

THE BULLFIGHTER WAS A LADY

Written by

James Goodwin

Based on Conchita Cintron's final fight - 1949

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The early morning sun rose over the arena, the great plaza de toros. It was a new day ready to bring forth the cheering and vivacious crowds to the bullfight, a tradition that is centuries old, a tradition filled with pride and courage. All were coming to see Pedro, one of the most feared bulls ever introduced in the arena. Normally the bulls don't live to fight again, but Pedro was the strongest bull that had ever been challenged in the bullfighter's ring. In the previous match, he put on such an impressive display that the crowd petitioned to let him live. Unfortunately, his challenger was not able to share the same fate, suffering *cogidas*, being gored so ferociously that the brave matador was carried out, unable to continue. The officials knew there was much value in this bull, and the people would be eager to return to see who would be brave enough to step into the ring with him. It must no doubt be the bravest matador who would put his life in the way of this beast. A man with the skills not only to match the strength of Pedro but also to surpass and outwit him.

Dust shook from the wooden door that held back the killer. The deafening roar of the crowds shouting for the release of Pedro reached far into the streets surrounding the arena. Pedro pawed at the dirt inside the *chequero*; this pen would not hold him for long, snorting and ready to face whoever waited on the other side of the barrier. He would do the same to this fighter as he had to the other. Today, Pedro knew what to expect and was ready more than ever. The puny *banderillas*, the flags tipped with a dart that had been thrust into his shoulders, had barely scratched him in the last fight; he was healed and prepared. The matadors didn't have any chance with him. Pedro began to stir as the chains holding the door rattled. His breathing grew deeper. He would not play with this matador; no, the kill would be swift and sure this time.

The brightness of the sun broke through the door as it slowly opened. Pedro was momentarily blinded, but he shook it off and strode out to face the matador. The crowd roared as Pedro made his entrance; he was magnificent and proud. Snorting loudly in greeting to the cheers as he pawed at the yellow organic sand beneath his massive hooves. The light was still in his eyes, but as he moved to his left, the great walls of the arena blocked the glare, bringing into view the matador that stood in the middle of the ring.

This matador stood with a confidence and courage that Pedro had never seen before.

The poise was different from the other fighters; the curves and shape of this matador were unfamiliar. But, there was no better time to test his foe, and Pedro began his charge, ready to end this quickly. The matador stood solidly in place, with the large magenta and yellow/blue coloured capote slightly flowing in the breeze. Pedro was now just feet away, but still, the matador was unmoved. The crowd cheered both in eager anticipation and terror. Then Pedro saw... Her eyes. The deepness of the black and the shape of them was something he never saw before, intoxicated by her steady gaze; the bullfighter was a lady.

Pedro faltered and almost tripped at the sight he beheld before him. The matadora smiled, causing Pedro's heart to skip as he raced past her as she deftly turned. He stopped to look at her as the crowd grew silent in unexpected awe. Delores was the matadora. She stood upright and proud with her back to Pedro but now slowly turned her head over her shoulder to gaze back at him. Pedro snorted and was confused by the change of circumstances today. He could not fight her; there was no possible way he could bring pain and suffering to the beautiful lady that stood before him. The crowd sensed the change of the spirit in the bull and began to murmur, "What is this? Has Pedro become el manso!" Pedro was definitely no coward, and hearing the boos and taunts from the crowd caused his anger to rise. Delores didn't falter at hearing the chants from the crowd; she turned and flourished her cape in a grand gesture to capture Pedro's attention. Her cuadrilla, the men on the field who were there to assist her, rushed forward, ready to provoke the bull and stir his wrath, but Delores waved them back.

But Pedro's attention was on them now, and these men he would hurt. One of the three banderilleros had his back to the bull, so Pedro charged. The crowd instantly erupted in fanatical cheers seeing the return of fury and killer instinct in the bull. Carlito, the unaware banderillero, quickly looked up and saw the imminent danger and ran to the edge of the ring, leaping up in the barest of time as Pedro's massive head smashed hard into the wooden barrier. His horns ripping splinters from the boards. The crowd cheered in uncontrolled fervour as the dust billowed, and the shock of the blow rattled the walls. Carlito looked up from the dirt where he had fallen in his escape. He watched in fear as the shockwave of the impact hit him, unsure if the thick wood would keep the ferocious beast back. The barrier held, but something did fall. There was a bouquet resting atop, placed carelessly by some adoring fan. The flowers landed on Pedro, and he barely felt it bounce off him with a single flower that came to rest on his broad shoulders. Maybe this was his plan all along, as he turned back to face Delores and moved quickly again towards her, quick enough to rouse the crowd, but not lose the flower that was unseen by all except Pedro.

Delores remained in place and lowered her head in anticipation of the imminent threat that rushed her, holding her cape, ready for the pass. But Pedro suddenly stopped, and at the same moment, he lowered his head, and the momentum of the flower caused it to float off of his neck, landing at Delores' feet. No one was close enough to see the flower fall, and Pedro looked up into Delores' eyes again, and he saw her. She smiled just the slightest bit so that only Pedro could see. There was trust and understanding in those beautiful eyes and her captivating smile.

The crowd was silent and confused again. They came to see the magnificent display of Pedro but were shocked and unsure at the way the events were playing out. Pedro sensed this, as did Delores, and they both knew what had to happen. It was time to put on the great display of courage and power of both the bullfighter and the bull.

Delores backed away and held her cape ready, taunting the bull. Pedro once again pawed deeply into the sand. The crowd's unease and disapproving jeers slowly turned to excited clamour at the signs of the real fight about to begin. Pedro charged with renewed fury causing the loudest cry of delight from the crowd thus far. Delores' skill was unmatched by any previous matador; she performed the tightest of passes with skill, allowing his razor-sharp horns to pass by her legs by a mere inch. She felt the passion in Pedro's attacks but knew there was no intention to do her harm, and she used that trust to draw Pedro even closer. It was a dance between bull and bullfighter that no one had ever witnessed before. The crowd was in such a fervour that the cheers never stopped, and the volume of their cries and praise was ever-increasing.

But now the time has come. It was the Suerte de matar, the third and final act of the bullfight. Delores changed her cape to the red muleta, ready to execute her tandas, a series of specialized passes. Pedro was growing tired, but his passion gave him the strength to continue. He allowed the banderillas to be placed as was customary in the second act. It caused him little pain, and the crowd expected it. Still, he could sense that it was something Delores did not like to see, but they both knew it was part of the performance. The arena shook with roaring applause as the two continued their elaborate and skillful dance in the ring. Not once did Pedro cause even the merest of scratches to Delores' beautiful and graceful form. In return, she made Pedro look as fearsome and impressive in his attacks. The respect and admiration between the two were great and equal.

The eagerness to see the final act left the crowd seething in anticipation but also in doubt about the fate of Pedro as he had performed even more admirably than in his previous match. Surely, Delores would spare him at the end;

he was too magnificent to be killed. The arena fell into complete silence the moment Delores brought her sword up high, preparing Pedro for the kill. Pedro began his final charge, and at the moment Delores lined up the sword, ready to thrust, she dropped it to the sand in dramatic fashion. She then simulated the kill, touching Pedro on the shoulders with her empty hand as he charged by. The crowd exploded into thunderous cheers and applause, throwing hats and flowers into the ring in glorious admiration to both participants of the fight.

Pedro stopped and turned back to face Delores. Their eyes met again, one final time. There was an unspoken connection between them that was shared with no one else. Pedro bowed slightly, and Delores nodded and winked. She pulled a white handkerchief from her waist pocket, raising it in the air. The crowd applauded and cheered, pleading in agreement for Pedro to be indultado. He would be pardoned, and his life would be spared. He would return to the fields to live out the rest of his life the way he so justly deserved. Delores smiled and saluted the crowd. The flowers continued to reign down as she walked out of the ring, to retire and never fight again.

THE END