

## JEZEBEL

The waitress cuts right to the chase, rattling off specials before Maslow even sits down.

“Hey,” he interrupts, “What happened to, ‘My name is blah-blah and I’ll be your server today’?”

She dredges up an indulgent smile: “OK, my name is blah-blah and I’ll be your server today.”

“OK, Blah Blah, forget the specials. I’ll have an iced tea and a taco salad...”  
He pauses to look at her name tag, “Jess.”

“It’s actually Jezz.”

“Says Jess.”

“I say Jess. Avoids explanation.” Maslow doesn’t blink, so she condescends to continue. “Short for Jezebel. My parents were hippies,” she says as if that explains many an idiocy. Including Maslow’s.

It seems that no matter where he goes, there they are.

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All Maslow remembers about Jezebel from those endless 1960s Sunday school classes in itchy wool pants and embarrassing clip-on ties is that she was a “bad girl.” Although he’s heard that some people now consider her a deeply spiritual nature-worshiper. Maslow doesn’t take sides. After all, some of his favorite, deeply spiritual, nature-worshiper friends have had their “bad girl” moments—especially at Jezebel’s age.

Tell me more, he thinks. To himself. And whoever else is listening.

The next day is sultry and significantly cloudless. So, after several hours of mosquito-plagued brush clearing in the woods behind his house, Maslow stretches out on his reclining porch chair and subjects himself to King James.

It doesn't take long to recollect the gist. Around 850 BC, Jezebel, a take-no-prisoners, idol-worshipping princess from Lebanon, got married off to Ahab, a Hebrew king. This was a typical diplomacy-by-marriage ploy at the time, except that Jezebel had the admirable *chutzpah* to bring her fertility God Ba'al (along with his multiple personalities and supernatural associates) along with her. Her smitten husband not only welcomed her with open arms, he embraced all those gods of hers, too. This was definitely not the way to win the hearts and minds of a monotheistic people. A typical religious power struggle ensued but, thanks to Jezebel's persistence—and occasional persecution of Yahweh's prophets—Ba'al *et al.* got the upper hand.

This blasphemy incurred the sanctimonious wrath of Elijah. Oh yeah, Maslow thinks. The Passover guy. When Maslow was a kid, an older cousin used to slip outside between courses, put a sheet over his head, and knock on the door, scaring the bejeezus out of Maslow's grandfather who, by then, was leading the Seder through sheer muscle memory, since he didn't have much of any other kind left.

Maslow returns to ninth Century BC where he finds Elijah trying to put an end to Jezebel's polytheistic nonsense by proving that his singular God can whip all her gods with one hand tied behind His Almighty back.

Maslow's eyes get heavy, but just as he's about to slip into his inevitable afternoon nap, he reaches 1 Kings 17:22, the chapter and verse in which Elijah does a so-called miracle healing: "*He stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again.'*"

*And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.”*

“Hear that? Hear that?” a voice shouts. “I bet the poor kid revived. He was probably scared out of his wits when he saw that old guy crawling on top of him. This is the voice of moral authority upon which you base my wickedness? Spare me.”

Maslow looks up and there she is: ravishing, radiant, raven-haired; eyes aflame and sparks a-flying; a cross between Janis Joplin and Grace Slick at Woodstock. Full volume. Dressed in a brilliant, multicolored robe, arms outstretched to the heavens before a huge statue of a bull. Lightning flashes above her, while torrential rains assault the parched earth. She’s a wide-awake lucid dream.

“For almost three thousand years, they’ve been dragging my name through the historical gutter: ‘Oh, she’s a real Jezebel,’ you people say with a dismissive shake of your self-righteous heads.” She feigns an indulgent affection for the ignorance of humans. And then roars like a lioness unleashed: “More power to her! More power to every woman who refuses to bow to your macho revisionist crap!”

Maslow is getting used to being harangued by the allegedly dead, but her intensity gives him pause. He blinks and lowers his head in case she decides to smite him on the spot. But she’s so stunning, he can’t keep himself from looking back up. Eyes wide.

The rain stops. She lowers her hands and sits down against the large statue. A fire appears before her. She seems ready to have a more civil conversation. Although he expects it will be one-sided.

“As every Bible thumper knows,” Jezebel explains, now as calm as she’d been enraged before, “I waged a battle of wills with the famous exhibitionist and prophet,” she spits the word, “Elijah.”

“Exhibitionist?” she continues, answering Maslow’s unspoken question. “This is a guy who doesn’t just die. He ascends to his precious personal heaven in a goddamn whirlwind. And still makes those miraculous appearances every Passover to every Jewish household. What a show-off.”

Jezebel laughs heartily at this. Not some kind of witchy cackle either. A deep, throaty, triumphant laugh.

So far, the vision has been like watching a movie. But now she waves her hand over the blaze, reducing it to embers, so she can shoot the fire in her eyes directly into Maslow’s heart.

“This is the same guy,” she continues, “who had hissy fits about *my* modest attempts to give Ba’al the respect he deserved, when *he* was the one who whipped *his* people into such a frenzy that they went on a rampage and killed four hundred of *my* prophets. All because we didn’t bow to his precious Yahweh.”

She takes a deep breath and looks to the heavens. “What makes me the bad girl here? What about those commandments you’re always prattling on about? What part of ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’ didn’t you understand? Did I miss the fine print?”

She shakes her head in exasperation. “And please don’t bring up the lightning strike that ‘proved’ little old Elijah was mightier than all my prophets combined. What a bunch of revisionist crap! Elijah couldn’t get a fire going with one of your matches, let alone a bolt of lightning! *My* god was the lightning god. *My* prophets of Ba’al caused the fire to light under our sacrificial bull. Elijah had his people kill my prophets so he could take all the credit for ending the three-year drought that, by the way, his God started!”

Her body begins to shimmer and drift away until she becomes a solitary figure in the air looking to the heavens, lost in thought.

Maslow's vision clears in the blink of an eye. He's back on the porch. Looking out through the screen door to the piles of brush he'd collected that morning. He closes his eyes and leans back to sleep, hoping to dream his way back to the here and now. But he remains suspended between worlds. So he picks King James back up to see what the good book actually says:

Indeed, a drought threatened the entire kingdom. It was time for desperate measures. So, one sunny day, Jezebel's prophets engaged in a frenzy of chanting and blood-letting (was she a cutter?) to convince Ba'al to send some lightning down, figuring it would presage some serious rain.

After they failed—according to the well-worn myth—Elijah had his people soak the altar with water, even fill a trench around it. An exhibitionist, just like she'd said. Then, sure enough, good old Yahweh sent down a bolt of lightning that vaporized the whole bloody thing and set off a torrential downpour.

When you spend your formative years like Maslow, reading about seas parting and spontaneously combusting bushes, you get used to this kind of thing. But the description of the mass murder in 1 Kings 18:40 gives him pause:

*“And Elijah said to them, ‘Seize the prophets of Ba'al; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and killed them there.”*

Maslow begins to get a little indignant. How did he get brainwashed as a kid to believe massacres like this justified? What is it about people who worship one God? Yahweh, Allah, Christ almighty, are these guys all fucking sociopaths or what? Something get lost in translation? When did people nonchalantly start accepting that unconditional love required spilling rivers of blood? How much self-righteous smite-ing, Crusade-ing and Fatwa-ing is it going to take before we stop this endless idiocy?

“Exactly,” Maslow hears Jezebel sigh in his ear. “Let's move on, already.”

Maslow begins to wonder whether Elijah will show up and shake hands with her, and together they'll proclaim eternal peace throughout the Middle East.

Jezebel breaks into his reverie. "Stop dreaming, my simple Scribe."

She reappears again before him, but now as a modern teenage girl, dressed in an angry shade of dark purple and showing a little roll of midriff. She has green streaks in her henna'd black hair, rings through both eyebrows, and is sitting on a curb in a downtown parking lot where skateboards outnumber cars. She's smoking a cigarette and smoothing the fur on a large gray cat whom she's trying to protect from getting flattened by some skateboarder landing a Jesus Flip.

"You know what it's like to be a teenager in love?" she asks, looking over Maslow's left shoulder as she takes the deep, exaggerated, side-mouthed drag of a still-unfamiliar smoker. Her voice is a bit plaintive, but not whining, "Do you know what it's like to have your dad marry you off to some disgusting old king? Who hires a delusional holy man to knock some sense into you?"

The vision goes split-screen: Palestine Jezebel staring defiantly into the void; modern Jezebel staring insolently into the distance, trying to see her way into some other reality. They're both talking, saying the same thing in stereo.

"How would you like to be forbidden to practice your rituals? How would you like to be forbidden to perform your sacraments?"

Maslow's increasingly fragile pretensions of normalcy crumble as the Jezebels shove him interrogation-like back in his chair and begin pounding on his chest. Glaring spitfires, they raise their voices and thunder: "When gods become weapons and women become coin, everyone suffers!"

She's gone. Totally gone. Leaving him in crash position—knees pulled up, arms over head—surrounded by fractal swirls of gasping thoughts, whispers of terror, and the secret thrill of someone who thinks he may have found the keys to the kingdom.

Who am I kidding? Maslow wonders. These are not figments. These “people” are as real, wise, and powerful as anyone he’s ever met. He’s willing and ready to own this thing. But he refuses to be possessed. And somehow, he knows he’s going to have to figure out the difference. Sanity be damned.