**Gaza Yeh Ruh**

Jeffrey Kahrs

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A girl walks down our street playing accordion on Sunday morning. Pumping her squeezebox without mercy, she forces songs out of it fractured by her amateur hands. Her sounds are as tangled as the strings I plucked on Muhittin’s Kabuli Rabab in the Covered Bazaar. Lion of instruments, its cracked Afghani neck lords over tinned jewelry stuffed into a wooden beggar’s bowl carved with prayers.

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A man approaches me where traffic stalls in hot, humid weather. I say nothing and stare straight ahead. One glance can bring flowers, a wafer with a dab of honey or your choice of power tools. He saunters by having seen NO writ large thousands of times. Carrying a handful of adaptors for lighters above his head, their spring cords bounce up and down with a cartoon’s comedic virus. But this is serious business. He is Turkish Romani and they claim the right to sell in traffic jams.

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The girl playing accordion is also a gypsy, but the large roses on her skirt announce she’s from the Balkans—her territory is whatever she and her family can make on the streets. She startles me. As if from nowhere a beautiful, clear tone breaks out of her instrument—perhaps her virtuosity will begin in this moment. But it’s a practical equation. She’s playing for *zakat*, the Islamic obligation to give alms. I wad up a few bank notes and drop them out the window. Perhaps they will put a small patch on her seeming misfortune. She yanks off her instrument, gathers the bills and stuffs them in the large pocket on the side of her skirt. As she wanders down the street; she straps the accordion back on and plays as if nothing’s happened. The music begins again: *Gaza Yeh Ruh*—food for the soul. Let it sing on these strings.