

ROSEMARY GARD



STEVO

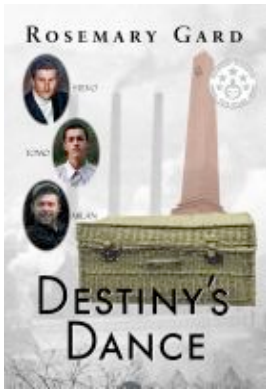
TOMO



MILAN



DESTINY'S
DANCE



The year is 1909. When Ivan accidentally causes the death of a gypsy girl, he and Katya must leave Europe to escape the gypsies' revenge. They settle in Gary, Indiana. Amidst the poor living conditions in the multi-cultural immigrant section of town, they make some good friends, yet Katya is subjected to much unhappiness. Other men pursue her, but she seeks independence. Destiny's Dance is part three of the "Destiny" trilogy.

Destiny's Dance

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DESTINY'S DANCE

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First Edition

CHAPTER 5

As early as the 1820s, Dalmatian seamen began arriving in New Orleans. It wasn't until 1891 that the handsome widower Stevo Markovich arrived in New Orleans on the Falkenhayn, an Austro-Hungarian merchant ship. With him was his ten-year-old son, also named Stevo. No one knows how the senior Stevo was able to bring his son on board the ship. Perhaps he bribed someone, or hid the boy as a stowaway.

Stevo stayed on in New Orleans when the Falkenhayn sailed for South America, working as a longshoreman and later, as an oysterman. He was a blue-eyed man with sandy-colored hair and strong, muscular arms from laboring as a seaman.

Father and son lived in one of the boarding houses in New Orleans. The owner of the house was a woman, born in America of an Italian mother and a French father. She was petite, very pretty with dark eyes. She wore her hair in two braids, pinned so that the braids wound around her head.

Theresa inherited the boarding house from her father, who was found dead in the street of a knife wound. No one was ever arrested for the crime. Her mother had died many years earlier in childbirth. Theresa was not only a hard worker, but clever.

It wasn't long before Theresa and Stevo were attracted to one another. Stevo needed a mother for his son and Theresa was pleased to have a responsible man in the house. A pretty and young woman didn't have much protection without a husband or brothers.

Stevo was 24 years old when his father was buried in an above-ground vault, so common in New Orleans because of the high water level under the city.

There was an impressive attendance at Stevo Markovich's funeral Mass held in St. Ann's, a Catholic church built in 1852. Croatians from other Louisiana parishes, some wearing the colorful clothes from their villages back home, came to honor one of their own. The

procession from the church was accompanied with the beloved tamburitza music.

As was the custom among immigrants, an envelope with money was given to the widow by friends and mourners.

With his father gone, young Stevo was heartsick. Theresa, his stepmother, appeared to handle the accidental death of her husband without a great show of grief. Stevo, on the other hand, was devastated. His father had been helping repair a friend's roof when he fell to his death.

The guilt Stevo felt nearly crushed him. His father had asked him to come and help, but Stevo claimed he had an important errand that afternoon. Perhaps, had he gone to help nail down some tar paper, it may have saved his father's life.

Dressed in rumpled grey trousers and an equally rumpled green shirt, his heart full of grief, Stevo sat on the tiny wrought iron balcony outside the home he shared with Theresa, and two nine-year-old half brothers.

Stevo was handsome and was aware that women stared at him when he passed them on the street. His hair was light brown, almost blond in the sunlight. Deep blue eyes looked out of a face that made women turn and men envy. His nose was straight and his strong chin had a hint of a cleft, his skin was without blemishes.

On the street below, Stevo could hear women under wide straw hats selling baskets of flowers, fruit, or baked goods, calling "Nice oranges for sale." or "Fresh sweet cakes." The sing-song voices of the women were mingled with the clip clop sounds of horse hooves and the shouts of children chasing one another down the street.

A fresh breeze from the Gulf of Mexico drifted through the city.

Stevo stamped out the cigarette he had been smoking, tossing it to the street below. His father had been buried three days ago and Stevo could not bring himself to leave the house. He was numb. He had loved his father so very much. He remembered how his father would not leave him behind with relatives when young Stevo's mother had died. Somehow he got the young boy on the ship to America. They had worked together as fishermen, as handy men, and even at

harvesting oysters. Father and son were as one, almost always together.

As Stevo got older, his father used to ask, "Why you no get married? You are good looking boy. Time you had a home of your own."

Stevo had thought about that often. It wasn't for lack of opportunity or beautiful women. In New Orleans one could choose from many nationalities: German, Croatian, Italian, or Creole. He just wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. He was fairly certain that he didn't want to be a fisherman or a longshoreman. He didn't want to smell of fish and sweat for the rest of his life. Often, while walking through the streets, he admired the colorful shops and wondered if he could ever have a business of his own. What kind of a store would he have? He knew nothing about business, but he was good with figures. He spoke English fluently, and could read and write.

From the balcony, Stevo noticed movement in the adjoining room. Through the closed glass door covered with filmy white curtains, he saw his stepmother seated at a small, kidney-shaped French desk. She wore the customary black clothing of someone in mourning. Stacked on the desk were the many envelopes received at the funeral.

Stevo watched as she placed a wooden Old Cheroots cigar box on the desk. With a knife, she sliced open each envelope, and looked at the money inside. She would smile when the money seemed generous, but smirk when she felt it wasn't enough.

When done separating the money from the envelopes, she put the cash in the Cheroots box. Stevo never knew about this box, so he watched with fascination as she went to the wall, moved a large picture slightly, just enough to reveal a hole in the plaster behind the picture. Theresa placed the box in the opening, positioning the picture as it had been, hiding the hole.

She looked around the room gathering up the empty envelopes. Smiling, she left the room.

Stevo stared for a long time at the picture on the wall. Had his father known about this hiding place? His father brought home the

money when he was paid and gave it to Theresa, assuming she would pay the bills and put what was left in the New Orleans National Bank.

Stevo never felt any motherly warmth or love from Theresa, but she was never unkind. When the twins, Franko and Petro were born, it was as if Stevo did not exist. He assumed her devotion to the boys was because they were so young and he was then, almost an adult. His mind floated back to his own childhood and he wondered if she had ever loved or cared for his father. Bewilderment gave way to a growing mistrust and then, into anger.

Theresa was in the kitchen sitting at the table. Before her was a pot of water ready for the potatoes she was peeling. She looked up at Stevo and wondered about the look on his face, which she couldn't quite read.

She hesitated a moment and then tried to say casually, "So, now that your father is gone, what are your plans?"

The unexpected question made him pause. He stared at her, "What do you mean my plans?"

She kept her eyes on the potato in her hand. "When are you leaving?" She still did not look up at him.

"Leaving? Why should I leave? This has been my home for fourteen years." His voice betrayed his confusion, his anger building. "My father and I have given you our earnings as long as we have been here. This house is as much mine as yours."

Wiping her hands on her apron, she stood up looking directly at Stevo. "This house was left to me by my father. It is in my name. Nowhere does your father's name appear, or yours."

"What about the bank account? His name is there."

With the smallest of smiles playing on her thin lips, she said, "Your father never had any bank accounts."

Stevo's mind was in a whirl. Had his father been so in love with this woman or just naive? It was becoming obvious to Stevo that Theresa was extremely clever and had taken advantage of his father, and of himself.

He asked, "What did my father leave me?"

Her burst of laughter startled him. She said, "He didn't leave you anything. And, don't ask me for money, I don't have anything to give you."

She turned to the sound of sizzling coffee boiling over on the iron stove. Grabbing a towel she removed the pot from the heat. Turning back she saw the anger in Stevo's eyes. Backing away from him, she stood so that the table was between them. She let out a startled scream when he angrily grabbed the table cloth and pulled it roughly sending the potatoes, pot of water, and cutlery crashing to the floor.

Stevo rested his palms on the empty table top. He leaned forward, glaring at the woman who had been his stepmother for fourteen years...now she was a stranger to him.

"I could kill you." His voice shook with dark anger. "But...I won't because you have my half brothers to care for."

Theresa's eyes were wide with fear. "You can stay!" She nearly shouted the words. She tried to smile, but her fear made the effort a contortion of her lips. Words came pouring out of her. She had always been able to control men, but she was terrified of Stevo.

"You are right." her voice disclosed her fear. "This is your home. Forgive me for asking you to leave." Again she repeated, "This is your home. Forgive me."

Theresa stared at his face seeing the blue eyes dark with disgust. She watched him leave the kitchen walking in the direction of his room. With weak knees, she lowered herself on the wooden kitchen chair. She crossed her arms on the table, dropping her head, sobbing with relief.

In his room, Stevo stood at the open window overlooking a gated courtyard where a tulip poplar tree showed off its blooms and the air was sweet with the scents of magnolia, oleander, and jasmine. He inhaled deeply. He needed to calm down...to make plans. His hands trembled slightly as he lit a cigarette. A bookcase stood next to his bed, where a half full bottle of anise-flavored absinthe rested. Not bothering to look for a glass, he pulled out the stopper and took a swig.

He looked around his room, the room where for fourteen years he had lived. The bed was the same wooden, four-poster from his

childhood. Against the wall was a cabinet for his clothes and a plain table he used for writing and reading. No comfortable lounging chair was in the room, just a wooden, straight back chair at the table. A small oval mirror, along with some pictures of far away places decorated the walls.

Looking at these meager surroundings, he wondered why he should stay. Somewhere there had to be something better for him. He pulled up the pillow to cushion his back as he sat on the bed, leaning against the headboard, the absinthe bottle still in his hand. He had to think. The words, *'there is something better'* kept running through his mind.

Sometime later, there was a knock at his door. His young brother Pietro said, "Stevo, Mama has supper on the table. She wants you to come down."

When Stevo didn't answer the boy knocked again. This time Stevo called out, "Tell her I don't want any supper." He added, "Tell her I am not hungry."

So, was stepmama trying to make a truce? He wondered.

Pietro did not reply, but Stevo heard the sound of the boy's footsteps as he walked away.

Later in the night, when the clock chimed eleven times, the house was silent except for the ticking of the clock. Outside a dog barked, a horse whinnied, and the sound of carriage wheels rolling on the pavement could be heard.

Stevo, with the agility of a cat burglar, slipped into the room where earlier, Theresa had counted the funeral money. The floor creaked and Stevo wished he had taken off his shoes. The moonlight through the balcony doors shone brightly enough so that Stevo could see the picture on the wall, the picture covering the hole behind it. Cautiously, he crept to the wall and gently moved the picture, ever so slightly, just enough to find the hole. He reached in and felt the box. Holding his breath he slid it out, careful not to drop it or spill its contents.

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Now was not the time to count what was in it...it didn't matter. What mattered was that he had money, money with which to get away...hopefully far away, up the Mississippi River.

The box containing his clothes, tied with rope, sat outside the kitchen door. As he opened it, Stevo noticed freshly-ironed pillowcases stacked on a chair. He grabbed one of the pillowcases and dropped the cigar box in it.

CHAPTER 15

Emma had accused Ivan of stealing a \$1.85 cot, and then took the box with Stevo's fortune.

Where could she go? Where could she hide from him? How much of a head start did she have? Thoughts crowded one another in his head.

He called aloud, Bobo's name, as he ran towards the barn where the man slept. Inside, he shook the sleeping man, "When did Emma leave?"

Bobo sat up, not fully awake. "Who? What you talking about?"

"Emma! When did Emma leave?" Stevo was shaking the man to waken him fully.

Bobo sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Now awake, he said, "I didn't see her leave. But the light was on till about 9 o'clock. I was surprised to see the house dark."

It was now eleven. Stevo decided she must have gone two hours ago.

To Bobo he said, "Get the buggy. We are going into town...now. Hurry and let me know when you are ready."

Stevo ran back to the kitchen. He pulled open a cabinet door and reached for the brandy. He uncorked the bottle and took a swig. Putting the bottle down, he pressed his hands to his face trying to calm himself. He had to think...think like a woman running away. She wouldn't stay in Gary, he was sure of that. He would find her sooner or later.

Going into his dark store from the kitchen, he found the phone which was on a shelf cut into the wall. The first call he made was to the Chicago, Lake Shore & Eastern Railroad located on 2nd Avenue and Broadway.

"When is the next train to Chicago?" He asked, aware that his voice sounded hoarse.

"Not till tomorrow morning," the voice on the other end replied, "six in the morning."

Stevo thought about this. She had to stay in a hotel until morning. He went through the city guide, reading the names of the hotels on Broadway. Gary Hotel, 6th Ave; West Hotel, 7th Ave; New World Hotel, 11th Ave; Marine Hotel, 9th Ave.

He started with the one closest to the train station. When the night clerk answered the phone at the Gary Hotel, Stevo said, "This is Steve Markovich." He was known as Stevo only in the Patch. "I am going to describe a woman and I would be most appreciative if you could tell me if she checked in there, probably after nine tonight."

John, the night manager, knew who Steve Markovich was and told him, "Yes, a woman of that description checked in, and is here on the 4th floor."

"Thank you, John." said Stevo, "I am on my way. Please be available to go to her room with me."

John, the night clerk, medium build, neatly dressed in a blue suit, blue tie, smiled when he saw Stevo enter the hotel lobby. John was young, smooth-skinned, blond, and blue-eyed, probably of Scandinavian descent.

As Stevo shook the clerk's hand, he slipped John some paper money. Smiling, John said, "Here is the key. She is in room 402."

Stevo said, "Come with me. I want you to remain outside the room."

John nodded. He secretly hoped this encounter would not end up in such a manner that the reputation of the hotel would suffer.

Once at the door of room 402, Stevo, with a nod of his head, indicated that John knock on the door.

"Who's there?" Ema's voice sounded wary.

"Miss, it is the night clerk, John. May I come in?"

"What do you want?"

"I need you to sign the registration card. I know you signed the book, but I also need you to sign the card for our files." he lied.

When she opened the door, Stevo whispered his earlier instructions to John, "Wait out here. Do not leave."

Ema's face went white. She never thought he would find her, or for that matter, that he would look for her. She should have known better. There was a lot of money in the Cheroots box.

In the clean room were a bed, a chair, and a small, mirrored chest for clothes. A kerosene lamp converted to electric, glowed on the dresser.

Stevo pushed her into the chair. She was dressed in a long, yellow crepe dress. She was so frightened that her weak knees let her collapse into the chair.

"What are you going to do to me?" her voice broke. "I promise I will never run away again." Her eyes full of fear, she pointed to her cloth travel bag. "The cigar box is in there."

When Stevo said nothing and made no move to get the cigar box, she said, "I'm sorry. I thought you were going to turn me out." With some optimism she said, "You are here for me. You want me back."

Stevo sat on the bed across from the frightened woman. He studied her for a long time before speaking. "What made you think you could speak to me about Katya the way you did? And...why did you want to lie about Ivan?"

Tears welled in her eyes. "Because I thought we belonged to one another, you and me."

Seeing the surprised look on Stevo's face, she said, "We were as good as married. I kept waiting for you to marry me."

Stevo's jaw dropped. He said, "Why would you think we would marry. You were my housekeeper, nothing more."

When Ema heard those words, the tears rolled down her cheeks. She said in between sobs, "I was a wife to you. I did everything for you. I went nowhere. We made love when you wanted."

Her last sentence hit Stevo like a stone. *Did she think those nighttime visits meant love?*

"Ema..." Stevo wasn't sure how to express his thoughts. "When a man sleeps with a woman, it doesn't always mean love." He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry if you thought we had anything more than an employer/employee relationship, but that is all that it was."

She was crying, "I love you. Isn't it enough that I love you?" Her face was red and tear stained.

Stevo stood, reaching for her cloth travel bag. He took out the Cheroots cigar box, opening it. "How much did you take out of here?" he asked.

She pointed to her purse, "I don't know." She wiped her eyes with her sleeve, "I just took a handful." Quickly she said, "Some of the money is what I saved from my salary."

Stevo dumped her purse out on the bed. He riffled through the contents. Left what he thought was her money and put the rest back in the Cheroots box.

Ema stood, thinking she was going back with Stevo. He studied her for a long moment. He opened the cigar box and took out several paper bills. He dropped them on the bed.

"Goodbye, Ema." He said, walking out the door and out of her life, leaving the bewildered woman standing alone.

There was no conversation on the buggy ride back to the store. Bobo didn't ask about Ema, but he was very curious. From time to time, he glanced at Stevo, who stared straight ahead. The look on Stevo's face disturbed Bobo. He liked Stevo. He worked for him from the time Stevo came to Gary. Now, for the first time, he worried about his boss.

Bobo got out of the buggy and opened the gate. Before he could climb into the rig to drive the buggy in, Stevo had already done so.

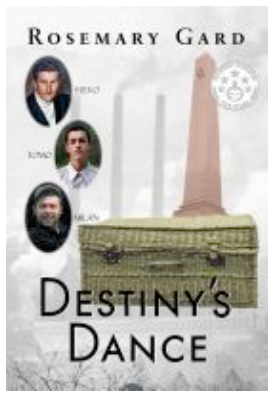
Stevo climbed down without a word, glanced up at the moonlit sky, and turned to go into the kitchen.

"Goodnight." said Bobo, watching his boss slowly walk away.

Stevo, his back to Bobo, said, "I need a new housekeeper." Then he added, "Find me one that doesn't live in. Just to cook and do some cleaning."

Bobo asked, "Does she have to be white?"

"No." said Stevo, going into his dark kitchen.



The year is 1909. When Ivan accidentally causes the death of a gypsy girl, he and Katya must leave Europe to escape the gypsies' revenge. They settle in Gary, Indiana. Amidst the poor living conditions in the multi-cultural immigrant section of town, they make some good friends, yet Katya is subjected to much unhappiness. Other men pursue her, but she seeks independence. Destiny's Dance is part three of the "Destiny" trilogy.

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