

Literary page

# Carmen Miranda

by Dale Kondro

You can handle this, I said to myself, you must.

Not a free table in sight I noted ruefully as Joan climbed onto a stool at the bar. Reluctantly, I joined her.

"So what is life?" This from a dark-haired aging jock that looked like classic marriage material.

John the bartender laughed and said, "Wait, I know the answer to this one, it's (he laughed again), no really, I know this one... it's, it's a dissipative structure participating in a rotting relay race," and he started to laugh so hard that he had to clutch onto the bar for support. It was obscene.

And the crazy sitting behind the jock — this one was genuine, I mean the kind that when you look into their eyes you can tell that there is someone else driving — laughed a laugh that he rapidly lost control of and as it floated erratically up and down the scale I winced to see that much agony concentrated in a single laugh. Finally he managed to say: "What is death?"

"Ah..." the bartender said and looked into the loon's eyes — I marvelled that he could find a focal point in them — then solemnly intoned "Death is a mirror which reflects the vain gesticulations of the living."

"Joan" I said "I'm not sure that I can handle this."

The bartender, his face suddenly a mask, his eyes retreating into nothingness, came up to us and said, "What would you ladies like?"

"An ashtray and a table as far away from the bar as possible" I said.

"And...?" His eyes flickered briefly then became a wall again — I hated this bartender and his eyes.

"Bourbon" I said.

"Rocks?"

"No."

"A glass of white" Joan said.

Marriage Material and the Loon were eyeing us speculatively while the bartender was fixing our drinks and suddenly I hated them: I hated all men and their womb envy.

"Let's leave" I whispered.

"Thanks" Joan said, waited until the bartender had gone back to talk to M.M. and L., then asked "What's with you tonight?"

"Sorry" I said, "I feel like a runaway train or something. John and I went out last Saturday night..."

Really? She whispered and glanced furtively at the bartender. "I can't even imagine going out with him... And...?"

"And he hasn't even called me, and I

don't know what he wants and I don't know what I want and sometimes I think I'm in love with him and then sometimes I wonder if I know who I'm in love with..."

"Or if you're just in love with being in love" Joan said, smiled at me, clinked our glasses together then said, "It's true it's true it's true when I'm not going out with someone I stop visiting my mother and I develop this incredible urge to walk up to the first good-looking man I see and say: Hey you, big boy, yea you, marry me now, see I'm beautiful I have no personality I do laundry I cook I love men who love football I don't care if I climax and all I want is a nice big dumb hard-working man who'll give me nice big dumb happy babies, see, so like what's the hold up, come on we haven't got all day."

Laughter that was rising up in me died suddenly when I glanced over at John as he abruptly backed away from M.M. and L. and said rudely:

"Hello? You're trying to tell me that you have free will when you can't even not think of oranges?"

but Joan nudged me and whispered:

"Hello, it's true it's true it's true, I can not think of apples bananas grapefruit cherries pineapple plums and even peeled grapes, but those oranges, oh woe is me, it's true it's true it's true"

And I burst into uncontrollable laughter God, I thought, I sound like the Loon.

"Hello? Hello Hello?" Joan said tapping her wine glass gently on the bar.

"Sorry I..." and Joan was nudging me and I knew that John was looking at me and I refused to look up from my empty

## "I was ravished in silk" I countered subversively

glass and the phone was ringing incessantly and I took a sip of bourbon

and Joan said "So tell me what happened."

I raised my glass and said "Too much of this I guess. I tried to seduce him."

"And?"

"And... and he tried to make a joke by saying 'Sorry honey I have a headache tonight.' I wasn't amused."

"No" Joan said.

"No?" I looked at her.

"You were drinking wine."

"We were drinking wine" I affirmed.

"After a candlelight dinner"

"That he had cooked."

She smiled. "You looked ravishing in silk."



"I was ravished in silk" I countered subversively.

"Its gentle folds suggested without revealing. Your hair fell in ringlets that gently teased the air. Your eyes were iridescent bewitching orbs."

"I am a witch, a muse, a mother, an idol, a goddess but never"

"Simone de Beauvoir." Joan countered, irritated that I was refusing to play this ritual game of ours. "He encircled you in his gentle yet strong arms and traced his lips along the delicate curve of your neck. 'Carmen Miranda' he whispered."

I was suddenly and acutely and sadly repentant for Joan knew me well and played the game extremely well. Carmen Miranda indeed.

"Carmen Miranda he whispered" I said.

"Your beauty overwhelms me"

"and transforms me."

"I am incomplete without you."

"And so are most fruit trees."

Joan rolled her eyes and valiantly suppressing her laughter continued: "Tracing his gentle yet strong fingers along the soft curves of your body he murmured 'Carmen Miranda, will you marry me?'"

I laughed but it was a lifeless hollow laugh. Bitterness rose in me like a dark insurmountable wave; I let it consume me.

"You are an asshole" I said, flinging my

glass at John as he locked the beer cooler. Mesmerized, I watched the path of the glass as it flew past his head and shattered on the wall behind him. His eyes were flames that flew over the short distance between us. Time lost all sense of regularity: Joan was suddenly and mysteriously gone, John was silently sweeping up the glass and then disappeared into some unknown region of the bar, I was alone. As I looked out over the dark and deserted bar my sanity slowly returned. I sighed. I wonder what uncharted seas of happiness misery and desire flow through here I asked myself. Hurriedly, I left the bar gasping as the cold night air assaulted me.

The phone was ringing off the hook as I turned the key in the lock. I made myself a cup of tea and settled down in front of my typewriter:

Fragile glass  
Thrown  
Symbol of my solitude.

My solitude  
Seeks  
Communion with the Other,  
You are the  
Other  
I am the  
Other  
We together are  
Other.



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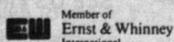
— Vicki Jones, B. Comm.  
University of Alberta

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