

Unlikely Romance

By: Michael A. Oren

Words come blasting out of the radio across the room, “Ain’t no mountain high, ain’t no valley low, ain’t no river wide enough.” Miguel Antonio is sitting on a bench, observing the crowd, searching for a female that can actually hold up to his exacting standards. He looks across the room at the radio, remembering all of the times that he has come to this café in hopes of finding his true love. Or, in the event that his true love is unavailable that night, at least some fun. For some reason though, and Miguel has yet to figure out why, the owners of this fine establishment, despite attracting a younger crowd, always play many of the older “classics.” Miguel would have been pleased with this if they had been either the true classics or classic love songs—both of which he finds useful while wooing various members of the opposite sex. The songs blasting on this radio, however, are ones that throw his concentration, and he blames them for his lack of success within this café. In fact, thinking about it further, Miguel finds himself unsure of the reason why he continually returns to this café and always takes the same spot across from the radio every Friday night when he has yet to be successful with it. Unless you count that model he met in January, but she was just--well let’s just say she wasn’t the brightest bulb in the marquee. Thus, the dilemma. Miguel wants to find the love of his life, or at least some fun, yet he constantly ends up finding nothing more than the bill for the coffee he drank that night.

“This problem must be solved!” Miguel jumps up yelling. He quickly slinks back on to his bench, however, as everybody immediately begins staring at him, and he begins to feel very self-conscious. “So, Miguel, what are we to do?” he asks himself. “This café

is the land of plenty when it comes to finding la bonita señoritas, but yet I have found nothing. Perhaps, maybe, it is this spot I have chosen to sit?” With this conclusion, Miguel gets up and moves over half an inch, “Ah, here we are, already I am feeling that my mojo is more powerful here. Now, all I have to do is to sit and wait, for surely the señoritas will now come to me.” Unfortunately, only one señorita comes up to Miguel, and she is his waitress, bringing him his bill.

Miguel pays his bill, sighs deeply, and listens for the sound of the wretched music oozing out of the radio. However, much to his surprise, he does not hear the familiar drawl of the usual “classics”, but instead, he hears, “Devil or angel, I can’t make up my mind.” Miguel is delighted, this is one of his favorites. “I am delighted, this song, it brings much pleasure to my ears.” In his ecstasy from actually hearing a song he enjoys, he fails to pay attention to where he is walking, and accidentally bumps into a young woman, about 5’7” with dirty blonde hair and steel blue eyes, who was not paying attention to him because she was busy fantasizing about knights and mysterious Latin lovers, minus the mysterious Latin lover part—that was just what Miguel was hoping. Because the second he set eyes on her, his heart misses a few beats and then does a flip or twenty-five and he knows, yes he knows, that he will have to pay for the dress that he had just spilled coffee all over by knocking into her.

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Daniela sits in the café sipping caramel macchiato and daydreaming about Heath Ledger and his role in *A Knight’s Tale*, wishing she could one day find a knight as sexy as Heath. All of a sudden this jerk crashes into her, spilling her caramel macchiato all over her brand new white, sleeveless dress with the paper thin fabric and tight fit that

leaves nothing to the imagination—perfect for catching the man of her dreams, or at least that’s what the woman who sold it to her told her. “My dress!”

“I am sorry, *senorita*, allow me to fix this,” and the young man rushes off to get a bottle of seltzer water. “Hold still, I shall be finished in *un momento*.” But in his clumsiness, he spills the water all over the front of her dress. “My apologies! I shall fix it,” and he reaches for some napkins and begins to dry off her chest.

SLAP! “I’ll do it myself, thank you!” and she grabs the napkins from his outstretched arms. As she begins to dry her dress, she realizes it was a very bad day not to wear a bra and with this realization, she drops the napkins, grabs her cashmere shoulder warmer, and bolts for the door. Unfortunately, the young klutz had not moved, in fact, the whole time he had stood there gaping at her through her transparent clothing. Now, she is furious. “What are you looking at?”

“To be honest, your breasts.”

Taken aback by his honesty, Daniela is unsure what to do, whether she should hit him again or just run out of the café, but instead she replies, “Why are you staring at a bunch of fat?”

“Fat? I see no fat, only the luxurious peaks of unclimbed mountains, and a land of adventure that we can both travel together.”

“Um, what the heck are you talking about? You’re really weird,” but at the same time, the word adventure sparks her overactive imagination and she dreams of climbing mountains with a strong, unruly, yet fluffy haired man, sporting a manly goatee. It is then she notices that this creep sports a goatee, a manly one at that, and hmm... his hair seems unruly, but is it fluffy? She reaches over to check.

“What are you doing?”

“Checking to see if your hair is fluffy.”

“Ooooooook... psycho... Want to go to my place?”

SLAP!

“Is that a no?”

“Not exactly.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Not exactly.”

“Can we pretend it’s a yes?”

“Sure,” she says as she pictures staring down into the abyss of the world from the peaks of adventurous mountains. Unsure of what she’s doing, with her only certainty being that something exciting will happen, she leaves the café with the stranger, their faces exhibiting mixed confusion and delight. Both of them know that this will be a night like neither of them has ever had before.

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Miguel Antonio can’t believe his luck, he ruins this girl’s dress, makes a total fool of himself around her, and even makes himself seem somewhat of a pervert. Yet she still agrees to accompany him back to his place. He wonders if maybe he wasn’t too hasty in inviting her back, after all, he’s never met a woman that agrees to accompany a guy after he almost completely humiliates her. What he did was almost as bad as if he had made out with her at a college lecture—making them the center of attention. If he were a girl, he wouldn’t have agreed to go back to his place. But then it strikes him. He isn’t a girl, so

how could he know what a girl would think? Yes, it all became so clear—spilling coffee on girls makes them like you. He should do it more often.

Pleased with his sudden revelation, he looks over at the girl as they continue to stroll down the street toward his luxurious apartment, an eight by eight room encrusted with mold and empty pizza boxes—the perfect bachelor’s pad. He notices that she never looks at him as they turn the corner to his block, in fact, she doesn’t seem to look at anything. She just seems to kind of stare blankly off into space. “A real loony this one,” he says and then quickly shuts his mouth hoping she didn’t hear. At this point, he begins worrying if maybe she could be a criminal or actually insane, one of those women that go home with strange men they meet in cafés, seduce them, then kill them or tie them up and take their money. Miguel isn’t so worried about being tied up, she doesn’t seem that strong, and most of the cases of men being tied up and left to die had to do with the men having some bondage fetish. Miguel isn’t into that. Or at least not on the submissive end—being the dominant one he would have to put some thought into though.

As Miguel continues to ponder this, he realizes that he doesn’t even know this girl’s name, and he figures that if he can get that out of her, then he can at least be sure she’s not one of the one’s he’s read about in the news lately. Of course, she could be new at the game. “So, I never asked, what’s your name anyway?” Silence. She’s still staring off blankly, oblivious now even to the fact that they’ve stopped walking. They now stand in front of Miguel’s apartment complex. Clearing his throat, “Hello? Anybody in there? I asked you what your name is.”

“Huh? Sorry, I do that a lot. My name is Daniela.” She goes back to staring blankly.

Miguel waits for a few seconds for her to ask him for his name; when no question comes he finally says, “My name is Miguel Antonio. Better known as Miguel Antonio, Latin lover extraordinaire.” No laugh, smirk, or even a slap. No reaction what so ever. He wonders if she even heard him, but then a sudden gleam of perception illuminates her face.

“HA! That’s funny! I have a Latin lover,” and her face beams in girlish joy.

“Bit slow there, but glad to know you’re still alive in there. What do you keep thinking about anyway?”

“Stuff.”

“Really, stuff, huh? Never would have thought. I must say that you have a way with description.”

“Thank you.”

“It was sarcasm.”

“You’re cute.”

“I know.”

“Not that cute.”

“Cute enough for you to agree to come to my place when we just met.”

“Perhaps.”

“Well you came, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Should we go up now?”

“Sure.”

The two ascend the staircase to Miguel’s apartment.

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“Well this place isn’t much to look at,” Daniela says. She had imagined a much more romantic setting: lit with candles, perhaps a coat of arms on the wall and many books—she loves books. Instead, she finds herself in a room she’s surprised hasn’t been condemned by the city as a health hazard. She begins to have second thoughts about this adventure; after all, he’s no Heath Ledger. Although she does think he is somewhat cute, in a hairy, potbelly sort of way, but he’s got nice hair, and that sexy goatee.

“What, you expected the Ritz?”

“No.”

“If you don’t like it you can leave.”

“It’s fine.”

“That’s what I thought. Have a seat. Want anything to drink? You seem to have some class; how about I open us up a bottle of wine?”

“Alcohol?”

“Did I say wine? I meant pine, as in canned pine, or that’s what I call it. Kind of smells funny in here, sorry about that. But as for that drink, how about a Coke?”

“I don’t drink pop.”

“I wouldn’t recommend the water.”

“I’m fine.”

Silence. She can hear the ticking of the clock, but pays it no mind. She doesn’t mind the silence. She’s always been more of an observer and dreamer anyway. However, glancing over at Miguel, she notices that he kind of shifts in discomfort, as if the silence is stifling him. Well, if he wants to talk, then let him talk, but Daniela is quite content

with her dreams of Heath Ledger and her thoughts of this upcoming adventure. She's never had a boyfriend before.

"Um, so, what do you want to do?" Even though the room only holds the two of them, it still takes her a second before she realizes he's talking to her.

"I don't know."

"Want to watch a movie?"

"I don't care."

"Want to play cards?"

"I don't care."

"Do you care or know about anything?"

"No."

"So we can do whatever I want?"

"Sure."

"Are you really that indifferent?"

"I don't know."

"No ideas?"

"Strip poker."

"What?"

"Let's play strip poker," and she pulls a deck of Crayola playing cards out from her purse. She has no idea where the idea came from, but it sounded fun. She's never played strip poker before.

"Well, that's not exactly what I was thinking, in fact that idea never crossed my mind, but if you want to then I'm all for it. I'm going to win though, you know."

“Ok, but I don’t know the rules to poker.”

Miguel quickly explains them to her, and then she deals the first hand. Miguel loses; he has a pair of queens while she has a pair of kings.

“What? You won?! Fine,” and he removes his shirt.

They play another hand. Miguel loses again.

“Again? You’re cheating; you have those cards marked, don’t you?”

“No, they’re new cards, you saw me open them.”

“Technicalities. You probably marked them secretly while opening them,” he takes off his pants and lets her deal for the third time in a row.

“I’m a good dealer.” She deals the cards out, but this time she loses. She takes off her shoulder wrap.

“Woohoo! I finally won one. Told you I would win.”

She deals again, and loses again. Her dress goes. She notices Miguel staring at her now completely exposed breasts. Now they are both only wearing their underwear. She deals. She loses.

“Ha ha! I won. I told you I would win.”

“Let’s play speed now.”

“But you still have to take off your panties.”

“I’m not going to.”

“Fine, let’s play speed, but if I win, you have to take them off.”

They play one game of speed; after refreshing each other on the rules, Miguel wins.

“Best 2 out of 3.”

“Fine, I’ll win again.” He wins again.

She reluctantly gives in after this last loss. “You have to take them off for me.”

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Miguel goes up to Daniela, and seductively kisses her, then slowly begins to take her panties off as he tells her the following story:

“I start at the cave, ribbed with red ringlets. My step must remain careful and deliberate since the two sets of white rocks open and close, whether I say ‘open sesame’ or not. To add to this danger, rumors abound of the red, muscular serpent that inhabits the cave and brings all who dare tread the ground to their death in a pit of acid.

“This is how my journey began, but I had much more land left to travel before I could reach my final destination. I walked without incident for a short while, over a small hill, but upon reaching the top of the hill, I looked down only to discover that I was on the top of a cliff with no easy way around it. The cliff bottom stood below me, it was smooth and pale with just a slight indenture at the center of the cliff, but it was much too high to simply leap down and safely land. While trying to locate any holds on the cliff, I began to feel the uneasiness of being watched, only to turn and, to my great fear, see the coarse hide of the cave serpent looming above me. Thus, I did the only thing I could do, and slid quickly down the cliff. To my astonishment, the surface was smooth, almost silky, and my landing ended softly without incident.

“Having gotten my bearings back, I looked back to my trail to see what obstacle next awaited me only to find that for a time I was stuck in a desert ribbed with small dunes. This would have dampened my spirits, since I much prefer adventurous land to these barren places, had I not spotted on the horizon two peaked mountains. It seemed as

if climbing to one of their peaks would make a nice quest. Off I went, across this desert, until I noticed a faint rumbling beneath me, a slight vibration of a massager set on low. I paused for a second and I seemed to make out a faint *boom* *boom*, but much to my great fear the noise appeared to grow louder and faster as I treaded further through the desert. This then caused me to fear for my safety, since I feared they were war drums of natives, and I quickly fled to the base of the mountain.

“The mountain loomed high above me, but, luckily, its slope was rounded, making it easier to ascend and I felt it depressing slightly as I went, almost like squeezing a stress ball lightly. I walked cautiously toward the peak; circling the mountainside on occasion to make sure, I took in the entire view and explored every angle of the mountain. Here, I could still hear the beating of the drums, but my elevated height made them fainter so I felt safe enough to continue my exploration as I approached the crest. Eventually I reached the top of the mountain, which I was astonished to discover had a light pink hue to it. This area reminded me of a pink thumbtack turned pointed side up, and I would have liked to spend more time here had adventure not called me elsewhere. For upon looking down from the summit, I discovered a wide valley below me with a crater at its center, and I was quickly whisked away by the intrigue of this mysterious crater.

“Upon reaching the valley, I discovered a trail of black saplings growing in a straight line that led me directly into the crater that I sought. I peered down into the crevice and lo and behold, I discovered a natural compass, in the middle of a valley. This compass had four points, with its north point leading toward the mountains I had just passed, the east and west points led to the edges of this land, and the south, where I was

determined to go, led deep into a dense forest of black trees. Circumventing the compass, I continued along my path, which was now made clear by slight, black abrasions to the turf leading directly into the center of the forest.

“I tread through the forest without incident. Finally, I stood looking into a valley with an orchard at its center. Having finally reached Eden, I strolled into the orchard to taste the sweet fruits within it.

“Lying next to you, feeling your soft skin against mine, I see that this adventure we went on, has brought us closer. I see that Eden is a place on Earth, in this world, but it is not a place to be sought. For it is a moment in time, or a collection of moments, that bring ecstasy to all involved. I see it all, and I let the compass be my guide.”

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“You weren’t lying about it being an adventure...” Daniela says.

“The next one will be to the moon.”

“I have no interest in the moon, just knights.”

“You’ll like the moon once I take you there, I promise.” He gives her a wry smile and a wink.

“You’re terrible,” she says as she tosses a pillow at him.

“Hey now, no rough stuff or else I’ll have to kick you out.”

“You won’t do that. I’ll leave.”

“No you won’t.”

“Maybe not, but you won’t throw me out.”

“Oh sure, ruin my fun by being realistic.” He sticks his tongue out.

“You’re so immature.” She sticks her tongue back out at him.

“You complaining?”

“Not at all.”

“I thought not. Shall we go to sleep now?”

“No, we should go on another adventure!”

“Haven’t you had enough adventure for one day?”

“No.”

“Well, I have, so let’s sleep now, ok?”

“Can we go on another adventure in the morning?”

“Of course.”

Daniela smiles as she lies down preparing for sleep knowing that there would be many adventures to come. Feeling that for once in her life, she has found somebody she can truly connect to.