

*Sforzando Sentimento for Five Voices in Twenty-one
Parts
A Progressive Story*

FOREWORD

The following 'progressive story' was a 'fun' project tackled by several members of the Faculty Women's Club Creative Writing Group during the Fall and Winter of 2010-11. This is how it worked.

We drew lots to establish an order for the contributions. Norma drew first base, followed by Christine on second, Sara on third, Lynda on fourth, and Marilyn on fifth. We brainstormed a number of possible opening lines, and Norma chose one of these to start the ball rolling with a couple of opening paragraphs.

Norma then sent her opening paragraphs to Christine, who added to them, and passed them along to Sara, who added more, and so on, in round robin fashion. No one knew what anyone else had written until it was their turn; only then did they see how the story had begun rolling out. As each person had her turn, she had to pick up the story from the people who had gone before, using cues already suggested, and adding new elements to move it along while keeping the plot as consistent as possible.

The project proved to be a huge amount of fun, and we all became very engaged, each of us longing to get our next part so we could see how it was shaping up. It brought us a lot of hilarity too, for nobody knew at any one time where on earth the story was going to go! One person might have a certain idea and nudge it in a certain direction, but then the next person might have quite different ideas, so that by the time it came back to the first person, it had moved in a quite other direction from what she had expected. So then she had to go with what other people had done, and take it on yet further, and so it went.

We loved writing this story so much that we want to share it with you. But just to be clear – it was never intended to be high art or great literature! Perish the thought! It was just a fun group project of friendship and laughter. So sit back, suspend disbelief, and enjoy!

The story reproduced here is almost exactly as we wrote it, with all its flaws and inconsistencies! Sara cleaned up the spelling and grammatical errors, made some very minimal editorial changes to tie some minor loose ends, and invented the title. Christine made some further very minor edits, reformatted it and added some pictures for visual appeal.

Sforzando Sentimento for Five Voices in Twenty-one Parts A Progressive Story



*by Norma Gutteridge, Christine Forth, Sara Norquay,
Lynda Neil and Marilyn Gaa*

CHAPTER ONE – OLD MONTREAL

Part 1 (Norma)

As the car rolled to a stop, she buried her face in her hands.

“I’ve got to go through with it,” she told herself, although every nerve in her body rebelled against the idea.

She continued sitting in the car, not daring even to look at the house, keeping her head buried in her hands, and trying not to think at all.

Eventually, she raised her head a little and, turning it slightly to the left, took in the silhouette of the gaunt house set among fir trees in the fading light. It was not an inspiring or cheerful sight. It gave her the horrors, though she knew that was ridiculous.

“I’m being silly,” she thought, yet still she didn’t move.

At last she sat upright and looked the house straight in the eye – or at least focused on the front door. “It’s only a house after all. Houses never hurt anyone unless they

collapse and as that one has been standing here for the last 75 years, it is not likely to collapse tonight.”

She gathered her bag and her scarf from the seat beside her and opened the car door. Just as quickly she shut it again.

“You are being an idiot. It has to be done. Now let’s go and do it.”

She opened the door again, stepped out, and slammed it behind her. Then, gathering up every scrap of courage she had, she walked toward the house.

Part 2 (Christine)

As she walked, she tried to hold her head high and her shoulders back.

“I WILL do this,” she said, and strangely, with this new resolve she already felt her heart beating a little less quickly. She walked up to the gate. It was hanging off its hinge and its paint, which once had been fresh and glossy, was now faded and flaked. Do children still swing on this gate, she wondered. Once through the gate she saw the old apple tree in the southeast corner of the front yard.

“My goodness, it’s still there,” she breathed, her palms beginning to sweat again. It was a little more gnarled and taller now, reaching above the second floor bedroom window, but you could still reach from that window to grab the small, rosy apples.



The flower borders along the front of the house were still there too, but in the cold gray twilight of late Fall, she couldn’t tell if they had been tended – right now they consisted of just brown matted leaves and broken stems.

The house was dark and seemed empty, bereft of any sign of human habitation. Then, as she walked up to the front door, a blazing light suddenly came on, flooding the front porch. She stood transfixed.

Part 3 (Sara)

Wishing the light were not in her eyes, she took a breath of resolve and walked up the steps. She took the doorknocker in her right hand and firmly rapped three times. She listened, then stepped back so she could run if she needed to. Her heart was pounding. She couldn’t help it. Ten seconds passed and nothing happened. She stepped forward and knocked again.

This time she heard music – a few notes played slowly on a violin. They didn’t seem like a recording but live sound coming out from the dark upstairs window. The violinist played a phrase of melody and then stopped. She held her breath, waited and then stepped forward to knock on the door again.

The light went off and the door opened towards her forcing her to retreat. She knew she was mostly afraid of being startled. And she was as an orange cat flashed past her into the shrubbery. She waited a moment longer and then said in firm voice, “Hello?”

Part 4 (Lynda)

As she took another step backwards to accommodate the opening storm door the automatic porch light was again triggered. The brightness temporarily blinded her.

After a few moments she regained her composure and was able to make out a dimly illuminated silhouette in the dark opening. She took a step forward and stood in front of the tall, willowy, silver grey haired figure, covered to the ankles with a sweater draped around the shoulders. The only thing separating them was the cane that was being used to push the door open. A gentle voice, with a hint of an accent, said, “Good evening, how may I help you?”

“I am sorry to bother you at this time, my name is Dominique Tremblay, remember me? I need to speak to Madam Isabelle about an important matter.”

The woman at the door searched her face attentively and pursed her lips. Dominique continued, “I apologize for coming unannounced, but I didn’t know any other way to contact her. Does Madame Isabelle still live here?” As she said this, her right hand slid into her tightly held purse nervously pressed to her chest and fingered the edges of the letter.

Part 5 (Marilyn)

“Madame Isabelle was my teacher, years ago, and I believe that she is the only one I know who could translate this letter from Romanian.”

The woman gestured with her cane saying, “I know who you are. Come dis way. Vait here in the parlor. I vill inform Madame that she has a guest.

“Thank you.”

She sat meekly on a footstool, the letter clutched between her palms. This letter from a foreign lawyer could mean anything. She had to know! Her burning, urgent curiosity led her to the den of “the Dragon Lady”, as she was known in the halls of the high school. Her methods of meting out discipline were almost as fierce as a dragon’s scorching breath.

The ticking of the clock was overcome by another sound, the stern tapping of heels on hardwood. Madame Isabelle filled the doorway with her grand countenance.

Part 6 (Norma)

Madame Isabelle was short in stature but fat, with bulging hips and breasts. Her black hair hung each side of her face in long curly strands. She wore a long, red garment, elasticized at the waist, and trimmed with gold at the neck and sleeves and hem making her look, Dominique thought, like a cheap Christmas cracker. In her right hand she held a violin and bow and she did not look pleased.

“I never expected to see you again, Dominique,” she said, still standing in the doorway. “In fact I know that this house has unhappy memories for you and I thought it was one place where you would never come. You and I do not exactly have a pleasant history together, do we?”



Dominique admitted that they did not. “I am willing to let bygones be bygones if you are,” she said summoning up her courage. Even the sight of Madame Isabelle filled her with unease. “If I knew someone else to turn to who could help me read this letter, believe me I would have gone

to them. But you are the only one I know who not only reads Romanian, but in the Wallachian dialect.”

Madame Isabelle gave a kind of sneer and advanced into the room. She put the violin under her chin and began to play a rousing gypsy melody.

“Stop!” shouted Dominique, unable to bear the thought of anyone in that house playing the violin but Danny, as Madame Isabelle well knew.

To stop her playing, Dominique took the letter out of her purse and waved it under Madame’s nose. She took one look at it and stopped playing abruptly. Putting down the violin and bow on a little side table, she took the letter from Dominique, opened it with distaste, and held it some way from her as she perused its contents. Then her whole frame stiffened.

“My God!” she exclaimed. “I can’t believe it.”

Part 7 (Christine)

Dominique watched Madame’s face turn from white to purple and back to white again. She watched her eyes flicker uneasily about the room, resting finally on the old woman with the cane, dismissing her with a slight shake of her head. The old woman obediently hobbled out, murmuring something about feeding the cat.

Dominique felt a flicker of triumph. Clearly, the letter had unnerved Madame, and she thought she knew why. Aside for her own name, there was one word in the letter that she did understand – the name ‘Daniel’. Was it possible, could it be that this was a reference to Danny, her Danny, that boy from so long ago, the boy with black curls and gypsy eyes, who brought comfort and joy to her cheerless world, and whose lilting violin still haunted her dreams?

She’d never known where he came from, what his connection to Madame’s household was, or where he disappeared to that day, never to be seen again. And how could she know, for she was only the cook’s daughter, living in Madame’s house on sufferance, and subject to Madame’s every whim. Worse, she had no choice but to attend the very school where Madame’s despised presence haunted the halls, and where Madame reserved a particular dislike for her employee’s daughter.

But Danny, Danny – where had he come from, where did he go? Who was he? Dominique only knew him as the gardener’s boy, a kind and gentle boy whose playing turned her tears to smiles. Did this strange letter somehow contain news of Danny? Was it possible, after all these years?

She looked at Madame’s ghostly face, her darting eyes. Her memory of Danny gave her courage, as if his spirit had entered her. She pulled herself up to her full height. Even though Madame was already short and fat, she looked even more diminished, and ridiculous, like a painted garden gnome. Dominique was no longer afraid.

“Tell me, Madame Isabelle. WHAT DOES THE LETTER SAY?”

Part 8 (Sara)

After a long pause, Madame Isabelle looked up and said, “I am under no obligation to tell you what is in this letter, Dominique, but because it is addressed to you, I will make a written translation and send it to your hotel or wherever you are staying.”

Madame Isabelle's face twitched as though to smile, and then called out, "Clara, bring supper to the library, please."

Then, managing a weak smile, she said "Won't you stay for a little refreshment before you go, Dominique?"

Dominique looked hard at Madame Isabelle. Does she take me for a fool, she thought and reached out her hand to take back the letter.

"I prefer not to leave the letter with you. A rough verbal translation is all I need." Then when Madame Isabelle did not hand her the letter, she said, "Perhaps you could tell me what it says after supper."

Madame Isabelle tucked the letter into her skirt and left the room, forcing Dominique to follow her.

Part 9 (Lynda)

Although the impulse to obediently follow was overwhelming, Dominique paused. She had become conscious of how vulnerable she was to be pulled into Madame's vortex of madness for power and control. After Danny's mysterious departure, this house had become a prison for her. At her first opportunity after finishing high school she had fled. Her natural talent and passion for cooking enabled her to work and get further training as a chef. She worked and traveled internationally and her new life was a series of unfolding adventures and exotic experiences.

Yet, despite her growing confidence and accomplishments, whenever she thought of Madame and her past life here, she was unable to make peace with a dark void within herself. Even now thinking about it, she felt a cold, dark hardness within, as if something was encased in steel. She was never able to figure it out. Was it an unclaimed part of herself wanting to come home? Perhaps it was the result of undiscernibly interwoven events. A more troubling reality for her was the fear that if she was not able to unravel her Gordian Knot, one of her escalating panic attacks might crush and destroy her.

As Madame left the room, with the letter, Dominique was distinctly aware of a deep and abiding anger projected onto this woman. She stood there pondering the reality confronting her. It was as if she had woken from a dream when her car rolled to a stop. Her newfound courage of the previous moment was being diminished with a growing fear of an impending doom.

Dominique had anticipated that Madame would toy with her about the letter. Although by now she must know that a photocopy of the original was safely hidden away. Why the charade? What mysteries would be revealed with its translation? Would things be resolved or become complicated? What should she do?



Part 10 (Marilyn)

The dining room was furnished with Victorian draperies, and linens in rich earth tones. Dusk cast shadows through the palm near the window. Clara ladled a thick, meaty soup into two broad, shallow bowls, and crusty bread was piled in a basket. Dominique put her napkin in her lap and sat at attention until Madame took up her spoon. The soup was comforting and

familiar, her mother's recipe from years ago, a remnant of the past to give her courage. This was a weekday meal, intended for one. Why had she been invited to stay?

Polite inquiries about how each diner had spent the last eight years revealed Madame's slow decline into old age and Dominique's rise in her profession. Both women were single and alone, but there the similarity ended.

After a pause, Dominique began cautiously, but soon the questions tumbled out. "I have always wondered how Danny came to live in the household. Was the gardener really his father? Have you had any contact with him since he left? Is he alive?"

Madame Isabelle set her spoon down with a thump.

"You are still curious, to a fault! I suppose it was your curiosity that brought you here today. It is beyond me why a Romanian lawyer would have written to you, a mere girl. I should have been the one to receive this letter, as I was his guardian and benefactor."

Surprise and puzzlement registered on Dominique's face.

Buttering some bread, Madame's face softened.

"His full name was Daniel Barbulescu and he was my great-nephew. After my sister died, the orphaned boy was shipped to me like an awkward parcel from Romania. Not inclined to be motherly, I thought it would be better for him, at the age of 12, to be a companion and helper to Henry, the bachelor gardener. I would have paid him no more attention had it not been for his obvious musical talent, so much like my sister, Theresa."

Madame buttered her bread thoughtfully.

"My goodness! You might guess that I have few visitors, the way I have gone on and on. You came about the letter, and not to visit with an old widow."

"Yes... about the letter. I have to know: is he alive?"

Part 11 (Norma)

Madame Isabelle's face showed her inner struggle as she debated whether to answer this question. Dominique saw it and waited quietly for the decision to be made. She knew from past experience that Madame was not good at keeping secrets.

"Daniel is alive, Dominique. He is second violin in the George Enescu Philharmonic in Bucharest." Madame Isabelle brought this out in a rush as though afraid that she might change her mind before the words were out of her mouth. "He wants to see you. Apparently he has something to tell you."

Dominique sat without moving for several seconds, her spoon raised to her lips, her mouth open in amazement. Finally she returned the spoon to the dish without consuming its contents.

"Alive!" she shouted triumphantly. "Danny is alive and well and living in Bucharest. Oh thank you Madame Isabelle. You could not have said anything to make me happier. And he wants to see me too?"

Madame's face became serious. "I don't know about well," she said. Then she forced a smile. "But he does want to see you. Now drink up your soup, Dominique. It's getting cold. After supper, I will read the letter to you word by word. You may write down the translation as I go."

Anxious for that moment, Dominique drank her soup hurriedly. Then, as she reached for another piece of bread, she felt a strange drowsiness creeping through her

body. A thought struck her and she managed to look up at Madame Isabelle just in time to see a victorious smile spreading across her tormentor's face before the room faded and she lost consciousness.

Part 12 (Christine)

Dominique woke to a blinding headache. Her mind was a fog. She opened her eyes – blackness. Had she gone blind? Something was cutting into her wrists – she tried to pull her hands away, and realized her wrists were bound with some kind of thin wire, like the spent strings of a violin. Where was she? She began to remember – the dinner with Madame, how the old woman had suddenly become so friendly and accommodating, telling her that Danny was alive and wanted to see her. The soup! How foolish she'd been to have trusted Madame Isabelle so quickly. How foolish to imagine the woman's sudden change of heart had in fact come from the heart; Madame Isabelle had always been a calculating, duplicitous woman, and she'd duped her and abused her again, just as she had when she was a child. Could she even now believe any of the things Madame had told her about Danny?

Dominique realized she was sprawled on the floor, her back against a wall. What was this dark place? Her head began to clear. She struggled to her knees and shuffled around, the wire cutting deep into her wrists, to ascertain the dimensions of the room she was in. She'd gone no further than a foot when she hit a wall. She twisted her body to the right – another wall. To the left – another wall. Then it dawned on her and she felt the old panic rising. Her mind flashed back to her childhood. The broom cupboard! Now rationality gave way to blind terror as she relived the many times Madame had used this favourite childhood punishment on her. Please, please, she moaned, not the broom cupboard! Anything but the broom cupboard! She began to cry, softly at first, then loudly, hysterically, banging on the door with her bleeding wrists, screaming "Let me out! Let me out!" She was crying so hysterically that she did not hear the clump, clump of limping footsteps coming to the door, and the click of the latch, the squeak as the doorknob turned, and the creak of the door as it opened. She felt a hand on her arm, and began crying and shaking even more as she waited to see what further punishments Madame had in mind for her. But the hand on her arm was gentle, and the voice that was speaking was soft, with a strange accent she couldn't quite place. She opened her eyes slowly.

"Clara!" she exclaimed.

"Now stop dis crying, young lady, or I vill not untie your wrists. You must be quiet now. And ve must get you out of dis house before de police come."

"The police? What are you talking about?"

"Dere has been ah....an unfortunate accident."

"What do you mean? What's happened?"

"Madame Isabelle. She's dead. An accident of course." Clara had a sly smile on her face as she said this. "I vas careless enough to leave my cane on de floor at the top of de basement stairs." She looked suddenly pensive, "If only she vash't so fat. She couldn't see her feet, you see. So she slipped and tumbled down de stairs. Yes.....very unfortunate. An accident, of course."

As Clara untied her wrists and rubbed the skin, Dominique digested this information with a fury of mixed emotions. Why was Clara protecting her? What was her interest in the affair? And could it really be true that Madame was lying crumpled and dead at the bottom of the basement stairs?

“But I was too late to save de letter,” Clara continued, “She burned it last night. But I know enough about vat vas in it to know that you must leave, and go straight to Bucharest; it is imperative you get there before it’s too late. And you must take this package with you.” Clara pushed a brown paper package, neatly wrapped and sealed, into Dominique’s hands. “Don’t let it out of your sight. Come now. I vill be calling the police about the accident. I am an old woman. I have lived here a long time. They vill just put it down to an unfortunate accident.”

Clara, who appeared now to be quite sprightly on her feet, pulled Dominique out of the cupboard and pushed her out of the front door. There was her car, still waiting outside the house. Dominique stood on the doorstep, bewildered, a little foggy, holding the package Clara had given her, trying to decide whether to go or insist on staying to question Clara further.

“Go, go,” said Clara and pushed the front door closed.



CHAPTER TWO – BUCHAREST



Part 13 (Sara)

Before she drove away, Dominique made an anonymous phone call to the police so Madame’s death would not go unnoticed. Whatever happened, she would deal with Clara when she returned.

Getting to Bucharest was more time consuming and more complicated than Dominique could have imagined. Madame had given her only one clue as to where Danny might be found and she had hinted he wasn’t well.

Dominique opened the package Clara had given her. Many pages of handwritten music manuscript were tightly rolled together. Dominique opened the pages carefully. They would need to be flattened or eventually they would break. The composition appeared to be a violin concerto, but the composer's name was absent. This was certainly a mystery that Danny would be able to solve.

Her flight arrived in Otopeni from Paris late in the afternoon. She took a Fly Taxi into Bucharest, an 18 km ride, and was dropped off at the Hotel Calea Victoriei Residence where she registered, changed her dress and went immediately out to the Romanian Athenaeum to buy a ticket for that evening's Beethoven concert. She hoped Danny would be playing and she would surprise him at the stage door after the performance.

She was hungry, so purchased her ticket and then stood in a coffee bar nearby, drank an espresso and ate a slightly stale sandwich. She made it to her seat just as the lights dimmed and the concertmaster strode onstage.

The house was pretty crowded with only a few seats vacant. Dominique searched the musicians' faces playing in the second violin section. From her vantage point, she thought none of them looked like the Danny she remembered. The conductor made his entrance and the crowd cheered. Then as he raised his arms, silence fell over the audience.

At intermission she hurried to the stage door and asked to speak to Daniel Barbulescu. The man at the door let her in and asked her to wait while he disappeared into the wings. She looked around at the black and white photos on the wall. The artists who had performed here since the early part of the 20th century came from around the world. There was a photo of Danny when he was very young standing beside and looking up at a dark-haired violinist dressed as a gypsy. He probably was a gypsy. Oh, and judging from the signature, the gypsy was his father. Dominique smiled. Danny's father was a well-known gypsy violinist. And behind them stood Madame Isabelle. No, not quite. Madame's sister? Dominique was startled by the doorman's voice. "The person you wish to see is not here."

"He plays in the orchestra, doesn't he?"

"He no longer plays here."

"Do you know where I can find him?" Dominique could feel a fog of anxiety settle in her mind. "It's very important that I find him. I've come a long way and at his request."

"You could try the Ferentari, the gypsy enclave, but you cannot go there at night. It's not safe for people like you."

Dominique thanked him and went back to her hotel. She felt she couldn't afford to wait for something to happen. She needed to act. She changed her clothes again, pulling on slacks, a sweater and good walking shoes. She put some money and a credit card into her pocket, the manuscript into a bag, and headed downstairs to hail a taxi. Despite the theatre doorman's warning, she was going to the Ferentari tonight.

Part 14 (Lynda)

She darted out the hotel doors into the dark night. There was no moonlight to guide her steps, as the rain moistened her face. As she reached the curb she threw out her right arm to hail a taxi and then stopped abruptly in her tracks as she felt a hand lightly touch her shoulder and a gentle voice whispered, "Madame." She cautiously turned

around to meet the concerned eyes of the same man she had spoken to at the stage door. He was dressed as the doorman for the hotel. He was looking intently at her.

“Madame, do not go to the Ferentari alone tonight. You cannot find the person you search for. If anything happens to you, your friend will feel responsible. I know the Ferentari well. Tomorrow I can take you there myself.”

Dominique stood transfixed as she gazed into his eyes and contemplated the offer. His dark eyes and the gentle voice calmed her impulsive spirit. She caught her breath and thought about the last time she was faced with a dangerous dilemma, to leave Madame’s home or follow her into the Library for dinner. She knew that her impulsiveness complicated matters. What tangled web of intrigue was now being spun? Perhaps deductive reasoning instead of blind passion might achieve better results in this foreign city.

The man introduced himself as Azure and suggested that she go back into the hotel and over a warm beverage think over his offer. He wanted her to understand that his intentions were honourable. He reached out and offered her his gloved hand, escorted her back into the security of the hotel and led her over to a secluded part of the lobby.

There he sat her by a warm fire and motioned for the waiter. The waiter suggested some spiced hot chocolate, with some pastries to warm her. As she settled herself into the comfortable armchair she thought to herself, he knows the Ferentari well; perhaps he would be able to further translate her photocopied letter written in the Wallachian dialect? All of the excitement of the day caught up with her and in the dimly lit room, the warmth of the fire in the grate relaxed her and as she securely held her bag to her chest, memories of the past filled her mind. She also had an eerie feeling that Danny’s spirit was in the room with her. This caused her to debate in her mind, whether she had an over active imagination or was simply suffering from exhaustion. Ever since she had received the letter, she had been having disturbing dreams and flashbacks. They had become increasingly difficult to push out of her consciousness making it impossible for her to concentrate at her work. She had even lost her appetite finding that the sight of food made her nauseous. What had provoked Madame Isabelle to drug her? Is Madame really dead or is she involving Dominique in some sinister plot? The mysterious letter and Daniel’s urgent request to see her obsessed Dominique.

Now, in the safety of this room she began to recall fonder memories. In her mind she could hear him playing a haunting gypsy melody on the violin, which held her spellbound as it always had when she heard him play. The two of them, as children, became inseparable soon after they first met. Although he was a few years older than her, in their innocence they were not conscious of the changes that were taking place as they grew up. She was not aware of when exactly her feelings changed and she felt strangely drawn to him. When they were together she hung onto his every word, as if nothing else existed. How handsome he looked as he played. The perspiration ran down his face and the smell of his sweat inflamed her nostrils those hot summer evenings. She had felt the heat rising within her; a shortness of breath and suddenly aware of her budding breasts pressing against her cotton blouse as she breathed deeply. He would look down at her fondly as he played his violin. He said he was composing music for her. Had he realized the effect he was having on her?



Her last memories of him were of him playing their secret melody. As he was carefully putting his violin and bow in their case, he gently brushed against her arm. She felt faint and experienced a tingling sensation, never again to be duplicated by a lover. She remembered it was only ten years ago that Madame had burst into the room and sternly ordered her to return to her duties. Madame's voice startled her into reality. She had bolted from her chair, similar to the one she was now nestled in. As she passed through the door she had only intended to glance back. Their eyes locked. She never forgot his deep penetrating dark eyes and the warm sensation she felt in her body. It was as if each of their souls had become metaphysically connected forever.

She awoke with a start and for a moment forgot where she was. After regaining her composure she turned to her right and found upon the small end table, a tray with the hot chocolate and gourmet pastries that she requested. It was a presentation that she could imagine making herself. It was in stark contrast to the stale sandwich she had demolished earlier, eating to survive. The aroma was intoxicating; it even gave her an appetite. As she reached for the cloth napkin and pulled it from the tray, the concealed envelope emerged. She gasped. Why did it look familiar? Although her drink had cooled, she hungrily drank it and ate the delicious food. The waiter observed that she was nearly finished and inquired if she was satisfied with his selection and if she desired anything else.

“Another drink please. What made the chocolate so delicious?”

He replied, “Paprika! We put paprika in everything. In our beverages, on the vegetables, meat dishes, even cologne.”

They both laughed. He returned to the kitchen after she motioned for him to leave the tray. When she was alone she slowly reached for the wax sealed envelope and then with both hands held it on her lap.

Part 15 (Marilyn)

Dominique made her way down the narrow passageway to her room, opened her thick door with the heavy brass key. The privacy of a softly lit bedroom enclosed her. She sank into the velvet armchair and opened the sealed note with interest.

Dear Ms. Tremblay,

Sorry for my English. I think you search for Daniel Barbulescu. You ask for him at the theatre. He is my friend. I told you look in the Ferentari because he lives there, but he is not there now. He spoke of a foreign woman in his past, perhaps you? If so, go to the city hospital near the hotel. He is very bad.

Please excuse. Azure (hotel doorman)

Her body folded over the crumpled letter, moaning softly, and tears fell. “Oh Danny” she muttered, “I must see you before it is too late, I can't bear to lose you now.”

She gazed out of the window overlooking the street, and the illuminated “H” for hospital appeared as a beacon hope.

As the first rays of dawn broke through her curtains, Dominique sprang from her bed, “Jetlag, be damned!” Hurriedly, she dressed and snatched a bun and a sip of tea from the tray in the lobby before she ran to the hospital. Tucked into her satchel was the letter that launched her journey, and the parcel, entrusted to her by Clara.

Inside the heavy glass doors, the smell of antiseptic, the clatter of busy orderlies, and the jumble of unfamiliar language momentarily dazed her. So close to her goal, she pressed the information clerk for assistance. Remembering to speak slowly and clearly, Dominique asked to see Mr. Daniel Barbulescu.

The frowning attendant hesitated, "He is in critical condition and may only see family members."

Dominique blurted out, "I am his sister from abroad, I have traveled all night to see him before it is too late!"

With a sigh, the attendant led her through corridors into the bowels of the hospital. Suddenly, she was in the doorway, paralyzed by emotion. Her lovely Danny, a grown man with the same unruly dark curls lay sleeping peacefully, oblivious to the monitors, tubes and charts. Slowly, she approached the bed, and instinctively took his hand: warm and soft, with the calluses of a musician. His dark lashes fluttered and their eyes met.

"You came..."

"Yes, Danny, I had to see you..."

"The letter..."

"Yes, a long story, a long journey." She briefly recounted all that had happened since she'd arrived at Madame Isabelle's house. "I am here with you now. You must get well, what are the doctors doing? Are you in pain? Can I get you something?"

Daniel signed and cleared his throat. "Don't be upset. There is nothing you can do. I have a brain tumor. They will operate tomorrow. I might live, I might die. This could be my last day on earth. It is a dream, that I can spend it with you. Don't cry, don't spoil the time we have."

"When I got the diagnosis, I went to a lawyer to write a will. He offered to find family members to be notified, in case... but there is...only you. I asked him to find you now, so that we could meet again. Did you bring the music?"

"Yes, right here." She patted her satchel. "I went to see Madame Isabelle to translate the letter. I only faced her because I saw your name in the Romanian text. She hasn't changed, maybe even more fierce and wicked. In spite of her, I am here! Your friend Azure helped me. Now, I am here with you! This is our day!"

A crooked smile crossed Daniel's face. Dominique noticed other signs of the tumor's toll. He assured her that he felt no pain. At first, friends asked him why he was limping. Finally, alarmed by numbness on his left side, he sought a doctor because his music suffered.

"They don't know if it is cancer. My doctor is hoping he can remove the tumor and restore my abilities. The risks are high, but what choice do I have? Without music, my life is ended, even if I go on living." With his right hand, he reached out to grasp hers.

Part 16 (Norma)

It was two days before Dominique was allowed to talk to Danny again. Fortunately the tumor was benign and he was out of intensive care 48 hours after surgery. He kept up the fiction of her being his sister and continually demanded to see her, so eventually she was admitted to his ward.

"I can concentrate better now on what you told me," he said almost as soon as she reached his bedside.

He looked pale and had a large dressing over his crown but was otherwise alert and had something of the old Danny's spark. She resisted her impulse to throw her arms around him, mindful of the fact that she was his "sister," and sat down on the one chair by the bed, as he began to pour out his story.

"Now... listen... carefully," he began, his English a little rusty having not used it much in the years he had lived in Romania. "Do not believe that Madame Isabelle is dead. She and Clara are in close relationship. Never would one kill the other. They are playing a deep game."

"Why then did Clara release me, after Madame had drugged and imprisoned me?"

"They decided to get you out of Canada. It was better than to have a dead body they had to explain to authorities. Clara got rid of you quick, was it not so?"

"Yes, she hustled me out of the house."

"Ahh," he said with deep satisfaction. "Here is my story. After Second World War, there was a great displacement of persons in Eastern Europe as the Russians advanced. My grandfather's family was persecuted oh so many times here in Romania because they were Romani. They sneaked over the border and joined with crowds of refugees fleeing to the west.



We had here a great Romani violinist -- Arturo -- he was also a composer, but he never wrote his music down. He could make a fortune if he published with a big international company, but he did not know how to write music. He loved giving people music for dances to forget sorrows, but he told my grandfather that he got a music professor to write down his music as he played. Took a long time, but several pieces got written.

He gave the manuscript to my grandfather to take west to get published and send the money back to Romania. My grandfather took the music with him but sadly the family ended up in a large refugee camp. Madame Isabelle and her sister Juliana were teenagers also in the camp. Juliana and my grandfather got married and my father was born in the camp. Madame Isabelle fluttered her eyes at a Canadian soldier guarding the camp and he got her to Canada. She was cunning and clever and got a university education there in Canada, while my grandma and grandpa were sent back to Rumania in 1947. Before Isabelle left the refugee camp, my grandfather gave her Arturo's music to get published in the west, but this never happened. Isabelle also played the violin and in Canada passed off the music as hers."

Dominique remembered the lively piece Madame Isabelle had played when Dominique had gone to see her. There had been something so sprightly and yet elegant in the melody that it had made her want to dance even though she was wary and frightened.

"Did Madame Isabelle make a lot of money from the music? And why did she give me this parcel of manuscript. Is it the music Arturo wrote?"

"Yes, she made money. It paid for the school where you, my dear, suffered so much. And yes, I think it is Arturo's original manuscript written by the professor. The music is now in thousands of copies. She no longer needs the original manuscript so she sent it back to me. I will take it to the Ferentari as soon as I am out of hospital. Azure will

drive us. We must get Arturo recognized as the composer of this music in Romania and in the world, even though he is long dead.

“Grandma brought me up because my mother died when I was born. My father told me about Arturo’s music and taught me to play the violin as he and grandfather did before me. Grandma sent me to Canada as soon as I was old enough to travel by myself to get the music back because it belongs in Romania. Madame Isabelle treated me like a servant, made me the gardener’s boy, though I was her great-nephew. She said the original music was lost. She taunted me that everyone believed she wrote it.

“I saved enough to come back to Romania. I ran away and came here on a ship from Montreal to France, and walked through Europe on foot. Many months it took. Always I wanted to go back for you, but . . . when I think I will die, I send the letter to you through a lawyer. I had to see you one last time.”

“Well, you’re not going to die, Danny. You are going to get better, and we’ll see that Madame Isabelle doesn’t get away with saying that music is hers.”

He smiled at her. “Now you are here, I can do anything,” he said.

Ten days later they set off to the Ferentari camp with Azure driving, the music carefully stowed in Danny’s knapsack. He also took his violin.



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#### *Part 17 (Christine)*

As they drove, Dominique thought about the overwhelming news she’d received over the last few days. Her head was still spinning with it all, still trying to process what it meant. The information had unfolded slowly, as Danny gained his strength day by day, and Dominique sat holding his hand at his bedside.

As soon as Danny had been well enough to sit up, Dominique pulled out the photocopied letter from the lawyer. She still didn’t know what was in it, and couldn’t wait any longer to beg Danny to translate it for her. She laid it out on Danny’s bed. There at the top was the lawyer’s name and address, and the brief introductory paragraph, typed in poor English that she’d already read:

*Dear Miss Tremblay,*

*Letter below have important information for you. Please keep safe. Take many photocopies. We happy to help you more if need. Please to contact our office in Bucharest. Yours etc.*

That part had always been clear. But the attachments to the letter consisted of several pages of closely handwritten text, in a spidery hand, in the Wallachian dialect.

Danny looked at her, squeezed her hand.

“Prepare yourself for a shock. For me, it was a shock when I found out. It took many years to find answers. I asked many questions of my people, over and over,” he said, “And how many times I wrote to Isabelle, begging for answers, and asking about you. But never did she reply. All I had were my memories and my music. Remember how I used to play for you, remember the one we called our ‘secret melody’? Before I left Canada, I

found the original music for that piece, hidden away in Isabelle's bedroom. Then I knew she lied about the manuscript being lost. I realized then I had to leave, go back to Romania to find the answers to all my questions. And now, at last, I know. Now I have the answers."

"Yes, tell me, Danny, tell me. Start with the letter."

"All right. Do you remember Isabelle ever talking about her sister Theresa?"

"Theresa? But I thought you said her sister's name was Juliana, your mother?"

"Yes she was. But there was another sister, Theresa. A violinist. Oh, they say she played like an angel."

Dominique thought hard and suddenly remembered. Yes, Isabelle had mentioned Theresa that day when Dominique had gone to the house about the letter. She'd mentioned that the only reason she kept Danny was because of his musical talent, 'so much like my sister, Theresa' she'd said. Dominique had assumed that Theresa had been Danny's deceased mother.

"This letter was written by Theresa. I told you it was from me because that was easier until you knew whole story. But I hired a lawyer, a Romani lawyer, to do detective work. He found Theresa, and got her to write this letter. Then I got sick, and the lawyer thought it best to send it quickly to you exactly as she had written it."

"She's still alive?"

"She is. The lawyer found her down at Ferentari. She is very old and sick. She is fading, but her memory is still sharp. This is what she says." Dominique held her breath, as Danny began to translate, struggling a little to render the dialect into English.

**I am Theresa Vasilescu. I am of sound mind, and I now tell world, and this lawyer that my sister Isabelle is an evil woman. She mistreated my great-nephew Daniel, and she stole Arturo's music and claimed it as her own, and made money from it. I say now. I put Romani curse on Isabelle....**

Dominique couldn't help smiling. "Wow, a curse," she murmured, "no wonder Isabelle turned purple when she saw the letter."

Danny looked up. "Don't joke about Romani curse," he said sharply, "that is serious." He continued.

**...I put a Romani curse on Isabelle and I tell the world what a thief she is. I have many witnesses who know she is a thief. The lawyer knows and he now prepares to prosecute her under the law. Interpol already knows.**

**I say now in my will, that the rightful owner of the music is me, and when I die the sole and rightful heir to all I own is Miss Dominique Tremblay....**

Dominique gasped. “How, what...?” she could only splutter.

Danny looked up from the letter.

“It’s all in here,” he said, “and it took me years to discover everything. Remember I told you Theresa was a violinist. Well, she came to that refugee camp with Isabelle and my grandfather, and later there was another person there too.

“Who, who?”

“Arturo. Arturo Vasilescu.”

“The composer of the music?”

“The same. Theresa and Arturo fell in love in that refugee camp. They played his music together. They were married by a Catholic priest. She has the marriage certificate to prove it.” He continued translating.

**Arturo and I made beautiful music together. And we made a beautiful baby too. A girl. But what I can do? A refugee camp is no place for a baby, so I gave my baby to my sister, Isabelle, to take to Canada, to make a better life. But she abused my child, and she abused my husband’s music, that my brother gave her. He trusted her, she abused his trust. She made the music her own. With money from Arturo’s music she bought a big house for a school. She made my child cook and clean for her school.**

Dominique looked up at Danny. She was confused. Danny took her hand.

“Dominique, that baby was your mother. Isabelle raised her, made her the cook. Your mother had no choice – she was always made to feel obligated to Isabelle, enslaved by her. Isabelle never stopped reminding her that it was she who brought her to a better life. Without her, your mother would have died in that camp, she said. But your mother didn’t know about the music. Isabelle never told her.”

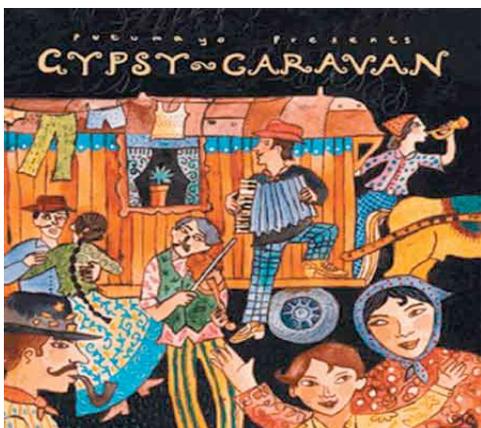
“And so Theresa is...”

“Your grandmother.”

“And Arturo, the composer...”

“Is your grandfather. When Theresa dies you will be the sole heir to the Vasilescu family, and the direct descendent of Arturo Vasilescu, the great Romani composer.”





As they set out for the Ferentari, Dominique was filled with excited anticipation, but also apprehension. She would soon meet a Gypsy grandmother she hadn't known existed, and Gypsy relatives she never knew she had. How would they receive her? She'd always thought of gypsies as closed, clannish people who were suspicious of outsiders. Yet these same people were now her people. And then there was the prospect of setting things right over the ownership of the music – no doubt she might have a protracted court battle to look forward to, but she knew she had the law on

her side; if nothing else, the marriage certificate of Theresa and Arturo was proof enough.

Soon, under the influence of the car's soft hum, she began to get drowsy, and her mind drifted. She'd learned more than she ever thought possible over the last ten days, and yet there were still some puzzles, some threads to the story that she didn't understand. She hadn't wanted to bother Danny with too many unanswered questions – he was still weak and tired easily. But there were some that kept bothering her.

For example, who exactly was Clara? How did she fit into the picture? And was she truly in deep with Isabelle, as Danny said, or had she actually redeemed herself by helping Dominique? Danny said he doubted Isabelle was dead, and doubted that Clara would ever cause her death. Danny was convinced they were both evil. But one thing that bothered Dominique was the soup. She remembered that Clara served the soup from a single tureen in the dining room. Which meant that if her soup was drugged then so was Isabelle's, and it must have been Clara who drugged them both. Was that possible? And after all, Clara had given her the manuscript and sent her to Romania – surely she must have realized Dominique would seek answers once in Romania. Well, she'd probably have to wait till she got back to Canada to find out if Isabelle was really dead and whether Clara was really friend or foe. At least, she remembered, she'd made that phone call to the police, so they would have a record.

And then there was Azure. She watched him as he drove, his hands firmly on the wheel, his eyes looking straight ahead. Was he just a good and loyal friend, who wanted to help his people? Or was there something else about him, something she couldn't quite put her finger on. Oh, all this intrigue was probably making her imagine conspiracies where none existed! But there was that note he left her in the hotel that had made her feel quite odd. There was something about that note that seemed familiar. Was it just the handwriting? Or something else? Oh, it was all just too confusing.

She was still musing these questions as she dozed off. But she dozed off with a deep sense of contentment. She had no doubt now that with Danny by her side she would soon have the answers to all these lingering questions.

### *Part 18 (Sara)*

Dominique woke up the instant she heard the window break. She was thrown forward, then back, and saw Azure slumped in the front seat, his head thrown back and

bleeding. She instinctively ducked down behind the seat and listened. No sound other than the wind and the rain. Danny quietly opened the door on his side and crept out of the car. He looked around and then motioned for her to exit the car quietly and crouch down. In a few minutes they were inside a dilapidated hallway and could stand up.

“Where are we?” asked Dominique.

Danny put his finger to his lips indicating that they shouldn’t talk, took her hand and led her up some crumbling steps to a rusting iron gate, walking slowly and quietly. He slipped his hand through the bars of the gate and lifted the latch. They moved through without a sound and entered a sort of terrace where a number of doors presented themselves. Without hesitating, Danny opened the one farthest to the right, pulled Dominique inside, closed it behind them, and stood listening.

Suddenly, a shriek of anger could be heard above them. There was a sound of scuffling and a loud thump and then silence. Danny let go of Dominique’s hand and raced towards the stairs leading to the second floor. Dominique followed close behind. What they found when they entered the room was terrible.

Two bodies were lying on the floor: one was Clara, the other... “Theressa!” breathed Danny. Beside them was a gypsy knife covered in blood. Danny fell to his knees beside Theressa. He checked to see if she was alive. When he found no pulse, he looked at Clara with what Dominique would describe later as searing hate. Clara’s eyes stared at the ceiling, her chest seemed to be moving at least for a moment, but then death claimed her as well.

Dominique started to shake. She looked at her grandmother in disbelief. This wasn’t the happy ending she’d imagined.

### *Part 19 (Lynda)*

Dominique moved closer to sit on the floor next to her grandmother and gently held her limp left hand in hers as if to warm it. Tears welled up in her eyes, and then ran down her face dropping to the ground and splashing into the blood pooling on the floor. Neither Dominique nor Danny made any attempt to comfort each other. Dominique was not crying solely for Theressa, but for all of these people her life had become entangled with. She knew there was no way for her to comprehend the memory of the terror that continued to scar the surviving victims of the war, the fascists, the communist police, and the corruption of the ruling family who had stripped the people of their dignity and possessions for their own personal gain. She could not imagine what life in a refugee camp would have been like, the starvation and appalling living conditions. Even in Danny, who had never lived in either the luxury of Romania’s past or in a refugee camp, she saw hatred when he looked at Clara. It sent a chill through her body. There seemed to be no room for forgiveness, only a desperate clinging onto the wreckage of life and an obsession to possess a music manuscript. Lost long ago, was the spirit of the melodies that brought joy to the composer and those who heard them. The portal of sounds that once helped them to transcend their misery long ago seemed to have become a customized personal hell.

She wanted to get away from the envy, jealousy and hatred she’d seen in others, since she received the letter. The fact of her ancestry was made worse because in one way or another everyone seemed to be related by crime. She felt trapped. All her life she had hoped to be part of a family, having never known her father. Her mother had refused to

speak of the past. They had shared a passion for cooking and she loved her dearly, even now. With her grandmother killed, she felt alone, isolated, and wanted to be free of all this misery. Instinctively she knew it was dangerous to stay here. Who could she trust? Despite her disgust she wanted to find help.

After Dominique regained her composure she quietly stood up, picked up Danny's knapsack and walked out of the door and made her way back to the car where they had left Azure. Danny did not move. When she made it back to Azure she found him with a blanket draped over his shoulders sitting on a large rock next to the road. Blood was still oozing from his head where he hit it on the side of the rearview mirror. The white bandana he tied around his head to stop the bleeding was drenched with congealed blood. Although she was relieved to find him alive, she was still suspicious of him.

"Lousy roads," he said. "The rain made it worse." He looked down at the mud all over his boots.

"Who are you really?" she asked sternly while making a fist with her right hand and positioning it in front of her. "Why, ever since I arrived in Bucharest, do you keep showing up? At the concert hall, on the street at the hotel and then there is the note you gave me, it was on the same stationary as the lawyer's letter. Why are you helping me?" She let out a deep sigh.

Azure said, "It's complicated. Car works but light smashed right side. Windshield broken from rock. Maybe slingshot. Crazy enclave kids. Lucky, we can get out of here."

"No, who are you?" Dominique demanded.

Azure, hesitated. He contemplated the situation. He pursed his lips and then said, "Danny knows nothing about this." Then he slowly reached into the inside breast pocket of his coat and pulled out a leather wallet. He opened it to show her his Interpol Identification Card and said, "I was assigned to the case after Theresa made her report. There is more to the manuscript than theft. I am looking for Madame Isabelle. I think she is following you."

Dominique moved forward to get a better look. Although the picture resembled him, the name was different. She raised her eyebrows and stepped back while saying, "Danny said she was finished with the manuscript."

As Azure put away his wallet, he stood up and said, "I am supposed to find her and bring her in for questioning. There is a war crimes investigation. That's all I know."

After all that had happened nothing would surprise Dominique about the dragon lady's past. She remembered the cold-blooded punishments inflicted on her and being locked in the closet. She started remembering things about the abuses Madame inflicted on her mother and her mother holding her in her arms while they both sobbed. Her panic attacks, that continued to plague her.

Dominique was shaking as she began telling Azure or whatever his name was, what she had seen in the house. Then she stammered, "Who was Clara?"

As Azure listened to these words, he saw the colour drain from Dominique's face. He quickly rushed to her to catch her in his arms as she collapsed into the mud. The knapsack was still slung over her left shoulder. Her head was rolled back supported by his left shoulder and her body was cold and shaking. He carried her and put her safely down on some grass, then took the blanket off his shoulders and quickly wrapped her up in it.

Then he opened the back seat car door, picked her up, laid her carefully in the back seat and put the knapsack on the floor next to her.

In the house on the second floor, where Dominique had left the carnage and Danny, a closet door slowly opened. Someone was watching Danny from a crack in the door. If Danny had heard any sounds, he did not move. He sat in a frozen position on the floor, before the bloodied bodies. His head was cradled in his hands as they rested on his raised knees. He was horrified. He was staring at the handle of the gypsy knife. He recognized the initials.

*Part 20 (Marilyn)*

From her unconscious state, Dominique felt the rush of adrenaline wake her with the realization they were surrounded by danger. The only one that she loved and trusted was Danny, and she must protect him. Overwhelmed by their entwined histories, the intrigues and deceptions that have been brewing over generations, Dominique's primitive instincts surged. Protect Danny. Escape. Find safety.

She came to with a jerk, threw the blanket off, leapt from the car and rushed into the house and up the stairs. She approached Danny and stooped to softly wrap her arms around his shoulders, urging him to stand. "We must go now, nothing can be done here. Azure will take us away. We are in danger. You must be careful until you have your strength back. Lean on me." Danny complied in a daze, slipping the dagger into his coat as he rose.

As they turned, a figure swept from the shadows of the closet and surged ahead to slam the door behind them. Trapped by the killer, they froze. In the next breath, they shrieked and shoved the dark form to the floor, giving kicks as they bullied their way out the door. In the hallway, holding the door shut, Dominique and Danny exchanged looks of horror: Could they out run the killer if they let the doorknob go? Danny reached into his coat for the dagger and held it ready as they backed away from the door.

*Part 21 (Norma)*

*FINALE*



To their amazement they heard an old woman's voice behind the door.  
 "Danny, Dominique, it's me Madame Isabelle. I wish you no harm. Let me out."  
 "Madam Isabelle?" Danny cried. "Clara told Dominique that you were dead."

“Of course she did. Look. You kicked me and knocked me over. I am 87 years of age. Let me out. I am no match for both of you together.”

“Why should I let you out? You killed Theresa. I could forgive you for killing Clara, but never Theresa. She was a wonderful woman and never did harm to a soul. Unlike you.”

“I didn’t kill Theresa. She was already dead when I arrived. Clara killed her. We had a fight and I stabbed Clara. I heard you coming up the stairs and hid in the closet. I didn’t know who it was. I was so relieved when I saw it was you two that I burst out of the closet to welcome you. I’m sorry I frightened you. You didn’t have to kick me.”

Danny and Dominique looked at each other with doubtful expressions.

“You drugged Dominique and locked her in broom cupboard. Why not kill your sister and your servant?”

“I didn’t drug Dominique. Clara did. It was a miracle that I did not die. She put the drug in the bread, which I did not eat. I buttered it, but I didn’t eat it. I agree that I was quite pleased to see Dominique succumb because she was getting very worked up about my telling her what was in your letter and I didn’t want her to know.”

Dominique found her voice at last. “What happened after that and why did Clara let me escape?”

“Ah it’s a long story. Come, let me out and we will sit down and talk together.”

“All right. Remember I have knife.” Danny slowly opened the door and a very battered looking Madame Isabelle stood before them. Her clothes were badly torn, her hair in wild disarray. There was a large bruise on her forehead and there was obviously a cut on her arm that was bleeding through her sleeve. Her complexion was yellow and her eyes were deeply sunken into her face.

She took a step forward and staggered. Dominique instinctively took her arm and led her into the next room, through the open door to a table with chairs around it. It was a dining room with a high-backed buffet against one wall. She sat the old lady down. Danny followed and he and Dominique sat opposite her.

“Now suppose you tell us what all this is about.”

“I don’t think I have long to live. I have known for a while now that I have inoperable cancer and the fight with Clara followed by your kicks, Daniel, have probably shortened my life even further.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know it was an old woman I was kicking at the time.”

“No of course not. I have to say first of all that I have not lived an honourable life. It is no good now saying that I am sorry because actually I’m not. I have had a very good life. I had amazing luck when I was a teenager, lots of money and a position of power as headmistress of the school in my middle years, and have lived to a considerable old age. I will die a satisfied woman. But this story starts during World War II....”

“We know that...” broke in Danny.

“No you don’t. It starts here in Bucharest during the reign of General Ion Antonescu. He was intent on getting rid of the Jews and was instrumental in having hundreds of thousands of them killed. I was only 18 and earning my living by doing Gypsy dances in a café here in Bucharest. General Antonescu came in one night and liked the look of me. I became his mistress. My parents were dead and I was supporting my sisters Juliana and Theresa. He promised to look after them and he did. He made sure

they were never short of anything during those terrible years when most Romanians were starving. He took me with him everywhere, leaving his dear wife Maria at home. I accompanied him when he visited Hitler several times. What's more he let me personally kill some of the Jewish swine who were sucking the blood out of our beloved Romania."

Dominique felt sick. "How could you?"

"I enjoyed it. My dear Ion gave me a servant girl to look after me."

"Clara!" Danny exclaimed.

"Yes, Clara. She stuck by me through thick and thin and in 1944 things began to be very thin indeed. Romania changed sides and my darling Antonescu was sent away to Russia. I never saw him again. Clara and I escaped and we were taken in and hidden by Juliana and Theresa. Together at the end of the war we joined the throngs surging towards the west but were rounded up by some Canadians and put into a refugee camp as you know."

Dominique suddenly remembered Azure saying something about a war crimes case. It seemed that for once Madame Isabelle was telling the truth.

"I heard that the Romanians were all to be sent back home and I knew I couldn't go back without dire consequences. My relationship with Antonescu was very well known and so were the killings I had perpetrated on the Jews. Antonescu was tried for war crimes in 1946 and executed. I knew a similar fate awaited me. I had no money and no means of escape, but I did have my good looks and my youth. I seduced a Canadian soldier and he wanted to marry me. He pulled some strings, I don't know how, and got Clara and me to Canada. I was free."

"Why did you take Clara?"

"She knew too much. I had to have her under my control. Unfortunately, as time went on, I became under hers simply because she could denounce me at any time."

"You stole Arturo Vasilescu's marvelous gypsy music."

"I had to. The Canadian officer was coming home to Montreal to marry me and I had no intention of marrying him. I had to disappear and for that I needed money. I had learned to play the violin in the camp – Arturo himself taught me, and so I borrowed the money for the fare and went to New York and found a publisher for the music. Of course I said I had written it and I played one of the easier pieces for the man who interviewed me. Arturo had taught it to me and I knew exactly the brio to give it to make people want to dance. He was enchanted by it and when he heard that I had other pieces, well he had a contract drawn up right away. I bartered with him over royalties and performance rights and I must say that the music has given me a good living over the years. Also I was able to move west and the soldier never did trace me. However, there was one piece of music in the manuscript that no one else knew about – not even your grandfather Daniel."

"A violin concerto!" shouted Dominique. "I thought it was a concerto I looked at. I was quite surprised to hear that the music was dance music."

"Yes, a concerto. I dared not say I had written that. I could never have played it, and it would have aroused enormous international interest and questioning. I was going to destroy it, but thought I might use it to my advantage some day, so I hid it and only Clara ever knew about it."

Danny was blinking. "I never suspected Arturo wrote a violin concerto. I wonder what it sounds like. Of course, you need an orchestra to bring it to life, but perhaps there is solo part I could try out. I'm going to get it."

He ran out of the room and Dominique faced the old lady.

"Tell me about Clara."

"As I said, she became domineering and as I am a dominant person myself, we had huge rows. I knew she would never leave me and I could not live without her. We were tied together even though we grew to hate each other. It had reached a point of no return when you called at the house, so unexpectedly. It took us both by surprise. She had hoped to kill me that night and I had hoped to kill her."

Dominique shuddered. "How horrible."

She drugged you and had hoped to drug me too, but as I said, I escaped by not eating the bread. Clara came in and was not pleased to see only one inert form at the table. Together we bound you and carried you to the broom cupboard and locked you in. I remembered particularly how you had hated that as a child, so it gave me great pleasure to lock you in there again."

Dominique could only look at Madame Isabelle with contempt.

"No, it is not very nice, but then I am not very nice. I decided that I would pretend to go to bed. I knew that Clara always got up in the night to go to the bathroom on the floor below, so I decided to creep out and put a string across the head of the stairs after she had retired. She knew I had something planned and so she let you out, telling you that she had killed me and knowing you would phone the police. That would mean they would call round already suspicious. I wouldn't dare do anything in those circumstances, and indeed I could not. She gave you the music too. She knew that would upset me more than anything. You see I had left the violin concerto to Itzhak Perlman in my will, knowing that he would bring it to the world's attention as being by me. I would not be around for anyone to question so I would have the glory after my death. I would go down in the history of music as the inspired composer of the towering Concerto in E flat for Violin and Orchestra. I would never hear it played, but I would bequeath it to the world to make up for the sins of my life."

Her voice sagged. She put her head on her arms and gave a great sigh.

After a minute she spoke again in a muffled voice.

"She told you to find Daniel. She knew you would have a photocopy of the letter and would find out about your grandmother, something I did not want you to know. He would read it and tell you. He would also find the Concerto and recognize it for what it was.

"When I realized what had happened I made haste to book my passage here to Bucharest – oh to see it again after all these years – I cannot tell you what it has meant to me. I can die happy now. Of course, Clara followed me, having sent an express letter to Theresa telling her to meet her here. I don't know quite what happened, but obviously Theresa did not agree to Clara's terms and she killed her moments before I arrived, having only this morning found out where she was going which..."

The sound of two pairs of footsteps coming up the stairs caused her to break off her sentence and they both looked towards the doorway with bated breath. Danny and

Azure came in and they both relaxed. Danny was carrying his violin out of its case and a couple of pages of the cracked decrepit music. He was looking very excited.

“The concerto -- it is amazing,” he said. “Listen.”

He propped up the sheets of music against the back of the buffet, placed his violin under his chin, and drew his bow across it. Within seconds the three listeners were wafted to some magic realm where only sweetness and light reigned and wickedness had been vanquished. All too soon, he stopped and said: “The woodwinds break in there, then the strings join them – it’s magical. I can’t wait to hear it played by a maestro with full orchestra.”

“I have heard enough. It is as I thought.” Madame Isabelle raised her head and looked at Danny and Dominique. “It will set the two of you up for life. I have made amends to Juliana and Theresa.”

There was a long silence suddenly broken by Azure, whom everyone had forgotten was there. “Isabelle Slavici I arrest you for the murder of Joseph Stein and Ruth Solomon in Bucharest in 1943, along with many other Jewish people whose names are not known. I will be taking you to the police station where you will be formally charged and handed over to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.”

“Ugh. You did for me with that last kick...Daniel...I...I...” blood suddenly erupted from her mouth and Madame Isabelle slumped over, the rattle of her last breath cleaving the clammy atmosphere.

It was a solemn Azure who drove Danny and Dominique back to Bucharest. The authorities had been notified and an ambulance arrived to take three dead old ladies to the local morgue. Fortunately, Dominique had been wired for sound at Danny’s instigation, so there would be no question about how each one had died. Danny might be charged with assault as he had kicked an old lady, but in the circumstances, Azure did not think the punishment would be too harsh.

Six months later they sat among an enthralled audience at the Lincoln Centre’s Avery Fisher Hall where Arturo Vasilescu’s Violin Concerto in E flat was being performed for the first time. “Great way to start a honeymoon,” Danny whispered to Dominique as the conductor raised his baton for the first chord.

*THE END*



**Acknowledgements**

Photograph of Bucharest - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bucharest>  
'Gypsy caravan' - <http://www.dv247.fr/invt/11897/>  
Image of hearts and birds - <http://abkldesigns.com>

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