

# *The Queen of Cups*

*by*

Mina Samuels

© 2006 by Mina Samuels

All rights reserved under Title 17, U.S. Code, International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this work, whether in printed or digital form, may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including (but not limited to) photocopying, scanning, recording, live performance or broadcast, or duplication by any information storage or retrieval system without prior written permission from the author and publisher.

*Unlimited Publishing LLC "UP" works with professional authors and publishers, serving as distributing publisher. Sole responsibility for the content of each work rests with the author and/or co-publisher. Information or opinions expressed herein may not be interpreted as originating from, or endorsed by UP, nor any of its officers, members, contractors, agents or assigns.*

This is a work of fiction. All characters, products, corporations, institutions, and/or entities of any kind in this book are either the product of the author's imagination or, if real, used fictitiously without any intent to describe their actual characteristics.

ISBN 1-58832-154-1



**Unlimited Publishing LLC**  
**Bloomington, Indiana**  
*<http://www.unlimitedpublishing.com>*

## The Beginning

*Remarks made at dinner in honor of the opening of the Charles and Juliette Peirce exhibit at the Boston Historical Society, March 23, 2004. Dr. Elizabeth Godfrey, Gerard Lloyd Professor of Russian and European History, Harvard University.*

Welcome. Jeremy, our wonderful director of the Historical Society, asked if I could say a few words at this dinner to mark the opening of the Charles and Juliette Peirce exhibit. Let me first say that I am thrilled to be here. Finding Juliette Peirce's journals was one of those rare and incredible moments that every historian dreams of. I am going to tell you how I found her journals, but first I'll give you a little background.

As you may have gathered from your programs, I teach Russian and European history at Harvard. What the program doesn't tell you is that my husband, Will Addison, is a professor of philosophy at Harvard. His field of expertise is pragmatism, that branch of thought whose beginnings many attribute to Charles Sanders Peirce. So I have been, by virtue of marriage more than avocation, a Charles Peirce amateur.

I think of Peirce and yes, it is pronounced "purse," as odd as it sounds, I think of Peirce as America's philosopher manqué. He was our own Boston Brahmin stock, marinating in the exciting intellectual environment of post Civil War United States. What Charles Peirce did in his writings, teachings and thinking was create the beginning of the philosophy equivalent of physics' Theory of Everything. He crossed over logic, philosophy and science to create what he called his architectonic, a system of thought for every important discipline. Those who are "in the know" consider him our American Aristotle. And almost one hundred years after his death, he is enjoying a renaissance as modern day philosophers rediscover his ideas.

As important as Charles Peirce is, I had always been fascinated by Juliette, Peirce's wife. The woman historians have blamed for the great man's downfall. The mysterious Juliette. The woman who came from nowhere and had no past. The couple met in 1876 at the New Year's Eve ball at the Hotel Brevoort in New York while Peirce was still married to his first wife. They had an affair that lasted seven years, until their marriage in 1883, and they

were married until Charles's death in 1914. Juliette lived the rest of her life, until 1934, in memory of him. So everything known about Juliette related to Charles. Her motives, her historical context, were a blank. As a historian, I was intrigued. As a woman, I wanted to lift the blame for his troubles from her shoulders. But I had only him and what was known about him.

Charles Peirce's life followed the same tragic path of so many whose genius is understood by only a very few until long after their death. He was a great intellect, to be sure, but he was plagued by illnesses, which probably account for his failure to achieve due recognition in his time.

Peirce suffered from facial neuralgia, which we now call trigeminal neuralgia. It is characterized by the onset of a pain so severe it can cause paralysis. On a personal note, my own grandfather suffered from a form of neuralgia brought on by memories of World War II, and my mother remembers him retreating to darkened rooms until the pain passed. Peirce took drugs to combat the pain; laudanum, morphine and later, cocaine. Of course, this was back in a time when drugs were not regulated in any way and were more or less available without the intervention of a doctor. As you might guess, Peirce became a drug addict. If these problems were not enough, it appears from research that Peirce was bipolar. Unfortunately, the *DSM IV*, the diagnostician's bible, did not exist then, and bipolar disorder was unknown. So his mental illness went undiagnosed and untreated and was probably exacerbated by the drug habit. As a result, Peirce's mental, physical and financial condition deteriorated over his lifetime. By the end of their life together, Charles and Juliette were poverty-stricken, and Peirce was completely unemployable.

Why did she stay with him? Obvious answers come to mind. It was the nineteenth century, and divorce was extremely rare. Wives stayed with husbands for no better reason than that they were married to them. Women had few options. But I never like that kind of oversimplification. Even if a woman is to some extent a product of her age, the individual nuances of women's lives deserve our attention, my attention as a historian. I had always wanted to know the personal reasons for why Juliette stayed in what had to have been a supremely difficult marriage. I wanted to know what it was in her particular background that influenced her decisions.

The mystery of Juliette was that she arrived at the Hotel Brevoort that New Year's Eve in 1876, apparently newborn, though financially independent. No historian had ever managed to find even the barest shred of information about her existence prior to the evening she met Charles. So there was no personal context in which to understand her actions.

As you all know, that has changed.

In 2002, I spent the winter semester in New York teaching at Columbia and NYU. One Friday when Will was down from Boston we decided to drive over to Milford, Pennsylvania, to see the house where Charles Peirce and his wife, Juliette, lived. Arisbe, they called it, after the ancient Greek colony where philosophy was born. You may have noticed the photograph of the house in the lobby as you came in this evening. The house is now the office for the biological research division of the Delaware Water Gap Authority, but they have kept it reasonably intact, and they welcome visitors interested in Charles Peirce. In addition, they have on display a small collection of items owned by Charles and Juliette, items that have passed down with each successive sale of the house apparently.

When we were at the house, I found in the attic, amid stacks of old research reports, a dusty forgotten box filled with Juliette's collection of Emile Zola's novels. In twelve of these novels, between the lines written by Zola, in her own tiny, crabbed script, Juliette wrote an account of her life. Her husband was dead, and she was alone in the house, without money, without servants, and with hardly a friend.

I think the day I found Juliette's journals was one of the most exciting of my life. It was the day I knew that I was truly meant to be a professor of Russian history, and nothing else. Juliette Peirce wrote her journals in Russian. I was possibly the first person to see them, and I was certainly the first to understand what she had written.

For the past two years, I have worked on the translation of Juliette's journals, and it has been an extraordinary journey. The unknown woman is no longer. The Juliette or perhaps I ought to call her Marie, which was her given name- who emerges from the pages was a strong, determined woman who gave her life to propping up her husband because she believed he was brilliant. Without her, I suspect that Peirce's deterioration would have been

worse earlier, and perhaps we would not have the good fortune of the legacy of his prolific writings, which now so occupy serious students of philosophy. The debate about her role in history is just beginning.

You'll see that we have the original journals displayed alongside my translation in the Green Room. The journals will be published next year. The Peirce family estate and I are in the final stages of negotiating the publishing contract.

I know you are all looking forward to browsing the collection. Enjoy the exhibit.

## **Juliette's Journals**

***Date Unknown***

I am alone and have been for some time. My fingers tremble to begin. The house is cold and I have eaten little in the last days. Money is scarce.

I love these Zola novels. They were a gift from Charles. They are the only things he gave me that I have not sold. I could buy journals in which to write my memories, but it would be an expense I could ill afford. I will write in Zola's books, between the lines of his stories.

I do not know if anyone will ever read what I am about to record. I think not. Zola is not so valued as he was, not in America. My books will hardly attract notice after my death.

I'm writing because the house is so silent that I hear only my thoughts, and they rattle around inside my head clamoring for attention; disordered bits of my life appear and disappear. Mamma, Pappa, Dina and others are frozen in time. They will forever be as they were when I was young. I feel myself almost a child again to think of them.

I fear sometimes that I am going mad and will soon forget who I am. Thus I record what memories I have left, for me to remember myself by. There is no one else who can.

~~\*~~



**Part I**

***“Marie”***

**1874**

When I was fifteen, my mother took my older sister, Dina, and me to St. Petersburg for what we thought would be a short holiday, leaving my father in Poltava, where we were camped. I left everything I knew and who I was.

We were gypsies, or rather my father Misha was. My mother, Anna, was a Jew who had run away from her wealthy family at the age of fifteen with my father, leaving both her family and her religion behind. From my parents I learned that for some of the fortunate there is one true love, whatever the price.

Mamma had lived for eighteen years with the gypsies, as a gypsy, and was much loved by them. She had adopted the gypsy ways in everything except three things. My mother would not wear the traditional cross pendant worn by men and women, nor did she raise us with religion. She eschewed her Jewish heritage and would not adopt Pappa's Christianity neither for herself, nor for her daughters. She also insisted that Dina and I be well educated, in the tradition of the Jews, studying languages, literature and art, in addition to the music and performance we learned from the gypsies.

My mother had a beautiful voice and sang every evening for us when we were on the road. The musicians in the group vied for the favor of her song because they knew they would earn more money for a performance with her. The audience's wallets would inevitably open wider on hearing the first note my mother sang. There was always fresh meat and vegetables, tea with heaps of sugar, and plenty to drink for the adults on the days Mamma sang. On the days without performances, we ate cheese and bread, potato and cabbage soups.

My father played the violin and the Chinese tam-tam and sang in a baritone so rich it captured my mother's heart when she first heard him. My sister, Dina, played the mandolin and the wooden flute. I played the tiny upright piano that traveled everywhere with us on a wagon, told fortunes and drew sketch portraits that people bought for two slices of bread, an apple or, if I was lucky, an orange. Mme. B the clairvoyant had taught me to read the fortunes and to draw.

My gypsy family of almost thirty people traveled around Russia providing classical entertainment—music, dance, some graceful acrobatics, skating in the winter and outdoor theater in the summer. It was a healthy life. We were much outdoors in the summer and in the winter stayed in cozy barns on soft hay beds and sometimes even at an out-of-the-way inn. We were never hungry and never cold. We performed for the cream of society, saw their clothing and houses and armies of servants. The rich were a circus curiosity to me, and I was fascinated by their pale indoor complexions and cushioned surroundings. I wondered what they dreamed at night as they suffocated beneath their piles of linens and pillows on their high fluffy beds. I was neither envious nor disdainful. They were foreign creatures, and I thought little of them when we had left their cavernous rooms filled with inanimate possessions.

Two important things happened in the week before my mother took us away, solidifying her decision.

For six months past, Viktor Brovitch had adopted a new hangdog expression in Dina's presence. Mamma had muttered about this romantic development. She said that Viktor was not good enough for her Dina. She said it wasn't healthy to intermarry inside such a small community. She was grasping at any excuse to prevent their marriage. In anticipation of the marriage proposal Mamma correctly feared was coming, she consulted Mme. B weekly and would emerge from Mme. B's tent looking troubled. So the first important thing that happened was a proposal of marriage for Dina. Viktor Brovitch's father approached Pappa about Viktor marrying my older sister. After the marriage offer, Mamma and Pappa stayed up late talking about it. Awake on the straw pallet I shared with Dina, I perked my ears to listen. The sound was muffled, coming as it did through the curtain drawn around my parents' pallet on the other side of the tent. My sister missed it all, sleeping and breathing in her characteristic three-four tempo. She dreamed in waltz time.

"Who? Who will you think is good enough for Dina?" Pappa asked.

"Someone. There will be someone. I don't know who it will be, but I know how. And so do you. You make me nervous with that look. She's only seventeen. Why do I need to answer now?"

“Hah.” I heard my father’s deep smooth laugh. It had an underlying hardness to it this time, like when I bit through soft peach flesh and struck against the pip. “There’s never anyone. Seventeen is more than old enough. You were fifteen when I met you and plenty independent enough to make up your mind about me.” Pappa’s voice softened when he said this. I could imagine him caressing Mamma with his big smile, the way he often did.

“Stop. Misha. This is serious. This Viktor is a lout.”

“Sometimes, Anna, I wonder if you think all of us gypsy men are louts.”

“Of course not,” Mamma said.

And then there was a rustling of straw and skirts and breath. I smiled to myself in the dark. I knew the sounds of my parents’ love. It made my stomach curl in a queer way when I heard them, as if I was anxious or nervous. I was glad, too, because I knew it meant they were not really fighting. I thought about Mamma meeting Pappa when she was just my age. Perhaps Dina would not marry after all. Mamma usually got her way. I knew that Dina would be just as happy not to marry Viktor. My sister had her eye on Walther Soltin, even though Mamma would not approve of him, either.

Then the second important thing happened a few days later. The feeling in my belly returned. I was sitting with my friend Pietor on the rails of the fenced horse stockade. We were watching the horses snort and flick their manes at the afternoon flies, their brown velvet flanks sinuous as they moved. The sun was hot on my shoulders, and my scalp and hair baked beneath the sky. Pietor’s strong boy smell, stale musk and sugar, churned my stomach. Pietor must have felt it, too, because he reached his hand out and touched my hair.

Pietor had small, delicate musician’s hands, and people made fun of his femininity. His thick black hair curled over his eyes and ears, and his lips were red grapes ready to burst their skins. Pietor’s hand brushed my scalp, and I looked at the muddy ground and back up at the horses. From the corner of my eye, I saw Pietor flush the color of a dusk sky.

Just then Mamma came out of Mme. B’s tent, across the other side of the stockade fence. She saw it all between the twitching bodies of the horses. Even at the distance of fifty feet, I

could see her lips tighten. I ran after her to explain myself, heart hammering.

“Marie, what are you thinking, letting that boy touch your hair? What will I say about my daughter? That she lets anyone touch her hair? There will be no more of that. I don’t want to so much as see you talking to Pietor again.”

I was flustered and hot. Sweat ran in rivulets down the back of my legs, and my heart beat wrong.

“But Mamma, we weren’t doing anything. He’s my friend. There’s hardly anyone to be friends with here. Everyone will notice. How can I not talk to him?”

“Easily. You will just do it. Find others to talk to. I prefer if you have girls for friends. You’re too young to be up to nonsense with boys.”

“But Mamma, you were fifteen when you met Pappa,” I risked.

My mother’s face darkened, and she turned away from me without answering. Mamma couldn’t watch me all the time. Besides, it was nothing. I didn’t care for Pietor, and I felt sure he didn’t care for me. It was the horses that made us do it.

That night Mamma and Pappa talked late, but their voices were so low I could hear nothing but the cresting and falling of murmured words. Finally I fell asleep.

“Up, up,” Mamma said the next morning when she woke us. An oil lamp lighted the tent, but I could see that outside it was not yet dawn. Mamma didn’t usually wake us until dawn, when the sun seeped through the heavy cloth of the tent. “My lovely sleepyheads, Dina, Marie. It’s time to open your eyes.”

Mamma’s words assured me that she wasn’t mad at me any longer. Dina and I lay curled together on our straw pallet. I drew the scratchy wool blanket up over my head to block out my mother, and my head filled with the smell of the sweet grass we had tamped down beneath our beds.

“We are going on an adventure today,” Mamma said, pulling the blanket down to my chin and planting a kiss on my nose. She smelled of milk and cinnamon and tea.

“Where?” asked Dina.

“To St. Petersburg.”

Mamma paused and looked at our faces. I was incredulous. I guessed my sister was, too, but dared not turn my head to see her

expression. I did not want to miss a thing my mother said or did. We never went to big cities. I looked past the lamp into the gloom at the other side of the tent and saw Pappa was busy with something.

“And then...” Mamma’s voiced trailed off under our gaze.

“And then?” Dina persisted.

“To wherever we like. Paris? Would that suit us? Rome? Biarritz? Baden-Baden?”

“What? Why?” I said, seeing that Dina was silenced by the news. I sat up on my pallet and drew the blanket around my neck. I was frightened, excited and not quite awake. Mamma was talking nonsense. Was she ill? I looked at her face. She looked just the same as always, her lovely wheat-gold hair tied back, flaxen strands curling around her broad open face and a small smile that showed only the tips of the top row of her teeth.

“A few weeks of holiday.”

We had never been on holiday before. I could see that Dina was as shocked as I. Taking a holiday was something rich people did. I didn’t know what we would do on a holiday, much less why we would go at all. It was mysterious, but not bad, I decided.

“I will tell all when we are on the train. In the meantime, here are the new dresses I have brought you for the trip. We will buy others more suitable later.”

Then I saw that my mother was dressed differently from usual. She wore the typical dress of a Russian peasant, and for us she had laid out the same. A peasant was always more welcome than a gypsy, or at least less disliked, less likely to be spat upon, if a peasant even merited notice. I assumed it must be so in the big cities too. I put on the stout white linen shirt with large puffed sleeves, embroidered in red and blue, then the blue skirt embroidered in red at the hem. Over the skirt, a shorter black wrap fastened at the waist with a fringed wool belt, again embroidered in red and blue. My mother wore a scarf that covered her head. She plaited red ribbons into my hair and blue into Dina’s, so that three ribbon tails hung down our backs. My shoes were black with red heels. I was very taken with them, although I found the rest of the clothes stiff and heavy, without a bit of the shine or twinkle I was used to. The gypsies loved ornamentation, even if it was only a bangle or a gold thread running through the fabric of their shirt.

Mamma usually wore two necklaces and an armful of bangles. Her clothes were always bright colors, and she favored gold sashes and silver headscarves wound turban-style on her head like those of a Mongol warrior.

“Goodbye, my angels,” Pappa said, twirling his fingers in our ribbons and scratching our faces with his half-grown beard. He held us in a bear hug, drawing us to his chest. He smelled of freshcut wheat. “I will see you soon, soon, soon.”

Pappa wore a purple shirt with large gold buttons, and sleeves as big as bat wings. His tight black trousers were tucked into worn leather knee boots. My father was tall and broad, with straight dark hair he wore to his shoulders. His eyebrows were thick black lines above his deep brown eyes. I saw him look at Mamma over Dina’s head and did not understand the look that passed between them. It was love and anguish mixed equal parts. Below the surface I thought I detected anger, too, but even then I could not tell if it was she or he who was angry.

My father was an emotional man, even by the demonstrative gypsy standards, and his leave-taking was extravagant, as if we were leaving for years and not a mere few weeks. But then he knew Mamma’s full plan. He must have known we might be gone forever. Why did he let us go?

“You promised, Misha,” Mamma said.

“I know. I know. But I thought...I thought you would forget.”

“Forget? When have I ever stopped talking about this? Just last night, even.”

“Have a change of heart.”

“After all these years, you can’t pretend to know me so little, Misha.”

“After all these years, Anna, I thought this was enough. I thought that when it really came to it, you would see that. How can you not? What am I to think?”

My father gave a strangled cry, as of a pigeon before its neck is snapped. He turned away for a moment.

“Misha,” my mother said.

She gathered him in her arms, and though she was half his size, her arms seemed to envelop him in their embrace. They clung to each other like that until the shuffling of our feet brought them back to their senses.

Outside, the pre-dawn moon cast its thin silver light over the camp. A droshky was waiting for us on the road at the edge of the field. It was a small carriage with two wheels, pulled by one horse and hardly big enough for our luggage and the three of us, but Dina and I wiggled and squirmed until the two of us were piled on Mamma's lap. Just then Mme. B came running from her tent. Her black hair was loose and flew around her face and chest. It was so long she had shown me once how she could sit on it. When she reached the droshky, she stood by the side, her chest heaving with sorrowful sighs.

"So it has come to pass, Anna?" Mme. B said.

"Yes," Mamma said.

"You are a good woman, Anna. The cards tell me you will come back, and I look forward to that day."

Mme. B could be so melodramatic. We would hardly be gone before we were back.

"And us?" Dina asked.

I heard a note of teasing in her voice. Dina did not believe in fortunetelling. Pappa joked that Dina was born too modern and had too much of Mamma's sensible blood, forgetting that it was Mamma who consulted Mme. B more than anyone in our family.

"The cards are hiding that from me, Dina. I can't see yet for you."

Dina rolled her eyes at me and whispered in my ear, "Abracadabra, I can see us back next month." Mme. B smiled at Dina sadly. She had overheard. I stifled the giggle that had risen in my throat and turned my face severely to my sister. I did not want to offend Mme. B. Besides, I believed.

Mme. B kissed my mother and Dina on each cheek twice and then turned to me. She held out her hands and took mine. She wore oversized gold rings on every finger of her right hand and silver rings on her left. The right hand was the hand of the heart, sunshine, daylight, understanding and clarity. The left hand was the hand of the mind, the moon, night, darkness, obscurity and mystery. Gold and silver. When she let go of my hands, I could feel the imprints of her rings. Heart and mind. Sun and moon. Mme. B reached into a pocket deep inside her skirt and drew out a deck of cards wrapped in a yellow gold velvet bag, the color of the sign of the bull, under which Mme. B had been born. Mme. B gave the velvet bag of cards to me.



“But those,” I said. “Those are your Napoleon cards.”

They were the cards on which she had foreseen the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte.

“Yes, and they are for you, Marie. I told Dina that I could not see your futures right now, and that’s true. But I saw one thing. You will have a use for these cards. They belong to you now.”

Fat tears rolled down Mme. B’s cheeks, and soon we were all crying, Pappa, too. What a pack of silly geese we made, all damp over a short separation, even if it was our first.

“We must go,” Mamma said. “Before everyone wakes. They mustn’t know until I’m gone.”

I tried to imagine what the others would think, a holiday, whoever heard of such a thing. I was tickled with excitement. I looked at the quiet camp with its six cloth tents and the two overturned carts we used as tables. It was still. The horses snorted, and Mamma signaled the driver. Dina and I looked back until we couldn’t see Mme. B and Pappa anymore. Mamma stared straight ahead and did not move or blink, even as the tears rolled down her cheeks and collected in the hollow of her collarbone. She would not talk to us until we were on the train.

Once we were settled in our compartment, we could contain ourselves no longer.

“Why is Pappa not with us? Why are you crying? Why do we need a holiday?” Dina demanded.

“So many questions. Let’s see. Pappa is not coming because he is working and because...because...because Pappa is...he’s not...it’s not his way of life. I’m going to show you how my life was. So you can see another way of living,” Mamma answered.

I was even more interested. Mamma’s family had been very wealthy. I knew that. But she didn’t talk about it often, so we had only ever heard tantalizing hints of country estates and dinners and dresses and theater. I had never really understood how Mamma had lived her life “before.”

“But why can’t Pappa come, too, and see how it is?” I asked.

“Oh, Marie, it wouldn’t work for your Pappa. I only hope it can still work for me. I want you to see that the life you’ve had is not the only possibility for you. You’re different. Haven’t I always said so?”

Our “difference” had been much impressed on us, but truthfully, Dina and I had never, until that moment, thought much of it. We were not just gypsies, we were also Jews, our mother told us, and we were from educated society. Mamma’s father owned land and textile mills where wool and cotton and linen were made. But these were not facts that had ever before affected our lives, nor were they things that gave us any status. On the contrary, in Russia as far as I could tell, the Jew, no matter what his stature, was midway between a dog and an ape; at least that was what I had read in the paper not so long before. Of course, gypsies were not thought much better, so on the whole I did not see the superiority of one or the other.

As for society, or at least what I knew of it from when my parents performed, I had always been curious about the pale, fragile women with hair stacked precariously on their heads, dresses they could hardly move in and husbands who paid them no attention, preferring to congregate in rooms without women and smoke and drink and play at cards. But I had seen this from the vantage point of a child watching, watching.

“What will we do on a holiday?” Dina asked.

“You will learn the skills of gentle life—read the right books, play music, draw, study the art of conversation, dress and eat well.”

I was disappointed. It didn’t sound like a holiday to me. No horseback riding? No running through forests or swimming in lakes? Mamma already made us study like beasts. Music. Dance. Etiquette. Languages, too. On top of my native tongue, Romany, I spoke French perfectly. I could read German and English. At the end of performances, Mamma sometimes had Dina and me recite French poetry, Musset, Racine and others, to the great delight of the audience, who found it amusing to watch the “little gypsies” imitate their ways. If only they had known what a great imitator I was to become.

“But we already do those things,” I said. “How can it be a holiday if we just do what we already do?”

“You will see, Marie,” my mother said. “There is a whole world waiting for us. Theater. Opera. Art. Music.”

I was doubtful.

“But Pappa likes those things, doesn’t he? Why can’t he come?” I asked.

Pappa loved to hear us recite or watch us dance a waltz or mazaruka together, pretending we were in a room filled with other dancers.

“Dina, Marie, it’s such a short time. Let’s just enjoy ourselves. This holiday is an agreement your Pappa and I made a long time ago. He promised me that our children would be taken to Western Europe and be introduced to society. Not a proper comingout, of course. That simply isn’t possible.” Mamma tsktsked to herself and continued on as if she had forgotten we were there. “I almost waited too long, missed the opportunity. My only fear is that it is too late.” She looked up, as if suddenly remembering us. “Dina, you are already seventeen, and you will need to learn the right manners as quickly as you can. Marie, you will have a moment’s more time before people will notice whether you fit in or not.”

Oh, what agony to think back on that conversation and my light heart skittering with excitement at all the new things I would see and feel and taste. Not the slightest regret or longing for Pappa or my old life clouded my thoughts. I even imagined the pleasure I would have recounting the tales when I got home. I hadn’t experienced a single new thing yet, and already I imagined my friends wide-eyed and rapt as they listened to me. I imagined Piotor touching my hair again when I told him the stories.

“Shall we write to Pappa?” Dina asked.

“Yes, of course. We must tell him everything we’re doing.”

I closed my eyes to absorb all this news and woke some time later when one of my hair ribbons caught behind my shoulder and pulled my hair as the train jolted on its track. I opened my eyes drowsily and saw that Mamma was embroidering and Dina was staring out the window. They were not talking. So I did not talk, either. I looked out the window at Russia passing by, at the muddy road, the great stretches of browning fields, the little wooden bridge thrown across a stream, the churches with their cupolas shaped and colored like upsidedown figs, the peasants by the roadside watching the train pass. I wondered how things would look where we were going.

I didn’t know what to feel. I was excited and confused and exhausted. I loved my gypsy family, my father, but suddenly a whole new world was on offer, and every feeling I had ever had was changing. I slept again. The train was comfortable, and because

the engine fires were fed with wood, we were spared the smell and grime of burning coal of so many trains we'd seen rushing through the countryside as we traveled the roads.

~~\*~~

END OF EXCERPT FROM THE QUEEN OF CUPS