

The Unfaithful Wife

To Lydia Cabrera
and her little dark girl.

And I took her to the river
thinking her a maid
but she was already wed.

It was on Saint James' night
and as if by duty bound,
the street lamps went out
and the crickets ignited.
At the furthest corners of the town
I touched her slumbering breasts
and soon they blossomed for me
like clusters of hyacinth.
The starch of her petticoat
kept rustling in my ears
like a piece of silk
torn by ten nails.
With no moonlight on the treetops
the trees seemed taller;
a background of barking dogs
was heard far away from the river.

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After passing the brambleberries,
the hawthorn and the reeds,
I made a hollow in the sand
under her cascade of hair.
I took off my tie.
She took off her dress.
I, my leather holster.
She, four bodices of lace.
Neither rose petal nor seashell
has skin so fine.
Nor do panes of glass glimmer,
with such a glow, in the moonlight.
Her thighs slipped from me
like startled fish,
half shimmering with fire,
half shivering with ice.
That night I rode
the best of all roads,
galloping on a mother-of-pearl mare
without bridle or spur.

The things she told me,
being a Man, I won't tell.
The light of experience
has made me quite circumspect.
Soiled with dirt and kisses
I brought her from the river.
The sabres of the lilies
fought with the wind.

I behaved like the Man I am,
like a true-bred gypsy.
I gave her a large sewing basket
of straw-coloured satin.
I refused to fall in love
since she was already wed,
though she told me she was a maid,
when I took her to the river.

From Gypsy Ballads,
by Federico García Lorca.

Translated by Salvador Ortiz-Carboneres