

*New Orleans - 1917. Stevo Markovich is a successful hotelier surrounded by friends and family. The world around them is changing quickly. Times of strife reveal character, as well as surprising new relationships. What is Stevo's destiny?*

## **STEVO FINDS HIS DESTINY**

By Rosemary Gard

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ROSEMARY GARD

STEVO  
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## CHAPTER 1

TAYLOR, TEXAS - 1917

Anna Badrich looked out into the barnyard of her home from her second floor bedroom window. Under the bright moon she could see her father digging two more graves. It had been only two months earlier he had dug a grave for her mother, who died while pregnant.

Anna watched from the room she had not left for over a month. Her father successfully kept her safe from the contagious measles her younger brothers had had, which took their lives.

She had been angry at her father for not allowing her to leave the room she once shared with her sister, Danica, who now was married and living in New Orleans.

Anna had no way of knowing how dangerous the measles disease was. Her father, Ladra, looked so angry, pale, and tired that it had frightened her into obeying him. He left food outside her closed door. He brought her pitchers of water and buckets for toilet use.

A prisoner in her room, Anna read every book she owned more than once. Some of the books had been loaned to her by Miss Street, who taught the farm children in a makeshift school she had in her home.

Anna re-read *Anne of Green Gables* and especially *Anne of Avonlea*. This second book interested her the most because the Anne in the book was 15 years old, the same age as her. The Anne of Avonlea, in the book was a school teacher, while Anna of Taylor, Texas felt she was a prisoner.

She was frightened and sad seeing her father place each brother, wrapped in sheets, into the graves he had dug. She sobbed watching the wrapped bodies being covered with shovels full of soil.

A shock ran through her when she saw her father fall to his knees sobbing. Her Tata had always been so strong. He would calm them whenever they were worried or frightened. Now...how would they get along, just the two of them?

Anna looked into her dresser mirror. She dried her red, wet eyes before going to help her Tata. As she walked down the stairs leading to the main floor, she had to sidestep the many bowls and plates filled with sliced onions her father had placed everywhere thinking it would help keep the measles from spreading. Here and there she saw raw garlic, also meant to kill germs.

The house was a mess. Towels were strewn about, loose tea scattered on the kitchen table, and sugar spilled on the floor along with flour. Anna did not know that her father had tried to make a paste of flour and water to spread on the measles rash.

In the room which had belonged to her parents, Anna saw the soiled bed sheets and pillows. Her father was startled when he entered the room, to see her standing there.

“Anna! Why aren’t you in your room?” He said in a hoarse voice, his face wet with tears.

More worried than annoyed, he said, “Stay out of my way.”

He gathered the soiled bedding and pillows, wrapping them into a loose bundle, dragging it outdoors.

Watching from the doorway, she saw him throw the bundle on an already burning fire in the barnyard.

Tears mingled with the perspiration on his face as he returned to try and drag the straw filled mattress from the bed.

Anna helped pull the mattress from the bed and together they carried it to the fire.

Ladra, weak with grief, let his beloved daughter help. He feared for her safety, but was grateful she was there. While he watched the fire, Anna carried out the feather comforter. It took many chicken and goose feathers to fill it, only to now be thrown onto the fire.

Anna, standing near the fire, could hear the horse and cow, aware of the smell of the burning items, moving about in the barn. The pig at the far end of the yard seemed uninterested in the blaze.

When Tata rose and went into the house, Anna followed him. She was shocked to see him pulling apart the bed and breaking it down. It, too, was fed to the fire.

Now, only two weeks after her brothers died, Anna stood on the dusty dirt road in front of the house where she had been born and lived. At her side were two wicker suitcases with her meager wardrobe and her books. She found the wedding pictures of her sister taken when Danica married John Morovich. These were very carefully wrapped in a table cloth and tucked in among her clothes.

A small trunk was placed alongside the suitcases. In it were only a few family items such as their prayer books, some handmade items along with the beautiful tablecloth

Mrs. Morovich had sent to Anna's mother when Danica became part of the Morovich family.

Ladra sat on the stairs leading into the house which was no longer his home. He and Anna sold everything and now waited for a friend to come with a horse and wagon to take them to the train station.

Anna kept watch on her father, who appeared so frail, so lost. She was now in the role of caretaker and she didn't know if she was capable of handling it.

When the wagon arrived, Anna helped her father get up into it. Once settled in the wagon with their luggage, they were on their way. It was a silent ride. No one spoke until Anna said, "Molim, stoy....Please stop." They were at Miss Street's house. Anna needed to speak with her.

The school teacher was in the yard and came to the road when she saw them coming. She walked out onto the road, extending her hand to Ladra, saying, "I am so sorry for your sorrow. You will be missed by us all." He seemed not to have heard her.

Anna got down from the wagon and walked a short bit away, so as not to be heard by her father or the wagon driver. She said, "Would you please call Mr. Stevo Markovich at the Dalmatcia Hotel? Tell him we are coming." Now she reached for the teacher's hand saying, "Please ask him not to let my sister know we are coming. I need Tata to get stronger, better."

"Of course, I will call." said Miss Street. She touched Ladra's thin hand and looking at him, no longer recognizing

the strong, healthy man she stood with at Danica's wedding in New Orleans.

Anna had never seen a train, much less ridden on one. The ticket agent explained the difference of a sleeping car and a public seat. It would be a long ride taking many hours, so without asking her father, Anna purchased the sleeping car.

Not knowing if she could buy food on the train, Anna purchased sandwiches and drinks at the train station.

A kind stranger helped Anna with the luggage and her father into the train to their assigned travel car. Ladra said nothing. It was as if he didn't know what was happening. The shock of the past events seemed to have shut him down. Seeing him like this worried Anna. She hoped her sister could help. Not knowing anything about Danica's in-laws, she wondered, would they resent Danica's sister and father coming into their lives?

Anna removed her father's suit coat and let him lie down on the comfortable seat. She watched him, as he appeared to fall asleep. Even in his sleep his face looked troubled.

As Anna looked out the train window, she realized how different she looked from the women on the train platform. She wore a long skirt of patterned blue cotton fabric and a matching long-sleeved blouse. The women she saw out of her train window were wearing colorful skirts with layers of fabric, some with ruffles. Anna admired those dresses and hoped she could one day have a dress as stylish as these women wore.

Slowly the train started its long journey from Taylor to New Orleans. Anna's brown eyes filled with tears. She was



frightened. She didn't know what the future held for her. Would Tata be alright? Would they be welcome in New Orleans? How would they live if the Morovich family didn't have room for them...or what if they didn't want them?

Anna sat on the seat across from where her father was sleeping. His face appeared more peaceful as he slept. Anna had always felt sorry because of the mean treatment her mother had always showed him. Angry words were often heard, except for the night he came home from New Orleans with the gifts and pictures of Danica's wedding. It was not long before Majka again showed her dislike for her husband, along with the dislike for her very own children.

After her mother's death, Anna was aware of how withdrawn her father had become. Then the boys got the measles and she only saw her father from her bedroom window, where he demanded she stay, to protect her from catching the disease.

Ladra had been racked with guilt when Mara died during her pregnancy. She was angry when she discovered she was pregnant. Something she did not want.

What Anna didn't know!

Mara had become pregnant by Ladra, while she was engaged to a young man of a prosperous family back in the old country. Ladra would have been punished by Mara's fiancé, while Mara's father would have beaten her badly. So, they escaped to America on a ship sailing from a Dalmatian coast to New Orleans, with money Lahdra's uncle gave them. They made friends with other passengers who were going to

Texas where farm land was cheap, so that became Ladra's destination.

What Ladra didn't know!

He would forever carry the guilt of Mara's having died while pregnant, blaming himself. In the community where they had their farm, lived an old Baba. She lived alone and had few friends, but most of the women knew about her and used her services when they did not want to have a baby. Mara had gone to this Baba and shortly after her visit there, Mara died.

Uncertain of what the future had in store for herself and Ladra, Anna watched from her train window the changing countryside. There were forests, fields of corn, herds of cattle, sometimes sheep and even what looked like settlements of wooden houses.

The following morning, a man walked thru the train aisle selling coffee, bread with jam, and hard boiled eggs. Anna bought two coffees with milk and five hard boiled eggs.

The small trunk was on the floor near where her father lay sleeping. She placed the coffee on the wooden trunk near his head. It wasn't long before the smell of the coffee awakened him.

"Dobro jutro...Good morning." Said Anna, pleased to see him looking more rested.

Ladra looked around the small confined space, realizing where he was, he smiled at his daughter saying, "Dobro jutro moja, Zlata...Good morning, Goldie." An affectionate name he sometimes uses.

He sat up, stretched and moved his shoulders about, releasing some tension in his muscles. Lahdra lifted the coffee cup, watching his Anna.

“Are you alright?” He asked. “I have been no help to you. I needed to be the one in charge, not you.” He looked at her pretty, young face saying, “I don’t want to disappoint you the way I disappointed your mother while she was alive.”

Anna leaned forward and placed her hand on her father’s knee. “Oh, Tata! You could never disappoint me. You have always been wonderful to us. You never made us feel that we were in the way or that you didn’t care for us.” She wanted to say, “Like Majka did.” but she didn’t say it.

Ladra took a sip of the coffee and gave Anna a small smile and a nod of approval. Picking up a hardboiled egg, he said, “Joj...Oh, Anica, using his affectionate name for Anna. I hope we will have a good life in New Orleans.”

Starting to peel an egg for herself, Anna said a silent prayer. Dragi Bog...Dear God, don’t let Tata be disappointed in New Orleans.

## CHAPTER 2

Arriving at the beautiful New Orleans train station on North Rampart Street, Anna was stunned when seeing the station. In Taylor the train station was only a wooden building with benches for waiting passengers and a clerk behind a counter.

Now Anna stared in wide-eyed wonder at the building around her.

New Orleans Union Station was the only train station architect Louis Sullivan designed. It was constructed in the architect's well-known 'Chicago School' style and decorated with his iconic ornaments. Sullivan's head draftsman, Frank Lloyd Wright, was involved in the final work under Sullivan's supervision. Union Station was a three-story, hip-roofed structure with a cupola, including office and waiting areas, a broad portico with central columns, and arched entryways at each end.

Anna didn't know which way to go. Her eyes danced, watching the people as they walked to the exit. Once out of the station, Ladra gave some money to the man who carried the wooden trunk for them.

Anna was startled when a man came running up to her father, throwing his arms around Ladra. Her eyes grew large as she saw her father wrap his arms around the man. It appeared both men were almost crying.

She heard the muffled words of her father, "Dragi Stevo...Dear Stevo."

When the two men parted, drying their eyes and clearing their throats, Ladra reached for Anna's hand, introducing her.

"Stevo, evo moja cherka....here is my daughter, Anna."

Steve Markovich reached for her wicker suitcase. Smiling, he said, "You are just as pretty as your sister."

Anna was bewildered that her father not only knew such an elegant man, but they appeared to have a strong bond between them. Stevo took Ladra's suitcase while motioning for a porter to bring the trunk.

Once on Rampart Street, Anna saw carriages and a couple jitney cars.

A tall Black man, wearing a red Coachman's coat and red top hat, reached out his hand to Ladra saying, "Welcome, Mr. Badrich."

Ladra took Bobo's hand and then wrapped his arms around the carriage driver in a warm embrace.

Open mouthed, Anna could only stare in disbelief. Who are these people, she wondered? Anna could not remember her father ever hugging a male friend in Texas, much less a Black man.

Then she saw the carriage. Never had she seen a horse-drawn carriage. All she ever saw back home were farm wagons. Anna thought this carriage was beautiful.

Instead of sitting in the back seat of the carriage with Stevo and her father, she wanted to ride with Bobo. She wanted to feel the wind in her face and to feel the excitement of her first ride in such an elegant carriage.

She noticed the smell of New Orleans. Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River, along with the flowering trees and

lush floral gardens, made the air smell wonderful. In Texas, there was only the hot smell of farms and dusty roads. Her eyes darted looking at all the stores on Rampart Street, along with the colorfully-dressed people selling things. There were children dancing and singing on the walkways. It was all so exciting!

In the back seat of the carriage, Stevo's eyes studied his friend. Ladra's eyes were sad, even when he smiled. He was thinner than Stevo remembered and his face revealed the stress he had experienced the last few months.

Anna glanced back, looking at Stevo and her father. She had no idea how old Stevo was. Could he be about the same age as her Tata?

She noticed Stevo's blue eyes were fixed on Ladra's face. He listened intently to what Ladra was saying. Stevo's thick, light brown hair had flecks of grey at his temples.

His suit was the three-button sack style with slender, cuffed trousers and a long jacket made of lightweight woven grey-blue gabardine. His shoes were the low, laced style, not the high tops.

Her father wore the blue suit he had worn for Danica's wedding. It fit him loosely for Ladra was now thinner.

When the carriage stopped in front of the hotel, Anna's jaw dropped and her eyes were wide. It was such a tall building. The doorman helped her father out of the carriage, at the same time signaling a bellman to come for the luggage.

Bobo helped Anna down, saying, "Enjoy your stay in New Orleans. We are glad to have you and your father here."

He tipped his hat and drove away, making room for an automobile waiting behind the carriage.

Miss Street had given her the book, *The Wizard of Oz*, to read. Anna felt like Dorothy in the city of Oz as she looked at the large lobby filled with comfortable seating of art deco grey stuffed chairs with couches large enough for two people. Tables and large ashtrays were everywhere. There were vases of fragrant flowers placed on some of the reading tables. Along one wall were assorted paintings, all of women.

At the far end of the room was the front desk, but they didn't go there. Instead, Stevo lead them to a door in the wall. He pressed a button and the door opened. Anna saw a uniformed young man greet them. Stevo told him, "Fourth floor" and Anna was startled to feel the floor beneath her move. She later learned this was known as a lift.

This had to be a dream, thought Anna, once she was in a room all her own. She would wake up and be back in Taylor on the farm with her family. She couldn't believe such a lovely room was just for her.

An adjoining door opened to her father's room. There she saw her father sitting on the bed, while Stevo sat on a side chair. She couldn't hear what they were saying. She again wondered why this man, this successful man, cared so much for her father. Anna had no idea that Stevo had adopted Ladra as his father. Never had Stevo been able to do good things for his own father. So now he would do what he could for Ladra.

In her room, Anna saw a glass door leading to the iron balcony known as a gallery. On the small terrace was a comfortable chair and a small table. Several pots of fragrant

flowers such as hibiscus, angel trumpet, and bougainvillea were on the gallery.

She stepped out onto the gallery. She leaned over the ornate railing. She could hear music in the distance and wanted to find where the sound was coming from. Music was everywhere on the streets.

“Come,” Said Stevo, “we are going down for some lunch. Anna dutifully followed them to the lift, which brought them down to the lobby.

Out of the lift they turned left, and walked a short distance to the outdoor eating area. This can’t be real, thought Anna. The original outdoor eating area had been destroyed by the hurricane. The rebuilt one still had cages of parrots throughout the area along with brightly colored hanging plants. The once open-air dining area now had a roll out canopy to be used when it rained.

They sat at what was known as the family table, reserved for Stevo and his very close friends, such as the banker Brouchard, or the artist Michael Dukane, and others.

The table had a small vase of camellias on the center. There were already place settings for the three of them. Instead of just a fork or spoon, there were several pieces of silverware alongside the plate. A folded napkin was on each plate.

The server, wearing a red vest, the color worn by all Dalmatcia employees, removed Anna’s napkin, dropping it on her lap. Wide-eyed, she watched as he placed a plate of food before her. She stared at the wonderful smelling food.



“I hope you like beans and rice.” said Stevo, “It is a local dish of New Orleans.” Anna saw a large piece of sausage in the plate. She said, “I am used to beans and sauerkraut.”

“Ah, yes.” said Stevo. “Grah i zele. They serve it across the street at Little Zagreb. Klara is the cook there. She makes all the Croatian food.”

## CHAPTER 3

After the meal, Stevo had to tend to some business, so he excused himself, promising to see them later.

Up in his room, Ladra lay down on his bed to rest. He was still emotional from the death of most of his family, and the travel. As he started to fall asleep, he thought of his two sons, wishing he could have had them with him on this trip to New Orleans.

In her adjoining room, Anna unpacked her suitcase. There was a two-drawer dresser where she placed her things. Above the dresser was a wall mirror.

She stared at her reflection, feeling that she looked like a child with her light-brown hair in two braids. All the women she had observed without hats had their hair up on the backs of their heads.

Anna undid her braids. She removed the center part in her hair, combing it straight back, she then made one thick braid which she coiled into a bun at the back of her head. She fastened the bun in place with tortoise hair pins which had belonged to her mother. Looking into the mirror and turning her head from side-to-side, she was pleased with the new look. She looked older.

Above her hazel eyes, she ran a comb through her nicely shaped eyebrows.

She didn't have a purse as she never needed one in Taylor. Her long, cotton skirt had a pocket where she put some money. Anna knew she wanted to buy something new

to wear. She had some money of her own from selling the things in their house.

Her father was sleeping. She hoped she would return before he awoke. Seeing her gone, he would be concerned by her absence.

She enjoyed the ride in the lift to the lobby. She turned right, going to the front doors. The sun shone brightly and as always, the air had the scent of flowers.

She stood on the walkway, deciding which way to go. The building, built on the corner across the street, caught her attention. The sign stated, "Little Zagreb". As people entered and exited, Anna heard snatches of music each time the door was opened. She crossed the street, hurrying out of the way of a carriage, to go there. A curtained window blocked her from seeing inside. As someone was exiting, Anna slipped through the open door to see the restaurant. There were assorted tables and chairs. Some had seating for only two, others for four, and a couple long tables for larger groups.

To the right of the doorway was the bar area, marked off with a waist-high wall. There were about three small tables in that area. Looking straight ahead, she saw, on a far wall, a raised area where a man was playing a stringed instrument.

Near the doorway, to the right of the entrance, was a spiral metal staircase. This building had been a ladies' garment store and the stairway led to the storage area. That upper area was now the living space of Little Zagreb's owner, Tomo, Stevo's dear friend.

Tomo was midway down the stairs when he stopped to look at the girl in the doorway. Something about her took his

breath away. Who was she? Did she want to work there? Was she looking for someone? These thoughts all ran through his mind.

Ignatz, who was one of the Croatians who came from Gary, Indiana to join Stevo, was in charge of the bar. He called out to Tomo, “Bring a check. The barrels of beer have arrived.”

Reluctantly, Tomo went up to his apartment. He grabbed the business checkbook which was a binder with three checks to a page.

When he came down the stairs, she was gone. He looked all around the room. He thought to himself ‘this is ridiculous.’ He had known many women and had many affairs. His feeling was more than a disappointment; it was a sense of loss.

Anna had stepped outside of Little Zagreb where there were children dancing and making music on handmade instruments. There was a little Black boy doing some wonderful dancing with shoes making clicking and tapping sounds. Anna had no idea that the boy had attached bottle caps to the bottom of his shoes to make the sounds.

Many people crossed the street going somewhere behind the side of the Dalmatcia Hotel. Anna followed the stream of people and found a large outdoor market. She saw an overhead banner with the words: FRENCH MARKET painted on it. The first table Anna saw was full of assorted fruit. Then there was a table with a Gypsy telling fortunes with cards. Next to her was a table of assorted candles and

different colored sand in assorted bowls. She stopped at this table, wondering what all these things meant or were used for.

The slender, somewhat exotic woman selling these items studied Anna, asking, “Have you never seen the power of voodoo magic?”

Anna had never seen a woman such as this one, much less the items she was selling. The woman’s eyes were outlined in black, her cheeks were pink, and her lips looked as though they had been colored red. Anna was fascinated and a bit wary of her.

Before Anna could move away, the woman said. “Look at these candles in the shape of people.” She picked up a red candle in the shape of a nude male. Anna’s eyes grew wide. On the table were male candles in black, green and white. There also were nude figures of women in the same colors.

“These have magic powers if you know how to use them.” She pointed to the bowls of colored sand. “These have powers to bring you what you want.”

Now Anna was frightened. She didn’t want to hear anymore. These items had to be sinful. As she started to walk away, the woman called out to her, “When you know what you want, come back and I can show you how to get it.”

Anna didn’t look back. She just kept walking, wanting to get away from the strange looking woman who made her so uncomfortable.

There were tables of skulls made of clay alongside wooden crosses and statues of saints. “Why were skulls with crosses?”, she wondered.

Tables with wonderful smelling sweets full of pralines and beignets were next to a table displaying shoes and purses. This table caught Anna's full attention. Alongside the table was a rack of what appeared to be women's clothes.

The nicely-dressed, slender woman, her hair back in a bun, was how Anna wanted to look. While the woman was in the midst of wrapping some items for a customer, Anna admired the small purses. Then she went to the rack of dresses. How beautiful they all were!

When the woman was done with her customer, she looked at Anna in her cotton peasant skirt and long-sleeved blouse. The woman, studying Anna, thought to herself, 'She is lovely. I could really make her look wonderful.'

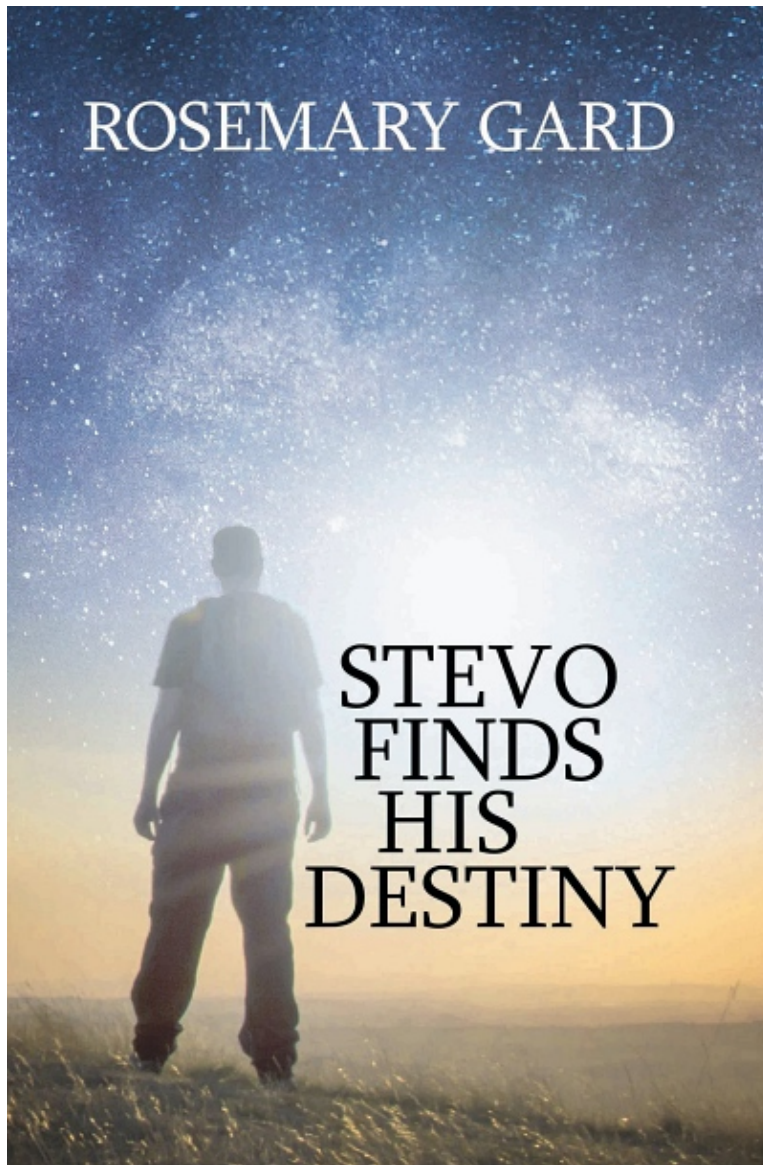
This lady once owned the dress shop that Tomo bought and transformed into Little Zagreb. Being a smart business woman, she had contacted her previous customers letting them know that she would buy any clothes they wanted to dispose of. Of course, at a reasonable price! She was a popular seller at the market.

The lady studied Anna, wondering if the girl was just looking or was a serious buyer. When she saw Anna remove a red outfit from the clothing rack, the woman went into action, saying, "That red outfit would look wonderful on you. With your coloring it would be most attractive." Anna didn't understand what was meant by the word coloring.

The woman held the outfit up against Anna's body, determining that it would fit her. It was red, just like the color worn by the Dalmatcia staff. The flared, ankle-length skirt had a ruffle near the hem. The fitted, long-sleeved blouse had

a peplum at the waist. Anna listened as the woman described how the dress would enhance her already nice figure. Before Anna knew it, she was leaving the market with a dress, a handbag, and a red cloth flower to fasten in her hair.

As Anna was leaving the market, she saw two young men walking past the side of Little Zagreb, going up towards Canal Street. She wondered what was up in that direction.



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