

THE QUEEN AND I



Russell Andresen

*The Queen
and I*

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By
Russell Andresen



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This book is dedicated to the comic geniuses who entertained and inspired me my whole life.

Let's face it, without Jews, fags, and gypsies, there is no theater.

—Mel Brooks, *To Be or Not To Be*

Contents

Chapter One: Show of Shows	1
Chapter Two: Creative Differences	8
Chapter Three: Heinrich	18
Chapter Four: To Catch a Hit	23
Chapter Five: If This House Is Rocking . . .	28
Chapter Six: Betrayal	34
Chapter Seven: Rave Reviews	40
Chapter Eight: Phases	46
Chapter Nine: Ups and Downs	53

<i>Chapter Ten: The Phone Is Not Ringing</i>	58
<i>Chapter Eleven: Thinking for Two</i>	65
<i>Chapter Twelve: No Prospects</i>	73
<i>Chapter Thirteen: Rewrite</i>	80
<i>Chapter Fourteen: Missing Persons</i>	84
<i>Chapter Fifteen: Zion</i>	91
<i>Chapter Sixteen: The Locals</i>	99
<i>Chapter Seventeen: Sheriff Pitts</i>	107
<i>Chapter Eighteen: Music in the Night</i>	112
<i>Chapter Nineteen: Pish-Posh, Tisch-Tosh</i>	121
<i>Chapter Twenty: Everyone Is a Critic</i>	127
<i>Chapter Twenty-One: Like Mother, Like Son</i>	132

THE QUEEN AND I

<i>Chapter Twenty-Two: Saul</i>	141
<i>Chapter Twenty-Three: A Lady Reveals Nothing</i>	152
<i>Chapter Twenty-Four: Strange Bedfellows</i>	162
<i>Chapter Twenty-Five: Vaudeville Origins</i>	169
<i>Chapter Twenty-Six: The Hunt</i>	178
<i>Chapter Twenty-Seven: Anti-Playwright</i>	182
<i>Chapter Twenty-Eight: Love and Sushi</i>	189
<i>Chapter Twenty-Nine: Brainstorming</i>	199
<i>Chapter Thirty: Houseguest</i>	209
<i>Chapter Thirty-One: Someone's in the Kitchen with Cloris</i>	216
<i>Chapter Thirty-Two: Love and Mishegas</i>	224

<i>Chapter Thirty-Three: Yom Kippur Is the New Christmas</i>	235
<i>Chapter Thirty-Four: Abby-Dexterous</i>	242
<i>Chapter Thirty-Five: The Cat Show</i>	252
<i>Chapter Thirty-Six: You Little Mamzer</i>	260
<i>Chapter Thirty-Seven: Dinner for Two</i>	269
<i>Chapter Thirty-Eight: Eyes Wide Open</i>	276
<i>Chapter Thirty-Nine: Off to the Island</i>	281
<i>Chapter Forty: Bounty, Set, Catch</i>	290
<i>Chapter Forty-One: Hate Crimes</i>	294
<i>Chapter Forty-Two: Leaving the Nest</i>	307

THE QUEEN AND I

<i>Chapter Forty-Three: With Two, You Get Kreplach</i>	314
<i>Chapter Forty-Four: I See You</i>	319
<i>Chapter Forty-Five: Rounding up the Schmendricks</i>	329
<i>Chapter Forty-Six: Devil among Us</i>	336
<i>Chapter Forty-Seven: Eyes of a Monster</i>	344
<i>Chapter Forty-Eight: Premier</i>	358
<i>Chapter Forty-Nine: Night on the Town</i>	367
<i>Chapter Fifty: Curtain Call</i>	373
<i>Chapter Fifty-One: New Tenants</i>	380

Chapter One: Show of Shows

The champagne exploded, reverberating through the giant hall as the well-wishers and invited guests took in the festivities. This was a grand night, a triumph! This was the night for all involved to praise their favorite playwright, Jeffrey David Rothstein, for his latest and greatest work to date. The smash hit, *A Dreidel Spins in Yonkers*.

A play that took Broadway by storm and was already generating buzz about shattering all of the records come awards season. The heartwarming tale of a Hassidic Jewish girl breaking away from the bonds of the rabbinical laws set forth by her father to become an exotic dancer in the seedy underworld of Yonkers.

“Gritty and joyous” was what they were saying, and the show had been sold out for tonight’s premier and for the foreseeable future. It was the perfect blend of politically incorrect humor and outright offensiveness that the new Broadway audience craved and spent big money to see.

Gone were the times of the happy-go-lucky show tunes and tales of hardworking artists struggling to pay the rent. This was offensive at its very core, which made you want to jump out of your seat and scream, “I feel the same way!”, and for the two and a half hours that it ran, the audience was free from the restraints set forth by the media and political pundits who told all of us how to think and speak.

Jeffrey David Rothstein was a genius among ordinary men, and this was surely to be his crowning achievement. His last play, *Shakespeare in Borough Park*, had brought him the most recognition to date, and from what the early reviews were saying, this new play was going to make everyone forget that groundbreaking tale of culture shock when an anti-Semite embraces his inner Jew.

Business cards were exchanged, jokes were told, and it seemed that everywhere one turned, another person was quoting a line from the show. It was what every writer dreams of, that not only is his work appreciated, but it is loved by so many that they cannot help but tell everyone and anyone who they meet about it, thus giving life and legs to the artist's work.

"Well, it really was amazing working with him. The man is a genius," Jacob Stone said to a grateful guest who was praising the performance with the joy of a child on Chanukah. "Just being around him was a privilege that I will never forget and am so grateful for."

Jacob was Jeffrey's newest assistant and had worked very closely with the star of the evening during all of those long nights of writing this future masterpiece. He had done everything that his mentor had asked of him. He ran errands, made sure there was always plenty of Perrier and orange juice available, which was Jeffrey's poison when he wrote, and he was there to run to the Second Avenue Deli when the craving hit for pastrami, corned beef, and chopped liver on rye bread.

Jacob was an aspiring writer himself and just being around Jeffrey fed more passion and desire to write than any other experience in his entire life. He had been hooked from the first time his mother and grandmother brought him to see Jeffrey's first play, *All's Quiet in the West Bank*, a love story about a

THE QUEEN AND I

Palestinian girl who shuns her Islamic upbringing to marry an Israeli soldier who killed her brother.

Tonight, Jacob's true responsibilities were to entertain the guests until the very shy Jeffrey was ready to come out to receive his accolades. Jeffrey was never comfortable with crowds and even less at ease with constant praise. Part of his reasoning was that he knew how good he was, and getting the approval from those whom he didn't care about did very little to change his perspective on life. The only person whose opinion mattered to him was Rachel Benjamin, his longtime girlfriend and drama critic, who had been seeing him for the last five years.

"So, tell us, Jacob. Where is the man of the hour?" a guest asked with great anticipation.

"Oh, knowing him, he's probably hidden away in the men's room, writing on that little pad of his and coming up with his newest work of sheer brilliance."

* * *

"I'm telling you, Jeffrey, this is the big one. You have etched your name in the hearts and minds of the Broadway community, and there is nothing to stop you now," said Rachel as she typed away text after text on her phone. "The way that audience was eating it up, you would think that Jesus himself was speaking."

She was a very attractive woman of only thirty, slender of build, and her body could best be described as athletic with a bit more voluptuousness. Already she was at the top of her profession as an award-winning theater critic. She always found it amusing that she should get awards for expressing her opinion, which was seldom different from her readers. After all, if they didn't agree with her, they wouldn't read her reviews.

“That’s what you should do next, Jeffrey, you should write a play about Jesus!” she continued excitedly. “That way we can get more of the goyim into the theater. Those Gentiles don’t know what they’re missing.”

She put her phone down and tilted her head back, stretching her neck from right to left to release tension. “So, what do you think?”

Jeffrey mumbled a response that was barely audible, and she looked down and asked, “What did you say?”

He pulled his head out from under her skirt and said, “I hope they like it better than what I’m trying to do right now.”

“Aww, I’m sorry,” she said, rubbing her fingers through his hair. “I guess I’m just a little distracted.”

“Well, I’m done with this then,” Jeffrey said as he washed his face in the sink of the men’s room. They had snuck in here together, locked the door behind themselves for a little alone time, and their feelings for each other had taken over. Actually, it was more of her feelings for herself than anything else since she was the only person whom she really cared about. Jeffrey had thought this on many occasions, but he was the type of man who was better with a loveless relationship than no relationship at all.

Being with Rachel had even inspired many of his writings that had not yet been sold or even published, just another spiral binder in his library of unfinished or unpublished work. These were his babies, and nobody knew about them. These were the words that flowed late at night when he had time to himself and nobody could pollute his mind with their senseless jargon.

Writing was the way Jeffrey found release and was able to transform himself into something and someone whom he was not. Where he was uncomfortable with crowds, his hero was charismatic and posh. Where he was shy around women, his leading men could melt the female heart by just entering the

THE QUEEN AND I

room. He was king of his fantasy worlds, and he loved expanding them.

“I guess it’s time for me to head out there, isn’t it?” he asked, although he really wasn’t interested in the answer.

“Well, they *are* here for you. It’s your night.”

* * *

Back in the ballroom with the guests, Jeffrey was immediately spotted, and the roar of approval and clinking of glasses echoed throughout the room. If it had not been for the fact that Jeffrey was already a pseudo famous writer, he may not have even been noticed in a crowd of this size. He did not solicit much attention in a crowd.

He was about six feet tall with salt and pepper hair, medium build, and crow’s feet around his shockingly bright blue eyes. If you did not know better, you would swear that he was maybe of Irish descent, but he was born and bred Jewish. His father’s family came from the Ukraine and his mother’s from Germany; a great many of them had been killed during the Nazi reign of terror throughout Europe. But Jeffrey did little to draw attention to himself. He did not walk with his head held high or with perfect posture; he was just another talented shmuck walking among the talentless.

A microphone was handed to Jeffrey as the cry of “Speech, speech!” began ringing out amongst the crowd. He moved in to speak, and the ring of the microphone momentarily left everyone in attendance flinching at the sound.

“Sorry about that,” he began. “Well, I would like to thank all of you for coming out tonight, and it looks like you all enjoyed the show. I would like to thank Jacob Stone for all of his invaluable help during this process.” The crowd erupted in

applause as Jacob gave an awkward wave and smile. "I would also like to thank the best critic in the world, and my personal worst critic, the love of my life, Rachel Benjamin." The crowd again applauded, and someone asked when there would be wedding bells.

"Not until he wins all of his Tonys," Rachel interrupted and shouted back to the crowd. She had saved Jeffrey from answering this very uncomfortable question, one that even they rarely discussed.

Jeffrey laughed with the crowd and continued, "I wish I shared your confidence, Rachel. But in the meantime, thank you all for coming and enjoy the rest of the evening."

Another round of applause broke out, and Jeffrey and Rachel began mingling through the crowd until they eventually went their own ways. She was a driven woman who never failed to seize an opportunity to advance her career and reputation, while Jeffrey found Jacob and the nearest corner so he would have some form of buffer between him and the encroaching crowds that just wanted to share a few brief moments picking the brains of this genius in their midst.

"This could not have gone any better, Jeffrey," Jacob said, trying to contain his excitement. "They love it! You can write your own check for the next one."

"We'll see."

"I'm telling you, we have to strike while the iron is hot." Jacob was almost jumping from excitement.

"I was thinking about taking some time off."

"Bad idea! You have to keep it going while you're in the zone. Imagine what you can write next."

"I actually have nothing in my head right now, Jacob. That's why I want some time off. You know, to refresh."

THE QUEEN AND I

Jacob smiled at Jeffrey and said to him as quietly as the crowd would allow, “Why don’t you pen someone else’s idea?”

Jeffrey returned a puzzled look and asked, “What do you mean someone else’s?”

“I have a guy who I met a couple of months ago who has a shitload of money and wants to get on Broadway, but he can’t write worth a shit. He told me that he would let you name your price if you agreed to write his idea and bring the concept to life. He’ll even fund the play.” Jacob’s excitement was overwhelming him as he started to giggle and asked, “What do you think?”

Jeffrey took a sip of his champagne and gave an awkward, undecided nod of his head.

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