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*In the Plaza de Toros
Madrid, September 1956*

Six bulls. And three young men,
Three *novilleros*, had come
To kill them, to earn
At their first *corrida* (and mine)
The name of *matador*.

The parade of the bright *cuadrillas*,
Picadores on old geldings,
The brandishing of cornets,
And a bull came rushing through
Death's Door, looking like death,
Enormously black, outraged
By what this scene might be,
Quivering, quick, horns high.

While *pics* with their Don Quixote
Lances lowered those horns
By piercing, muscle-wrenching,
Fat-and-lean punishment
In spite of the bone-breaking
Lunges against live horsehide,
The first novice stared
Hard from the barrier
In his unscarred suit of lights
Like an aristocrat
Insulted by a peasant.
He entered, flourished his cape,
And was hooked, tossed twice, and killed.

It happened just like that.
And after the stunned *chulos*
Had carried his body off
At a run, the next in order
Came out, out of tradition,
To fight before his turn,
To finish that incompleteness.

He was as tall and handsome
As the Dawn of a New Regime,
And he smiled grimly, gamely
Above backsliding feet
Till, trembling, sword in hand,
He was gored high in the groin,
Spun up and around and down.
It took him days to die.

The third, a slim dark frowning
Round-shouldered hollow-eyed
Hesitant solemn gypsy,

Faced all six bulls alone.
He finally killed the killer
But clumsily and "badly,"
And the Plaza whistled him
To scorn and cheered the bull.
But more and more skillfully,
"Bravely" and bravely,
He dealt with those five others.

Four more times his sword
Between huge shoulderbones
Plunged deep into a lung,
And the mule-team trotted on
To drag black shapes away
To the place where the meat goes.
After five, his face went gray
Under the falling flowers,
And the sixth was nearly the dance
Aficionados pray for
In honor of darkness.

The President gave him an ear
(For a novice, almost Glory),
And while the band thrust home
Ear-piercing *paso dobles*,
He toured the bloody sand
High on his world's shoulders.

Had any other tourist
Out in the sunswept bleachers
Or the nearer, more costly shadows
Been as full of Dominguín
And Hemingway as *I'd* been?
Did anyone leave as empty?
I could hardly tell the gardens
Of Spain from the Guardia Civil
Or death in the afternoon.

If the gypsy isn't dead
By now, does he feel, as I do,
That something of his died
Back then (whatever he did
In the long meanwhile
Or earned or learned to want)
And was hauled away in chains
By mules or by strange hands
To be honored under the knives
Of doctors or pious butchers
For the gaping mouths of the poor?—
That he lost that day, forever,
Some unforgiveable hunger?