Nascent Talk with the Gypsy

by Brian Michael Barbeito

She was having a laugh, but I didn't know what about. We were sitting in a big house that was on the top of a large incline. All these books were scattered around, and the walls and the kitchen, the doors and the quarter round and every other thing, was old and betrayed. But I liked it. There was this subdued intense energy there, and maybe it was the energy of the past, fading out, but still making a signature on the present. I was glad to be speaking to her because she was fat and homely looking. Some of the others of her large group, one especially, were thin and beautiful and mysterious. But they were sketchy in their own ways with a type of stain of unleavened self importance. This one laughing was on the level, and we just talked about a few things with no ulterior motives or vested interest on either side.

“What is the funny thing?” I asked her.

“The radio yesterday. The man drove us in the car. They were playing a song that you have about a Gypsy woman. We were all laughing.”

“That is not a song I have. That is an old song.”

“Gypsy woman, gypsy woman, gypsy woman…”

She looked out the window and laughed some more. I said that some people said her group was supposed to be called Roma. She brushed her hand down across her side like she was discarding something and the movement said, ‘Please, don't patronize me. Such things are silly...'

“What makes a gypsy....a gypsy?” I asked.

To this she held up her arm and pinched her skin, to denote that the skin contained her blood, and said in seriousness,"Gypsy is in the blood. Gypsy is the best blood.”

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I asked if it had been hard where she had been.
“They killed my brother. And then they killed my cousin,” she said.
“Why?”
“Because Gypsy.”
“Who killed them?”
“Skinheads. At nightclub. After nightclub. One year ago only. Don't like gypsy. Much trouble for gypsy people.”
We looked out the window. The house seemed to be able to hold any emotion, as if its joints and stucco and brick were now transformed into a strong person, a present person yet one whose face we could not see. The hydro lines and telephone lines stretched through rural hills outside like elastics that never broke, and if one did break, there were others that kept up the work of going along and along and along. In a moment a group of about two or three entered the room and broke the energy, the almost sacred place that a conversation can be with the wind going outside and the night coming. She winked at me, as if to say it was alright and not to take her too seriously, and she called to the others because it was their joke of that week, ‘Gypsy woman, gypsy woman, gypsy woman!' I shot a glance outside. Tops of septic tanks were overgrown with wild bushes, and the alarm panels rose up and up affixed to metal poles, a series of mechanical and industrial sprouts that received the splashes of sun in the days and heard from the windows the stories relayed at nights from the house.
The other women laughed back while the old books and quarter round absorbed and took the collective noise in stride.