



BACK IN TIME

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Toro!

One of the first books I read after arriving in Madrid in the mid-1960s was Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises." I immediately wanted to go to Pamplona to see the running of the bulls, and the following summer my dream came true. In the company of my incomparable partner-in-adventure, Juanín, I journeyed to the Feria de San Fermín, which began with a bang on the seventh day of the seventh month as it had for centuries. It appeared that a number of other people had also read the book, however, and the town was as packed as the Costa Brava in the high season. The cafés around the plaza could barely keep up with the trade, the streets were mainly given over to heavy foot traffic, and all the hotels were full. Which was a blow, as we had neglected to make reservations.

Never mind; we plowed into the seething crowd and were soon caught up in the exuberant, anything-goes mood of the *aficionados*. The whole center of town was one big party, where people from all over the world had come to act out some fantasy or other. Before there was Elvis, there was Ernest—and several Hemingway imitators sat conspicuously and somewhat self-consciously here and there in safari jackets, each with a full white beard and a pipe. As the night wore on and wine flowed like water, everyone wanted to talk or hear about the bulls. "The first bullfight was held

in 1133 for the coronation of King Alfonso VIII." "The great *toreros* like Manolete refined what began as a primitive and cruel medieval hunt into the skillful art form that is now practiced all over the world." "Don't say 'toreador'—that's just a word that was popularized by Bizet's Carmen." Long after midnight we sneaked into one of the nicer hotels near the main plaza and took the lift to the top floor. At a remote end of the hallway, around a few bends, we found the service area where we lay on the floor and slept soundly until the housekeeping staff roused us and told us to be on our way. It was nearly six o'clock and the sun was also rising; time to hit the streets.

Café con leche seldom tastes as good as it does when you've only slept for an hour or so on the floor of an inhospitable hotel. A shot of brandy and a sweet roll at a local tavern and we were once more ready for the Feria. The streets where the bulls were to run had been barricaded to create a chute that led into the ring, and people were standing on balconies and hanging out of trees to see the spectacle. I sat on Juanín's shoulders and caught a glimpse of a group of wide-eyed young men in white slacks and shirts racing by with a herd of huge bulls in hot pursuit. They were all gone in an instant, and we returned to the tavern for breakfast. Spain's idea of breakfast, especially during the running of the bulls in Pamplona, was flexible enough





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to include several *carajillos*—a mixture of espresso and cognac—and our attention soon drifted away from the bulls and toward a group of young Swedish tourists. Unbridled fraternization is de rigueur at any event of this nature, and since neither Juanín nor I were particularly backward in coming forward, it wasn't long before our accommodation difficulties were a thing of the past.

from Sevilla, a giant five-year-old weighing about twelve hundred pounds. Snorting and stamping, he strutted out and we stood facing each other on the hot sand. After the *picadores* and *banderilleros* had completed their ritual preparation, I was alone with the Miura and a deathly silence settled over the plaza. After making a few passes with my cape—a *veronica*, a *media veronica*, and a couple of *naturales*—we were on the verge



A long, languid lunch led into a magnificent siesta, and between dreams and fantasies I suddenly saw myself as the great Manolete—*el matador!* Rising from the rumpled sheets in the darkened room, I carefully donned the *traje de luces*, the traditional bullfighter's costume, with its sparkles and ruffles and snugly fitting tights. Stepping out into the sunshine, I raised my hand to acknowledge the roar of the crowd packed into the stands in the ring. The trumpets blared, the gates opened, and the crowd gasped when they saw that I had drawn one of the notorious Miura bulls

of a moment of truth. As I advanced, step by graceful step, my sword ready, the bull suddenly spoke to me in a Swedish accent and shouted, “*olé* my liddle sweetheart!”

The following day Juanín and I said farewell to Pamplona and, feeling older, wiser, and very tired, made our way back to Madrid. It appeared to us that we had survived a rite of passage, and felt quietly content, if somewhat disoriented. Coming home took some adjustment after spending a few days at a pagan festival in medieval Spain.