

Finding
MY
Heart



Queen of Spades

Finding My Heart

By Author Queen of Spades

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I.

6 2019. White numbers etched against a strip of blue. That held my focus instead of the mesmerizing beauty in front of me stating a truth I didn't want to accept as my own.

“In front of me, I see a stranger,” Katarina said. “What happened to the man who enjoyed the simple pleasures associated with science—the shock in how all of life’s creatures operated? Did your thirst for knowledge really get replaced with money and grandeur?”

The strip of blue, atop the color of silver. No, *steel*. Silver was meant to stand out. Steel was meant to blend in.

“I’m *still* that man,” I argued.

“If you were still *that man*,” countered Katarina, poking my chest with her index finger, “then I would *still* be a priority to you. When did I

get put in a column, a mere footnote in your grand design?”

My eyes moved from the decoration of the train to the top of her head. The roots of the hair—a light chestnut, a telltale sign the dye job was nearing its end. The rest of Katarina’s hair, strawberry blond. I still lacked courage to look in her eyes.

“I don’t know what you mean, Rina.”

“Did you forget I was there for you when the world was ignorant to your existence?”

The sting of the inquiry made me brave. Her eyes were in view, filled with brimming tears.

“Rina, of course I didn’t forget!” I covered her hands with my own. “I am forever grateful for your loyalty.”

Katarina yanked her hands from mine. Tears flowed down her cheeks. “Loyalty? *Loyalty* is what a dog gives its master. I am nobody’s dog, and I serve no master!”

She grabbed the handle of her beige suitcase, then passed it to the awaiting porter.

“Rina-”

“Leopold Hawkins Threadbare, in matters of the heart, you are one of the most *obtuse* human beings on the planet!”

Flabbergasted at her statement, I shouted. “Rina, why so salty? I thanked you for being there for me. What else do you want?”

The porter pointed at the watch, signaling the last call for passengers.

Katarina sighed. “I pray it won’t be too late by the time you figure out the answer.”

She kissed me on my right cheek. “This is farewell Leopold. For now or forever is up to you.”

With that declaration, she boarded the train. The doors closed, and the train began pulling off.

My body had a mind of its own. The clanking of my shoes against the surface of the platform. The train was not quite at maximum speed. Perhaps I could make it stop.

“Rina!” I screamed. I waved my arms, hoping to get someone’s attention. Not willing to give up, I sprinted. Still yelling Rina’s name. Still waving frantically.

A sharp pain flooded my body. My hands clutched my chest. My sprinting slowed into a walk, then to a crawl. The train gained speed, widening the distance. *I’d never be able to catch up.*

More pain came, paralyzing me. The act of breathing was a struggle. My throat tightened. All surroundings became fuzzy. Then distorted. Then deleted.



The crackling. It's what I heard first. Followed by the humming of a tune I didn't recognize.

Mixtures of colors: red, orange, and yellow. It was the first image I saw once I opened my eyes.

Fire. Fire atop wood. No other colors surrounded it, as if the scene was randomly thrown in.

"It was randomly thrown in," a voice replied.

I twirled around with my fists raised. "Who said that? Where are you?"

"Technically, I have the ability to be everywhere, but in this particular case, I'm in front of you."

I rubbed my eyes. Thrice. All remained black.

“I can’t see you. Show yourself!”

The voice scoffed. “Demanding bugger, aren’t you? I’m not revealing myself until you act like you have some manners!”

I lowered my fists. Relaxed my hands. “Mr. Invisible Man, will you do me the honor of revealing yourself?”

“Maybe, but only if you eliminate the sarcasm.”

“You’re being utterly ridiculous!” I yelled.

“You’re the one who’s pressed for time. Not me. I can do this game all day.” The voice resumed its humming.

“Okay, okay, okay,” I relented. “Mysterious voice, will you please reveal yourself?”

“That’s more like it.”

As soon as the figure came into view, I stepped backwards. Partly from fear, but mostly from shock and awe. The figure was well over six feet. Hair straight and the color of bone. His skin, unblemished and coal black. The lower part of his

anatomy was concealed by a sarong inundated with symbols I could not discern.

I scrambled to formulate the scientific questions one would ask when encountering something new. What tumbled out instead was, “Are you God?”

“Nope but I do work for Her.”

“*Her?* Are you saying God is a-a-a-”

“Woman. But of course! She just permitted the religious texts to depict her as male, since men have difficulty taking direction from the ‘truly harder’ sex.”

God is a woman? Short for Goddess, maybe? I cannot wait to share my findings with my colleagues ...

That train of thought was halted by snippets of imagery. Closing doors. Wheels grinding against tracks. Pattering feet. Yelling. A body hitting the ground. Unresponsive.

Wait, that’s my body! What in the ...

“You are dead. At least temporarily.” God’s helper yanked me upright. “Look, as much as I’d like to have small talk, you don’t have a lot of time.”

“Look, whatever your name is, this is the second instance where you’ve mentioned time. What is it that I’m missing?”

At a snap of the being’s fingers, two chairs appeared. He sat in one, invited me to sit on the other.

“I’m Titan. This is the part where you close your mouth and open your ears.”

Titan created a small table. On top of the table was a plate of hot food, eating utensils, and a glass of water.

“Go on. Dig in,” Titan insisted. “The sound of your grumbling belly is rather loud.”

Was it? I couldn’t hear it.

“I’m a supernatural being. My sense of hearing is better than yours.”

“Quit being in my head Titan.”

“Quit talking slick Leopold.”

Instead of a counter quip, I filled my mouth with the meat. It didn't have the appearance of chicken but tasted like such.

“Humans were created to be social beings. Although the level of social interaction varies, this remains to be true. Humans were also designed so that their minds, hearts, and spirits are in sync. These measurements also differ based on the being but if the measurements are off, it causes DAPP.”

After swallowing the chewed protein, I said, “DAPP?”

“Disassociation Affecting Proper Placement. Leopold, during your early days, particularly your moments with Katarina, you were in sync. A symmetry that was superb, very impressive to God.”

I piled some vegetables on the fork. Sampled them. Green beans. “God is impressed by *me*? That's fantastic news! Is this what you're here for Titan? Prepping me to be Her assistant, like you?”

“*Were*. Past tense.” More chicken-flavored strips materialized on the plate. “There are elements which can throw the uniformity off balance. You got exposed to those elements once others realized the importance of your research. Money and fame, two facets not in your original biology, changed you. Hence, putting you in DAPP status.”

“I get what you are telling me Titan, but I fail to understand. Why is wanting my contributions to the world seen and paid top dollar for so wrong?”

“It’s not necessarily wrong, *unless* it does damage to your vitals. In your case, the damage was done to your heart.”

“My heart? Why did my doctor tell me year after year that I was in tip top condition?”

“Not the simple mechanics of the heart. Its emotional and spiritual tether. Body parts also need intangible elements to keep operating. Those cannot be seen or measured by the scientific eye Leopold. As your zest increased, the

vivacity of your heart decreased. What is there currently is a piece of black ice and will remain so, unless your disassociation is fixed.”

Body parts operating on intangibles? I've never heard of such jargon.

“Look, you’ve never heard of me before today. But I am here right in front of you, Leopold. I am here to help—to tell you what is required for your reset.”

“And if I refuse Titan?”

“I’ll tell Her my work is done, and you’ll be passed over to Archfiend, Her wayward son. He’s also called Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub ... well, you get the picture.”

The food temporarily stuck in my throat. Titan placed his palm over my Adam’s apple. It dislodged, permitting me to swallow.

“Leopold don’t freak out. None of that will take place if you do your task.”

“Which is?”

“Find your old heart.”

I laughed. “Find my old heart, eh? How do you suppose I do that?”

“She has permitted me to give you one hint. The rest of the puzzle you must do on your own.”

“Really? That’s it? Just one hint?”

“Leopold, I’m Her assistant. Not your Guardian Angel. Guardian Angels are the ones who help with things.”

“Titan, if that is so, where’s mine?” In my opinion, Titan was the middleman. To get real action, I needed a mover and shaker.

“Those suffering from DAPP do not get a Guardian Angel. That’s the rule set by God.”

Baffled, I countered, “What about Jesus? Doesn’t Jesus help sinners.”

It was Titan’s turn to laugh. “Jesus helps those on Earth. In case you haven’t noticed, you’re not on Earth. For all intents and purposes, Leopold, you’ve been declared missing. Do you want the hint or not?”

Still simmering with anger, I nod.

Titan claps twice. The dark spot in front of us splits, then opens.

“What am I supposed to be seeing Titan?”

“Patience Leopold.” The blanket of mist evaporated, leaving a visual. A place with a tall mountain in the outskirts. Fields plush with greenery. A monarch butterfly traveled, landed on waves of strawberry blond hair. A hand reached across so the insect can select a finger as its new perch. Only then do I see the face. A lady.

“Rina,” I whispered. Her eyes perked up. At that second, all was dark once more.

“Katarina is the key to finding your heart. You only have thirty-six hours. Otherwise, you belong to Archfiend.”

My anger decelerated to fear. “There’s no way to get an extension, Titan? No substitute for this task?”

“God is absolute. She does not bargain.” Titan disbanded the fire. “The Conductor will be here soon. Pinpoint three possible locations where

your heart could be. Good luck Leopold. I am pulling for you.”

Titan faded into the darkness. Overwhelmed by the severity of my situation, I screamed continuously until the effort made me hoarse.

I made this mess. How can Rina possibly get me out of it? I'll just have to figure it out.

Leopold use your brain. A heart would go to where it's most loved. Who have you loved most in your life?

My parents. Right! Why didn't I conjure it sooner? Perhaps this task is easier than I believed.



A streak of steel pierced the black landscape, followed by hues of red, white, and blue. Looking out the front window of the pilot car was The Conductor. Navy blue jacket and pants hung on a frame that was decayed flesh and mostly bone.

The front door of the car opened. “Are you passenger Leopold Hawkins Threadbare?”

“Do you see anyone *else* here?” I boarded, then sat a few rows behind The Conductor.

“Fair enough. Where to?”

“1476 New Hampshire Street.”

“What time frame and year?”

“Come again?”

“What time frame and year, Leopold?”

Time frame and year? This was getting too complicated. “How about you choose?”

“Fair enough,” The Conductor repeated.

“Do you say anything other than ‘fair enough’?”

“I also say, ‘Away we go’. Along with, ‘Hold on to your seat’. Also, ‘In case you get sick going through year zones, there are barf bags in the seat pocket in front of you’.”

Barf bags? There was the sensation of climbing the sky. I looked out the window and saw the wheels were no longer on the train tracks. The angle of the train steepened with each movement upward.

Then we paused.

“You doing alright there, Leopold?”

I don’t speak but nod my head.

“Good. Doing better than most. You haven’t gotten lightheaded yet. I warn, this bit will be unpleasant.”

At the touch of a button, the train slowly descended then picked up speed.

We were falling. No, more like plummeting! I was trapped with The Conductor, who looked more dead than alive. Was he trying to kill me? Would my last days be with this skeletal freak?

My mouth opened to scream but my earlier meal surfaced instead. I put one barf bag to my mouth. By the time the train touched ground, all barf bags were filled to the brim.

The stop was the opposite of the journey—smooth and gentle.

“We have arrived,” The Conductor announced. He pulled two tickets from his pocket, tattered and covered with white webbing. “When you are ready to board once more, pull on the white. Not a moment earlier. Understood?”

“Yes,” I croaked. My throat was still sore from the upchucking.

“Off you go, and best of luck.”

What year was this? Only a quarter of the roads were tarred. None of the tall corporate buildings existed. Even with that, I was able to find my street. The nature surrounding my neighborhood was still intact. I saw the big oak tree I enjoyed scaling in my youth. The hopscotch diagram drawn in chalk on the sidewalk.

Soon I stood in front of the house. *What was the next move? Do I make myself known? Do I ask questions? Would Mom and Dad be able to see me?*

“Maybe I should just knock and see what happens.” I raised my fist to do so when I heard voices. The right window was raised, so I looked in and listened.

Inside was a brunette. Her pregnancy was just starting to show. Across from her was a man. Black haired. It was Mom and Dad in their younger years. I was more concerned with the expressions

on their faces. Mom was upset, sad ... perhaps a bit of both. Dad was quiet. Quieter than usual.

“Leo, I didn’t mean for this to happen. We both had one too many. I swear to you ... I never slept with him again.”

“It only takes *one* time, Flora,” Dad stated. “Does Percy know about your condition?”

Percy? Who in the devil is Percy?

“He is aware,” Mom answered.

“And?”

“He assumes no guilt. Takes no responsibility. Tells me it could be anyone’s.”

Dad stepped back and forth. Mom lowered her head. “I’m so sorry Leo! You are the only man I’ve ever loved. Please believe me.”

Dad walked over and tilted Mom’s head so he could look into her eyes. I could almost hear my dad’s mind ticking, trying to make the best decision.

“Flora I do believe that you love me. I also believe you are sincere in your regret and apology. I do not want shame associated with our family. I will raise this seed as my own.”

Mom exhaled with relief. Dad, however, was not finished.

“However, from this moment on, I will no longer have intimate relations with you. The guest bedroom will be my permanent residence. I will continue to do my role as a husband but only in function and in obligation. Are you willing to accept this arrangement?”

The tears resumed as Mom agreed.

Stunned by the revelation, I fled from the house.

IV.

Mom had a one-night stand. The man I called Dad was not Dad. My biological father wanted nothing to do with me.

Pondering further, Dad was always aloof. Not cruel but not emotionally open, either. I believed it was just his makeup, but the truth was it hurt him every day to see a reminder of Mom's mistake. Mom showed extra love and care to me just to make up where Dad lacked.

“I was wrong. My heart is not here.” I slowed my sprint to a walk. “Think Leopold, think. Where else was I most loved? Who has loved me most in my life?”

I closed my eyes to do a mental rewind. *Maybe it has less to do with love and more to do with joy. When did I feel the most joy?*

“MacKenzie. MacKenzie John. Of course. Our relationship was relatively effortless, even concluded on a fantastic note. My heart is bound to be there.”

I tugged at the white covering one ticket. This time, the train came from the sky, did a fancy loop, then landed.

“Ready to leave so soon Leopold?”

“My heart isn’t here. I do have a person in mind, but I don’t remember the time, only the age. Will that do?”

“I can work with that,” The Conductor assured me while I took my seat. He passed me a fizzy drink. “But first, gulp this down. It’ll help you not vomit so much.”

I chugged down the concoction. It was nasty but anything was better than filling up the barf bags.

“So ... how old is this dame?”

“How do you know it’s a woman?”

“Because if home is not where the heart is, a woman is the next best thing.” The Conductor pushed a few buttons, preparing the train for travel. “Next stop, MacKenzie John. Age 22.”

Whether the drink helped, or the ride was smoother, I could not ascertain. I stood outside MacKenzie’s dorm quarters. She sat on the concrete steps, engaged in study with her chemistry partner. *What was her name? Jozie? Josette? It escaped me. I just knew that she wasn’t a fan of mine.*

“I’m so glad you’re my partner Mac. Otherwise, I’d have failed chemistry for sure.”

“You give me too much credit Josetta. When you apply yourself one hundred percent, you can accomplish anything.”

“Well, not everything.” Josetta concluded. “I’ve pointed out so many reasons why Leopold is wrong for you, yet you are still dating him.”

“Leopold’s nice,-”

“So are walks on the beach.”

“Leopold’s kind,-”

“Like people who donate to charity.”

“He’s very sweet,-”

“Like Lindt milk chocolate truffles.”

“He’s intelligent,-”

“So is Albert Einstein.”

“Josetta, quit interrupting me! Now, you’re just being annoying.”

“The point I’m making is that all of those traits about Leopold are textbook. You don’t say anything about charisma, how he stirs you emotionally. You don’t even speak about the sex, which is new for you.”

“Josetta, not everything is about sex.”

“Not everything. About eighty percent. Even subtracting sex from this, do you *love* him? He

always says it to you, but you've never said it to him. Has he even called you on it?"

Josetta you're so full of ... but was she? My mind functioned like a Polaroid, shaking each portion of my relationship with MacKenzie. Yes, I spoke love. Every time. MacKenzie never said love. She responded with other terms.

"I adore you as well."

"Me too."

"Same."

"How lovely!"

I always deemed it as close enough. Maybe it really wasn't.

"Look Mac. Leopold isn't a bad guy but is he really a perfect fit for you? Are you the type of woman who would sacrifice excitement for contentment? Passion for tenderness? If not, you need to let him go."

MacKenzie slammed the Chemistry book shut. "Josetta, you're absolutely right. I thought the easygoing nature of Leopold would be enough

to fulfill me. It's not. I'm tired of wearing out my fingers. I'm also tired of settling!"

"Ha, there's the Mac I know," Study session concluded, Josette and MacKenzie entered the building.

V.

In matters of the heart, you are one of the most obtuse human beings on the planet.

Katarina's voice entered my mind. *Did she have a point? Did I miss the obvious signs that MacKenzie was just tolerating me until she found her forever guy?*

"Apparently I did. Makes me wonder if I'm worthy of my heart at all. If home was not where my heart was, nor resided with this woman, where else would it be?"

I was unsure of the next destination, but I didn't want to be here anymore. I activated the remaining ticket.

"Ah Leopold, you look rather dejected."

"Nothing was as it seemed with MacKenzie," I complained. "I am uncertain what to do or where

to go. Perhaps this whole journey was to prove a heart is useless to a man like me.”

The Conductor looked at his pocket watch. “You still have some time yet. We can cruise until you’ve made up your mind. First, I have a pit stop.”

I covered my body with the blanket next to my seat. Perhaps sleep was the requirement to put hope back in my efforts.



“Arf! Arf! Arf!” This was the sound close to my right ear. My arm flailed to distance it from me.

“Arf! Arf! Arf!” The sound migrated to my left. My left arm swatted. Hit nothing but air.

A weight landed on my chest. Something rough and wet lapped my cheeks and nose. My

eyelids raised. My eyes focused. It was a black pup.

“Skye, come here girl. You’ve frightened this poor man to death!” the lady fussed, then turned her attention to me.

Wait? She can see me?

“Leopold?”

My eyes blinked repeatedly. Sure enough, it was Katarina.

How did she get here? How did I get here?

“Rina, where’s The Conductor?”

“Leopold, what are you talking about? There isn’t a train station around for at least thirty miles.”

“Um ... yeah, right.” I scratched my head, still confused. *About year. About date. About time.*

Katarina looked the same prior to her boarding the train. That wasn’t fully helpful. She had one of those faces which defied aging.

“The more important question is how did you get here. Where is your car?”

“Rina, I really don’t know. That’s the truth.” I rose to my feet but almost plopped down again if not for Katarina’s quick reflexes.

“Easy. Let’s get you back to the cottage.” She and I slowly walked down the path. Skye the pup followed closely behind.

VI.

After filling my belly with some home cooking, Katarina walked to the bathroom, “I’m drawing you a bath Leopold. You stink.”

“Like a rotten egg stink?” I joked.

“No, more like death,” she countered, wiping the smile from my face.

I disrobed outside the bathroom door then stepped in. Katarina blushed before ordering me in. She lathered the foam sponge, then scrubbed my back.

“I am perfectly capable of bathing myself Rina. I’m not an invalid.”

“Just shush and let me take care of you.”

I occupied myself with trivial issues. Needing to clip my toenails. Soaking more sun so I wouldn't look so pale. Doing sit ups to tighten my abdominals. How my hair was in dire need of a haircut.

My head was doused with water. Before I could protest, she explained, "Might as well wash your hair too."

Some of the water wet her blouse. Katarina removed the wet material, leaving on her brassiere. Without interior lining, nothing was left to the imagination. Her nipples were noticeably swollen. From the water. From exposure to the air.

Or was it something else?

"Leopold, if I didn't know you any better, I'd mistake you for a hippie," she teased.

I tickled her sides. Katarina lost her footing, landing in the tub. We took turns splashing water on each other, laughing all the while.

Her knees gave way. Katarina adjusted her body, placing her legs behind my back.

“What now Rina?”

“Pull me closer Leopold,” she whispered. I blindly obeyed her.

Katarina’s lips hovered above my own. We worked closely together often. But, never this close.

“Rina, what-”

“Leopold, for once in your life, don’t think. Trust your instincts and do.”

Katarina is the key to finding your heart, Titan told me. Was Katarina more than the key?

Nothing about this scenario felt strange. Hypnagogic, yes—a dream I never wanted to end. Holding Katarina in my arms felt natural. Felt right.

As if she belonged to me.

Katarina’s fingers twirled the wayward strands of my hair. “I’m waiting,” she whispered.

What if I'm still wrong? My mind fussed. At this point, I no longer cared. This was exactly where I needed to be and whatever the outcome, I was satisfied.

For the first time, our lips met. Yet they knew exactly what to do. What tricks to do to accelerate our desires for each other. I quieted all the questions, succumbed to what my body and spirit didn't know it craved.

VII.

There was a tug of my knit pajama pants. I arose from slumber. The black puppy barked while jumping on the bed.

“Skye. Hey girl,” I patted her on the head. I smiled, playing in slow motion the intimacy with Katarina.

Where is Katarina?

“Perhaps in the bathroom,” I believed. “I’ll get a head start on breakfast.”

After fixing breakfast, I began to worry. Katarina hadn’t emerged. I knocked on the bathroom door. No answer. I barged in.

No Katarina. None of the clothes she wore the previous night. Just what hung from the edge of the bathtub—a heart and key locket I gifted her decades ago. As a symbol of friendship.

Forgoing a shirt and footwear, I stepped outside. Surveyed the surroundings.

“Rina!” I yelled. No response. *Where in the blazes could she be?* “Rina, if this is a joke, it’s not funny. You can stop hiding now.”

I trekked up the hill, then into the forest. Called her name multiple times. Nothing.

Titan was at the cottage when I returned. Skye made figure eights around his feet.

“Titan, what are you doing here?”

“Congratulations Leopold. You’ve found your heart.” Titan stuck out his hand for me to shake but noticed my pained expression. “You don’t seem too thrilled.”

“I have my heart but Katarina’s missing.”

Titan picked up Skye, ruffled her fur ahead of putting her down. “All I can say is God has an uncanny sense of humor.”

“Whatever do you mean by that Titan?”

“Ah, my work is done here. I bid you adieu, Leopold Hawkins Threadbare.”

With a snap of the fingers Titan vanished.

“God what have You done?” I looked at the sky awaiting an explanation. “Figures. When I call You, You have nothing to say!”

Dismayed at having to solve another mystery, I ate some breakfast. One must have fuel to properly think.

The End

About the Author



The best way to describe Queen of Spades is an Antiquated Hybrid: a contemporary author whose writings have a down-to-earth resonance to anyone who reads them.

Since the age of eleven, Queen of Spades flowed with the fire of ideas indicative of rhythm inundated with stanzas. She made her writing debut as a presenter and poet in the anthology *Soulful Branches: Words and Sounds*. Her other poetry works include *Reflections of Soul*, the Eclectic collection (*Skin Edition & Beyond the Skin*), the *Spaded Truths* collection (*Themes and*

Proclamations and Life-O-Suction), Private Pain: Amidst These Ashes, and R.I.P.(E): Random Inspirations on Paper: (E)ve-olution.

Queen of Spades also collaborates in subjects she is passionate about. She provided works in the April 2014 poetry anthology Words of Fire and Ice by Durham Editing and E-books. In addition, she partnered with fellow author MJ Holman addressing the stigma of mental illness: The Sea of Conscience and Waves to Light.

Storytelling took spotlight alongside poetry in Queen's literary evolution. She has written four independent short stories: "Taint on Religion", "Mr. Bradley's Garden", "When Summer Lingers", and "Finding My Heart". Furthermore, she has participated in a number of short story compilations, such as Continuous Drips, the Concordant Vibrancy anthology series (Unity, Vitality, Lustrate, Inferno), and the Divergent Ink collection (Crackles of the Heart, Pleasure Prints). She released her first short story collection A Scribe's Sentiments in 2019.

Some tout Queen of Spades is a Poet of the People. Others classify her as a Life Writer. The primary quality that remains consistent is her dedication to contemporary creativity while remaining true to herself.