

THE DANCER

A rippling murmur surged through the crowd as she got to her feet, gold bangles sparkled in the dancing firelight as she moved to the centre of the circle. Her skirts rustled ever so faintly as she passed by me and I caught the distant aroma of an exotic perfume that hinted of balmy Mediterranean nights. She stalked around the campfire her body hidden by the black cloak as her green eyes sought us out. And having found what she came for rose up on her toes and twirled about, flinging the cloak from her shoulders as the music sounded out. The silken sleeves of her blouse shimmered in the light as the haunting melody grasped her hips, swaying seductively to the applause of the crowd. The melody was so plaintive and deep as to flood her innermost being, she stretched out her arms as if seeking to be able to mold the music to her every desire. Rolling her head from side to side as the melodies swept her away to another time and place the gypsy woman broke into song, a sad sweet song of a love gone wrong.

She sang of a lover who had stolen her heart, whose feet she had worshipped as they loved through the night. She had given her all to this mysterious stranger her mind, body, and soul-his every wish had been her command. Faithfully she had carried his children and hushed their cries. Night followed night as she welcomed him home, his aching loins had filled her every need.

The crowd murmured its approval as she swayed by the fire, her breasts rising and falling in time to the rhythm. Long red hair caressed her features as she moved around the circle. Bending down to touch each man in turn, pausing for a moment at the man beside me before moving on as her long dainty fingers brushed their upturned faces.

But as they reached for her skirts she was gone, leaving only her scent to tantalize our lingering desires. Her voice gaining depth as she sang of the glories of love, its lullaby's spreading like a rippling pool touching each and every one of us, as its cooling balm soothed the scars of crippled generations. Passion burned higher as the flames reached for the sky till it seemed as if heaven itself would stoop down to join in everlasting union with the fires of love.

And then suddenly-the music ceased, the love that had been so sweet had died. The gypsy bent down her arms cradling her knees as she knelt on the ground, head bent low as she sobbed out her requiem-he had found another to fill his needs.

A cold grey silence descended upon us all, and the song took on a sombre tone. As she raised a tear-streaked face to the starry sky and screamed of her pain and anguish and her terrible loss. How long she had lain there on that wooden cross, each breath was her last and she prayed for the end. But as cruel as death is, it let her live spurning her hand in the dance of death. So deep was her torment in those twilight hours that it was life she abhorred and the grave she adored.

The music began playing a lilting tune, so obscure were the notes that we had to strain our ears to catch the melody. Moving over her body as she lay on her bed of nails, softly tantalizing as it moved through her hair. Tortured features softened as she got to her feet and the song began again, faintly at first but gathering in strength until it reached a mighty crescendo.

The woman took to herself the mysterious forbidden world of the dance, a place deep within herself where no man's hand had touched. No questing explorer no matter

how brave had ever ventured in so deep, the magical stirrings from beyond the dawn of time as the void gave birth. The faint humming of life, and in the grey shades of morning no one saw the woman take her first nervous steps. Haltingly bringing on the dawn of that first new day, the air was now filled with light and sound as she drew courage from the applause. Her song now told of hope, filled with a lust for life as she danced long into the night. By day she slept and at night she danced the steps of life everlasting, many men sought after her but she kept herself aloof. No man could hold her save he who had left her as she moved to the fiddle and the pounding drum.

And then one night he chanced by the fire, the woman at his side was wild with desire, but his eyes fell upon the gypsy woman who danced like the wind. His eyes followed her every move as she swayed round the fire, her song grew intense as I watched her twirling skirts. There was a frenzied intent as she told her tale, skirts lifting high as her eyes met his in a flash of recognition the red mane sweeping over her face. It was a long soulful look that spoke of hunger and desire, transporting him once more to the woman he'd loved so long ago.

The steps she danced were only for him, the song in her heart told of the passion within. Never before had he seen her like this, his throat pumping in time to the beat of the drum, the ache in his loins was a physical pain. His eyes flashed as she moved round the circle, touching and caressing each face in turn, pausing by him before she turned away.

He reached for her skirts but she danced lightly away, casting a lust filled look his way as she stopped on the other side of the fire. She seemed to disappear within the smoke, shimmering as she raised her hands above her head. Swinging her hips as she slipped them down over her breasts and belly, encircling her hips as she gazed upon he who had cast her aside. The music faded as the gypsy sauntered around the fire and I caught each movement from the shimmering white blouse and rustling skirts. The golden bangles winked mischievously as she placed her hands on her hips, and at first I thought she was headed straight for me. But her eyes were fixed on the man beside and I felt him stiffen as she stopped before him. She seemed to grow above me as her scent filled my throat, she leaned down and whispered in his ear. He trembled as she spoke and I felt the earth move under my feet as she straightened up, tossing a sly wink and a nod in my direction as she walked away.

Whatever was said in those brief stolen moments of intimacy I did not know but the man bowed his head in bitter defeat. The sob ripped from his belly as she disappeared from view, a satisfied grin spreading over her face. She stopped at the edge of the circle and stared down at the broken man at my side and the look in her eyes told me all that had been whispered in his ear. And as the sacrificial fire burned low into the night I reflected on the gypsy's dance and her soulful song, with the by now silent man staring into space and time.

It seems to me that we never know what we have, till it's gone.

Written by Alastair Rosie © 1997