

The Bullfight

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The young matador walked onto the field with dignified, deliberate steps, his head held high, his eyes flashing with pride. If his manner had truly mirrored his excitement he would have run, leapt, or danced for joy. Of course this was only Tierra Roja, not Mexico City or Monterey, but to be wearing the cape and hat of the matador at age nineteen was honor enough. It was of little matter that the cape had been cut from one of the thick red curtains from the old hotel. Tierra Roja was a poor village, and one had to be creative in using the few resources it contained.

To compensate for the limitations of his surroundings, the young man had incessantly practiced the turns and graceful spins that he had seen the great matadors in Monterey employ. He had made his pilgrimage to the great bullring during the previous summer and had brought home the memory of every sight, sound, and emotion. Many hours were spent perfecting his art, carefully sweeping the air as he performed the cape movements with his old woolen coat each night after his work in the fields. His thoughts continually recreated the structure of those bullfights in Monterey—the prologue to the excitement given by the picadors, the exquisite unveiling of the matador's skill and mastery over the brute, and then the ultimate when supremacy of man's intelligence and courage over the bestial nature was again displayed with pride before all the world.

The matador scanned the small, familiar crowd, scarcely noticing the similarity in the swarthy faces of the farmers, faces that had been eroded of all expression by

the effect of wind and heat, the strain of extracting a livelihood from the tired and recalcitrant red clay, and their abandonment of the faint belief that the trip toward tomorrow would be any better or any different than a journey back to their yesterdays. They lived only for Saturday with the matador and the fiesta at night and Sunday at church. The few animate faces of the people working in the village were also visible. Only four shopkeepers, the saloon manager, the blacksmith, their families, and the old padre made up the village proper now. The village had become too small over the past two decades with the young people leaving to find fuller horizons to support a banker, hotel manager, or even a sheriff. Their respective buildings had been stripped of all useful material and had been left as vestigial reminders of past life.

The matador trained his eyes on the brute slowly approaching and took a firmer grip on the cape. The young man felt at once the exhilaration of beginning the deadly ballet with his partner and foe, but also the familiar regret that Tierra Roja was so lowly that no one could spare even a diseased, ancient bull for the ring.



He approached the matador slowly, carefully examining the countenance and the lean, straight body of his enemy. The strong neck and shoulders were wet with the gentle currents of blood still seeping from the wounds made by the picador. The thin, ornate blades used in Monterey had been approximated by darts borrowed from the saloon's dart board. His neck muscles were weakening, and his head was sagging forward under the weight of the horns clamped to his head by a metal band. Thorny burrs of the unpolished metal cut deeper into his head as he nodded forward, sending small rivulets of blood into his eyes, obscuring his sight of the matador. He gave in to a flood of mindless rage from his anguish and the sight of the matador waving

his cape, taunting him, tormenting him like a spiteful demon. He loped awkwardly toward the young matador. The matador neatly side-stepped and did a simple cape flourish to warm up for the more intricate turns to follow. The flash of the cape before his blood-clouded eyes and the sudden disappearance of the matador's body confused him as he reeled past. He tried to turn quickly to attack again, but his legs buckled, dropping him to the ground. He lay there, unable to struggle to his feet. Random catcalls came from the crowd. The angry, disappointed matador ran to him and kicked him viciously. "On your feet! Get up!" the matador screamed. He fought to his knees, but could not find the strength to rise. His arms tied tightly behind him strained and writhed, like chained bulls, to be free and avenge the awful pain. He twisted about to spit on the cape but was felled by a second kick and lurched forward, the horns furrowing the reddened earth.

"Even a murderer is still a man. I beg you. Hang me."