

Imaginary Places

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IMAGINARY PLACES I

Buleria Madrugada

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Buleria Madrugada

No one has ever visited the great walled city of Buleria Madrugada except in early morning before sunrise. The Arabian scholar Alhazan computed the mathematics required, and has suggested in his treatise on the geometry of eccentric culture that such cities can only exist ante meridian and by candle light not to exceed the number five hundred.

According to travelers, the city gates operate in response to sounds in the minor key and played in sequences of twelve beats counted in twos or threes, depending on the season. The inartistic are barred from entering the city except in the company of local guides. There is a famous story concerning six Germans who entered the city unaccompanied; three lost their hair, two lost teeth, and one went mad thinking he had been rendered human. **The women of the city leave only during daylight and return before sunset**, and they never fail to say appropriate prayers for all whose misfortune it is not to be a native of this, the most splendid city ever built by man.

The streets of the city are narrow and winding. They are more like membranes, and seem as alive, especially so when, at night, they fill with the human pulse that issues this way and that, ever carefree and happy; the word for it is **Alegria**. There are no motor vehicles permitted, especially after dark; this is tradition, and the citizens are firm about its application. Donkeys and bicycles are the favored transport for long distances.

The people are magnificent in every respect. When it comes to style (whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining) the native of this city cuts a splendid figure. The average Bulerian will spend a whole lifetime **perfecting a look, a pose, or a gesture**. He calls it art. And, in fact, he calls everything art.

Music and dance, for which the Bulerians are known the world over, are but extensions of getting up in the morning. But they will claim that it is not they who are responsible for the music or dancing. They blame it on the

BULERIA MADRUGADA

spirits that hang around the city during those late hours when people get to feeling good and forget they are their own masters. They even have a word for it, though no one has ever been heard to use it.

Curro de Vaca, a local expert on **causes and effects**, wrote somewhere that the most perfect people are those who have reduced everything to its essence and have become it, whatever it might be. *I, for example, like my coffee, but I do not think of myself as a coffee*

*drinker. No, I am [coffee itself] (he uses a word that roughly translates as *coffeeness*). He goes on to say that his wife is not fond of coffee, but prefers the more traditional mint tea. *She takes the good herb six times a day, he writes, a schedule so predictable that my neighbors have no need of clocks. Her true name is Consuelo.**

The city is closed to all but natives during the months of October and December.



The Women Return

The habit of prayer is commonplace, but the sincere compassion felt by citizens of this city for outsiders is truly remarkable. It has become traditional for women to pause in prayer outside the city gates at sunset to speak to saints and other supernaturals on behalf of all who cannot claim citizenship. Special prayers are also said for those persons who have been required to abandon citizenship for whatever reason. One need only look at their faces to know that each prayer is heartfelt. Tears are so plentiful at times that clever men have been known to make a good wage selling hankies and tissues to these good ladies.



Alegria

*Listen, I'm dreaming of that valley
You know the one
There is no salt in the ground
And the vines grow like weeds
Shall we say the name?
No, there is no need
By the light of the moon we'll see it
By the light of the moon we'll see it*

Night comes and the oil lamps are lit, casting their soft light on the cobbles and white-washed walls along the streets. A guitarist and singer commence a collaboration, and as always it begins with Alegria, just to let people know who they are and why they are there. Alegria, like the people themselves, has a split personality; one part is happy, the other melancholy. Every word sung is authentic, too. And though they know the words by heart, they are constantly surprised by what they hear.



Perfection in the Art of Sitting

The women of the Heredia clan are exquisite in the manner of their sitting. Three times they have defeated all comers in the polling that is done each year before the Festival of the Moon, an event that draws the finest posers from every precinct of the city, including the district of *Calle Dulce* where, it is said, art is so utterly plentiful that it pollutes the drinking water. Boys and girls are encouraged at an early age to imitate the best examples of any art before attempting innovations. Innovation for its own sake is considered bad form, of course, since everyone knows that the truest art arises naturally and settles upon a person with the same subtle shading as candlelight upon a beautiful woman's cheek.



Madrugada

*Let's hear it for the street
The street knows it all
It knows about my stuck up girlfriend
The one who's too good to say good-day
Too stuck up to say good-day even to herself
Hers is the face that makes the candle blush
Hers is the face that makes the candle blush*

But in the wee hours *duende* (which is just another word for mischief) has descended and rendered them helpless. A *Bulerias* erupts, sensibility evaporates, and the people, young and old, are converted into spirits that glow like fireflies and June bugs. An Englishman who managed to survive a week in Buleria returned to his home only to find that he had lost interest in everything that was particular to his life. He wasn't the first; very often such persons will flee all responsibility and become wanderers.



Morning at Curro's Cave

*Tar-ah, tar-ah, tar-ah
Who knows my true name?
It's a secret I keep from God
If he knew how to say it
He would know the mistake he made*

Consuelo, the wife of Curro de Vaca, is a miracle of patience. She watches over her husband as a mother would her child. She is especially attentive during the morning hours, when the danger of explosion is particularly acute. Curro de Vaca believes with absolute certainty that he was born on one of the moons of Jupiter. This belief is based on the fact that since his earliest memory as a child he has been plagued by severe attacks of stomach gas every morning of his life and again at night after his evening meal. He is always careful not to sit in direct sunlight, and he almost never smokes cigars or pipes until well past noon.