

Don't dance with gypsy girls

The hour was late and the night was quiet, at least as quiet as a night can get in a small town - the perfect night for a stroll. Once I was convinced that my absence wouldn't become a cause for unnecessary concern, I covered myself with a coat. Its weight burdened my shoulders with the sudden drop and I slipped out of the house through the front door.

Upon adaptation to the cold I was immersed into contemplation of the fresh air and flickering stars. Stars reflected in a puddle in front of me. I looked up to see the stars in their pure form, untainted by the mixture of water, soot and dirt in the puddle. But the sight lacked something. The dirty water in the puddle did not taint the image of the stars above, but rather enriched it and gave it the slight flicker as the breeze, barely stronger than the still air, moved the surface of the puddle with gentle strokes.

Memories the gentle breeze, the fresh air, the flickering stars and the darkness of the night brought up were filling my mind. It was nights like this one that we slipped out of the house while our parents slept, and wandered around the sleeping town. We were under the impression that it was the emptiness of the otherwise crowded streets, the possibility to enter places we were forced to avoid - by their trustees or their everyday dullness - and the eerie scent that filled the darkness and ourselves. But the real reason our night adventures were so thrilling, was the defiance. They represented doing something that was forbidden and the threat of punishment brought real worth to them, even though it was unknown to us at the time.

That feeling, the thrill of doing something that could get me into trouble was what I lacked on this night as I strolled around the town in the late hours. The age at which my disappearance during the night would cause anything more than confusion was long gone. Were my parents to find out about my departure, my father would merely shake his head in disapproval and my mother would perhaps utter a few soundless and meaningless prayers for my safe return. No matter how much I tried, I could not bring myself to feel the way I felt during the nights of yore.

As I strode along the empty streets, trying not to disturb the stillness with my steps, the stillness being pierced by the occasional barking of a dog, I noticed a noise, which didn't quite fit into the town. The noise was as if it came from a foreign, forgotten world - intimidating, and yet luring. The air of supernaturalism that it emitted made me wander into the deepest corners of my mind only reachable at instants like these. They are hidden most of the time and during the day seem silly. But if certain circumstances are met, one might enter into a dreadful place. It is often hard to believe how different the world can seem all of a sudden. The things denied, mocked even, become as real as ever. At that moment, I thought I heard the feast of the demons.

Luckily, the impression didn't last too long. I shook off the horror and, driven by curiosity, I followed the noise. The indistinctive yells became clearer, though no less wild. The closer I got, the more assured and comforted I became that the voices were purely human - female, mostly. I was led to the gypsy encampment.

They had arrived several days earlier and until then I had barely heard of them. Except for buying some supplies and trying to make money by playing their instruments in local inns, they avoided our society. It was well, for they were said to be of an unpredictable temperament and often aggressive. They were fabled musicians, however, and also cunning vendors.

As I went on, entering the small plain lying between the gypsy encampment and me, I heard them singing. The songs were, however, in a language unknown to me, though I was already fluent in two foreign languages and understood more or less at least two others. I followed a clear destination - the blazing fires ahead.

The night was still but the flames of the campfires swayed in a wild dance. The long skirts,

which would normally reach almost all the way to the ground, now barely covered the knees of the gypsy girls twirling around the fires. The garments formed a flying circle around them, as if to mark the distance one should keep from them as they danced and swirled the air, as well as the fires vainly reaching for them. Sometimes they got so close the flames licked the skirts, but in that ferocious velocity they could do no harm.

A sentence came to my mind. It was something my mother said whenever she needed to warn me, though when she said it, it was usually too late. "Don't tease angry dogs and don't dance with gypsy girls!" It was more of a saying, really, and therefore was not to be taken literally. Yet I wondered at the reason behind placing gypsy girls right next to vicious beasts. In fact, as I was looking at them and the way they smiled as they danced, it almost made them seem somewhat naive and silly. Why would people want to use these harmless creatures as an example of threat?

Nevertheless, I didn't feel as if I needed to be warned not to join them. The barbaric movements were rather repulsive. Their dance lacked order and subtlety. Their raw, and for me until that time unseen spontaneity was almost rabble-rousing. What was more, they were far too foreign. It was humiliating to approach this lower society, let alone get involved in their dances and songs.

"Welcome, stray boy!" someone yelled merrily. Before I could turn in the direction of the voice, I found myself being pulled by my right arm. Did I really think that they wouldn't notice me watching them? I had been bound to be discovered, and I was about to feel their aggressive nature on my own skin.

A short stocky man sat me down on what seemed to be a wooden log covered with a rug or a blanket of sort. To my surprise, there wasn't a grain of spite in his eyes. Before I managed to examine him from head to toe he had already pulled out a bottle, and holding a metal cup in his other hand, poured me a drink. With short hesitation, but still baffled from being seized by him so suddenly, I took it from his dark hand and took a sip. The strong beverage burned within me like acid, but its heat offered pleasant warmth in the ever-colder night. I downed it and it struck me like lightning.

"Tired of the fancy town life, eh? It is so nice to have a visitor!" he made use of my inability to speak after drinking what I deemed to be the devil's blood. His words were sincere and friendly. There wasn't a trace of the aggressive nature I'd heard so much about.

I didn't reply. Mesmerized by the dancing girls, his words seemed weaker and weaker as if there was a thick wall between the two of us. I was being drawn towards one girl in particular by her dance, and each time she turned I caught one of her features. First was the flower in her hair. It rested firmly upon her head, as if it had already grown there. Then I noticed her skin, illuminated by the restless fire. It was somewhat darker than the skin of the townspeople, but it was so smooth. The next thing that stood out was her full lips open around her white teeth in a smile, which no longer seemed naive. Her smile was shrouded with mystery, something I knew I couldn't understand. By the time I got to her eyes, she was right in front of me and was pulling me from my sitting place with an intent gaze. Her brown eyes were so disarming *I* became the lesser person.

Then we danced. And we danced like no one had ever danced before us. I didn't need to know the dancing steps - she was teaching me as we spun in a wild vortex. Not for a second did we break eye contact. I was dancing for her and she was dancing for me, there was nobody else in the world except for us. The rest of the gypsies cheering and singing were mere echoes of the world, as were the blazing fires. I wanted it to never end, to never lose her from my embrace.

I woke up on the cold, wet ground. The gypsy encampment was gone and the marks of mud in the grass and ashen circles on the ground were the only traces of their presence. Unable to tell whether I had entered the nest of devil the previous night, or whether the witchery began with the beverage I had been offered, I felt an empty hole in my heart. An empty hole I knew, I would never fill. The uncontrollable desire for her presence and a torturing realization - I was not the only one she had danced for. I was not the first, and I wouldn't be the last. Yet there would never be another one like her for *me*.