



Gipsy Lake

Domenico Corna

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This Everywoman dives into a fantastical world to explore mysterious inner experiences.

Domenico Corna's spellbinding third book and second novel, *Gipsy Lake*, explores philosophy in a compelling, nuanced way. In a nameless country, fearful Helen has an out-of-body experience while flying over Gipsy Lake in her brother's airplane. Compelled to get to the root of this mystical occurrence, she returns to camp for a week by the lakeside, and there she finds her sense of self called into question as she comes upon a strange, nameless community of farmers whose inhabitants claim to be several hundred years old; some even remember the Spanish Inquisition. Are the people lying, or do they hold the answers Helen seeks?

In any case, Helen calls this incident "a momentary liberation of the mind." Similarly, this novel brings about a feeling of freedom from conventions. Only the lake gets a proper name in the book; by never identifying Helen's nationality or naming other landmarks, the author lends the story an eerie timelessness often associated with folktales.

The trope of the ancient inhabitants who never seem to age recalls the tradition of Fairyland, where time moves slower than in the human world. Those who dwell near Gipsy Lake speak of being driven out of everywhere they try to settle, like the biblical Jews who search for a homeland. By combining mythic and biblical tropes, Corna manages to make his story simultaneously familiar and mysterious.

In a refreshing departure from the norm, the author gives the role of the Everyman character to a woman. Helen represents the seeker in all of us. The chief conflict in the story is existential and internal, as Helen tries to figure out the best way to live her life. Everyone must forge her or his own path, and Corna wraps this conundrum into one woman's search for meaning in her life.

Although Helen goes on an arduous physical and mental journey during which she learns many philosophical truths, this heady novel contains all the suspense of a high-octane thriller because Helen's character and her philosophical discoveries remain relatable. For example, a character offers her a clever twist on the notion that all one needs to live happily are the resources within oneself: "Everything is in you! And don't be so pessimistic about life; you're hurting yourself... Think of building up and not tearing down."

The story falters slightly when it strays from Helen's point of view into the perspectives of secondary characters for short periods of time. Near the conclusion, the narration changes from third-person omniscient to the first-person point of view of a minor character. The close of the book would have been more moving if the end had been seen from Helen's perspective.

Still, these missteps do not detract from the overall eerie, fantastical world painted in *Gipsy Lake*.

JILL ALLEN (March 18, 2014)

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