

# THE MATADOR

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Gazing at Carlos Chico

**I**T IS a strange story, this one. But it is a true story, for I have it from the two men involved.

They told me about it afterward. But the girl—I know her, too—told me nothing of it. Women seldom talk about such things.

It goes to show—that a man's handsome face may cause as much trouble as a woman's pretty face. Men are fond of speaking of the havoc made by pretty faces. Now let the women have a chance, this one time, anyway.

Mary was good to look at. She worked in a big store in El Paso, a hustling western city which grew in a corner of Texas, on the Mexican border, where Latin and Anglo-Saxon meet and shake hands every day. Mary could play the piano and sing musical comedy selections, and she had other accomplishments of lesser worth. Everybody, from the carpet department up, admitted that Mary was pretty and that she was a "cute little trick." As Mary served in the ladies' department, she knew something about clothes; and her weekly salary was generously spent.

Murray—that was his first name—worked in the same store. He was not handsome, nor particularly bright. But Mary overlooked all that, for Murray was a good boy and didn't drink. Nor did he play keno, nor do any of the many bad things that the other boys did. Murray had known Mary back in Ohio. Mary's father had come west "for his lungs"; and Murray, who had no father or mother, had just "wandered out." He liked the town, fell in love with the girl from home, and so remained.

Carlos Chico was a killer of bulls—a *matador*. He was one of the youngest, and quite the most handsome, bull fighter in all Mexico. His beauty, for such it was, could only be described in Spanish by the word *simpatico*. He was altogether perfect, charming; in short, an Apollo. Everybody knew it and admitted it, even the other bull fighters, who could rival him only in skill. Carlos knew it, too; but the adulation of others made it unnecessary for him to admit it.

Carlos Chico was a Spaniard, as are many in the bull rings of Mexico. He had come from his home in Andaluca to seek fortune, also glory, by traveling from city to city, killing bulls, breaking hearts, and bowing to bravos. That was Carlos Chico, the *simpatico*.

Mary had long wanted to see a bull fight. But she was not so sure that it was the proper thing to see. She admitted her almost secret desire to Murray, upon a day when he came into the ladies' department in search of a certain floor-walker. Murray, as usual, was quick with an invitation and the necessary expenditure of his salary. Mary declared that she was only joking, and would not see a bull fight for love or money. Then she changed her mind three times, and three is an uneven number.

So Mary and Murray went to the bull fight. They took a street car across the international bridge to old Ciudad Juarez—a ten minutes' journey. American tourists support the bull ring in Ciudad Juarez, where, every Sunday during the season, fights are held, to the horror of the Americans who sit in the one dollar "shade" seats, and to the acclaim of the Mexicans who sit in the fifty cent "sun" seats and in the balcony. There is nothing picturesque about a bull fight except the costumes of the fighters and the mob around the ring. The fighting itself is of interest only to the packing-house butcher. Still they go, scores of well dressed and better fed Americans. And even so went Mary and Murray, for the ever-promised "first and only time."

Fate decreed that Carlos Chico, the most handsome of all *toreros*, made his debut that Sunday in Ciudad Juarez. He had come for a month's visit, and he did his best to kill the bulls and to break hearts, as was his fashion. Why should Ciudad Juarez be different? Were these Bustillos bulls more fierce? Hardly! And were the fair ones more hard of heart?

Well, we shall see! So thought Carlos Chico, as he entered the ring at the head of the procession of spangled *toreros* and workworn horses. He marched across the ring, saluted the judge, and bowed to the people with his most gracious salaam. Carlos Chico, also the *simpatico* was about to charm.

Mary and Murray sat in the "shade" seats with the gaping tourists—American men, women and children come to see the butchery of animals. Murray had told Mary that she would not like the bull fight, in fact would beg to go home after the first bull—there were to be five that Sunday—had been artistically tortured, and then slaughtered when life was at its ebb and anger had changed to fear. Even the bulls fear, as Murray knew; and it is not good to see a thing fight that wants to flee.

But Mary liked the bull fight. From the moment that Carlos Chico entered the ring, she was charmed. Carlos fascinated her, as he had done all the others. The girl watched every step he made, and marveled at his grace of movement and his handsome face. When the other *matador* killed, she did not see; but remained gazing at Carlos Chico as he leaned upon the barrier, now and then darting behind the refuge as the maddened bull came near. To the very last did Mary gaze at Carlos, clapping her hands when the others cheered, and all but throwing her muff into the ring when the others threw hats and cigarettes and silver coins.

Being rather a stupid boy, and altogether good, Murray did not understand. He complimented Mary for being a "good fellow." He felt very happy as they returned home in the crowd that poured through the lane of sweetmeat and refreshment vendors, and the small boys who sold bloody *banderillas* for only fifty cents, "gold." That was the beginning of it, so Murray and Carlos told me. Mary never told me anything—they seldom do.

Every Sunday after that one, Mary and Murray went to see the bull fight in Ciudad Juarez. Murray tolerated it, and Mary remained charmed, not by the fighting, as Murray supposed, but by the personality of Carlos Chico, the *simpatico*, the young killer of bulls and breaker of hearts. In Mary's eyes, the bull fight was perfect. She could not understand why the other girls in the big store complained of its brutality after a first visit, and why they would not go a second time. Mary failed to see why any one should object to the spectacle, not realizing that, to her, Carlos Chico was the bull fight.

One day the most handsome of all *matadores* received a letter from Mary. An American bartender translated the letter, and wrote an answer for the bull fighter, who knew but little English. But the language of love, when spoken with the eyes, is the same the whole world over; and Mary and Carlos talked freely in this universal way at each bull fight every Sunday. Murray did not know this, for the conversation of the eyes is difficult to detect.

One night, Mary, the American shop girl, and Carlos Chico, the Spanish *matador*, met by appointment in the plaza of Ciudad Juarez. They had few words for each other; but they conversed as lovers do. The face of Carlos Chico, ever glowing in expression, talked for him in its Latin way. And Mary was a charming girl, as everybody admitted, from the carpet department in the basement to the very top floor where the furniture is sold. Murray, still ignorant of it all, took Mary to the bull fight on the last Sunday on which Carlos was to appear. On the night be-

fore, Carlos and Mary had met; and it had been decided that they would go to Mexico City, where there is a very large bull ring, fine theaters and beautiful boulevards.

But Murray knew nothing of this, as he sat with Mary in the "shade" seats purchased with his money.

Mary clapped her hands when the bugle sounded for the entrance of the fighters; but as the stately procession crossed the ring, she noticed that Carlos was not there. She had not heard that Carlos Chico, the *simpatico*, had been taken suddenly ill that day, and was too weak to trust himself before the bulls. Fearing that Murray would suspect, Mary said nothing; but she remained quietly watching the fight.

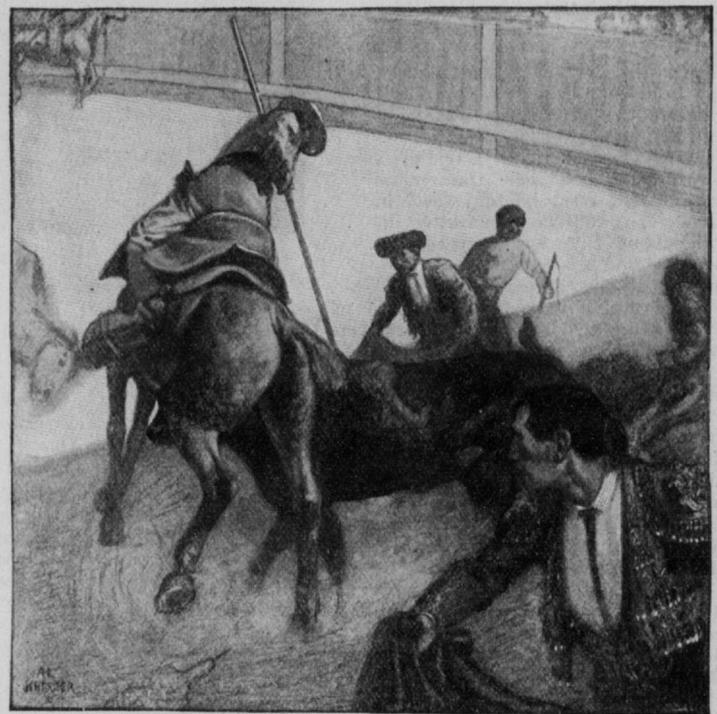
What went on in the arena that afternoon was in no wise different from the spectacle that Mary had watched every Sunday for many weeks. But Carlos Chico was not there, and the things that Mary saw now appeared to her in a different light. She saw the "*monos sabios*" lash the broken horses with long, cutting whips; she saw the bull charge the frightened horse and gore its side; she saw the slave-horse fall in a cloud of dust and a jet of blood; she saw the bull cringe as the *banderillas* pierced its back; she saw the *matador* thrust his sword into the quivering flesh; she saw the bull tremble as blood spouted from its nose, and then fall to the ground, slaughtered but not defeated.

In all of these things, until this Sunday, Carlos Chico had taken a leading part. He had thrust home the slender blade, as did the Mexican *matador* with the bulldog jaw and the snake-like little eyes. But Mary had not seen such things when Carlos was in the ring. Then all had been fascinating; now all was horrible. After the first bull had been

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Killer of bulls and breaker of hearts



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