

Story 6: The story about Gipsy court

Story shared by: *Milan*

Representing: *Roma and lives in Belgrade.*

The Story:

This is a story about the tradition of the Gypsy court, which still exists in some Roma communities.

In many Roma families, tradition has been cultivated for generations. This applies to marriage, lifestyle, and other customs. Among us, we are all equal. There is no distinction. If someone is a millionaire, he will sit at the same table with someone who has nothing. There must be a sense of unity. We are very close as families, constantly seeing each other and staying in touch every day.

In some Roma groups, we have the Gypsy court. There, there is no real police. The leader holds the knife, holds the bread, and it's his decision that stands. It's not just the family that gathers. Whenever a disagreement arises, the court is immediately convened. Both sides must be heard, and both stories must be examined. Then the people around comment and bring judgment. For example, if two people can't agree on something, all the Roma in the area are called. They might occupy a café or a hotel hall... A large crowd gathers, sometimes even two hundred people. A court sessions have been held in the middle of a square. The leader is the oldest, the one most involved in these Gypsy courts. He can sense who is lying a bit and who is being more honest. He listens to both versions and always has questions for each side: "Couldn't it have been resolved like this...?" or "You said earlier that it could have been done this way...". The play of words is very important here; you have to be careful with what you say. These sessions last for hours and hours, sometimes five, six, seven, eight hours... sometimes an entire night and day, depending on the issue. In the end, the leader delivers the verdict. If the court decides on something, that's how it will be. Out of so many people, essentially just a few make the final decision. The others only comment, observe, and provide suggestions to the leader.

There was an instance where a girl was supposed to get married. There was a celebration, but she wasn't a virgin. At first, both families met privately to try to resolve the issue, but when they couldn't find a solution, the court stepped in. Even though the court was involved, the couple stayed together because he was in love. He fell in love, and it didn't bother him. The young man eventually moved out of his family's house. He was around eighteen or nineteen years old. He moved out because he couldn't handle the pressure and the disdain from his father, mother, and the entire family toward him and his fiancée. But this is a very rare case— for a man to stay with a woman if she's not a virgin. Still, it happens.



