

Excerpt from ‘Perdita Sails to School: Maritcha & Paul Cuffee Black History Flash Cards Dance’ from *Door of No Return* © Nehassaiu deGannes

...

Maritcha was Crazy Courageous too!

While her parents were pursuing big-word conversations with  
the important **Negro** people of their time  
Maritcha sat down & wrote a long letter To  
all the old women & all the old men  
Who said she’d never ever ever go to school again.  
Then she climbed the Rhode Island statehouse steps with her letter in her hand And  
she entered the statehouse doors  
And she opened her Maritcha Remond Lyons mouth And  
let out a literary roar  
And you know what?  
All the old women and all the old men who said she’d never go to school again Had  
To Eat Crow!  
They had to swing wide the doors of The Girls Dep’t of Providence High Like  
the mighty gates of Zion  
And say “Welcome, Come On In”  
To our very own Maritcha Remond Lyons.

Run Perdita Run Run Run! Run Perdita Run Run Run!  
Gotta make it back before the second bell rings!

*(the hat shares a secret!)*

C is for Clever Connections. I, Paul Cuffee, carried letters from my Quaker allies proving  
I was a free black man and not a slave.

*(hat on heart)*

Oh...Maybe, that’s why he became a Quaker...

*(hat as crown)*

I want all ships’ cargo leaving the coast of Sierra Leone to be full of camwood and spice  
and ivory and not slaves.

Paul Cuffee wants to stop the slave trade! Paul  
Cuffee wants to stop the slave trade! *(the girl sails  
away with her hat)*

C is for Crew. Paul Cuffee sailed with a multicultural crew. All Black and Native  
American, the same color as me and my lost Mommy, Hermione!

But Maritcha didn’t have a crew

When she stood at the door  
to her new Providence classroom...

Even the chalk in the teacher's hand went still— "Class,  
Now, Who Would Like To Share Her Desk?"

Not Me! One girl-bird flew to the windowsill  
Not Me! One girl-bird flew to the floor.

Maritcha walked to her desk... & absorbed the  
emptiness beside her  
She opened her primer (*& writes*)  
"The iron has entered my soul" I am  
not here to make friends  
I am not here to be BFF's with these girls I am  
here to kindle the fires within me  
To read & to write as is my God-given light "The  
iron has entered my soul"

But then, one little girl-bird perched at Maritcha's side  
& opened her primer & looked deep deep deep into Maritcha's eyes

That girl's name was Lucia Tappan!  
Her grand-uncles were the Abolitionists Arthur & Lewis Tappan!  
Lucia & Maritcha became BFF's Best Friends Forever?!?

*(the hat congratulates his girl)*

Good girl, Perdita. C is for cool clandestine reading. I may have had bibles and bibles and  
bibles in my trunk as I sailed to Sierra Leone, but what did I read? Not the bible, but  
a book on the abolition of slavery!

C is for Circle. Maritcha & Lucia & Paul Cuffe & me work to reverse the circle that had stolen  
people like Paul Cuffe's Daddy from Africa at the age of 3.

Lucia as in "light" & Maritcha Remond "Iron" Lyons  
That is so cool! I wish I had a BFF.  
*(Perdita is back at school, but exhausted from her exertions, she begins to grow sleepy)*  
Hey, did you know that Pearl St. was named Pearl St.  
because it's where oysters washed ashore in good ol' New York City &  
they paved the streets with pearls? Well not pearls exactly  
but oyster shells, the shells of pearls and well you know P is for Perdita P is  
for Pearl & Pearl rhymes with Girlllllllllll?  
*((the second bell rings))* Made it.  
Hey, did they ever line the streets with girls?  
*(and Perdita is gone)*  
Ohhhh, did they ever line the seas with girls?