



After a pogrom forces Batya's Russian Jewish family to leave their home and make the journey to America, Batya hopes her new life will offer her a chance to become a woodcarver like her beloved father. But while many things in America are different from the world of her shtetl, one thing seems to be the same: only boys can be woodcarvers. Still, Batya is determined to learn. With the same perseverance that helped her family survive and start over in an unfamiliar land, Batya sets out to carve a place for herself.

The
Woodcarver's
Daughter



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Chapter 1 **Sugar**

The sky is still dark when I go to the window. No light can be seen through the slats in the wooden shutters, and I carefully pull one back, hoping the slow *c-r-e-a-k* won't wake anyone else in the cottage. I crane my neck to peer up at the sky. It's dark, but clear. No clouds at all. I keep staring, as if my fierce gaze will keep the clouds—and the rain—away.

I pull my head back inside. My parents are asleep in their bed way over by the far wall. The beds of my sisters, Gittel and Sarah, are closer, so I can make out their forms. Sarah is curled up on her side like a little mouse. Gittel sleeps like a lady, hands placed neatly outside the covers,

mouth closed. Avram, my older brother, is restless in sleep. And he snores!

But I'm too excited to sleep. Today is my twelfth birthday. And today is the day Papa has promised to take us to the fair. I'm so happy that I'll get to go. Last year there was a big storm, and the fair was called off. Two years ago I was sick, and the year before that, Papa didn't have the money to take us. So I've been praying that this year, nothing will go wrong.

I know all about the fair. It has a fortune-teller, a puppet theater, and real live dancing bears. And the things you can buy! A lace-edged handkerchief, a toy drum, a doll with a felt dress. Then there's the food—blini, pierogi, roasted nuts, and gingerbread.

The sky is brighter now. I get dressed so I can do my chores. Even though it's a special day, I still have to feed the chickens, gather the eggs, and milk the cow. And I must give oats and fresh water to Mala, the little black horse that I love almost as much as I love my Mama and Papa. Mala is high-strung and spirited. She knocks her bucket of oats all over the stall floor. When

Avram tries to ride her, she throws him off. Oh, she's a naughty one! Papa keeps threatening to sell her, but I don't think he will. Deep down, he loves her too.



An hour later, we're seated in our wooden cart, on our way. Mala's black coat shines in the morning light, and she holds her head high. On one side of me is Sarah, who is only four. She bounces up and down on the seat while Gittel, who is a year younger than me but who acts two years older, sits primly, hands folded in her lap. Avram is asleep. His mouth is open, and he's snoring—again!

“Sarah, stop,” says Gittel crossly. “You're on my skirt.”

“She's excited—can't you see?” I say.

“Well, you may not care if your apron is stained or your hair is snarled. But I do!”

I look down to see that, yes, there is a yellow smear on my apron. And in my rush to get ready, I didn't do a very good job fixing my hair.

“Some people have more important things to do than to fuss over their clothes!”

“No fighting,” says Mama. She turns to Sarah. “You’ll wear yourself out before we get there. Settle down.”

“All right.” Sarah is briefly still, but as soon as Mama turns, she starts bouncing again. Avram stirs, and his butter-blond curls fall across his face. Gittel and I envy those curls. But I envy a lot of things about Avram, not just his hair.

I decide to ignore Gittel and Avram and look at the scenery. We go past the woods and onto the open road. Soon I see the cottages and the wooden *shul* of the next village, and next, there is a long stretch filled only with fields and sky. Mala keeps up a lively pace—*clip CLOP, clip CLOP*—and soon we’re on the outskirts of the town. “We’re almost there,” I announce. And although I don’t bounce, I’m as excited as Sarah.

Sarah’s jostling wakes Avram, who rubs his eyes and mumbles, “Almost where?”

“The fair, you silly!” cries Sarah.

“My skirt!” Gittel says, smoothing the cotton with her hand.

Gittel and her stupid old skirt, I think. I give Sarah’s shoulders a little squeeze.

“Girls, what did I say about quarreling?” Mama asks. But she’s smiling. Mama, like the rest of us, is looking forward to the fair. Papa clucks his tongue to tell Mala to stop, and then he gets down to tie her up. We’re here!



I’ve been to town before on market days with Papa. I’ve seen the stalls crammed with cherries, plums splitting their skins, currants in their wicker baskets. I remember the butcher and the fishmonger and the baker with his loaves piled way up high. There was a woman who sold fabric, the coiled bolts standing straight as young trees, and another who sold used shoes and boots, all heaped together—you had to dig to find a pair in your size.

But I’ve never been here on the day of the fair, and I can’t get over how different everything looks. Garlands of evergreen boughs and flowers hang from the buildings. The stalls—so

many more than on market day—are decorated with shiny fabric and still more flowers. I spy the fortune-teller with her heavy silver earrings and her silk scarf tied tightly over her black hair. She sits at a table behind a crystal ball. Right in front of her is a troupe of jugglers. One juggles apples, and another, golden hoops. A third juggles lighted torches. The crowd gasps as the torches rise and fall in the air. But the fire frightens me. Last summer, our neighbor's cottage burned down. I can still remember the way the flames gobbled up the little house, leaving only chunks of blackened wood and ashes behind.

I'd much rather look at the fortune-teller with her spangled shawl. Or the man next to her, selling round cakes that are fried in oil and sprinkled with sugar. Next to him is another man selling strawberries topped with cream.

"Papa, I want strawberries," says Sarah. "Please, can I have some?"

"And I want a fried cake," Avram adds. "Maybe two. They're small."

"Each of you can choose a treat," Papa says, reaching in his pocket for the flannel sack that

holds the kopecks we can spend today. Sarah and Gittel choose the berries, and Avram picks the fried cakes.

"What about you, Batya?" Papa asks. "Wouldn't you like something too?"

I can't decide. The cakes smell delicious, and the berries look juicy and sweet. But I want something even more special. "I'll wait, Papa," I say, and we continue on our way. Here is the man with the roasted nuts; there is the gingerbread lady. I see people eating pierogi and blini. But still I don't ask for anything.

We stop at the puppet theater. I laugh at the jester's tricks and admire the princess's velvet dress. But when I glance over at Papa, I see that he is not watching the puppets. He's talking to someone; I recognize Mr. Moskowitz from the shop where Papa works as a woodcarver. Mr. Moskowitz has a merry face with blue eyes and a black beard. But today he looks worried. And so does Papa. I move closer, trying to hear what they're saying.

". . . setting houses on fire," says Mr. Moskowitz. Fires? Where? But the puppet show is

over and the applause drowns out the rest of his words. Mr. Moskowitz shakes Papa's hand and says goodbye. Papa still looks worried. Is it about the fires?

I want to find out—but wait, what's this? I hear a very noisy machine and see a man standing behind it. The machine is spinning sugar into a pink cloud. It looks so light and fluffy. "Fairy floss!" calls the man. "Only two kopecks for a stick. Step right up, and try it yourself!" A crowd gathers.

"Fairy floss," repeats Sarah. "What's that?"

"It's candy," Gittel declares as if she knows everything. I stare at the man and his long paper tube. Every time it travels around the bowl of the machine, more of the floss sticks to it. Soon there's a pink, shimmery cloud of candy attached to the paper. When he removes it from the machine, the sugary crystals glint in the sun. I have to try it. "Papa, can I have a stick of fairy floss?"

"It's two kopecks," Papa says. He worries a lot about money. But then he smiles. "All right. You'll give your sisters and brother a taste, right?"

"Oh yes!" I say, though I wish I didn't have to share with Gittel. Papa tells the man to prepare another stick, and I watch as he spins a new pink cloud and hands it to me. I raise the candy to my lips. Sweet, light, and gone in an instant, it really *does* taste like something a fairy would eat. Mmm!

"Save some for me!" Sarah says, and so I hand the fluffy stick to her. She passes it to Gittel, who then gives it to Avram. After the floss is gone, Avram wants to stop at the stall where you can shoot an arrow at a target for a prize, and Sarah wants to see the bears. While they're arguing, I move closer to Papa.

"What did you and Mr. Moskowitz talk about?" I ask quietly.

"Shoptalk," Papa says. "Nothing too exciting."

"But you looked so worried," I say.

Papa stares at me as if he's trying to decide whether to say more. But before he can answer, we're interrupted, this time by the sound of music.

"What's that?" Gittel asks.

"It must be the carousel," Mama says.

“I’ve never seen a carousel,” Avram says.

“Me neither,” says Sarah.

“Let’s go!” Gittel says. “We don’t want to miss *that*.”

Again, I forget about Papa and Mr. Moskowitz as I take my sisters’ hands and hurry toward the sound. There is a crowd in front of me, so I have to wriggle my way between a man smoking a pipe and a tall woman in a dark blue dress. Finally, I reach the front—and there it is! Under the red-and-white striped awning are the leaping painted horses, spinning around in a circle. Some are black, like Mala. Others are gray, and others all the shades of brown: honey, nutmeg, cinnamon, chocolate. Their saddles are scarlet, midnight blue, gold, and green.

I move still closer so I can see their faces. They look so real! There’s one that’s jet black, just like Mala. Her bridle is pink, and there is a real, pale pink ostrich feather attached to her forehead.

“How beautiful!” murmurs Mama.

“And such fine workmanship!” Papa notices such things. So do I.

“Can we have a ride, Papa?” cries Sarah. “Please?”

Papa fishes out the kopecks for the tickets. Sarah, Gittel, and even Avram line up immediately. Only I hang back.

“Don’t you want a ride too, *katzeleh*?” Papa says, using his favorite nickname for me, *little cat*.

“Not yet,” I say. Of course I want to ride the carousel. But I have to look at it—really look—first. Each horse looks so different. The person who made these horses is more than a carver. He is an artist.

When I finally do take my ride, I climb on the black horse with the pink plume. The carousel begins to move, and everything goes by in a blur. But all too soon, the music slows, and we come to a stop. I get down, and even though it’s silly, I pat the horse’s muzzle. If I could, I would ride her all day.

Later, we sit on benches in the town square and eat the supper Mama has brought: black bread, boiled potatoes, cucumbers, cheese, and tart green apples. And later still, we watch a display of fireworks, the night sky exploding with

color. The fireworks are pretty, but my mind keeps going back to the carousel. In my imagination, I hear the music, and I climb on top of my black horse—for she *is* mine, at least in my dreams—as she bobs up and down, up and down, up and up and up.