



Federico García Lorca  
**Ballad of the  
Spanish Civil  
Guard**

*To Juan Guerrero*

Their horses are black.  
Black are their iron shoes.  
On their capes shimmer  
stains of ink and wax.  
They never weep because  
their skulls are of lead.  
With their patent leather souls  
they ride down the road.  
Crouched like hunchbacks and dark  
wherever they pass  
they spread silence of murky rubber  
and fear of fine sand.  
They go by, if they wish to go,  
concealing in their heads  
the vague astronomy  
of abstract pistols.

Oh, city of the gypsies!  
On the corners, banners.  
The moon and pumpkins  
preserved with gooseberries.  
Oh, city of the gypsies!  
Who could see you and not remember you?  
City of grief and of musk  
with towers of cinnamon.

When the night came  
that nightly comes nightly,  
the gypsies at their forges  
forged suns and arrows.  
A horse with a mortal wound  
knocked at door after door.  
Glass roosters crowed  
toward Jerez de la Frontera.  
The naked wind swirled  
round a corner of dismay  
in the night-silver night  
that nightly comes nightly.

Saint Joseph and the Virgin  
lost their castanets  
so came looking for the gypsies  
to see if they could find them.  
The Virgin comes dressed  
like a village Mayor's wife  
in tinfoil from chocolate candy  
and necklaces of almonds.  
Saint Joseph swings his arms  
under a silken cape.  
Behind comes Pedro Domecq  
with three sultans of Persia.  
The half moon dreams

an ecstasy of cranes.  
Banners and torches  
invade the roof-tops.  
In the looking-glasses sob  
dancers without hips.  
Water and shadow,  
shadow and water  
toward Jerez de la Frontera.

Oh, city of the gypsies!  
On all the corners, banners.  
Put out your green lights  
for the Civil Guards are coming.  
Oh, city of the gypsies!  
Who could see you and not remember you?  
Leave her far from the sea  
with no combs for her hair.

Two by two they ride  
into the city in fiesta.  
A rustle of straw-flowers  
invades their cartridge belts.  
Two by two they ride,  
a shadow-show but doubled.  
To them the sky is nothing  
but a window full of spurs.

Swept clean of fear, the city  
multiplies its doors.  
Forty Civil Guards  
burst through them like a storm.  
The clocks all stopped  
and the cognac in the bottles  
put on a November mask  
to arouse no suspicions.  
A flight of screams unending  
rose among the weathervanes.  
Sabres cut the air  
that horses trampled.  
Through the dusky streets  
gypsy crones fled  
with drowsy nags  
and crocks full of coins.  
Up the steep streets  
mounted sinister capes  
followed by a fugitive  
whirlwind of scissors.

At Bethlehem's manger  
the gypsies gather.  
Saint Joseph, covered with wounds,  
shrouds a young maiden.  
All through the night  
stubborn guns sound sharply.  
The Virgin heals the children  
with star-drops of saliva.  
But the Civil Guard  
advances sowing sparks  
that set fire to imagination,  
young and naked.  
Rosa de los Camborios  
sobs at her doorstep,  
her two breasts cut away  
and put on a platter.  
Other girls flee  
pursued by their tresses  
through the air where black roses  
of gun-powder explode.  
When all the roof-tops are nothing  
but furrows on the earth,  
dawn shrugs her shoulders  
in a vast profile of stone.

Oh, city of gypsies!  
As the flames draw near  
the Civil Guards ride away  
through a tunnel of silence.

Oh, city of the gypsies  
Who could see you and not remember you?  
May they seek you in my forehead,  
a game of the sand and the moon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Guided Questions:

### *Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard*

Answer the following questions about Federico Garcia Lorca's *Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard*. Make an educated guess- there is no right or wrong answer! On a separate sheet of paper, define any words you do not recognize.

1. A ballad is defined as a simple narrative poem of folk origin, composed in short stanzas and adapted for singing. Why might Lorca have chosen to tell this story through a ballad?
2. Who is being described in the first stanza?
3. In Stanza 1, what is the significance of the color black?
4. Why are their clothes stained with ink and wax?
5. What do the skulls of lead signify?
6. Which words or phrases contribute to the ominous tone of the first stanza?
7. Why can they go wherever they want?
8. Toward which modern-day cities is this ballad directed?
9. Why are there banners on the corners of the city?
10. What is cinnamon describing in Stanza 2?

11. Why do these phrases stand out from the rest?

*When the night came / that nightly comes nightly...*  
*in the night-silver night / that nightly comes nightly.*

12. Why are the gypsies at their forges? What do the suns and arrows represent?

13. What does the horse in Stanza 3 represent?

14. What is Jerez de la Frontera? Why is it mentioned?

15. What are castanets?

16. Why might the gypsies have the castanets?

17. Why are St. Joseph and the Virgin mentioned?

18. Why is the Virgin wearing tinfoil and a necklace of almonds?

19. Who do the three sultans of Persia represent?

20. Why are there banners and torches on the rooftops?

21. What does it mean that the dancers do not have hips?

22. In Stanza 5, what does the color green represent?

23. Why should the gypsies turn off their lights?
24. In Stanza 5, to whom or what does “she” refer?
25. What is the significance of her not having combs for her hair?
26. Who is being described in Stanza 6?
27. What does “a shadow-show but doubled” mean?
28. The spurs are a metaphor for what?
29. What does “the city multiplies its doors” describe?
30. What does the November mask represent?
31. What do the “mounted sinister capes” represent?
32. How does the Bethlehem manger contribute to the setting of the ballad?
33. In Stanza 8, is there really a fire or is it a symbol? Why do you think this?
34. What does the personification of the dawn shrugging her shoulders represent?
35. Why is this conflict happening?

36. What is the significance of the silence of the Civil Guards?
37. Why is this ballad written *to* a city of gypsies?
38. What do the gypsies represent?
39. What do the Civil Guards represent?
40. What does “who can see you and not remember you” mean?
41. What does the narrator’s forehead represent?
42. What does “a game of the sand and the moon” represent?