way and slithers in and you stumble blindly towards him like a stupid moth to a flame. He's a creep and you know it but don't care. And underneath the layer of oil, swarm and polyester, there's that warm layer of raw sexiness that exudes its terrible odor. He's Matthew McConaughey in *Dazed and Confused*, the Linklater film—the older guy who prowls around your high school and dates the younger girls. He's Eric Roberts, the stalker and eventual killer in *Star '80*.

He's a boy my sister dated when she was fourteen; an older, slick redneck boy with long, oily black hair, shiny eyes and curled lips who harassed her on the school bus in the wild confines of the Virginia countryside. The guy who does the peace sign with his fingers—then his tongue slides out and he wiggles it between his two fingers. This is the guy with the fingernails that are a little too long, with the smile that hints at a surplus of hidden tooth decay, with the perpetual outline of his penis pushing through his tight pants. He's your best friend's older brother—the one who hooks his thumbs in his jeans, leans back and stares at you during dinner. The guy in highschool that whispers perverted, crass things he wants to do to you in your ear when you walk by him in the hall. This is the guy you eventually sleep with, then later wonder why but do it again.

Where are these guys now?

