

*"The following is a Roma story told by a seventy-five year-old Cergari woman:*

*I've heard this story from my father, so it must be an old one. I used to tell this story to my children and grandchildren when they were just little kids. It's about the girl and a young emperor, or Proma and Paramic. This is a good one: kids learn a lot from it. Once upon a time, there was a young Gypsy girl who had two brothers. She was really a beauty, and good in school. The best pupil. She was so clever and bright, that soon she surpassed her schoolteacher. She was more literate than he was. The schoolteacher liked her a lot, and wanted to take advantage of her?to sleep with her. He tried many times, but the girl resisted, for she was an honest creature. When he finally got tired of trying, he got angry with her, so he went to the girl's father. Her family was the richest one in the county, and her father was a big man, a Roma, with a status and horses and everything. So, the schoolteacher came to the house, and he was offered food and coffee, but he said no. He said, "I didn't come for your food or coffee, but to tell you about your daughter's debauchery." And the schoolteacher told the girl's father that his daughter is a dishonest and a promiscuous woman. Her father was devastated and desperate to have heard something like that about his only daughter; and he trusted the schoolteacher, for this fellow was respected by people [Serbs] in the village: he was, after all, educated and literate. So, the father told his sons to take their sister to the woods and slay her as a punishment for disgracing her family. The two brothers were very sad, but they had to obey the father's order. They took her to the place where there is no sound, there is no human hand, there is no rooster to sing or a voice to hear. A dog followed them along. They traveled for two days and two nights. When they arrived in a dense forest, the brothers said, "It is a great sin to kill our sister. We will place her high on one tree with three branches, and build three posts around, and put three branches around to protect her from wild animals. And we will slay the dog, and take his heart to our father." That's what they said, and that's how they did it. The forest where the brothers left the girl was an [Roma] emperor's forest, where he hunted every day. After three days, the emperor came to the forest to hunt; his dogs smelled the girl's flesh and started to bark at the tree where she was hiding. And the emperor said "If you are a wild animal I will shoot you. If you are not, come out and show your face." And the girl said, "My master, I am no wild animal, I am a human being." Then he took her down from the tree, and asked her what she was up to. She responded that she went out of her village to find a job. The emperor asked her what does she know to do, and she said, "I know how to clean, and cook, and how to serve." So he decided to take the girl to his palace. So she became a servant in his palace; she was hardworking and honest, and everybody liked her. In the meantime, the young emperor decided to get married. He wanted a woman that could fit into his mother's shoes. He took his mother's shoe, and said that a girl who can wear this shoe will be his bride. He tried and tried, went everywhere around his empire, but none of the girls could fit into the shoe. He came*

back home. One day, he said that the new servant should try the shoe, too, which she did, and it fit her perfectly. The emperor's mother was furious, and told him that it would be the greatest disgrace for all of them if he married an ordinary servant. The emperor stood by his decision, and married the servant. In the first year of their marriage, the girl bore him one son. In their second year, a second son, and in the third year, she gave him their third son. This way she got three empires. The emperor was delighted, and out of his great love for his wife, he made her a golden swing. After their children grew up a little, the emperor asked his wife if she has a family. "Yes," she responded, "but they live far and away, and there is no need to look for them anyway." However, he decided it was time for her to get together with her family again, now that she had three sons, and gave her an army and a major, the commander, to accompany her during her journey home. So they started to travel, the girl, her three sons, the major, and the army. They traveled day and night until they finally reached a valley where they made the camp for the night. Her tent was in the middle, surrounded by the army. Later that night, the major entered her tent, and asked her in front of her children, "Will you make love to me? If not, I will slaughter your son." And she responded, "I will not have anything to do with you, ever, kill my son." And she was an empress, dressed in rich clothes, with epaulets. But the major killed her son. The next day they continued their journey; they traveled all night and day and by the nightfall they reached another valley. Her tent was in the middle, surrounded by the army. And the major entered her tent and asked again, "Will you sleep with me? If not, I will kill your second son." This time, she responded: "I will. But first I'll go outside to see if it is raining or there are stars in the sky." She went outside and ran away as fast as she could. She met some people who were shepherds, and asked them to exchange their clothes with her, and so they did. She put their clothes on and gave them her nice dresses. In the morning she reached a roadhouse where her father used to drink coffee. She saw him, her father, and she stayed at one corner, watching him. So, he was there and he asked her, "What is with you, you good-for-nothing bump? What are you looking for?" She replied, "I came to serve here. I know horses, and how to attend them, and how to keep them and feed them." He asked, "Where will you sleep?" And she said she could sleep in the stables, with horses. She was afraid that her brothers would recognize her. Her father agreed, and took her home. Three years went by. During those three years, the emperor was seriously ill. It was a nervous breakdown. Near the emperor's palace, there was one little house where an old, wise woman lived. The emperor went to see her, and she asked: "My precious emperor, what pain brings you to me?" The emperor said, "I don't have my wife anymore. I don't know where she is. I don't know where my sons are. What advice can you give me?" The old woman told him, "My advice to you is to go to every kingdom, and when people gather around you because you are an emperor, ask everybody to tell a story. That's how you will find her traces." And so he did. He went everywhere. He finally reached the village of the girl's father. People gathered around

him, to eat and drink, including the schoolteacher, and the major. And the emperor was sweating, and he said, "I'm not into food and drinks, I just want that you people tell me a story." So they did. The emperor heard a lot of different stories and they went on and on. But he wasn't satisfied. Finally, he asked, "Is there anybody else that could tell me a story?" And the people said, "Yes, there is one servant; he sleeps in the stables, but he is stinky and bad, and you don't want him to tell you a story." But the emperor insisted. So they brought the servant, she was dirty and smelly, and had poor, ripped clothes on. And she said, "My master, I will tell you a story. But you have to order to lock all doors and gates, and close all windows. And light a fire in the hearth." And they did the way she asked. They put the locks on every door, and closed all windows and lit a fire. And she began her story: "Do you see that man? He had one daughter. One day a schoolteacher came to him, and slandered his daughter, saying that she is bad girl and that she sleeps around. And the father believed him. And her two brothers, these men over here, took her to the woods to slay her, and to bring her heart back to the father. But they killed the dog, and let her live. Then one emperor came to the forest, and noticed a girl. He took her to his palace and married her. During the next three years, she gave him three sons, and therefore three empires. Tell me, my master, how would you recognize your wife? And the emperor responded, "By the moon on her back and the sun on her chest." And she took her dirty clothes off, and there was the moon and there was the sun on her chest. And the emperor ordered that the schoolteacher and the major be thrown into the fire. And so they burned until nothing was left of them. After that she returned to her empire. And the moon and the sun were on her."

Cvorovic, 2006, 140-143