



ernest hemingway

Men Without Women

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Ernest Hemingway



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The Undefeated

Manuel Garcia climbed the stairs to Don Miguel Retana's office. He set down his suitcase and knocked on the door. There was no answer. Manuel, standing in the hallway felt there was someone in the room. He felt it through the door.

'Retana,' he said, listening.

There was no answer.

He's there, all right, Manuel thought.

'Retana,' he said and banged the door.

'Who's there?' said someone in the office.

'Me, Manolo,' Manuel said.

'What do you want?' asked the voice.

'I want to work,' Manuel said.

Something in the door clicked several times and it swung open. Manuel went in, carrying his suitcase.

A little man sat behind a desk at the far side of the room. Over his head was a bull's head, stuffed by a Madrid taxidermist; on the walls were framed photographs and bullfight posters.

The little man sat looking at Manuel.

'I thought they'd killed you,' he said.

Manuel knocked with his knuckles on the desk. The little man sat looking at him across the desk.

'How many corridas you had this year?' Retana asked.

'One,' he answered.

'Just that one?' the little man asked.

'That's all.'

‘I read about it in the papers,’ Retana said. He leaned back in the chair and looked at Manuel.

Manuel looked up at the stuffed bull. He had seen it often before. He felt a certain family interest in it. It had killed his brother, the promising one, about nine years ago. Manuel remembered the day. There was a brass plate on the oak shield the bull’s head was mounted on. Manuel could not read it, but he imagined it was in memory of his brother. Well, he had been a good kid.

The plate said: ‘The Bull “Mariposa” of the Duke of Veragua, which accepted 9 varas for 7 caballos, and caused the death of Antonio Garcia, Novillero, April 27, 1909.’

Retana saw him looking at the stuffed bull’s head.

‘The lot the Duke sent me for Sunday will make a scandal,’ he said. ‘They’re all bad in the legs. What do they say about them at the Café?’

‘I don’t know,’ Manuel said. ‘I just got in.’

‘Yes,’ Retana said. ‘You still have your bag.’

He looked at Manuel, leaning back behind the big desk.

‘Sit down,’ he said. ‘Take off your cap.’

Manuel sat down; his cap off, his face was changed. He looked pale, and his coleta pinned forward on his head, so that it would not show under the cap, gave him a strange look.

‘You don’t look well,’ Retana said.

‘I just got out of hospital,’ Manuel said.

‘I heard they’d cut your leg off,’ Retana said.

‘No,’ said Manuel. ‘It got all right.’

Retana leaned forward across the desk and pushed a wooden box of cigarettes toward Manuel.

‘Have a cigarette,’ he said.

‘Thanks.’

Manuel lit it.

‘Smoke?’ he said, offering the match to Retana.

‘No,’ Retana waved his hand. ‘I never smoke.’

Retana watched him smoking.

‘Why don’t you get a job and go to work?’ he said.

‘I don’t want to work,’ Manuel said. ‘I am a bullfighter.’

‘There aren’t any bullfighters any more,’ Retana said.

'I'm a bullfighter,' Manuel said.

'Yes, while you're in there,' Retana said.

Manuel laughed.

Retana sat, saying nothing and looking at Manuel.

'I'll put you in a nocturnal if you want,' Retana offered.

'When?' Manuel asked.

'Tomorrow night.'

'I don't like to substitute for anybody,' Manuel said. That was the way they all got killed. That was the way Salvador got killed. He tapped his knuckles on the table.

'It's all I've got,' Retana said.

'Why don't you put me on next week?' Manuel suggested.

'You wouldn't draw,' Retana said. 'All they want is Litri and Rubito and La Torre. Those kids are good.'

'They'd come to see me get it,' Manuel said, hopefully.

'No, they wouldn't. They don't know who you are any more.'

'I've got a lot of stuff,' Manuel said.

'I'm offering to put you on tomorrow night,' Retana said. 'You can work with young Hernandez and kill two novillos after the Charlots.'

'Whose novillos?' Manuel asked.

'I don't know. Whatever stuff they've got in the corrals. What the veterinaries won't pass in the daytime.'

'I don't like to substitute,' Manuel said.

'You can take it or leave it,' Retana said. He leaned forward over the papers. He was no longer interested. The appeal that Manuel had made to him for a moment when he thought of the old days was gone. He would like to get him to substitute for Larita because he could get him cheaply. He could get others cheaply too. He would like to help him though. Still he had given him the chance. It was up to him.

'How much do I get?' Manuel asked. He was still playing with the idea of refusing. But he knew he could not refuse.

'Two hundred and fifty pesetas,' Retana said. He had thought of five hundred, but when he opened his mouth it said two hundred and fifty.

'You pay Villalta seven thousand,' Manuel said.

'You're not Villalta,' Retana said.

'I know it,' Manuel said.

'He draws it, Manolo,' Retana said in explanation.

'Sure,' said Manuel. He stood up. 'Give me three hundred, Retana.'

'All right,' Retana agreed. He reached in the drawer for a paper.

'Can I have fifty now?' Manuel asked.

'Sure,' said Retana. He took a fifty-peseta note out of his pocket-book and laid it, spread out flat, on the table.

Manuel picked it up and put it in his pocket.

'What about a cuadrilla?' he asked.

'There's the boys that always work for me nights,' Retana said. 'They're all right.'

'How about picadors?' Manuel asked.

'They're not much,' Retana admitted.

'I've got to have one good pic,' Manuel said.

'Get him then,' Retana said. 'Go and get him.'

'Not out of this,' Manuel said. 'I'm not paying for any cuadrilla out of sixty duros.'

Retana said nothing but looked at Manuel across the big desk.

'You know I've got to have one good pic,' Manuel said.

Retana said nothing but looked at Manuel from a long way off.

'It isn't right,' Manuel said.

Retana was still considering him, leaning back in his chair, considering him from a long way away.

'They're the regular pics,' he offered.

'I know,' Manuel said. 'I know your regular pics.'

Retana did not smile. Manuel knew it was over.

'All I want is an even break,' Manuel said reasoningly. 'When I go out there I want to be able to call my shots on the bull. It only takes one good picador.'

He was talking to a man who was no longer listening.

'If you want something extra,' Retana said, 'go and get it. There will be a regular cuadrilla out there. Bring as many of your own pics as you want. The charlotada is over by 10.30.'

‘All right,’ Manuel said. ‘If that’s the way you feel about it.’

‘That’s the way,’ Retana said.

‘I’ll see you tomorrow night,’ Manuel said.

‘I’ll be out there,’ Retana said.

Manuel looked back. Retana was sitting forward looking at some papers. Manuel pulled the door tight until it clicked.

He went down the stairs and out of the door into the hot brightness of the street. It was very hot in the street and the light on the white buildings was sudden and hard on his eyes. He walked down the shady side of the steep street toward the Puerta del Sol. The shade felt solid and cool as running water. The heat came suddenly as he crossed the intersecting streets. Manuel saw no one he knew in all the people he passed.

Just before the Puerta del Sol he turned into a café.

It was quiet in the café. There were a few men sitting at tables against the wall. At one table four men played cards. Most of the men sat against the wall smoking, empty coffee-cups and liqueur-glasses before them on the tables. Manuel went through the long room to a small room in back. A man sat at a table in the corner asleep. Manuel sat down at one of the tables.

A waiter came in and stood beside Manuel’s table.

‘Have you seen Zurito?’ Manuel asked him.

‘He was in before lunch,’ the waiter answered. ‘He won’t be back before five o’clock.’

‘Bring me some coffee and milk and a shot of the ordinary,’ Manuel said.

The waiter came back into the room carrying a tray with a big coffee-glass and a liqueur-glass on it. In his left hand he held a bottle of brandy. He swung these down to the table and a boy who had followed him poured coffee and milk into the glass from two shiny, spouted pots with long handles.

Manuel took off his cap and the waiter noticed his pigtail pinned forward on his head. He winked at the coffee-boy as he poured out the brandy into the little glass beside

Manuel's coffee. The coffee-boy looked at Manuel's pale face curiously.

'You fighting here?' asked the waiter, corking up the bottle.

'Yes,' Manuel said. 'Tomorrow.'

The waiter stood there, holding the bottle on one hip.

'You in the Charlie Chaplins?' he asked.

The coffee-boy looked away, embarrassed.

'No. In the ordinary.'

'I thought they were going to have Chaves and Hernandez,' the waiter said.

'No. Me and another.'

'Who? Chaves or Hernandez?'

'Hernandez, I think.'

'What's the matter with Chaves?'

'He got hurt.'

'Where did you hear that?'

'Retana.'

'Hey, Looie,' the waiter called to the next room, 'Chaves got cogida.'

Manuel had taken the wrapper off the lumps of sugar and dropped them into his coffee. He stirred it and drank it down, sweet, hot, and warming in his empty stomach. He drank off the brandy.

'Give me another shot of that,' he said to the waiter.

The waiter uncorked the bottle and poured the glass full, slopping another drink into the saucer. Another waiter had come up in front of the table. The coffee-boy was gone.

'Is Chaves hurt bad?' the second waiter asked Manuel.

'I don't know,' Manuel said, 'Retana didn't say.'

'A hell of a lot he cares,' the tall waiter said. Manuel had not seen him before. He must have just come up.

'If you stand in with Retana in this town, you're a made man,' the tall waiter said. 'If you aren't in with him, you might just as well go out and shoot yourself.'

'You said it,' the other waiter who had come in said. 'You said it then.'

'You're right I said it,' said the tall waiter. 'I know what I'm talking about when I talk about that bird.'

‘Look what’s he’s done for Villalta,’ the first waiter said.

‘And that ain’t all,’ the tall waiter said. ‘Look what he’s done for Marcial Lalanda. Look what he’s done for Nacional.’

‘You said it, kid,’ agreed the short waiter.

Manuel looked at them, standing talking in front of his table. He had drunk his second brandy. They had forgotten about him. They were not interested in him.

‘Look at that bunch of camels,’ the tall waiter went on. ‘Did you ever see this Nacional II?’

‘I seen him last Sunday didn’t I?’ the original waiter said.

‘He’s a giraffe,’ the short waiter said.

‘What did I tell you?’ the tall waiter said. ‘Those are Retana’s boys.’

‘Say, give me another shot of that,’ Manuel said. He had poured the brandy the waiter had slopped over in the saucer into his glass and drank it while they were talking.

The original waiter poured his glass full mechanically, and the three of them went out of the room talking.

In the far corner the man was still asleep, snoring slightly on the intaking breath, his head back against the wall.

Manuel drank his brandy. He felt sleepy himself. It was too hot to go out into the town. Besides there was nothing to do. He wanted to see Zurito. He would go to sleep while he waited. He kicked his suitcase under the table to be sure it was there. Perhaps it would be better to put it back under the seat, against the wall. He leaned down and shoved it under. Then he leaned forward on the table and went to sleep.

When he woke there was someone sitting across the table from him. It was a big man with a heavy brown face like an Indian. He had been sitting there some time. He had waved the waiter away and sat reading the paper and occasionally looking down at Manuel, asleep, his head on the table. He read the paper laboriously, forming the words with his lips as he read. When it tired him he looked at Manuel. He sat heavily in the chair, his black Cordoba hat tipped forward.

Manuel sat up and looked at him.

‘Hello, Zurito,’ he said.

‘Hello, kid,’ the big man said.

‘I’ve been asleep.’ Manuel rubbed his forehead with the back of his fist.

‘I thought maybe you were.’

‘How’s everything?’

‘Good. How is everything with you?’

‘Not so good.’

They were both silent. Zurito, the picador, looked at Manuel’s white face. Manuel looked down at the picador’s enormous hands folding the paper to put away in his pocket.

‘I got a favor to ask you, Manos,’ Manuel said.

Manosduros was Zurito’s nickname. He never heard it without thinking of his huge hands. He put them forward on the table self-consciously.

‘Let’s have a drink,’ he said.

‘Sure,’ said Manuel.

The waiter came and went and came again. He went out of the room looking back at the two men at the table.

‘What’s the matter, Manolo?’ Zurito set down his glass.

‘Would you pic two bulls for me tomorrow night?’ Manuel asked, looking up at Zurito across the table.

‘No,’ said Zurito. ‘I’m not pic-ing.’

Manuel looked down at his glass. He had expected that answer; now he had it. Well, he had it.

‘I’m sorry, Manolo, but I’m not pic-ing.’ Zurito looked at his hands.

‘That’s all right,’ Manuel said.

‘I’m too old,’ Zurito said.

‘I just asked you,’ Manuel said.

‘Is it the nocturnal tomorrow?’

‘That’s it. I figured if I had just one good pic, I could get away with it.’

‘How much are you getting?’

‘Three hundred pesetas.’

‘I get more than that for pic-ing.’

‘I know,’ said Manuel. ‘I didn’t have any right to ask you.’

'What do you keep on doing it for?' Zurito asked. 'Why don't you cut off your coleta, Manolo?'

'I don't know,' Manuel said.

'You're pretty near as old as I am,' Zurito said.

'I don't know,' Manuel said. 'I got to do it. If I can fix it so that I get an even break, that's all I want. I got to stick with it, Manos.'

'No, you don't.'

'Yes I do. I've tried keeping away from it.'

'I know how you feel. But it isn't right. You ought to get out and stay out.'

'I can't do it. Besides, I've been going good lately.'

Zurito looked at his face.

'You've been in the hospital.'

'But I was going great when I got hurt.'

Zurito said nothing. He tipped the cognac out of his saucer into his glass.

'The papers say they never saw a better faena,' Manuel said.

Zurito looked at him.

'You know when I get going I'm good,' Manuel said.

'You're too old,' the picador said.

'No,' said Manuel. 'You're ten years older than I am.'

'With me it's different.'

'I'm not too old,' Manuel said.

They sat silent, Manuel watching the picador's face.

'I was going great till I got hurt,' Manuel offered.

'You ought to have seen me, Manos,' Manuel said, reproachfully.

'I don't want to see you,' Zurito said. 'It makes me nervous.'

'You haven't seen me lately.'

'I've seen you plenty.'

Zurito looked at Manuel, avoiding his eyes.

'You ought to quit it, Manolo.'

'I can't,' Manuel said, 'I'm going good now, I tell you.'

Zurito leaned forward, his hands on the table.

'Listen. I'll pic for you and if you don't go big tomorrow night, you'll quit. See? Will you do that?'

‘Sure.’

Zurito leaned back, relieved.

‘You got to quit,’ he said. ‘No monkey business. You got to cut the coleta.’

‘I won’t have to quit,’ Manuel said. ‘You watch me. I’ve got the stuff.’

Zurito stood up. He felt tired from arguing.

‘You got to quit,’ he said. ‘I’ll cut your coleta myself.’

‘No, you won’t,’ Manuel said. ‘You won’t have a chance.’

Zurito called the waiter.

‘Come on,’ said Zurito. ‘Come on up to the house.’

Manuel reached under the seat for his suitcase. He was happy. He knew Zurito would pic for him. He was the best picador living. It was all simple now.

‘Come on up to the house and we’ll eat,’ Zurito said.

Manuel stood in the patio de caballos waiting for the Charlie Chaplins to be over. Zurito stood beside him. Where they stood it was dark. The high door that led into the bull-ring was shut. Above them they heard a shout, then another shout of laughter. Then there was silence. Manuel liked the smell of the stables about the patio de caballos. It smelt good in the dark. There was another roar from the arena and then applause, prolonged applause, going on and on.

‘You ever seen these fellows?’ Zurito asked, big and looming beside Manuel in the dark.

‘No,’ Manuel said.

‘They’re pretty funny,’ Zurito said. He smiled to himself in the dark.

The high, double, tight-fitting door into the bull-ring swung open and Manuel saw the ring in the hard light of the arc-lights, the plaza, dark all the way around, rising high; around the edge of the ring were running and bowing two men dressed like tramps, followed by a third in the uniform of a hotel bell-boy who stooped and picked up the hats and canes thrown down onto the sand and tossed them back up into the darkness.

The electric light went on in the patio.

'I'll climb onto one of those ponies while you collect the kids,' Zurito said.

Behind them came the jingle of the mules, coming out to go into the arena and be hitched onto the dead bull.

The members of the cuadrilla, who had been watching the burlesque from the runway between the barrera and the seats, came walking back and stood in a group talking, under the electric light in the patio. A good-looking lad in a silver-and-orange suit came up to Manuel and smiled.

'I'm Hernandez,' he said and put out his hand.

Manuel shook it.

'They're regular elephants we've got tonight,' the boy said cheerfully.

'They're big ones with horns,' Manuel agreed.

'You drew the worst lot,' the boy said.

'That's all right,' Manuel said. 'The bigger they are, the more meat for the poor.'

'Where did you get that one?' Hernandez grinned.

'That's an old one,' Manuel said. 'You line up your cuadrilla, so I can see what I've got.'

'You've got some good kids,' Hernandez said. He was very cheerful. He had been on twice before in nocturnals and was beginning to get a following in Madrid. He was happy the fight would start in a few minutes.

'Where are the pics?' Manuel asked.

'They're back in the corrals fighting about who gets the beautiful horses,' Hernandez grinned.

The mules came through the gate in a rush, the whips snapping, bells jangling and the young bull plowing a furrow of sand.

They formed up for the paseo as soon as the bull had gone through.

Manuel and Hernandez stood in front. The youths of the cuadrillas were behind, their heavy capes furled over their arms. In back, the four picadors, mounted, holding their steel-tipped push-poles erect in the half-dark of the corral.

'It's a wonder Retana wouldn't give us enough light to see the horses by,' one picador said.

'He knows we'll be happier if we don't get too good a look at these skins,' another pic answered.

'This thing I'm on barely keeps me off the ground,' the first picador said.

'Well, they're horses.'

'Sure, they're horses.'

They talked, sitting their gaunt horses in the dark.

Zurito said nothing. He had the only steady horse of the lot. He had tried him, wheeling him in the corrals and he responded to the bit and the spurs. He had taken the bandage off his right eye and cut the strings where they had tied his ears tight shut at the base. He was a good, solid horse, solid on his legs. That was all he needed. He intended to ride him all through the corrida. He had already, since he had mounted sitting in the half-dark in the big, quilted saddle, waiting for the paseo, pic-ed through the whole corrida in his mind. The other picadors went on talking on both sides of him. He did not hear them.

The two matadors stood together in front of their three peones, their capes furled over their left arms in the same fashion. Manuel was thinking about the three lads in back of him. They were all three Madrilenos, like Hernandez, boys about nineteen. One of them, a gypsy, serious, aloof, and dark faced, he liked the look of. He turned.

'What's your name, kid?' he asked the gypsy.

'Fuentes,' the gypsy said.

'That's a good name,' Manuel said.

The gypsy smiled, showing his teeth.

'You take the bull and give him a little run when he comes out,' Manuel said.

'All right,' the gypsy said. His face was serious. He began to think about just what he would do.

'Here she goes,' Manuel said to Hernandez.

'All right. We'll go.'

Heads up, swinging with the music, their right arms swinging free, they stepped out, crossing the sanded arena under the arc-lights, the cuadrillas opening out behind, the picadors riding after, behind came the bull-ring servants and the jingling mules. The crowd applauded Hernandez as

they marched across the arena. Arrogant, swinging, they looked straight ahead as they marched.

They bowed before the president, and the procession broke up into its component parts. The bullfighters went over to the barrera and changed their heavy mantles for the light fighting capes. The mules went out. The picadors galloped jerkily around the ring, and two rode out the gate they had come in by. The servants swept the sand smooth.

Manuel drank a glass of water poured for him by one of Retana's deputies, who was acting as his manager and sword handler. Hernandez came over from speaking with his own manager.

'You got a good hand, kid,' Manuel complimented him.

'They like me,' Hernandez said happily.

'How did the paseo go?' Manuel asked Retana's man.

'Like a wedding,' said the handler. 'Fine. You came out like Joselito and Belmonte.'

Zurito rode by, a bulky equestrian statue. He wheeled his horse and faced him toward the toril on the far side of the ring where the bull would come out. It was strange under the arc-light. He pic-ed in the hot afternoon sun for big money. He didn't like this arc-light business. He wished they would get started.

Manuel went up to him.

'Pic him, Manos,' he said. 'Cut him down to size for me.'

'I'll pic him, kid,' Zurito spat on the sand. 'I'll make him jump out of the ring.'

'Lean on him, Manos,' Manuel said.

'I'll lean on him,' Zurito said. 'What's holding it up?'

'He's coming now,' Manuel said.

Zurito sat there, his feet in the box-stirrups, his great legs in the buckskin-covered armor gripping the horse, the reins in his left hand, the long pic held in his right hand, his broad hat well down over his eyes to shade them from the lights, watching the distant door of the toril. His horse's ears quivered. Zurito patted him with his left hand.

The red door of the toril swung back and for a moment Zurito looked into the empty passage-way far across the arena. Then the bull came out in a rush, skidding on his four