

Student's Name

MAS 10B – Sec 03

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Prof. Barrera

### Maria Cristina Mena's Masterpiece

The artifact attached is the first page of a short fiction story written by Maria Cristina Mena, a Mexican-American-female author in the early 1900s. The attached, short fiction story is entitled "Marriage by Miracle" published in *The Century Magazine* on March 1916. The online search for Mena's work was surprisingly easy. When I had the given knowledge that Mena published "her short stories in mainstream U.S. magazines," (timeline) I searched her fiction stories on Google, and a website showed up with a free, complete collection of her works. (<http://www.unz.org/Author/MenaMariaCristina>) Although Mena's masterpieces were easily accessible, her bibliography was difficult to find. Many articles about Mena's life were unavailable to viewers, so I used excerpts from a free Google book sample and another author's analysis article on one of Mena's other works.

The story I attached below was an interesting read because the title, "Marriage by Miracle", captured my attention. I assumed the story was about romance and overcoming barriers to find true love, but the story was completely the opposite and it was better than I expected. In the story, "Marriage by Miracle," Mena describes a Mexicana who needs to be married according to her parents. Marriage in the story is not about love but about financial status, and beauty is essential for women to capture a wealthy groom. The Mexicana named Ernestina, who was "twenty-five and hopelessly disfavored with her nose of ridicule, her eyes like two fleas, and her bony figure" undergoes plastic surgery to match English women's beauty.

(<http://www.unz.org/Author/MenaMariaCristina>) However, when the surgeon uncovered her bandages after surgery, Ernestina could not smile. The surgeon explained that not smiling was “in the latest mode cultivated by the most fashionable señoras and advised her to resist all impulse of smile.” (<http://www.unz.org/Author/MenaMariaCristina>) This part of the story is what made me think the story was interesting because it reminds me of my life. For example, every time I meet my aunt, she persistently tells me to get married in the future. She advises me to put on makeup, groom my eyebrows, and wear more fashionable clothes to attract a man. However, I do not find a major makeover would result in a happy relationship if it is about physical appearance. Similarly to Ernestina, she surgically changed her face to attract a groom, even if it means never experiencing happiness.

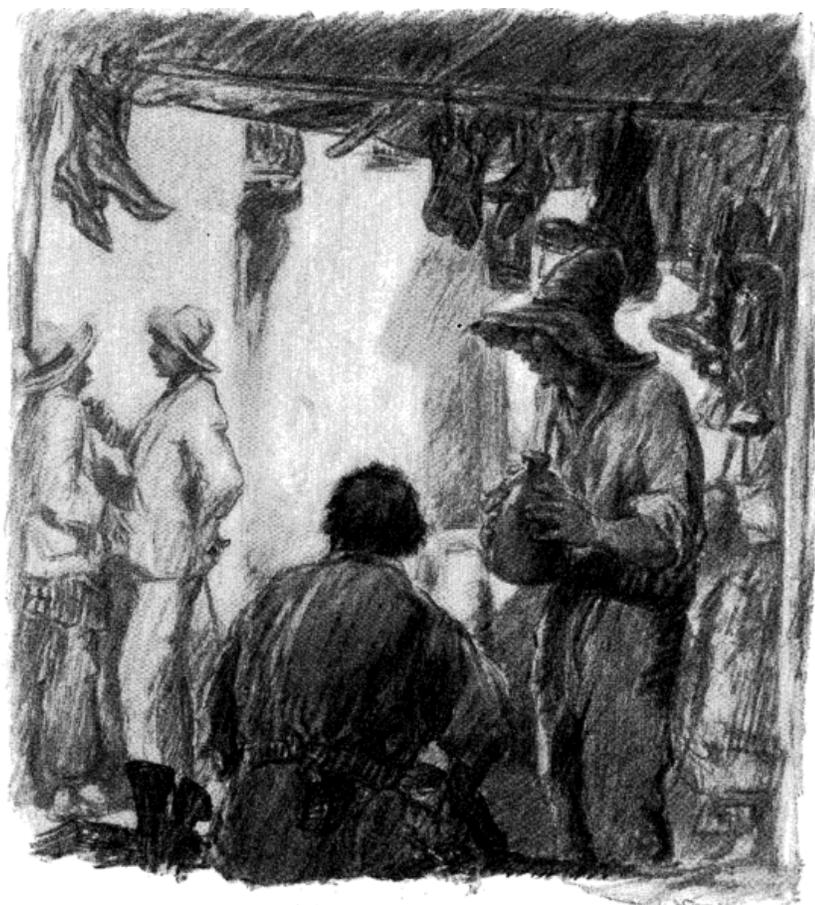
Similar to Mena’s work and class lectures, even when it came to love, Mexican women did not possess much power and freedom. Mexican women endured turmoil and sadness to face life that they did not choose, such as Ernestina who undergoes plastic surgery which resulted in never being able to smile again. The whole concept of marriage was about economic survival for Mexican women in the story like in the lectures. In lecture, we discussed that women travelled through tremendous turmoil with their husband or boyfriend who were soldiers everywhere they go because they were substantial to their survival. They had to carry the luggage and children and walked on foot besides their husband or boyfriend who rode on horses. In an excerpt from Ruiz’s book entitled *From Out of The Shadows*, a personal story of a single mother with two children who had to cross the border faced difficulties such as paying head tax when she was earning wages less than men and had to look for a babysitter and raising her children by herself. Women, especially single mothers with children, experienced hardships crossing the borders

without men. In general relation to the lecture and the story, women needed to depend on and please men.

Although there were minimal information about Mena, judging by her writing she was well-educated and articulate because of the difficult terminology she uses. Since Mena was a Mexican-American woman, she was criticized more severely than other writers of “white”-born. The critics inferred she idealized “white” culture and created a stereotypical picture of Mexican lifestyle. (*Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* edited by Vicki L. Ruiz, Virginia Sanchez Korrol) On the other hand, other critics viewed her as a phenomenal writer to describe and translate the lifestyles of Mexican life on pages.

(<http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/legacy/v026/26.1.toth.pdf>)

From a fanatic of fiction literature such as myself, I believe her work was well-written and had a nice storyline.



"The *señor pretendiente* had been seen to speak to him"

## Marriage by Miracle

By MARÍA CRISTINA MENA

Author of "John of God, the Water-carrier," "The Education of Popo," etc.

Illustrations by George Wright

PANCRAZIO, the cobbler, was the first of the humble neighbors of the Ramos Blancos to notice that *la niña Clarita* had a pretender. From across the *plazuela*, where he had his stool and his strings of shoes festooning the wall beneath his gay canopy of tacked-together

bull-fight programs, he had seen what was going on and prayed that, by the mercy of God, Doña Rosalia might not perceive the discreet signs with which her little one acknowledged the devoted presence of the strange young man in the shadow of the House of Colors.