

Gitanos

Ramon and I were walking home after a night on the tequilla. We stopped at the kiosko to buy cigarettes and wandered down the side streets back to the old town. Outside 'La Mina' with its broken neon light we saw a grubby gypsy idly smoking against a wall. Ramon froze up.

"We better turn around," he said, "there could be more." I shook my head, I wasn't taking the long way just because of a grubby looking man. I looked into his big brown eyes for a moment and saw an edge of drunken fear, Ramon is a fierce fighter if he has to be. I'm the guy who always falls over and ends up getting kicked.

The gypsy left the wall and threw his cigarette. The right hand was quick and we heard the catch on his knife springing open.

"Me da tu dinero," "*One gives his money to me,*" I was shocked by the eloquence of his speech and although he was dirty, he held himself in a proud way like a bull fighter. Ramon bit back,

"*There are two of us brother, and one will not have our money.*" The gypsy smiled and I heard footsteps behind us. Seven others fanned out from the side street, they ranged from the old to young, fat to thin.

Ramon pulled out his wallet and took out his money. He handed the notes to the gypsy in a friendlier manner. With the point of the blade the thief pointed to the tiny money pocket.

"*That as well?*" He nodded. Ramon emptied out the few coins into his hands whilst shaking his head.

An older man politely held out his hands and I fished around in my pockets for whatever money I might have.

"*Get his wallet,*" said the leader but Ramon cut in.

"*He's Americano, he doesn't have a wallet,*" which was true. It was the most polite mugging I had ever been through. I fished out two five hundred notes and a hand full of coins. I thought I'd push it.

"*It's long way to our house,*" I said, "*could I keep two hundred pesetas for a taxi home?*" Because he is a fighter Ramon spoke up again.

"*The Americano will need whiskey too because he has been frightened.*"

The lead gypsy concentrated for moment with narrow proud eyes,

"*Give the foreigner back five hundred,*" he said, and the old man gently handed me a blue note.

We parted on good terms and I turned back to say goodbye but Ramon looked at me coldly, his eyes were moist. As we turned the corner he held up his arms.

"Gitanos!!!!"