

Romance in a Relatively Small Space II

[The loveliest unanticipated sequel of the summer]

“MARRIED! What do you mean you’re getting MARRIED?” Critter said into the phone. All the air in his lungs emptied out into the kitchen, and he felt like his pants had fallen off and his entire third grade class was laughing at him—especially, Carmen Marin—his first crush (true story).

“No, I haven’t checked the mail today. I’m trying to heat a chalupa in the toaster. Yeah, a chulapa. It’s made with gordita. No, it’s not a fat girl, it’s a chubby tortilla. Huh? Pookie—yes, I always check the mail. No, I lied. I’m sorry—it’s shark week. I only get off the couch to make mojitos. I’m sorry, I won’t call you Pookie—it was just old feelings, it’s just, well, you know how romantic I am—okay, give me a second! B-R-B!

Critter rushed off. He left his phone on the toaster. His former lover’s voice yelled from the phone, “Critter, don’t come to the wedding. I shouldn’t have sent you an invitation...”

But the phone slipped into the mouth of the toaster. A beautiful fountain of sparks exploded from the toaster’s top. It was a shame. Critter’s phone was loaded with the numbers of unbelievably hot babes. Women who could twist your neck when they walked by and leave you feeling like you slept wrong. There was this woman from Brazil—Natalia—oh Natalia, she had these Beyonce hips like...sorry, I got distracted. Critter’s kitchen was now on fire.

Critter stood by his mailbox, with its lid hung open, as he looked down at the invitation. The wedding was real and so were the tears that had begun to wet the invitation he held in his hand.

The flames eating Critter’s apartment were even more real. They spread over the kitchen. Then they were on everything. They were all over Critter’s skinny jeans. Critter caught the scent of burning Shakira CD’s, and that’s when he realized his apartment was on fire.

“NOT MY COLUMBIANA!”

Critter ran into his apartment with the bravado of a horse with abs and a Guns and Roses tattoo on its back. The flames were as tall as NBA players, and they were everywhere. Critter attempted a cool swerve move around a mass of fire but he tripped and fell and hit his head on a novelty lamp shaped like a woman’s rump.

With the speed of a cheetah, Huici—Critter’s biological father—crashed through the front door. Huici was not afraid of fire, he was a hipster, and to him fire was so mainstream and overrated.

“Like—get out of my way you stupid posers,” Huici said to the fire as he did a very cool retro dance through the flames. He saw Critter on the floor with his face buried in the crack of the lamp.

“My poor boy,” said Huici. He lifted his son. The ceiling rained down in embers around him. And he walked out heroically, in slow motion, the flames swayed, tiny orange embers drifted down like snow, and a steamy breeze pushed back his \$700 Fedora. It was a very Hollywood scene, but Huici accepted it, because he was saving his very beautiful son’s life.

Critter lied unconscious on the ground. He wasn't breathing. The apartment collapsed under the flames and Huici wasn't about to let his son die. He screamed like an eagle into the clouds and tore off his 1980's Hawaiian shirt with one hand. He had to give his son CPR. It was the only way. He got down on his knees, pumped Critter's ribs with his hands, and put his mouth—

[The following scene was removed due to censorship. Please support free art by donating money into the Casanova mug on Critter's desk. Thank you.]

"How did you know I was in danger," Critter asked. He coughed.
Huici shrugged. "How does a mother bird know how to feed the baby bird..."
And simultaneously they both said, "She just knows."

"Papa, I must go to a wedding. Do you have a suit I can borrow?"

"I have the leopard suit I married your mother in. Your mom was a good woman. And I swear she looked just like Angelina Jolie. She would've been proud to see you on your wedding day. The suite might fit you big."

"I can fold it in."

"In what—in half?"

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When they got off the motorcycle in front of the church Huici said to Critter, "I'm going to tell you the same thing my father told me right before I got married. 'Ya hiciste pee-pee? Vas a estar parado mucho tiempo delante del altar y en ese punto estas delante de Dios, y nimodo, te tienes que aguantar.'"

Critter didn't understand Spanish too well, so he said, "That's beautiful, Papa," as he wiped a tear from his eye.

The heavy church door opened and Critter saw his Güera at the alter crying into her hands. There was a commotion spread over the pews. People whispered things, shaking their heads. Flor was seated with Adam, and Adam was drawing a stick picture of a dog eating cake. The organist sat by the door and Critter asked him, "Psst, what's going on?"

"The groom never showed up."

Critter looked at his Güera in her now worthless long white dress. He could hear her crying. His heart felt like it was on quicksand, sinking inside. Critter handed the organist a Kohl's discount coupon he'd taken from work.

"Play the damn song!"

As the wedding march played Critter walked down the aisle the way he had been taught to walk at the opening of a quinceñera. He knew this was a bad idea, but he was in love, and love made him do very stupid things. The bride's family was shocked. The groom's family was shocked. The priest was dumbfounded and making the sign of the cross over himself. But the Güera hadn't noticed the priest, because her eyes were on Critter's oversized and folded-in leopard suit and the grin and wink Critter shot at her.

“Please don’t,” said the Güera. “Don’t make this any worse. My wedding is already ruined.”

Critter took a ring from his pocket. The ring was gorgeous, and I’m not just saying that. The ring was actually gorgeous.

The Güera looked down at the ring and then to Critter’s big puppy dog eyes.

“Will you marry me?” Critter asked.

The church went dead silent, the organist’s fingers lifted off the keys as the Güera’s cheeks flushed.

TO BE CONTINUED...