

CARMEN'S LAST ACT (a revised, non-violent version)

Scene 1: the gypsy camp

The gypsies are beginning their preparations to decamp. Carmen enters from the left, followed closely by Don José, wearing a uniform with Captain's bars.

Don José: Carmen, will you marry me?

Carmen (hesitantly): I don't know how to break this to you, Don José, but I've fallen out of love with you and in love with Escamillo the toreador.

Don José (throwing himself at Carmen's feet and sobbing): How could you do this to me? It would have been a lot easier to take if you hadn't talked me into leaving the army and coming to this God-forsaken gypsy camp!

Carmen (retreating): Oh, come now! It's not as if I had this all planned. How was I supposed to know my feelings were going to change? It still mystifies me how it happened. The one thing I know for sure is that there isn't a damned thing I can do about it.

Don José: You could marry me anyway.

Carmen: What good would that do? You'd never find love, and neither would I. Is that what you want?

Don José (resigned, getting to his feet): I guess not.

Carmen (forcing a smile): Well, then? You said it'd be easier for you in the army. Isn't reenlisting the best thing to do now?

Don José (brightening a little): Yeah! It's the army life for me! *(He turns around and begins marching towards the left exit).* Hup, two, three, faw, do, re, mi, fa, ...

Carmen listens until Don José's voice fades out.

Carmen (to audience): The thing that mystifies me now is how I could have become attracted to him in the first place. Well, forget him! I've got bigger fish to fry.

Carmen moves towards the left exit, then suddenly turns around and exits to the right.

Scene 2: a dressing room in the bull-fighting arena.

Escamillo is there, wearing a cape and carrying a bloody sword.

Carmen enters, out of breath.

Carmen: Escamillo! Come quickly...

Escamillo, still carrying the sword, embraces and kisses Carmen.

Escamillo: Coming, Carmen baby! Should we do it right here or wait until we get to my place?

Carmen (extricating herself): There's no time for that now. We've got to get ready in a hurry! The gypsies are about to decamp, and we're going with them!

Escamillo: What do you mean 'we', Paleface?

Carmen (taken aback): Didn't you say you loved me so much you'd follow me to the ends of the Earth?

Escamillo (laughing): Of course I said that. That was what you wanted to hear, wasn't it? How else could I get you to lay me? That's all I've ever wanted from any woman!

Carmen raises her hand to slap Escamillo across the face, but then takes a look at his sword and stops her hand in mid-flight.

Carmen (contemptuously): Oh, you pathetic soul! You'll never know the beauty of love, will you?

Escamillo (still smiling): Oh, I wouldn't say that! Never is a long time away. Once I get too old to make it with gorgeous young chicks like you I'll probably tie the knot, but it'll have to be with a nice girl who's willing to be the wife of a bullfighter and not some domineering bitch who expects me to be the husband of a gypsy or whatever.

Carmen: Why, you're not only a cad, you're a male chauvinist pig to boot, and that's just what I'd like to do to you too!

Escamillo: Yep, that's me all over. Oink, oink! And that's why you've got the hots for me, isn't it? Don José used to be a male chauvinist pig too. He flashed his Captain's bars at you instead of a bullfighter's cape, and instead of lying to you to get you to go to bed with him, he *made* you do it! It was either that or he'd arrest you. And you loved him for it! But then the poor dope went all soft. Instead of bossing you around like a real man, he let *you* boss *him* around. He threw off his uniform which used to turn you on so much, and he let you drag him out of the army where he had friends and into your gypsy camp where you were the only friend he had; so he clung to you so tightly you got sick of him. You'd get sick of me too if I gave up bullfighting and tried to make it as a gypsy. So I'm getting out while the getting's good. Come to me when you want to get screwed, Carmen baby, because that's all you're ever gonna get from me!

Carmen (furiously): I'm sick of you already. Screw you! And ... and ... *get lost!*

Escamillo: *Me* get lost? You're on my turf, remember?

Carmen walks purposefully towards the left exit, then stops and turns to the audience.

Carmen (to audience): Bullfighter's wife indeed! Humph! I'd rather be a soldier's wife. At least Don José loves me. And an army Captain makes enough money that I'll never have to work in some smelly old cigarette factory!

Carmen exits, still in a huff.

Scene 3: the kitchen of the army camp.

Don José is there, wearing an apron over his uniform which now has no bars. He is washing dishes in the sink and singing one of the arias his counterpart sings in the Bizet opera. From offstage come the sound of marching feet and the voice of the Sergeant.

Sergeant (off-stage): Left! Left! Left, right, left! Companeeeee, halt! *(The sound of marching feet stops except for one footstep.)* What are you doing here, lady? The army is a men's club, you know!

Carmen (off-stage): Excuse me, Sir, but do you happen to know where Captain Don José is?

General laughter off-stage.

Sergeant (off-stage, laughing): Private Don José is in the kitchen over there. He's on KP duty for a year for desertion.

Carmen (off-stage): Thank you, Sir.

She enters from the left and stops near the exit.

Carmen (to audience): He looks pretty geeky in that apron, but I can hack it for a year. I'll get him now when nobody else wants him. He'll get off KP duty and get promoted soon enough. *(She pauses and listens for a while.)* I never heard him sing before. He seems awfully happy for a man in his situation. *(She listens some more.)* He sings nicely too. Maybe I could go for him even if he never does get promoted. Well, here goes.

Carmen (to Don José, softly): Ahem!

Don José can't hear her above his own singing.

Carmen (coming closer and speaking louder): Ahem!!

Still no response from Don José.

Carmen (screeching in his ear): AHM!!!

Don José (without turning around): Yeah, I know, Sarge, I'm not supposed to sing on the job, but ... *(he finally turns around)* ... Carmen! What a pleasant surprise! I thought you and Escamillo were going off somewhere with your band of gypsies.

Carmen (in her most seductive manner): I dropped Escamillo. He's full of bull! And I've had enough of wandering around with a bunch of gypsies. I figure it's about time I settled down.

Don José (apparently oblivious to her amorous intentions): Well, if you're thinking of returning to your old job in the cigarette factory, you're too late. The last vacancy was filled by my fiancée.

Carmen (incredulously): Your fiancée?

Don José wipes his hands, pulls a photograph out of his pocket and hands it to her.

Don José (enthusiastically): Yeah! Here's a picture of her singing in the local choir. She's in the first row, third from the left.

Carmen looks at the photograph for a moment and then returns it to Don José, who puts it back in his pocket.

Carmen (digustedly): Isn't she a little fat?

Don José (still smiling): Yeah! Her singing teacher says the extra weight's good for the vocal chords. He also says she's got so much talent that if she works hard enough she could turn pro. She's delighted with the idea - it means she could quit her job in the smelly old cigarette factory. Hey! If she ever sings the role of Carmen, I'll get you a complimentary ticket!

Carmen (slyly): Once she makes it big-time, how's she gonna feel about being married to a lowly private who's on KP duty?

Don José (as unflappable as ever): Right now she thinks it's great! She says it'll teach me how to be useful around the house so that when she comes home from work she won't have to do all the housework herself and she'll have more time to practise her singing. If she changes her mind later, I'll just try again, but I doubt if she will. She gets her ego boost out of singing, not out of marrying a high-status man!

Carmen (resigned): Well, I hope you two are happy together. I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got a caravan to catch. Toodle-oo! *(She moves quickly towards the left exit.)*

Don José: Give my regards to the gypsies!

Carmen exits, and Don José resumes his dishwashing and his singing.

The Sergeant enters.

Sergeant: Ahem!

Don José: Carmen? You're back?

The Sergeant utters some unprintable words as the curtain falls.

Scene 4: the gypsy camp.

It is night-time, and the stars are shining brightly. The ground is strewn with rubbish. Only one tent is standing, and only one gypsy is there, a short, skinny one by the name of Don Mills. He is pacing back and forth in front of the entrance to the tent.

Carmen enters from the left.

Carmen: Where is everyone? And what are you doing here?

Don Mills: They left without you, but I decided to wait for you so that I could take you to our new camp. If we get started right away we can probably get there by daybreak.

Carmen: That's very kind of you, but couldn't we start tomorrow morning? I'm too tired to walk any more tonight, and besides, how are we going to find our way at night?

Don Mills: I can navigate by the stars. I'll show you how in case you're ever alone and lost at night. Do you see that group of seven stars that looks like a dipper?

Carmen looks up and turns around and around. Suddenly the seven stars turn brighter to the accompaniment of tinkling noises.

Carmen: Yeah! I see them now!

Don Mills: And do you see the two stars on the side of the bowl away from the handle?

Carmen hesitates. The two stars briefly brighten, one after another, each to the sound of a different note played on a xylophone.

Carmen: Yeah!

Don Mills: Those two stars are called the pointer stars. If you draw a line from the one at the bottom of the bowl to the other one and extend it five and a half times the distance between the stars, you come to another star called the Pole Star.

Carmen: Huh?

A dotted line appears in the heavens, joining the two pointer stars and ending at the Pole Star, which briefly brightens to the sound of a triangle.

Carmen: Cool!

The dotted line fades out and all the stars resume their normal brightness.

Don Mills: Well, the Pole Star is always to the North; so that way you'll always know which way is north. Then all you have to do is think of a map and you'll know which way to go. But if you're tired we can spend the night in the tent and travel in the morning.

They enter the tent.

Don Mills (from inside the tent): The Big Dipper is a part of just one of eighty-eight constellations into which all the stars visible to the naked eye are grouped. Most of them were named by the ancient Greeks after characters in their mythology. The Big Dipper is part of the constellation which the Greeks called the Great Bear. The story they tell is that once upon a time there was a bear who ... *(his voice is interrupted by Carmen's loud snoring).*

Scene 5: the new gypsy camp

It is growing dark. The gypsies are putting up their tents and unpacking.

Enter Don Mills, followed closely by Carmen.

Carmen: Thank you ever so much for taking me here! I guess I owe you a reward. Would you like the usual one?

Don Mills: I've wanted that from you for years, but I never dared ask you because I didn't think I could compete with Escamillo or Don José or any of those other dashing heroes you went around with.

Carmen (visibly touched): Why didn't you ask me last night when we were alone together instead of talking about the stars until I fell asleep?

Don Mills: I was in a position of power over you then. If you had said no, I could have run away and abandoned you to your fate; so if you had said yes it could have been out of fear and it wouldn't have meant anything to me. But now you're doing it of your own free will; so even if it's only out of gratitude it's OK, 'cause it's coming from you.

Carmen: You certainly are very patient. If you're that patient tonight, you'll have no trouble competing with those other guys. They were all in such a damned hurry!

They begin pitching a tent together as the curtain falls.

Scene 6: the same place, one year later.

Before the curtain rises, the sound of a violin playing gypsy wedding music can be heard from behind the curtain. It rises to reveal Carmen and Don Mills dancing in the centre of the stage, while the other gypsies are dancing around them in a ring, their hands joined, except the violinist who is standing near the left exit.

A big, fat young woman wearing a glittering tiara enters from the left, leading Don José by the hand. He is wearing a uniform (without bars) and an apron and carrying a pair of oversize tickets. They applaud the violinist, who takes a deep bow and stops playing until angry words from the others encourage him to start again. Don José gives the tickets to Carmen, who shoves them into Don Mills' pocket, and then Don José and his partner join the dancers. At this point the Sergeant enters from the left, shaking his fist and swearing, but he gets carried away by the joyous mood and joins the dancers too.

Escamillo, wearing his bullfighter's cape but not carrying his sword, then enters from the right, leading two young girls, one on each arm. One of them is wearing a T-shirt which says 'BAN BULLFIGHTING' and the other one is wearing a T-shirt with a picture of a bull defecating and a red circle around it and a red bar through it. They too join the dancers.

The people in the outside ring stop dancing and start clapping their hands rhythmically. Don Mills and Carmen respond by embracing and kissing. The music stops, and the actors signal the end of the play. As soon as the first applause is heard from the audience, the violinist runs to centre stage and bows deeply - several times. Then Escamillo and Don José take their bows, and then everyone else, and then they all exit except Carmen and Don Mills, who are still locked in a passionate kiss. Suddenly they notice that everyone is laughing at them. They bow hastily and then head for the exit, but they bump into the other actors who are returning for a curtain call. They get it right the second time around.

THE END.