

## Mary, Me and Canters

Someone asked Kurt Vonnegut why he wrote. He said: "I write to kill time. Why are here? We are here to kill time—to fart around. That is my view".

I fart around at Canters deli. I do it with Mary Woronov. The name may be familiar. Mary was a movie star. She was a movie star for 3 months. Sometimes you are a movie star for 45 years and sometimes its for 3 months.

She was in a movie called *Eating Raoul* in 1985 that had a modest success. Later it became a cult favorite. Shes a cult star.

We get together once or twice a month to split a reuben at Canters. She lives in the hood--on Beverly and Kingsley. I am on Third and Kenmore. It's the neighborhood without a name. It isnt Koreatown or East Hollywood or mid-Wilshire. I once thought of giving it a name, something that would capture the flavor of these parts, a word like garbage would work—or a good symbol—a hovering chopper at 2 am—and sending it along to our intrepid councilperson, but never got around to it.

Mary lives in a courtyard type situation with a driveway down the middle and parking in back. She has a duplex. You enter via a small room—a study area. There are books, paintings, memorabilia,

souvenirs and artifacts gathered during her travels. The room has a thoughtful quality to it that is satisfying. Its philosophic. She likes philosophy.

Up a narrow flight of stairs to the studio--a long room that bridges the driveway below with windows on both sides and some gorgeous light pouring in.

There is a feeling to this room also—not so philosophic. Mary is a painter. She is a painter who supports herself through acting jobs. She's had many shows but the paintings are a hard sell. She's the German Expressionist type—twisted, perverse, haunted by *angst* etc.

From time to time she will shift gears and do a still life or some small landscapes in a more inviting vein. Last year she banged out 30 paintings in 30 days, small landscapes, 12 x 12, beautiful and they sold like hotcakes. Then she burned out on the landscapes and returned to her preferred style—Berlin in the twenties.

On to Canters. There is something about Canters. It relates to the concept of time and the puzzling ways this concept can be altered by the environment. Canters would have been a good place for Einstein—another Jew who enjoyed a good reuben—to invent the theory of relativity. Its open 24 hours and you can sit there for 24 hours and some people do. I frequently go there to write.

We pass the Canters bum on the way in, hunkered outside the door. There are several Canters bums. They work in shifts.

We eat in the back room—a cavernous space used for parties and banquets. Its quiet and we are not near people. Will Rogers said he never met a man he didn't like. Charles Bukowski said he never met a man he liked. Mary falls into the Bukowski category.

We order and conversation begins. The conversations always begin the same way. Mary says: "I have no money".

Here is a woman with a beautiful studio to paint in, no day job, her time is spent painting or writing or day trading on her lap top and on Sundays she hits the Hollywood farmers market to buy organic produce for \$4/lb. Its amazing what passes for being broke these days.

We move on.

She says: "I want to kill my mother".

This is more like it. We are both members of the aging mother club. Marys mother is 85; mine 87. Her mother lives in Florida. Last week she drove the car through the front of a store. Now they want to yank her license.

Mary has an impersonation she uses for auditions: she impersonates her mother responding to an unacceptable notion such as: no more driving. She screws her features up in an evil way and peels back her lips to reveal these little pointy fangs, the weasel effect, and her hands come up in front of her like paws, nails forward, puncturing the air and she screeches obscenities. Its terrifying.

This is why we must isolate ourselves in the back room of the restaurant.

While Mary's mother was driving the car through the storefront in Florida, my mother was falling down a flight of stairs at the airport hotel in Buffalo NY, breaking her hip as it turned out, on her way back to Los Angeles—to Ontario where I picked her up—in a wheel chair—and got her into the car and onto the freeway for the drive to Yucca Valley where she lives.

On the freeway she says: "I have to pee".

Pause

"Why didn't you pee in the plane—or at the airport where they have 170 toilets?"

"I was in too much pain".

I'll make a long story short. After controlling her bladder for 2700 miles she gets to within 25 feet of the toilet of her own house and there she is, standing outside the car, and she can't move another centimeter and pees her pants in the driveway.

Mary says: "They should just be put to sleep".

I said: "Hitler tried that one. They raised a hell of a stink".

Next: the stock market.

We are both in the market—getting hammered. It's a blood bath. I have read many books about the market

and they all agree on one thing: you must have a system. Mary has a system. She takes her dog for a walk around the block every day at 3 o'clock and coming in the other direction is a neighbor with his dog and when they meet the neighbor gives her a stock tip. That's her system.

It is always interesting to me that people who will drive 5 miles to save \$4 on an underwear sale at Target will dump \$50,000 into the stock market with zero idea of what they are doing.

I said: "There's an opening tomorrow—in West Hollywood. I've seen this woman's work. Its great. You would like it".

This one doesn't have a prayer. No more openings. She's been to 400 openings. She despises openings—including her own. Her attitude is: just buy the fucking painting!

Next: movies. This is a short conversation. I haven't seen a movie in 7 years. I have declared a moratorium. It's a long story. Now Mary insists it is time to terminate the moratorium and the movie to do it with is a German film, *The Princess and the Warrior*, that, as I understand it, documents the many laffs to be had by inhabiting an insane asylum. This is Mary: anything to hammer a little more *angst* into you with the greatest possible enthusiasm.

I say: "I am 60 years old and somehow, I know not why, the idea of sitting through 2 hours of a movie revealing the intimacies of life inside a German insane asylum has zero appeal for me".

We move on. I like talking to Mary. She is depressive, a type I normally avoid, but she is a funny depressive. She is funny, smart and has a good critical mind. She is into philosophy, anthropology, primitive myths and so forth. Its only when she involves herself with men that her instincts fail her.

So it goes for two hours. We eat and drink coffee, lost in our thoughts, a couple of beat artist/writer types with nothing to keep them going but some dismal hope that the future will work out better than the past. But what future? We are pushing 60. The future is Forest Lawn.

I say: "Say something. We've been here 2 hours. We have a half hour to go".

We speak of Paul Bartel. Paul Bartel produced *Eating Raoul*. Paul died two years ago but we continue to speak of him. Why? Because Paul for years had promised a sequel to *Eating Raoul*, and Mary was to star as per the original—at a salary of \$75,000--\$72,500 more than she received the first time around.

One day Paul called. He said: "Its set. I am making the movie. I have the money". The next day he dropped dead.

I call for the check. Mary is cheap. She admits it. The check arrives and it is always the same--\$21—and I leave a \$4 tip for Paul the waiter because my mother was a waitress—and I say to Mary "give me \$12" and she fishes around in her wallet and here comes a ten and she continues to fish for the other two, mumbling

about money, and says “I think I have another two here”, waiting for me to relieve her agony in this one and sometimes I do because, as she once said: when they stop buying your lunch—or paying for your drugs--you know you are finished.

I pay the check and we get in line at the bakery counter to buy an apricot macaroon for the dog. In front of us is a guy who catches sight of Mary pacing back and forth in her way and he says: “aren’t you Mary Woronov?”

Mary says: “yes”.

He lights up and so does she. She can turn on the charm when she wants to and lets face it—you must defer to your fans.

We leave Canters, past the Canters bum, a different bum. There is a moral to be drawn from the Canters bum. But I don’t bother. I have seen too many movies and I cant take another party or opening because I have met enough people and I have drawn every moral in the book.

Back to the ‘hood—garbageland.

She is working on a painting and I must give a critique. I park the car and up we go. It’s a large painting, 60x72, two people fucking. You could say two people fucking or you could say: hideous creatures engaged in mortal combat. It could go either way. There is a green creature and a red creature. The colors are wild—amazing. She has a way of cooking up

these complements—red/green, blue/orange, purple/yellow—to startling effect.

The green creature is on top looking up at the viewer in a disturbed way. They fornicate in this creepy landscape—a poisonous yellow sky above with a tree below, bearing some sort of nuclear fruit and here is a low wall of stone she has managed to paint in an evil way.

We stand studying the painting: two vile creatures with repellent skin tone banging amidst a piteous landscape.

I say: “I like it”.