

More than love

Drizzling grey clouds sat heavily over the whole town as a man left the mean, terraced house, glanced right and left in a shifty way and turned his collar up against the wind with a disgusted flick. A scarf hid the lower part of his face, so black eyebrows and deep set, dark lashed eyes were all a passer-by could see. He headed in the direction of the corner Pub, his wife watched him go and was dismayed, if he came home drunk there would be trouble. She considered going to her Mum's but didn't. Weariness consumed her and she would be reproached for her situation again.

Hard to believe it had come to this, she remembered the halcyon summer, seven years ago when his laughing eyes had beguiled her from across the bar and he'd sauntered over like he was James Dean and leant on the counter. "Give me your hand!"

"Why? You Gypsy Rose Lee?"

"Just give it!"

She extended her hand and he took it.

"Come here..."

He led her around the bar and she laughed shaking her head "you're crazy and I'm busy."

"Not anymore!" he gripped her hand and ran, dragging her through the front door of the Pub and along the cracked pavers of the street outside.

"Stop! What about my job?"

"There's another day tomorra girl, today's for fallin' in love with me."

She stared incredulously for a moment into his swarthy face, noticed his coal black hair lifted by the wind and his merry eyes sparkling. For the first time in her life, she threw caution to the winds and took to her heels after him. They ran until the Pub and her job were far behind and stopped breathless and laughing in the park. The scrubby grass, scuffed to brown scabs and oxygen-starved trees were redeemed by the air-brush of her first daring rebellion and its thrilling adrenaline rush. Here was the adventure and romance her fiction-lead soul craved.

He was drunk of course, but she didn't know.

The man sneaked back into the house silently, like a thief looking for something. He wasn't stealing, he was looking for someone to pick on. He grabbed his son whom he said should have been in bed. She watched him take off his belt, and before the first crack of it licked the child's bare calves, she yelled.

He turned his malevolent, drunken eyes towards her, dropped the curiously silent child and advanced slowly, fist raised.

"No! No!" She screamed. "I'm pregnant!"

Breaking the news to him this way could condemn the unborn child to death.

He hit her anyway, as her head snapped back and she tasted blood in her mouth, something inside her changed. She waited motionless until he collapsed drunkenly on the sofa, snoring, a line of dribble running down his chin.

She took her boy's hand, her coat and nothing else. She was on her way back to the refuge, for the last time, her bladder full, her black eye swollen.