

**DZHABA**  
**by Nikolay Boykov**

translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

I'm almost finished delivering *Literary Newspaper*. After stopping off at the Youth Theater, I take a detour through the Ladies' Market, it's dusk, all sorts of shady characters are coming out, hawking stuff on tarps, you can even buy yourself a Latin American dictionary for five bucks. I stroll through the darkening market, the vendors are packing up their stalls, others are letting down the shutters, I spot a little fish stand and head over to it. While looking over the selection, an ancient Gypsy appears out of the darkness, he is as ugly as Quasimodo, so ugly he's beautiful, carrying his little grandson, four or five years old, the child is shouting in childlike ecstasy that he wants dzhaba, the grandfather, beaming and radiant, promises him dzhaba. He turns to the vendor and asks for dzhaba, but they guy says he doesn't have any, what do you mean you don't have any, what's that there, I don't have any end-of-story. Pointing at the carp, I ever so pleasantly ask if that isn't dzhaba, the child has already disappeared, the vendor rudely tells the Gypsy to shove off, he helps himself to a sample of sprat, the guy is now screaming at him not to touch his merchandise, the Gypsy starts flinging around some small change, the vendor is screaming, and the Gypsy he starts screaming, too, is this guy a real salesman or what, I quietly walk away, leaving the dzhaba and the flounder and the whitefish behind me, trying to take a deep breath, something is choking my throat, a wave of weeping surges out of nowhere and washes over me.

March 1, 7:39-8:00