

# **Federico García Lorca**

## **Granada**

***(From: Impresiones y paisajes 1918)***

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## Summer Dawn

The distant hills appear with their smooth reptilian undulations. The infinitely crystalline transparencies reveal themselves in dim splendor. The shadows hold night in their tangles, and the city begins to shed its idle veils, rendering visible its cupolas and its ancient towers illuminated by a soft golden light.

The houses reveal faces with empty eyes among the verdure, and the grasses, poppies and vines dance entertainingly to the sound of the breeze from the sun.

The shadows are lifting and vanishing languidly, while in the air there is a piping of ocarinas and reed-flutes produced by the birds.

In the distance there are confusions of mist and heliotrope among the poplar groves, and now and then, in the dawn freshness, is heard a distant bleating in the key of F.

Along the valley of the Darro, anointed with blue and dark-green, fly pigeons from the countryside, whiter or darker, according to whether they come to rest beneath the poplars or beneath masses of yellow flowers.

The sober bell-towers are still asleep, except for some small bell on the Albaizín ingenuously quivering from its cypress tree.

The rushes, reeds and fragrant grasses are bent down to the water so as to kiss the sunlight whenever it should be reflected there...

The sun appears, almost without brightness...and in that moment the shadows lift and vanish, the city is tinted pale purple, the mountains turn to solid gold, and the trees acquire the brilliance of an Italian ascension.

And all the softness and paleness of indecisive blues changes to splendid luminosity, and the ancient towers of the Alhambra are illuminated with roseate light...the houses with their whiteness, and the shadows, exchanging brilliant greens.

The sun of Andalucia begins to sing its song of fire which all things listen to with fear.

The light is so marvellous and unique that the birds crossing the air are rare metals, solid rainbows and red opals....

The mists of the city start to lift covered in heavy incense....the sun shines and the sky, pure and fresh before, turns a dull white. A water-mill begins its sleepy serenade...a cock crows, remembering the dawn glow, and the mad cicadas of the Vega tune their violins to intoxicate themselves with melody.

## II

### Albaizín

*To Lorenzo Martínez Fuset, great friend and companion.*

With fantastic echoes, white houses spring up on the mountain...Opposite the golden towers of the Alhambra reveal a jagged oriental dream against the sky.

The Darro cries its ancient lament, lapping the regions of Moorish legend. The sound of the city vibrates in the air.

The Albaizín is heaped on its hill raising aloft its towers full of Mudéjar grace...it displays an infinite external harmony. Sweet is the dance of the houses round the mount. Here and there, among the red and white tones of the district, the rough outlines and green darkness of prickly pears appear...Around the tall towers of the churches appear the campaniles of the monasteries their cloistered bells gleaming behind the amaranths, singing in the divine dawn of Granada, echoing the deep honeyed tone of the bell of the Torre de la Vela.

In the clear and wondrous daylight of this magnificent and glorious city the Albaizín is delineated on a uniquely blue sky overflowing with rural grace and enchantment.

The streets are narrow, dramatic, with stairways infrequent and dilapidated, undulating tentacles that twist and turn capriciously and exhaustingly in order to reach little viewpoints from which the vast snowy spines of the mountains are seen, or the splendid and definitive chord of the Vega. In some parts, the streets are strange paths of bright fearful disquiet, formed by walls which reveal mantles of jasmine, creepers, and roses of St Francis. The barking of dogs is heard and distant voices calling out by chance to someone in disillusioned and sensual tones. Elsewhere they are swirling slopes, impossible of descent, full of large boulders, walls eaten away by time, in which women sit, tragic idiots who stare provocatively...

There are houses placed as if a hurricane wind has whirled them there. They mount one upon another in strange rhythmic lines. They lean together, their walls in collision, with original and diabolic expressions. Despite the mutilation this unique and evocative district has suffered at the hands of the Grenadines (an unfortunate name) the remainder fully retains its

characteristic ambience...strolling through its alleyways scenes from legend appear.

Shrines, gratings, large houses with an uninhabited air, frightful cisterns whose water holds the tragic mystery of an intimate drama, rambling portals where pillars groan among the shadows, hollows full of rubble below the blocks of the city wall, solitary streets that nobody traverses, and in which a door can gradually be made out...and the door is closed, abandoned grottoes, slopes of red earth in which live the petrified octopi of the agaves. Dark caverns of the nomadic and oriental race.

Here and there always the Moorish echoes of prickly pears...And the people, in this atmosphere so nervous and sensitive, invent stories about death and wintry phantoms, and demons and visitants that appear in the small hours when there is no moon about in the alleys, that come as midwives and stray prostitutes, and that later they discuss fearfully, victims of superstition. At these crossroads lives an Albaizín frightened and fantastical, that of barking dogs and grieving guitars, that of dark nights among streets of white walls, a tragic superstitious Albaizín, of witches, fortune-tellers and necromancers, of strange gipsy rites, of cabalistic signs and amulets, of souls in pain, of pregnant women, an Albaizín of aged prostitutes who know the evil eye, of seducers, and bloody curses, a passionate Albaizín...

There are other corners of these antiquities, in which a purely Grenadine romantic spirit seems to revive...the deeply lyrical Albaizín...Silent grassy streets of houses with beautiful facades, with white minarets on which gleam the green and grey breasts of characteristic decoration, with admirable gardens filled with colour and sound. Streets in which ancient races of the spirit live, in rooms with vast armchairs, dim paintings, and artless urns with versions of the boy Jesus among wreathes, garlands, and arches of brightly coloured flowers, people who put out lanterns of obsolete form when the Viaticum passes by, and who own silks and shawls of ancient ancestry.

Streets with monasteries of perpetual cloister, white, artless, with their snub bell-towers, their dusty amarantths, towering, brushing against the roof-eaves...with their doves and swallows' nests. Streets of serenades and processions with naive virgin nuns...Streets which hear the silvery melodies of the Darro, and the ballads of the leaves, that sing the distant groves of the Alhambra...an Albaizín splendidly romantic and distinguished. An Albaizín to the rhythm of Santa Isabel, and the entrances to the cármenes. The Albaizín of fountains, bowers, cypresses, of decorative gratings, of the full moon, of ancient musical romance, the Albaizín of the cornucopia, of the

convent organ, of Arab patios, of the upright piano, of spacious rooms moist with the scent of lavender, of cashmere shawls, of carnations.....

To traverse these streets is to observe fearful contrasts of mysticism and desire. Where one is overwhelmed most by the anguished avenue of shadows and slopes, revealing the gentle and muted tints of the Vega, often silvery, full of melancholy flashes of colour...and the city slumbering softly among the mists, in which the golden chord of the cathedral displays its splendid ambulatory, and the tower with its angel in triumph.

It is a tragedy of contrasts. Along a solitary street an organ is heard, playing very softly, from a convent...and the divine salutation of Ave Maria Stella chanted by sweet feminine voices...opposite the convent, a man in a blue blouse curses expressively as he feeds a goat. Further on, large-eyed prostitutes, very dark, with purple bags under their eyes, and clumsy bodies hunchbacked from lust, speak in throaty voices obscenities of commonplace magnificence; beside them, a sensitive ragged girl sings a devout religious song....

Everything reveals an atmosphere of infinite anguish, as if an oriental curse has fallen upon these streets.

An atmosphere burdened with the strumming of guitars and the phlegmatic cries of the gypsies.

A sound of religious voices, and a murmur of gypsy longing.

All that the Vega and the city retain of tranquillity and majesty, this Moorish district retains as anguish and tragedy.

Everywhere Arab culture is evoked. Blackened and rust-coloured arches, flattened and pot-bellied houses with ornate galleries, mysterious little caverns with oriental outlines, women who seem to have escaped from some harem...then a vagueness in all the gazes that seem to be dreaming of things past...and an overwhelming weariness.

If a woman calls to her child or to someone else, it's in a long moaning murmur, and the lowered arms and tangled hair give an impression of abandonment to fate, and a truly Muslim belief in destiny. There is always the rhythm of guitars in the air and of desperate or taunting song, guttural sounding. Through the alleyways wind gilded slopes with Arab walls. There are holes in the walls, weeping clear water that winds snake-like through the street below.

In the kitchens, pots of carnations and geraniums are reflected in the copper saucepans and dishes, and the cupboards open to the damp air are full of the Moorish wares of Fajalauza.

There are scents of the hot sun, of moisture, of wax, incense, wine, of billy-goats, of urine, of manure, of honeysuckle. In these districts there is a vast external uproar, enveloped by the dark sounds thrown out by the bells of the city.

A weariness, sunlit and shadowy, displaying an eternal blasphemy and a perpetual oration. To the guitars and the riotous sounds from the brothels, reply the chaste voices of the little bells calling to prayer.

Above the farmhouses rise the funereal notes of the cypress trees, shining with their darkness of romance and sentiment...linked to them are the hearts and crosses of the weather-vanes which slowly gyrate before the splendid majesty of the Vega.

### III

#### A Nightmarish Canephorus

From a dark doorway, with enormous cracks in its wood, and amidst green moist incense, appears a terrifying figure clothed in rags, and with eyes yellow with bile...in the background is an ancient patio...a patio in which eunuchs slumber perhaps in the moonlight, a patio paved with moss, with Arabic shadows on the walls, and a large cistern (*aljibe*) frighteningly deep...From its worm-eaten balustrades lean pots of withered geraniums, and to its blackened columns cling consumptive creepers...Deeper in there is a midden, and on one of its walls a terrifying Christ with ballerinas' skirts, decorated with flowers made of rags...A suffocating sickness of blowflies and a thousand wasps buzzes threateningly. In the deep blue sky is a fiery sun...and from here it arose.

I did not know if my eyes were seeing clearly or not, because terror confuses our thoughts.

It was a repugnant mystery, that horrible figure that staggered from the house.

There was no one about in the melancholy and deathly silent street.

The monstrous figure did not move from the doorway. It possessed in its attitude the cold interrogatory aspect of an Egyptian frieze.

With a swollen belly like an eternally pregnant woman, its lowered arms ended in slimy hands of formidable ugliness. On its hip it bore a truncated pitcher, and its thick white hair, wreathed a face with a hole for a nose. Beneath its cheekbones sallow patches revealed the depths of its stinking carrion, and a horrible eye shed tears across it, which the atrocious form wiped away with its filthy hand...It had emerged from that house of fearful vices and inordinate desires.

It was wrapped in a shameless costume, vile with sexual degeneration. It might have been a strange animal or a satanic hermaphrodite. Flesh without soul or a Dantean Medusa. A dream of Goya's or a vision of St John's. A lover from a Valdés Leal painting or a martyrdom by Jan Weenix...Its flesh was a deathly green. It coughed repeatedly...and seemed to smell of sulphur...beneath the weight of evil spirits...the figure began to move.

It wore slippers half falling-off which progressed with a lugubrious rhythm; and necklaces of dirty coral and a bag hanging from its neck, which held some infernal amulet.

Inside the house laughter could be heard and between sensual applause and painful 'ay's a coarse voice sang obscenities.

The monster slid away like an upright lizard and with a harsh grimace unsure whether it was or happy or aggrieved to be alive...occasionally it coughed, like a dog howling in a basement, and kept shedding the smell of stale lavender and tobacco.

It is a horror this creature in petticoats with flaccid breasts...it is what within the house eternally curses and terrifies good company. It is that which if it can do will brush against us everywhere in order to infest us with it evil. It is a eunuch from the harem of putrefaction. If it were beautiful it would be Lucrezia, since it is ugly it is Beelzebub. If it could choose a lover it would love Neptune or Attila...and if it could carry its maledictions through to the end it would be like Hatto, the savage bishop of Andernach....

There are women, horrors from nightmare, who sometimes traverse the Albaizín. They are the witches who involve passionate dark-eyed girls in cabalistic plots. They are the ones who mix home-made poison from vipers' venom, cinnamon, and the bones of children pounded together under a waning moon. They enclose the spirits of good and evil in phials...and, on account of them, ignorant and superstitious mothers pin gilded horns and sacred prints to their children's clothes, to keep them from the evil eye.

Yet this nightmare...What a cold anxious grimace it gives at crossing the street filled with sunlight and the fragrance of roses! Hetaera that banishes dreams! ...With pitcher on hip, and hands trailing to the ground, in the streets of the Albaizín....

## IV

### Sounds

*To María Luisa Egea. Beautiful, generous and kind... With all my devotion*

From the squared towers of the Alhambra the Albaizin is seen, with its patios, with its ancient galleries through which the nuns pass. Within the white walls of the cloisters lies the way of the cross. Beside the romantic latticework of the bell-towers the cypresses languidly sway their fragrant funereal masses...The patios are sonorous and shady...

In the midst of a vast solid harmony of farmsteads the monasteries convey an atmosphere of sadness.

There is something mysterious that attracts and fascinates in the sight of the Albaizín from this fortress and palace at midnight....Yet the panorama, with so splendid and strange a presence, and holding those potent voices of romanticism, is not that which fascinates. What fascinates is the sound. It might be said that everything is dreaming...That the light dreams, colour dreams, forms dream....

In areas of intense sound as in the mountains, woods, and plains, the musical clef of the countryside almost always holds the same harmony that controls the other modulations. On the slopes of the Sierra Nevada there are delicious inflections of sound...There are places in which, from the solid slopes, flows the sound of a bitter-sweet rural fragrance.

In the very pine groves, amidst the divine perfume that they exhale, is heard the gentle hiss of the pine-forest, in melodies of velvet, though it breathes the air *fortissimo*, gentle modulations, warm, incessant...but always with the same *tessitura*.

That is to say that Granada and the Vega do not get their sense of hearing from the Alhambra. Every hour of the day has a distinct sound. Symphonies of sweet sounds are heard...And in contrast to any other sonorous countryside to which I have listened, the countryside around this romantic city performs endless modulations.

It has minor and major tones. It has passionate melodies and solemn harmonies of cold ceremony...The sound changes with the colour, so that the one may speak what the other sings.

The sound of the Darro is the harmony of the countryside. It is a flute in immense agreement with what the breezes must play. The air descends with its vast monotonous load of mountain fragrances and enters the throat

of the river, which gives it its sound and sends it through the alleyways of the Albaicín, through the streets which it passes swiftly creating flats and sharps...later it reaches the Vega and combines with its admirable sounds and with the distant mountains and the clouds, forming that larger silvery harmony which is like an immense lullaby bringing us all voluptuous sleep...On sunny mornings there is the joy of romantic music in the throat of the Darro. One might say it sings the countryside in a major key...There are a thousand voices of bells, dreaming in a very distinct manner...

Sometimes the sonorous bells of the Cathedral ring in their grave tones, filling space with their waves of music...they fall silent and then various little Albaicín bell-towers reply in splendid counterpoint. Bells turn like mad, spilling bronze passion, until they sometimes melt with the sound of the air into a breathless panting...Others, virile, flee with their sounds into the distance...and one more unhurried and devoted, full of sacerdotal unction, calls to prayer in slower fashion, with a singing air, with philosophical resignation...The other bells that fly, mad with joyful passion, fall silent suddenly but the unhurried bell continues its melody of reproach...it is an old woman praying...and quarrelling with the young ones for their breathless air that never accepts reality...Certainly those bells which had rung out like mad enthusiasts, until dying of sound, they have begun to take flight, like lively acolytes from the parish churches, or the playful and skittish novices from some convent, frightened of laughing, or singing...and it is almost certain that this bell that calls to prayer in its grumbling manner is rung by some old sacristan stained with candle-wax...or some nun who dies forgotten, who waits in her convent for the stroke of the golden scythe...There are magnificent silences in which the countryside sings...Later the bells of the Cathedral ring again, the others comment on what the master says...and as a *finale* to the symphony there is a witty and childish *ritornello* from a little bell...that after its shrill melody is quenched little by little, dying delicately, as if not wishing to finish...until it ends in a blunt note scarcely heard. They are magnificent, wondrous, splendid and multifarious the bells of Granada!

Night holds a magical brilliance of sounds from the fortress. If there is a moon a vague structure of profound sensuality invades the harmony. If there is no moon...a fantastic and singular melody sings and laughs...yet the original and sensitive modulation in which colour reveals a musical expressiveness that appears more lost and faded, is the twilight...The atmosphere has been preparing itself for this since mid-afternoon. The shadows have cloaked the Alhambra's blaze...the Vega is flat and silent. The sun vanishes and on the mountain infinite cascades of musical colours

are born which flow down like velvet over the city and the hills, and forge a single musical colour from sonorous waves...Everything dreams of melody, of ancient sadness, of weeping.

Painful and irredeemable suffering trickles from the Albaicín quarter, and from the proud red and green slopes of the Alhambra and the Generalife...and the colour is endlessly changing and with the colour the sound....There are pink sounds, red sounds, yellow sounds and impossible sounds made of tone and colour...then there is a vast blue chord...and the nocturnal symphony of bells commences. It is distinct from that of the morning. Its passion holds a great sadness...Almost everyone, dreaming wearily tells their rosaries...The river sings more loudly. The flickering lamps in the alleyways of the Albaicín tremble with gold among the blackness of the cypresses...the Vela peals out its historic song...On the towers, frightened little lights shine, illuminating the bell-ringers...

A train whistles in the distance.

## V

### Sunsets

#### 1

### Summer

When the sun vanishes behind the mountains of mist and rose, and the atmosphere fills with a vast symphony of religious devotion, Granada bathes in gold and pink and purple tulle.

The Vega, its wheat fields already parched, sleeps in a yellow and silver stupor, while the distant skies hold bonfires of passionate purple and gentle ochre.

Over the surface of the soil there are vague patches of mist like air saturated with steam, or thick mists like enormous plumes of solid silver. The farmhouses are enveloped in heat and straw-dust, and the city suffocates among harmonies of luxurious greenness and fume-filled dusk.

The mountain slopes are coloured violet and bright blue, while the summits are rosy-white. There are still spirited patches of snow that resist the sun's fire.

The rivers are almost dry and the water in the irrigation channels is sluggish, as if an enormously weary romantic soul drags itself along for the afternoon's sorrowful pleasure.

In the sky above the mountains, a sky of timid blue, appears the moon's hieratic kiss.

In the groves and the vineyards a strange glare still remains...and little by little the mountains, blue, green and ashen over pink, cool, and all take on the hypnotic colour of the moon.

When there is scarcely any light remaining, the city acquires a dark shadow and seems constructed to a single plan, the frogs begin their strange *fermatas*, and all the trees seem to be cypresses...After the moon touches everything, and covers the lace of the branches with softness, there is light in the water, everything hateful is erased, distances increase and the depths of the Vega are converted into an ocean...Later there is a bright star of infinite tenderness, the wind in the trees, and the everlasting soporific song of the waters.

Night displays all its magic in the moonlight. In the blue misted lake of the Vega the farm dogs bark...

## Winter

The Vega is smooth. The sad winter days convert it into a field of dreams.

The distances veiled in snow are leaden and violet-coloured, and the leafless poplar groves are great dark rays. The sky is white and soft with swift dark strokes, the light bluish, blurred, delicate. The farmsteads shine and vanish in a misty vagueness. The sounds are dull and snow-filled.

The foreground of the countryside is strongly delineated. There are many olive-trees in silver and green, tall poplars tearful and languid, and dark cypresses which sway gently. Rising from the city are pine-trees with bowed heads.

All the colours are pallid and grave. Dark greens and reds dominate the foreground...but as it extends towards the plain the mist dulls and erases them...until in the depths they are indistinct and somnolent. The rivers appear as immense channels made in the earth, in which the sky is reflected below.

The sun at its setting appears among clouds...and the Vega is like an immense flower which suddenly opens its vast corolla showing all its wondrous colours. There is an enormous commotion throughout the landscape. The Vega throbs in splendour. Everything trembles. Strong lively colours spread everywhere.

On the mountain plateau there are strokes of intense blue...The snows of the sierra are visible beneath the gauzy mists...

The clouds rise one above another, snapping furiously at themselves, and turning black...and rain begins to fall heavily and sonorously. In the city there is a metallic sound with thin striations, produced by water striking the bronze pipes and channels...In the Vega there is a soft dull noise of water falling on water and grass...The rain falling into the pools generates strong gentle notes, falling on the grass, faintnesses of sound.

In the distance thunder extinguishes dream like a monstrous drum...

The shrunken villages freeze with cold...the roads are embroidered with great silver stains...the rain increases threateningly...The light dims and the vagueness intensifies...

Darkness and stupor fill the Vega....

A fascinating strip of white light triumphs on the horizon...then a cloak of black velvet embroidered with garnets covers the plain.....

