

Lorca

Fourteen Poems of Love and Death

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Ballad of the Small Plaza

Singing of children
in the night silence:
Light of the stream, and
calm of the fountain!

THE CHILDREN

What does your heart hold,
divine in its gladness?

MYSELF

A peal from the belltower,
lost in the dimness.

THE CHILDREN

You leave us singing
in the small plaza.
Light of the stream, and
calm of the fountain!

What do you hold in
your hands of springtime?

MYSELF

A rose of blood, and
a lily of whiteness.

THE CHILDREN

Dip them in water
of the song of the ages.
Light of the stream, and
calm of the fountain!

What does your tongue feel,
scarlet and thirsting?

MYSELF

A taste of the bones
of my giant forehead.

THE CHILDREN

Drink the still water
of the song of the ages.
Light of the stream, and
calm of the fountain!

Why do you roam far
from the small plaza?

MYSELF

I go to find Mages
and find princesses.

THE CHILDREN

Who showed you the road there,
the road of the poets?

MYSELF

The fount and the stream of
the song of the ages.

THE CHILDREN

Do you go far from
the earth and the ocean?

MYSELF

It's filled with light, is
my heart of silk, and
with bells that are lost,
with bees and with lilies,
and I will go far off,
behind those hills there,
close to the starlight,
to ask of the Christ there
Lord, to return me
my child's soul, ancient,
ripened with legends,
with a cap of feathers,
and a sword of wood.

THE CHILDREN

You leave us singing
in the small plaza.
Light of the stream, and
calm of the fountain!

Enormous pupils
of the parched palm fronds
hurt by the wind, they
weep their dead leaves.

Song of the Rider

Córdoba.
Far away, and lonely.

Full moon, black pony,
olives against my saddle.
Though I know all the roadways
I'll never get to Córdoba.

Through the breezes, through the valley,
red moon, black pony.
Death is looking at me
from the towers of Córdoba.

Ay, how long the road is!
Ay, my brave pony!
Ay, death is waiting for me,
before I get to Córdoba.

Córdoba.
Far away, and lonely.

It's True

Ay, the pain it costs me
to love you as I love you!

For love of you, the air, it hurts,
and my heart,
and my hat, they hurt me.

Who would buy it from me,
this ribbon I am holding,
and this sadness of cotton,
white, for making handkerchiefs with?

Ay, the pain it costs me
to love you as I love you!

Song of the Barren Orange Tree

Woodcutter.
Cut out my shadow.
Free me from the torture
of seeing myself fruitless.

Why was I born among mirrors?
The daylight revolves around me.
And the night herself repeats me
in all her constellations.

I want to live not seeing self.
I shall dream the husks and insects
change inside my dreaming
into my birds and foliage.

Woodcutter.
Cut out my shadow.
Free me from the torture
of seeing myself fruitless.

The Moon Wakes

When the moon sails out
the bells fade into stillness
and there emerge the pathways
that can't be penetrated.

When the moon sails out
the water hides earth's surface,
the heart feels like an island
in the infinite silence.

Nobody eats an orange
under the moon's fullness.
It is correct to eat, then,
green and icy fruit.

When the moon sails out
with a hundred identical faces,
the coins made of silver
sob in your pocket.

Farewell

If I am dying,
leave the balcony open.

The child is eating an orange.
(From my balcony, I see him.)

The reaper is reaping the barley.
(From my balcony, I hear him.)

If I am dying,
leave the balcony open.

Romance de la Luna, Luna

The moon comes to the forge,
in her creamy-white petticoat.
The child stares, stares.
The child is staring at her.
In the breeze, stirred,
the moon stirs her arms
shows, pure, voluptuous,
her breasts of hard tin.

- 'Away, luna, luna, luna.

If the gypsies come here,
they'll take your heart for
necklaces and white rings.'

- 'Child, let me dance now.

When the gypsies come here,
they'll find you on the anvil,
with your little eyes closed.'

- 'Away, luna, luna, luna,
because I hear their horses.'

- 'Child, go, but do not tread
on my starched whiteness.'

The riders are coming nearer
beating on the plain, drumming.
Inside the forge, the child
has both his eyes closed.

Through the olive trees they come,
bronze, and dream, the gypsies,
their heads held upright,
their eyes half-open.

How the owl is calling.
Ay, it calls in the branches!
Through the sky goes the moon,
gripping a child's fingers.

In the forge the gypsies
are shouting and weeping.
The breeze guards, guards.
The breeze guards it.

Romance Sonámbulo

Green, as I love you, greenly.
Green the wind, and green the branches.
The dark ship on the sea
and the horse on the mountain.
With her waist that's made of shadow
dreaming on the high veranda,
green the flesh, and green the tresses,
with eyes of frozen silver.
Green, as I love you, greenly.
Beneath the moon of the gypsies
silent things are looking at her
things she cannot see.

Green, as I love you, greenly.
Great stars of white hoarfrost
come with the fish of shadow
opening the road of morning.
The fig tree's rubbing on the dawn wind
with the rasping of its branches,
and the mountain thieving-cat-like
bristles with its sour agaves.
Who is coming? And from where...?
She waits on the high veranda,
green the flesh and green the tresses,
dreaming of the bitter ocean.

- 'Brother, friend, I want to barter
your house for my stallion,
sell my saddle for your mirror,
change my dagger for your blanket.
Brother mine, I come here bleeding
from the mountain pass of Cabra.'

- 'If I could, my young friend,
then maybe we'd strike a bargain,
but I am no longer I,
nor is this house, of mine, mine.'

- 'Brother, friend, I want to die now,
in the fitness of my own bed,
made of iron, if it can be,
with its sheets of finest cambric.
Can you see the wound I carry
from my throat to my heart?'

- 'Three hundred red roses
your white shirt now carries.
Your blood stinks and oozes,
all around your scarlet sashes.
But I am no longer I,
nor is this house of mine, mine.'

- 'Let me then, at least, climb up there,
up towards the high verandas.
Let me climb, let me climb there,

up towards the green verandas.
High verandas of the moonlight,
where I hear the sound of waters.'

Now they climb, the two companions,
up there to the high veranda,
letting fall a trail of blood drops,
letting fall a trail of tears.
On the morning rooftops,
trembled, the small tin lanterns.
A thousand tambourines of crystal
wounded the light of daybreak.

Green, as I love you, greenly.
Green the wind, and green the branches.
They climbed up, the two companions.
In the mouth, the dark breezes
left there a strange flavour,
of gall, and mint, and sweet-basil.
- 'Brother, friend! Where is she, tell me,
where is she, your bitter beauty?
How often, she waited for you!
How often, she would have waited,
cool the face, and dark the tresses,
on this green veranda!'

Over the cistern's surface
the gypsy girl was rocking.
Green the flesh is, green the tresses,
with eyes of frozen silver.
An ice-ray made of moonlight
holding her above the water.
How intimate the night became,
like a little, hidden plaza.
Drunken Civil Guards were beating,
beating, beating on the door frame.
Green, as I love you, greenly.
Green the wind, and green the branches.
The dark ship on the sea,
and the horse on the mountain.

Note: Cabra is south-east of Córdoba, and north of Málaga, in the mountains of Andalusia.

Lorca said ‘If you ask me why I wrote “A thousand tambourines of crystal, wounded the light of daybreak –Mil panderos di cristal, herían la madrugada,” I will tell you that I saw them in the hands of trees and angels, but I cannot say more: I cannot explain their meaning. And that is how it should be. Through poetry a man more quickly reaches the cutting edge that the philosopher and the mathematician silently turn away from.’

The Unfaithful Wife

So I took her to the river
thinking she was virgin,
but it seems she had a husband.
It was the night of Saint Iago,
and it almost was a duty.
The lamps went out,
the crickets lit up.
By the last street corners
I touched her sleeping breasts,
and they suddenly had opened
like the hyacinth petals.
The starch
of her slip crackled
in my ears like silk fragments
ripped apart by ten daggers.
The tree crowns
free of silver light are larger,
and a horizon, of dogs, howls
far away from the river.

Past the hawthorns,
the reeds, and the brambles,
below her dome of hair
I made a hollow in the sand.
I took off my tie.
She took off a garment.
I my belt with my revolver.
She four bodices.
Creamy tuberose
or shells are not as smooth as
her skin was, or, in the moonlight,
crystals shining brilliantly.

Her thighs slipped from me
like fish that are startled,
one half full of fire,
one half full of coldness.
That night I galloped
on the best of roadways,
on a mare of nacre,
without stirrups, without bridle.
As a man I cannot tell you
the things she said to me.
The light of understanding
has made me most discreet.
Smearred with sand and kisses,
I took her from the river.
The blades of the lilies
were fighting with the air.

I behaved as what I am,
as a true gypsy.
I gave her a sewing basket,
big, with straw-coloured satin.
I did not want to love her,
for though she had a husband
she said she was a virgin
when I took her to the river.

Gacela of Unexpected Love

No one understood the perfume
of the shadow magnolia of your belly.
No one knew you crushed completely
a humming-bird of love between your teeth.

There slept a thousand little Persian horses
in the moonlight plaza of your forehead,
while, for four nights, I embraced there
your waist, the enemy of snowfall.

Between the plaster and the jasmines,
your gaze was a pale branch, seeding.
I tried to give you, in my breastbone,
the ivory letters that say *ever*.

Ever, ever: garden of my torture,
your body, flies from me forever,
the blood of your veins is in my mouth
now, already light-free for my death.

Casida de la Rosa

The rose was
not looking for the morning:
on its branch, almost immortal,
it looked for something other.

The rose was
not looking for wisdom, or for shadow:
the edge of flesh and dreaming,
it looked for something other.

The rose was
not looking for the rose, was
unmoving in the heavens:
it looked for something other.

Casida of the Dark Doves

Through the laurel branches
I saw two doves of darkness.
The one it was the sun,
the other one was lunar.
I said: 'Little neighbours
where is my tombstone?'
'In my tail-feathers,' the sun said.
'In my throat,' said the lunar.
And I who was out walking
with the earth wrapped round me,
saw two eagles made of white snow,
and a girl who was naked.
And the one was the other,
and the girl, she was neither.
I said: 'Little eagles,
where is my tombstone?'
'In my tail-feathers,' the sun said.
'In my throat,' said the lunar.
Through the branches of laurel,
I saw two doves, both naked.
And the one was the other,
and the two of them were neither.

‘Ay voz secreta del amor oscuro!’

O secret voice of hidden love!
O bleating without wool! O wound!
O dry camellia, bitter needle!
O sea-less current, wall-less city!

O night immense with sharpened profile,
heavenly mountain, narrow valley!
O dog inside the heart, voice going,
endless silence, full-blown iris!

Let me be, hot voice of icebergs,
and do not ask me to vanish
in weeds, where sky and flesh are fruitless.

Leave my hard ivory skull forever,
have pity on me. Stop the torture!
O I am love, O I am nature!

Every Song

Every song
is the remains
of love.

Every light
the remains
of time.
A knot
of time.

And every sigh
the remains
of a cry.

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