

The Gypsy Nun

To José Moreno Villa.

Silence of lime and myrtle,
hollyhocks in the fine herbs.
The nun embroiders wallflowers
on straw-coloured linen.
The seven birds of the crystal prism
flutter in the grey chandelier.
In the distance, the church rumbles
like a grumbling bear.
What fine stitches! What graceful hands!
On straw-coloured linen
she would like to embroider
flowers of her fancy.
A sunflower! A magnolia
with sequins and ribbons!
Safflowers and moonflowers
upon the altar-cloth!
Within the nearby kitchen,
five grapefruit are sweetening.
The five wounds of Christ
as carved in Almeria.
Before the eyes of the nun
two horsemen gallop.
A distant, muffled murmur
undoes her camisole
and – on the still horizon -
the thought of clouds and mountains,
breaks her heart open
with sugar and bitter tansy.
Oh what a lofty plain
with twenty suns rising!
What waterfalls
glisten in her fantasies!
But she goes on with her flowers
while above, in the breeze,
the light keeps playing a game of chess
through the latticed window.

From Gypsy Ballads,
by Federico García Lorca.

Translated by Salvador Ortiz-Carboneres