

An excerpt from:

The Rink of Red

(a play in 3 acts by Eva Adderley)

Cast of Characters

GERVAISE -- A brave young woman (22 years old)

PEDRITO --A matador from Barcelona (28 years old)

ELOI -- The better man (25 years old)

MADÉLINE -- An erotic dancer (22 years old)

MADAME ASTRIÉ -- A wise old actress (60 years old)

BULL-- A beautiful black bull

Act One

Scene One

A deserted bullfighting rink.

A BULL restlessly pacing within its pen.

PEDRITO, outside the pen, practicing a series of movements with cape and sword.

Enter GERVAISE. She is carrying a platter of food covered by a cloth. On top of the cloth is a handful of flowers.

GERVAISE

Your lunch, Pedrito.

PEDRITO pulls the cloth off the food, mindless of the flowers. They fall. A look of disdain crosses PEDRITO's face.

Is something not as you wish?

PEDRITO

This isn't the food for a man, much less a matador. I said I wanted meat today, Gervaise.

GERVAISE

The butcher's wasn't open. There was a sign on his door saying something about a family emergency. One of the geese was rotten in the windows. There was blood under the door, thin and pink, and flies everywhere. The biting kind. Disgusting.

PEDRITO

I ask for meat and you bring me... flowers.

GERVAISE

They're not for you. I just didn't have a spare hand to hold them.

PEDRITO

They're yours? From a man?

GERVAISE

I picked them myself, from the poet's park.

PEDRITO

You shouldn't go carrying flowers around like that. Someone might assume that you're having an affair.

GERVAISE

I have no husband, no lover, no family save my brother. There is no reason I should not wear flowers on my breast for all to see.

PEDRITO

It doesn't look decent.

GERVAISE

It looks like spring.

PEDRITO

It would be a miracle if you were desired. I should never have thought those flowers were from a man.

GERVAISE

You're one to talk, Pedrito. The only passion you're ever privy to is the wrath of that poor bull over there.

PEDRITO

What do you know of my private affairs?

GERVAISE

I know you've been laying with one of the *Maison Rose* girls, and I know your tab hasn't been paid, and that last time you went by they turned you down because you couldn't even ask for a favor without slurring your words.

PEDRITO

Enraged.

And just how do you--

GERVAISE

I have my ways.

PEDRITO

Filthy fucking gossip.

PEDRITO moves as if to hit GERVAISE, then grabs her firmly around the waist instead.

GERVAISE

I'd better go. There's work for me still, today.

PEDRITO

You'll go when I tell you you'll go. Now listen here. Your manners are severely lacking. Your tongue is loose as a dead man's lulling from his mouth. I don't appreciate your audaciousness.

GERVAISE

And I don't appreciate yours.

PEDRITO

You've hardly any redeeming qualities at all.

GERVAISE

I don't need any. Redeeming implies I am starting from a deficit. In fact I have a surplus of charms.

PEDRITO

Modesty clearly not among them.

GERVAISE

What would I want with modesty?

PEDRITO

PEDRITO's grip around GERVAISE's waist tightens. He wrenches her to him, her face forced into his neck, her breasts forced against his chest.

A lack thereof is dangerous for any girl. But particularly one of your redeeming beauty. It disgusts me how you taunt me so.

GERVAISE

I never--

PEDRITO kisses GERVAISE. GERVAISE does not kiss back. A beat. And then she bites.

PEDRITO

Fuck.

PEDRITO stumbles. Then spits. Blood.

GERVAISE

And don't you ever/ try that again

PEDRITO

What the fuck is wrong with--/ You're crazy.

GERVAISE

You turn my stomach more than the sight at the butcher's shop today. I'll have my brother bring your lunch from now on.

PEDRITO

Don't bother. I'll take my business elsewhere.

GERVAISE

Even better. Your temper isn't worth your money.

PEDRITO

You can take this filth back to the kitchen. I won't eat another bite.

*GERVAISE reaches for the platter.
PEDRITO blocks her.*

On second thought, I'll take it back myself. I'd like to have a word with your brother.

GERVAISE

Jean has no jurisdiction over me.

PEDRITO

Even so.

*PEDRITO takes the tray and attempts to exit.
GERVAISE blocks him.
He presses past her. Exists.*

GERVAISE

GERVAISE is alone with the BULL. She begins to tie her flowers into a chain.

And all of this has nothing to do with you. What does a bull know of violence, really? Yes, you'd take Pedrito in a second if you had the chance. A horn through his groin. But it wouldn't be violence. It wouldn't be driven by envy or lust or greed or vengeance. It would be survival. Just that. Absolutely pure. And what is violence without vengeance?

Now Pedrito. If he kills you, *that* will be violence. That will be vengeance. Pedrito is a man and he has within him lusts and envies and furies that you can not imagine. If Pedrito kills you it won't be survival. It will be sport. It will be show. It will be fantasy; he will close his eyes at the moment that the sword enters your pelt, and imagine that his blade is sinking instead into the flesh of the girl from the *Maison Rose* who won't do as he demands, or into my dress, or into my brother's chest as he rests.

GERVAISE throws the flower chain. It snags on one of the BULL's horns.

It isn't right, *mon petit taureau*. It isn't right at all. But don't worry, my friend. I have a plan.

Scene Two

A pink room. Bead curtains, throw-pillows, incense. GERVAISE in the doorway. Another woman, MADELINE, on the bed. MADELINE is wearing alluring lingerie and not much else. She is pulling on a pair of fishnet tights.

You didn't. MADELINE

I did. GERVAISE

Merde. Merde, merde, /merde, merde, merde./ MADELINE

Smiling. GERVAISE

It's been a while since I heard you swear.

Merde merde merde-- MADELINE

Good for you. GERVAISE

How could you? MADELINE

GERVAISE

It was easy. You could have done it, too.

MADELINE

Of course I could have. But I didn't want to, and I didn't want you too, either! What am I going to do now?

GERVAISE

Oh...

Incredulously.

You're angry.

MADELINE

You're right. I am.

GERVAISE

You're actually mad at me.

MADELINE

So clever of you too see. But you always are, aren't you? Clever. That's what makes you Gervaise. You're so clever. And I'm so pretty. That's what makes me Madeline. Well fuck clever. Clever is *merde*.

MADELINE spits on the floor.

GERVAISE

Pretty isn't anything at all.

MADELINE

Pretty is nice, at least. Clever is cruel.

GERVAISE

And pretty isn't?

MADELINE

Sometimes clever is stupid. Sometimes like right now.

GERVAISE

I was trying to help.

MADLINE

Fuck “help”. I don’t need your help. The only thing that happens when you “help” is you fuck everything up for me. And I don’t need help with that. I can fuck everything up on my own just fine, merci.

GERVAISE

Can’t argue with that.

MADLINE

Livid.

What? What did you just say?

GERVAISE

You can fuck everything up on your own. You do a really good job of it. A really beautiful job of it, if you want to talk about “pretty”. You make it into an art form. The Art of Fucking Everything Up.

MADLINE

You’re being cruel.

GERVAISE

I’m not the only one.

MADLINE

I haven’t been cruel to you.

GERVAISE

No. But you’re cruel to *you* all the time. You don’t mean to be. I don’t believe for a second that you’re one of those girls who finds it arousing, being hurt. You’ve always been a hedonist. Even as a child. Sought sunlight, sought smiles, sought sweets. So I’m not saying that you mean to be mean to you, but you do it anyway, because you need people to tell you that you’re pretty, that you’re good... because that feels nice, doesn’t it? And when someone like Pedrito comes along-- with his sword and his swagger and his suit of lights-- and wants to use his big hands in all the wrong ways on all the most coveted parts of your body, you just say yes. You just say yes, Madeline! / YOU JUST SAY YES.

MADLINE

Stop. You know I hate it when you do this.

GERVAISE

No. Because what’s cruel is you, saying yes, being cruel to yourself. Not me saying that you say it. That’s honesty, not cruelty. *Ça va?*

Tearfully: MADELINE

I said stop.

GERVAISE

You stop.

MADLINE

I'm not doing anything.

GERVAISE

Exactly. That is exactly what I am telling you to stop.

MADLINE

You're confusing me.

GERVAISE

Stop. Not. Doing. Anything.

MADLINE

You think it's so easy?

GERVAISE

It's easy for me. But then I don't need people to tell me I'm pretty. I don't need people to tell me they want me. I don't need any of that.

MADLINE

I don't have anything else.

GERVAISE

Don't start. I hate that.

MADLINE

I don't care what you hate.

GERVAISE

Pedrito. I hate Pedrito.

MADLINE

I don't *care*, Gervaise.

GERVAISE

Well, in that case...

She turns towards the door.

Just as she is about to leave, MADELINE suddenly speaks up:

MADELINE

You don't know what it's like. Having people expect things from you.

GERVAISE stops mid stride.

GERVAISE

People?

MADELINE

People. Men.

GERVAISE

I see.

MADELINE

If I just stopped... or if I started... I mean, I don't really know what you want me say. What you want me to do. But if I did that, whatever it is, they wouldn't want me here anymore. And this is what I have, Gervaise. I have the dancing. I have the men that watch me dance. I have the nice things they say to me after. I have... pretty. And sometimes because of that, I have those other things, too. Sunlight, smiles, sweets. All of that.

She smiles.

It's nice. That's the thing you don't understand. Pretty is nice.

GERVAISE

Not always.

MADELINE

If I lost my job...

GERVAISE

If you lost your job, you'd be okay. You're too *pretty* not to end up okay.

MADELINE

But I like dancing.

GERVAISE

Dancing's fine. I love to watch you dance. But unless I've misunderstood something, *La Maison Rose* prides itself on being a relatively respectable establishment. There are lines that your clients are not supposed to cross.

MADELINE

And if it wasn't a *relatively respectable establishment*? Would you still want to help me? Or would you despise me too much to try?

Beat. GERVAISE stares at MADELINE, wounded.

You're just like them. You want me to be a certain way and I'm not.

GERVAISE

If this wasn't a *relatively respectable establishment*, but you were here because you wanted to be, you wouldn't need my help. But if you were here because you had to be, of course I would still be trying to help. I don't want you to be any one way in particular. All I want is for you to be happy, and you're not.

MADELINE

You think you know me better than I know myself.

GERVAISE

I think you don't want to admit what you know about yourself.

MADELINE

You don't understand. How much I love the dancing. It's everything to me.

GERVAISE

So you can dance, and they can watch you, and want you, and that can make you smile.

MADELINE

But Gervaise, they.

She stops.

GERVAISE

Yes, they do. Could you really expect anything different of them?

MADELINE

No.

GERVAISE

And you say yes.

MADELINE

Could you really expect anything different of me?

GERVAISE

Madeline...

MADELINE

What?

She's crying.

GERVAISE

Oh, Madeline.

MADELINE

WHAT?

GERVAISE

Nothing. I-- No, oh God no, Madeline. Please.

MADELINE

He'll know, you know. What... or "who" your ways are. He'll know you were talking to me. He'll come here, and call me a filthy fucking gossip, too. And he'll say a whole lot more than that. *Do* a whole lot more than that.

MADELINE curls into herself on the bed. GERVAISE goes to her, puts a hand on her shoulders.

GERVAISE

They won't let him in the door here anymore. They promised.

MADELINE

That's not the point. It's humiliating, Gervaise. Do you know what it's like to be humiliated? How it feels to warm your own leg with a rank streak of piss, right on stage, under the eyes of everyone who wants you, because Pedrito kept you late this morning so you've been denied your only washroom break?

GERVAISE

I'll fix this. Madeline, I'll fix this.

They fall silent. GERVAISE gently pets MADELINE's hair.

Scene Three

The rink. PEDRITO, with another man. This other man resembles PEDRITO in complexion, and in the Catalan flare of his voice and vestments. However, he is slighter, more unkempt, and a good deal less abrasive than the matador. His name is ELOI, and he is PEDRITO's brother.

PEDRITO

I didn't think you'd come this year.

ELOI

Don't test me.

PEDRITO

I'm only trying to sing your praises.

ELOI

Seethingly:

And the women in this town? Have you found them all to your liking as well?

PEDRITO

There's one.

ELOI

One?

PEDRITO

Or two.

ELOI snorts.

There's dozens!

A hearty chuckle. PEDRITO begins to pace. The next lines should sound exaggerated and rehearsed.

Most recently the matador has fixed upon a dancer. Slender thing, neck no bigger than the circumference of his ferocious fingers, and fair as a Swede. Twirls like a child's ribbon toy. Ridiculous girl. But he can't argue with those legs.

A moment of contemplation of his conquests.

There's also the girl who brings him his meat at lunch. In truth she isn't in keeping with his usual taste. But there's sometimes a gleam in her resentful eyes. Cold and bright as light on a blade. It fills the matador with a violent longing. Oh but how she *hates* him, Eloi! How she dreams to see him dead.

PEDRITO is delighted, amused, and aroused by this hatred. Suddenly, he rounds on ELOI.

ELOI

You've read my notes.

PEDRITO

You've been watching me.

ELOI

You're transfixing. I couldn't look away.

PEDRITO

Don't test me.

ELOI

Did you keep them? When you had read them?

PEDRITO doesn't answer.

Now dismayed:

You kept them.

PEDRITO

Tore the filth apart.

ELOI

With all the fervent fury of your bull, I'm sure.

PEDRITO

And with just that joy.

ELOI

I'm not going to apologize to you.

PEDRITO

Nor I to you.

ELOI

That goes without saying.

PEDRITO

Your insolence tires me.

ELOI

Your arrogance energizes me.

PEDRITO

I wouldn't spar unarmed with a man with a sword, Eloi.

ELOI

You see me empty-handed. I see you empty-headed. I'll spar as I please.

PEDRITO

Have you come to make peace or to make war?

ELOI

Neither.

PEDRITO

Then why?

ELOI

It isn't just a city of blood, Pedrito. It's a city of love. It belongs as much to the poets as to the matadors. I've come to Béziers from Barcelona for the same reason as you. To make the most of my ambitions.

PEDRITO

To make short work of your brother's reputation, you mean, with your flowery slander.

ELOI

You... inspire me.

Beat.

But you give yourself too much credit. The notes you read were not meant for the public's eye. They were meant only for mine.

PEDRITO

A diary! How sweet.

ELOI

Not in the least.

PEDRITO

And what is your plan? To poise picturesque on the fountain in the Poet's Park and read your verses to the geese?

ELOI

I thought I would start by talking to the head of the Béziers Player's Company. I heard she may have call for writers. Madame Astar?

PEDRITO

Astrié.

ELOI

You're acquainted? Perhaps you would introduce us?

PEDRITO

What have you heard about her?

ELOI

That she's an incorrigible old woman. Why? I can handle her.

PEDRITO

There's rumors.

ELOI

Rumors?

PEDRITO

People talk.

ELOI

Naturally.

PEDRITO

They say she's a witch.

ELOI

And they say you are a fool, as you believe such sordid stories.

PEDRITO

It's your doom. Walk to it, if you want.

ELOI

You won't dissuade me with your rampant tongue.

PEDRITO

She isn't fond of foreigners.

ELOI

You mean she isn't fond of you.

PEDRITO

Touché.

ELOI

Then you will introduce me?

PEDRITO

Why should I?

ELOI

Think of it as restitution.

PEDRITO

I owe you nothing.

ELOI

Then absolution.

Beat.

PEDRITO

I'll make you a deal. My assistant is ill disposed at the moment. If you help me train in his stead, I will take you to your witch.

ELOI

ELOI extends his hand.

As you wish.

PEDRITO

On my honor.

ELOI

No, Pedrito, on mine.

They shake.

Scene Five

La Maison Rose. MADELINE, dancing. On stage, she seems half burlesque dancer, half dainty ballerina. A salacious grace.

MADELINE

Watch: how they watch me.

A diaphanous scarf shimmers over her shoulders. She unties it.

How they want me.

She throws the scarf into the audience.

They're like marionettes with no strings. If I want them to look this way, I leap to the left.

She does. Her movements have the liquid look of spilling silk. It is impossible not to turn your head to follow her across the stage.

And if I want them to look this way...

Again, she leaps. Again, we turn to look.

Ah, see? You're doing it too.

Beat.

Later, I'll be at the mercy of these very men. But right now... I don't even need a cape to lead the bull. What greater power in this world than the illusion of control?

MADELINE continues to dance. She pauses occasionally to remove an article of clothing, though she never reveals the most coveted parts of her body. The dance builds to a dramatic finale. MADELINE strikes a dramatic pose to indicate the end of her act, and raises her arms high. The sound of men cheering and whistling rises, then fades. La Maison Rose falls silent.

For a moment MADELINE does no more than study the crowd. Then she begins to speak:

Gervaise is right. I am a hedonist. I'm not ashamed. But this is a hard world for hedonist girls. Pedrito is a hedonist, too, and that makes him a dangerous man. Because this isn't a hard world for hedonist men. Men can follow their desire like bulls follow the swish of a cape. They can get away with murder, madness, rape.

Slowly, MADELINE lowers her arms.

If women could chase pleasure as shamelessly as Pedrito, I'd never force my pleasure at the expense of another. But I'd press myself against a hundred different lovers. And no one would think me a whore. When our bodies merged, we'd soar.

MADELINE bows. She exits.

Scene Six

The rink. As promised, ELOI is helping PEDRITO. At ELOI's feet lie PEDRITO's sword, and a spare cape. PEDRITO holds his cape, and the four darts, (or banderilleros), that are traditionally placed in the BULL's back at the beginning of the fight. PEDRITO signals to ELOI. ELOI releases the BULL from its pen.

ELOI

To audience:

Watch.

PEDRITO and the BULL begin a treacherous tango as PEDRITO prepares to place the banderilleros.

PEDRITO places the first dart.

It is hard to say who is more handsome: matador or bull.

PEDRITO places the second dart.

Certainly Pedrito is a fine young man. There is something ruthless in him.

PEDRITO places the third dart.

Some find his beauty repulsive.

PEDRITO places the fourth dart. He signals to ELOI. ELOI hands PEDRITO his sword.

Watch: how Pedrito bears his sword with a warrior's proud cowardice.

ELOI fades into the background.

PEDRITO

To himself:

Watch.

The BULL prepares to charge.

He's no meek meat animal. No sweet innocent calf made to frolic in the countryside. He's a *bull*.

The BULL charges. PEDRITO steers him past with a masterful toss of his cape.

A brave one, at that.

Another charge.

When done right, it's a dance.

PEDRITO and the BULL dance.

If it isn't, you're doing it wrong.

ELOI

To audience:

Whatever else you may think about Pedrito, remember this: there is a hellish harmony to his hunt. A powerful poetry to his pursuit. A sinister symmetry to his *suetes*. He's an artist. It's the only thing we have in common.

Beat. ELOI watches PEDRITO with earnest admiration.

And of the bull? See how his muscles tense like clenched teeth. Hold your breath and hear his heart working inside of his barreled chest, pumping mad blood through delirious veins. He's no saint, that bull. He's a *bull*.

The BULL charges. He catches PEDRITO on a horn and tosses him.

A brave one, at that.

ELOI comes to PEDRITO's rescue, leading the BULL away with a quick flick of the spare cape. PEDRITO rises.

There is something ruthless in him.

A final charge.

PEDRITO reaches over the BULL's horn and sinks the sword into his back between the bandellerios. He stands back and watches as the BULL begins to sway, then crashes to the ground.

Beat.

PEDRITO pulls his sword from the BULL's back.

Again.

To ELOI:

PEDRITO

It's getting dark.

ELOI

Just one more.

PEDRITO

Tomorrow.

ELOI

Now.

PEDRITO

You'll run out of bulls.

ELOI

I don't care.

PEDRITO

You need to rest. I need to rest.

ELOI

PEDRITO

I'm wide awake. Soaring. Blood singing. If I stop now, everything will ache. These wounds will start stinging. My head will start ringing. I don't want that yet. Again.

ELOI

Isn't it enough to take one life tonight?

PEDRITO

Relenting.

Then the morning. At first light.

ELOI

No, Pedrito. Later. Good night.

PEDRITO is enraged. He storms from the stage.

ELOI examines the BULL.

The BULL stirs.

No.

Again, the BULL moves. Weakly but surely.

ELOI steps closer, peering in horror.

No, no, no, no, no.

ELOI looks around in desperation.

Pedrito? PEDRITO.

ELOI starts to run after PEDRITO. Realizes he does not know where PEDRITO has gone. Returns to the BULL. Paces. Runs both hands manically through his hair. Begins to curse in Spanish, softly at first, but rising to a shout:

Hijo de puta. Puta madre. Joder. Joder. Joder.

The BULL makes a plaintive, pathetic moo.

ELOI kneels.

My brother took his sword.

He reaches a hand out as if to pet the BULL, then hesitates.

I don't know what to do.

Beat.

There's nothing I can do.

ELOI pets the BULL's muzzle. Hold's the BULL's stare.

I can stay with you. I'll stay with you.

*ELOI lies beside the BULL, still stroking his muzzle, still holding his stare.
Everything is very quiet. Very still. ELOI's next words are lullaby-soft.*

It isn't right, *meu torito*. It isn't right at all. But don't worry, my friend. There will be an end.

*The lights begin to fall. ELOI closes his eyes. He drifts to sleep.
The BULL stops moving. At last, dead.*

Black out.