



Joanna the Villainess. Forgive us...

Members of large families often hear that the youngest of the family, known as "the baby," is spoiled. Indeed, it doesn't take a large family, the youngest Jacob definitely pulled the wool over his father's eyes to take the birthright from his elder brother Esau in early Biblical times. Some prefer to think that "the baby" isn't spoiled, but indeed has learned from all of his older brothers' and sisters' misdeeds, peccadilloes and mistakes, to know just what the limits, what they can get away with, and what will please their parents enough to make them indulgent. Putting on rose colored glasses, we might even think that the youngest learns what it will take to ease the elder parents through middle age and into retirement years, and so does those things rather than misbehaves.

At least, that is how I always preferred to look at it, being the youngest child of a large family. I supposed I looked at it that way too, as I prepared, at age 16 and a junior in high school, to take a trip to Spain. None of my other brothers and sisters had made such a trip, indeed, I don't think at that age that many of them had ever flown. So, like Jacob approaching his mother, I went to Mom with the brochure from the Spanish teacher. She convinced my father, and the decision was made that I might go. It was thus that I ended up in Spain for the first time, after a few hours in Portugal (TAP Air Portugal must have had a sale on, which the tour group took advantage of...), and our entrance into Spain was in the extreme south, as we got on the road for Seville. We toured Seville the day after Easter, the inches deep wax from the candles from the Holy Week processions being scraped off as we

toured. We also visit Cordoba and, as a "high point" to our visit to Southern Spain, Granada, the Alhambra, and the Generalife.

Family relationships can sometimes be complicated in Spain, especially when reading Spanish history. With an abundance of royal houses in Spain, and their ascendancies and descendancies, to say nothing of the Moorish royalty and their various family relationships, it can be easy to get lost in who did what to whom, who should have inherited what from whom, and who really inherited it. One of the chief villainesses in the affair was a certain Joanna, "la Beltraneja," well in Spanish history she is a villain, but a heroine to the Portuguese and French. More on that later.

One place all parties wanted to inherit was Granada, the extremely beautiful city and province through which the peloton passes today. Granada was so well defended because it was where the Moors wanted to stay, if at all they were to preserve some foothold in Spain, because it was so like paradise. Spanish, Mozarabic, and Moorish literature from that time and subsequent, is filled with odes of praise for the loveliness of the region, and of mournful laments over its loss, as well as family intrigues which led to both its construction and loss by the Moors.

By the time I was in High School, Washington Irving's "Tales of the Alhambra" had fallen from the canon, but I definitely knew the name from having played hours and hours of "The Authors" card game as a child. Looking back, though, on the mystical tales of adventures of which he wrote, and comparing those with the historical record, one can in some way come to appreciate the history and the loveliness of the place, even at a distance and through a 19th century optic.

The Romance of Abenámár is perhaps the best medieval poem which lauds the city, while placing it in the political context of the time. It describes a time of discord in the Nasrid dynasty, around 1430 or so. Castile had found it useful to maintain Granada as a client state, but sought greater tribute and control, so they negotiated with King Yusuf (known as Abenamar), and then King John II of Castille, present for the coronation of Yusuf, and seeing the towers of Granada in the distance, wishes for complete possession of Granada, asserted even greater privileges, even to the point of wanting the entire city. The poem is a dialogue between Abenamar, King John, and Granada. Robert Soulkev translated this dialogue thus:

Thank thee, thank thee, Abenamar,  
For thy gentle answer, thanks.  
What are yonder lofty castles,  
Those that shine so bright on high?

That, O King, is the Alhambra,  
Yonder is the Mosque of God.  
There you see the Alikares,  
Works of skill and wonder they;  
Ten times ten doubloons the builder  
Daily for his hire received;  
If an idle day he wasted  
Ten times ten doubloons he paid.  
Farther is the Generalife,  
Peerless are its garden groves.  
Those are the Vermilion Towers,  
Far and wide their fame is known.

Then spake up the King Don Juan  
(You shall hear the Monarch's speech):

Wouldst thou marry me, Granada,  
Gladly would I for thy dowry  
Cordoba and Sevilla give.

The end of the poem reminds Juan that he has wed Granada to Abenamar, and so the city will stay as it is.

Well, it would stay as it was for then, but soon, after the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, with the wedding of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, in 1469, the proverbial handwriting was on the wall. At the time, Isabella was merely the half sister of the King, but her brother, King Henry IV of Castile died in December 1474, setting off the War of the Castilian Succession between Isabella, and Henry's only daughter (was she that? or the love child of Juan Beltran?), who history tells us was named Joanna "la Beltraneja." History has also settled the vexing question of parentage by accepting that nickname. In any case the war raged from 1475 until 1479, setting the extremely capable Isabella and her many supporters, and the Crown of Aragon against Joanna's supporters, Portugal, and France. Having ignored Granada for so many years, those who received the title "the Catholic Kings," Ferdinand and Isabella, turned toward Granada to resolve that question, and in 1492, took up residence there.

Fortunately, most of our brave cyclists have passed through Granada at top speeds, rather than taking up residence.

Enjoy the Vuelta. Enjoy the day.







15ª etapa : Alcalá La Real • Sierra Nevada. Alto de H  
Clasificación general provisional

<b>1</b>	<b>C. Froome</b>		<b>SKY</b>	<b>62:06:25</b>
2	V. Nibali		TBM	+1:01
3	I. Zakarin		KAT	+2:08
4	W. Kelderman		SUN	+2:11
5	E. Chaves		ORS	+2:39