

Queen Isabella Eats a Pineapple and Misses the Jews

by Cami Park

It was Christopher who got her thinking about the Jews again. He had left the same day they did, and so all were connected in her mind, as if together somehow. She read his letters half-wondering if he would mention them, wanting to know if the Jews were devastated without her, or if they had moved on quickly. Were they sullen? Did they talk about her? What did they say? Were there other monarchs already? Did they seem happy, or were they sometimes wistful for no apparent reason?

Now Christopher was back again, without them, a year later, with gold and Indians and this odd fruit that confronts her now at her breakfast on the terrace overlooking the sea. It is funny-looking—bottom-heavy, spiny, rough to the touch, with a bushy, pompous crown. Yet split on the platter before her, the exposed flesh of the pineapple seems as the sun itself, and the sweetness of it is almost enough to cause Isabella to cast off her jewels and renounce Christ and everything and wander the earth. Just to do it.

She had only just started to get over them, the Jews, with their stubborn, endearing habits, the way they'd circumcise their young and refuse to lift a finger on Saturdays, and could never ever say the name of God out loud. Infuriating. Adorable.

She used to like to tease the Jews, on their lazy afternoons together. She would playfully circle the edge of their ear with her little finger and whisper —yah weh yah weh—it was a delight to her, their change in color, the turning away, the way she could feel them

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wanting to say something, not daring. How shamelessly she used them.

It wasn't that she wanted to change the Jews. She loved the Jews, and only wanted to improve them. She knew if she worked on them enough—restricted their living quarters, had them wear badges to identify themselves —she could eventually get them to change their eating habits, and little by little they would accept Jesus and stop lighting so many candles. It was a matter of perseverance. A labor of love. She would have kept the Jews around forever if it wasn't for Torquemada's jealousy. Silly Torquemada. Everyone knew he was gay, anyway.

She ended it when she found out the Jews had been trying to get her pregnant. Torquemada brought her the evidence. The charts, the graphs. The notes on her cravings for cacao. She had been spending more time with the Jews than she realized. Madness. As if a baby could solve all their problems, make her give up tempting the Jews with bacon, or allow them into universities.

Of course, it was unforgivable. Isabella was a queen, and would not be fooled. She went to Ferdinand and questioned him on his close associations with the Jews. She accused him of loving them more than he loved her. The ultimatum was issued—it was the Jews, or his queen. Isabella cried. The Jews had to go.

And now here she is, a year later, Jewless on the terrace, faced with this ridiculous looking, impossible-tasting fruit, and the sea beyond. The fragrance of the pineapple is heady, and Isabella catches herself entertaining such outlandish thoughts as would the Jews take her back after everything. She is relieved when Ferdinand comes onto the terrace, in full regalia, ready to start a day posturing over the spoils of the New World.

Isabella commands Ferdinand to taste, and he bends down to the chunk of pineapple in the linen napkin in her hand. But the scent of the fruit on her breath is too much for him, and he pushes his lips against hers, causing her to lurch back and smash the chunk of pineapple into his chin.

"All for the glory of Spain, my Queen, all for the glory of Spain," Ferdinand says as he wipes his face with the napkin. Isabella blinks.

There is silence between them. Ferdinand fidgets and paces behind Isabella; Isabella is still, looking at her hands.

"My King," the queen says, finally, "there's something I've often wondered. About the Jews."

Ferdinand stops moving altogether. "The Jews? What about them? I thought we were done with them."

"Why can't they—why don't they—didn't they—ever say the name of God out loud?"

"Oh." Ferdinand looks down, kicks at a stone on the terrace. "Grandfather said it was 'ineffable.'"

"Ineffable?"

"Yes. Ineffable."

"Oh."

Queen Isabella reaches across the table and spears a chunk of pineapple with her fork. Ferdinand gazes to the sea, tugs his codpiece.

