

ONE NIGHT IN BARCELONA

Sitting at the bar in the Las Cabalas bodega in Barcelona just off the Ramblas, I felt very continental. Dressed to the nines in a black tailor made suit, ascot and very pointy very uncomfortable Italian shoes. The only thing that gave my act away was the buzz GI hair cut. I was an American sailor on liberty at my home port in Spain with civilian cloths privileges. I had the world by the tail.

I was working on my third or was it my forth Cuba Libre. A rum, coke and lime drink, that legend has it Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders came up with the recipe at the end of their campaign. This was in Cuba at the close of the Spanish American War.

I liked this bar it was small intimate and comfortable. The walls were covered with posters from all the major bull fight arenas in Spain. Old matadors like Juan Belmonte and Manuel Benitez were still spoken of in quite reverence. This bar was the hang out from as far back as the eighteen hundreds for toreros, their entourage and aficionados. The most well known admirer of the art was Earnest Hemingway.

The term torero was used to describe any of the performers involved with the Bullfight. The matador de toros (killer of bulls) being the maestro and the picadors and rejoneadores being of less importance.

I got to know some of the younger aspiring novices of the sport. They showed me correct way to hold the cape and a few of the primary moves like the veronica, paso doble and paso piton piton. Trying to get the bull to charge by holding the cape in front of your body stomping your foot arching your back, jerking your head back in a come here motion while giving out a deep sound that sounds like EHEY, seems ludicrous when you realize that the bull is much faster than you are and weighs almost two tons.

As usual my Spanish improved in direct proportion to the number of drinks I had. I was now up to the level of a four year old. It seems I roll my R's much better as the evening progresses. Pepe a young torero and I were discussing the unbelievable amount of money a matador makes compared to a star soccer player.

Things never get rolling in Spain until after midnight. It was about two in the morning when a tour group flooded into the place. The Las Cabalas because of its history was a frequent stop for most organized tours. This was a mixed bunch of French, English and Germans mostly female. A few were already in their cups from visiting night clubs earlier.

I got into a conversation with an English couple. I told them all I knew about the bar and Bull Fighting in about five minutes. The English are always easy to impress and a little naive so they hung on every word. They said they had been promised a Bull Fight by their tour guide on this very night. I said that was not possible because the season was over for the blood in the sand show and they don't fight bulls at night. They were insistent that the bull fight was tonight an invited me to come along. The head count for groups like this are very exact so I knew the chances of crashing the party were not possible.

A novice torero I knew as PePe gripped me around the shoulder and said "come we follow". I must have been drunker then I thought. With out hesitation or thought I walked out of the bar and jumped on the back of an OSSA (The Bear). A powerful motorcycle known as the widow maker.

Pepe was on the small side and I didn't weigh much back then. As light as we were the motorcycle felt like we were mounted on a Grizzly Bear hell bend on our destruction. We tore out behind the bus just a foot or so distance behind. When we got out of the city and started up into the mountains I realized why we followed so close. The Ossa had no head lights we were dependant on the bus lights.

The bus driver must have been trained by an Italian cab driver in Rome, the more winding the road became the faster he drove. I leaned with Pepe into every switch back. The foot pegs on the Ossa would drag the pavement sending sparks flying lighting up the road behind us. I felt like I was riding a comet.

When we came down from the mountain and the road straightened I could see lights in the distance. Pepe turned his head and said "I know this place they raise the bulls here" We stopped in a clay parking lot with a couple of tour busses. I dismounted and discovered three things. I was stone sober, my knees were shaking and I had not peed my pants. I had to go ever since we left the bar an hour ago.

There was a well lit corrida (a small corral) with dining tables all around. Waiters dressed in black pants white shirts and a red sash around their waist, were busy severing grilled chicken, bread and Champaign. Two French girls sat near the arena with two empty chairs at their table. We ask "May we" which sounded kind of French. We learned that their traveling companion was in the corrida trying to get the bull to charge. He was waving the cape back and forth and up and down frantically trying to get the small bulls attention. The muletti turned his back on the would be matador and walked away in defiance.

Pepe a trained novice stepped into the ring and try as he may could not get the reluctant bull to charge. I had by then had a few campaigns to calm my nerves after the bike ride through the mountains. I figured that if a French student and a matador could not insight a bull to charge I was safe in showing how brave I was. One last sip of wine and I slid into the spotlight.

I gracefully took the cape from Pepe positioned my hands the way I had been instructed and faced the bull. I arched my back jerked my head back. The bull looked toward me I swear his eyes narrowed and turned blood red. One hoof pawed at the sand he lowered his head. Instead of calling the challenge EHEY I managed to squeak out , "OH Shit:

I side stepped the charging beast almost losing the cape to his tiny horns. The crowd yelled "OLAY" He came again this time I held the cape out in front of me and did an awkward veronica the crowd roared "OLAY" I was hot, the third pass was smother with a move that could pass for a Paso doble, more cheering spurred me on. I had seen a fighter exhibit a bold move at a fight at the Plaza de Torors. He turned his back to the bull draped the cape over his left shoulder and strutted away from the bull with accentuated hip and shoulder movement. This was my time for a big finale. Unfortunately this little bull had not seen that fight. He caught me just below the buttocks and sent me cart wheeling into the air. I hit the ground like a sack of concrete my ears were ringing. I came to one knee looked over my right shoulder and saw the little bastard moving in for the kill. I swear he was smiling.

I scrambled to my feet and ran for the exit. I turned and saw my nemesis prancing around the ring in a victory prance. He came back to where I was standing on the other side of the corral and stood there nodding his head up and down as if to say care to try for four. I moved much slower for several days a painful reminder of my day facing the BRAVE BULL.