

Esther

Queen with a mission

Act 1 Palace Gardens

(Backdrop, pillows, low table, wine goblet)

Narrator: Now it came to pass in the land of Elam, king Xerxes who ruled over his vast realm of Persia made up of 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush decided to display his empires great majesty and wealth to all the princes and nobles. For one hundred and eighty days Xerxes reigned from the citadel of Suza showing the people his great glory...

Xerxes: *(proudly, gesturing with open arms)*

Mehuman, my guests have seen the treasures from around my kingdom. But, they have yet to see my greatest prize. Bring Vashti my queen, so the nobles can see her beauty for she is the jewel of Shushan!

(Mehuman leaves and then quickly returns and whispers in the kings ear)

Xerxes: *(angrily)* How dare she refuse to come! What does the law require!

(Mehuman leaves to listen to the king's wise men then returns.)

Mehuman: *(bows and then speaks confidentially)*

The wise men advise you to dethrone Vashti, take her crown away from her, and choose another queen in her place.

Xerxes: But who will be queen in her place and in what way should I recruit another?

Mehuman: Your wise men council you to hold a beauty contest so you
my take the fairest queen in the land.

Xerxes: Let it be so! (*Lights dim*)

Narrator: So the proclamation went out from Shushan to all the provinces
and the fairest maidens were gathered to the palace harem.

Act 2 Palace Gate

(Scene change then lights on – backdrop of gate and pillars, bushes and palm trees – two guards in the background)

Narrator: In the citadel of Suza there was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, his name was Mordecai son of Jar. His family had been taken captive from the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar over 110 years earlier. Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, who he had brought up as his own daughter because her parents had died. Hadassah was also called Esther (which means star), and because she was very beautiful she was taken to the harem and entrusted to Hegai who looked after all the virgins...

Mordecai: *(eagerly)* Did you speak with Hagai? How is Esther?

Servant: *(earnestly)* Hegai has given her the best room in the harem. He favors her not just because of her beauty but for she has a good heart too! She is kind and cares for everyone.

Mordecai: I'm glad Esther is doing well. Please, keep me informed.

Scene 2: (Dim lights)

Narrator: A year passed while Esther was given beauty treatments. When it was Esther's turn to visit king Xerxes she only used the jewelry that Hegai had told her to use although she was allowed to take anything she wanted from the harem. The king was pleased with Esther, loved her dearly, and made her Queen. A wedding banquet was held for Esther and the king distributed gifts with royal liberality. Mordecai stood at the

palace gate to learn of Esther. She had not revealed that Mordecai, a Jew, was her father.

(Half lights, at the end of the day– Mordecai standing in the shadows)

Bigthana: Tomorrow when the ambassador from Egypt arrives with his guards we will signal the archers on the palace walls.

Teresh: (whispers vengefully) Yes! When king Xerxes comes down the stairs the trumpets will sound, then I will blow my trumpet when our archers have a clear shot of king Xerxes's back.

(Bigthana and Teresh go their separate ways)

Mordecai: *(patriotically – to the audience)*

I must warn the king before it is too late! His life is in danger.

(Dim lights)

Narrator: So that day Mordecai went to Esther and told her what he had overheard. Esther warned the king of the assassination plot giving Mordecai credit and it was written in the Chronicles of the King. Xerxes had the two guards executed immediately. After this Mordecai continued to go to the palace gate daily to hear news about Esther.

Royal Guardian: *(to Mordecai)* Here comes Haman he has become the most powerful noble in the entire kingdom, second only to King Xerxes. We are required to bow down to him as he passes.

(Royal Guardian kneels and then bows. Haman walks by arrogantly.

Mordecai bows in respect but does not kneel before him. Haman passes out of view)

Royal Guard: *(alarmed and confused)* Why did you disobey the king's command? Why did you refuse to kneel? Now your life may be in danger.

Mordecai: I am a Jew. I only bow down before my God.

(Lights dim)

Act 3 Palace Garden and Throne

(backdrop, table, pillows, throne)

Haman: *(Haman pacing, agitated and angry)*

Who is this Mordecai that he will not kneel to me?

Scribe: *(Scribe bows)* He is a Jew my master. He is an important merchant and a leader among the Jews of Shushan. Jews do not worship before any man, even if it means life or death.

Haman: *(mischievously)* If that's the case killing one Jew is not enough, I must find away to kill them all. They will all pay for dishonoring my family name. Bring the pur! *(Scribe returns with dice and game board)*

Narrator: Haman then cast pur (lots) to decide the best time for destroying the Jews. The lots fell on the twelfth month, Adar.

(Haman tossing dice, smiling evilly. Scribe writes. Dim lights)

Scene 2: Scene change and raise lights. Xerxes admires flowers.

Haman: *(enters and bows to the king)* You have been concerned about maintaining control in all the provinces. I have just been informed that there is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the people of you're empire whose customs and religion is different from all the others. They do not obey the king's laws and it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. Let a decree be issued to destroy them and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who will do this.

(King takes his signet ring and gives it to Haman then touches flower)

Xerxes: Keep the money; you may do with the people as you please.

Haman: I have the documents here... (*Haman's scribe enters with a box full of scrolls. Haman bows and the king leaves*) Seal and stamp these scrolls and send them out with the fastest horsemen you can find to all the 127 provinces of Persia! (*Sense of urgency*)

Act 4 City Gate

(Backdrop, stairs. Mordecai in sackcloth reads proclamation)

Mordecai: *(sorrowfully)* Listen to me. I will read the King's Edict.

By order of king Xerxes in the 12th year of our lord the King in the first month, Nissan, it has been declared that all the Jews – young and old, women and children – through out all the 127 provinces of our King's mighty empire, are to be annihilated, on the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar. They are to be completely destroyed, their land confiscated and their possessions plundered – for they are the enemies of our King.

Haman the King's counselor is willing to pay ten thousand silver talents in total for those who aid him in the total destruction and removal of this parasitic people.

By order of the King this proclamation is to be written into the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be undone.

(Mordecai bows his head and steps down from the stairs. Lights dim)

Narrator: *(quietly to the audience)*... The law cannot be changed even if the king himself wishes to do so!

(Lights raised to half-light. Hathach enters bringing clothes)

Hathach: *(worried)* Esther has heard that you have been wailing and mourning in great distress, now take off the ashes and sack cloth and put on these garments that Esther has graciously given you. *(Hands over clothes)*

Mordecai: (*persuasively pleading, holding shoulders*) Hathach, you are Esther 's most loyal servant. You must tell her what Haman plans to do; here is a copy of the king's decree. (*Mordecai hands over a copy of the Edict*)

Esther must go to the king to try and alter this terrible plot against her people for she is the one last hope for all the Jews in Persia. (*Pause*)

So you see I cannot accept these clothes! (*Hands back the clothes*)

Go now and I will wait here for her reply. (*Lights dim, spotlight off-stage*)

(Scene off-stage: *Hathach returns to Esther and tells her what Mordecai had said and Esther gives him another message to give to Mordecai*)

Narrator: that evening Hathach returned to Mordecai with Esther's message. (*Lights raised*)

Hathach: Esther told me to read this note to you.

“You know, my Father, that if anyone, man or woman, enters the King's inner court who has not been summoned, they will surely die, except that the king holds up his golden scepter. I have not seen the king in 30 days! He may not be pleased to see me anymore.” (*Pause*)

(*With compassion*) Mordecai, you must forgive her for her fear, she is so young and this is such a great burden of responsibility!

Mordecai: Thank-you Hathach here is another message for Esther.

(*Mordecai hands an envelope to Hathach and he exits*)

(*Lights dim*)

Act 5 Esther's Quarters

(Backdrop, bed and curtain, mirror, table with flowers)

Esther: How is Mordecai? Does he understand my position?

Hathach: (*bows*) He does indeed. Here is his response, my queen. Shall I read it to you? (Esther nods agreement)

“My dearest daughter, you must be brave! Do not think that you will be able to escape the fate of the rest of the Jews, your people, just because you live in the king's house! If you are silent at this time then God will send deliverance to his people from another place, but you and your Father's house will perish. And perhaps it was just for this very reason that God has brought you into the king's presence – so you might bring salvation to your people. Remember Deborah, Abigail and others who have gone before you and realize that God can work as he chooses to save his people.”

(*Fervently*) My Queen there is no doubt that your God, the One you serve in prayer every day will deliver you!

Esther: Thank you, my dear Hathach. (*Head down, pauses, then looks up*)

(*With resolve*) Tell Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Shushan so they may fast with me and my maids for three days – neither eating nor drinking – then I will go to the king even though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. Now go quickly and we will begin fasting and praying immediately.

Narrator: So Mordecai followed Esther's instruction to the letter and the Jews prayed and fasted for their Queen and their lives. And on the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the court awaiting the King's reply. (Pause) There was a hush in the courtyard as the eyes of all the courtiers and nobles turned to look on Xerxes new Queen. How beautiful! And how audacious to enter the court without being summoned!

The suspense was great as Esther's steady gaze met Xerxes steely eyes.

Act 6 Haman's House

(Backdrop, pillows, low tables in a half circle, wine glasses)

Haman: *(excited)* You just will not believe what happened at court this morning!

Haman's family: Tell us! What was it?

Haman: *(disdain, disbelief)* Esther appeared without being summoned and to everyone's amazement Xerxes held out the golden scepter to receive her – a mere woman!

Haman's family: Indeed! Then what?

Haman: Then, he asked her what her petition was. And you will never guess what it was.

Haman's family: Tell us! What was it?

Haman: Esther invited me to dine with her and the king – just the three of us at a royal banquet. I was the only one she honored in this way!

Family: Really! Amazing, tell us more.

Haman: *(Boasting)* Think of it! I am the chief prince in Persia, my riches are magnificent, the king has entrusted me with the royal insignia, and I have the power of life and death in my hands. And Esther has asked me to join her for a second banquet! *(Pause)*

(With anger) But all this does not satisfy me when I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate, for I am furious that he will not honor me

Zeresh: If you have the power of life and death, have a gallows built – fifty cubits high – to hang Mordecai on. Ask the king to let you do with him as you please and then you can go to Esther’s banquet being content.

Haman: Splendid idea! (To servant) Build the gallows just as my wife said. Now I can go to the banquet knowing Mordecai will no longer plague me.

Act 7 Palace Garden

(Backdrop, throne)

Harbonah: *(bows to king, caring)* Master, is there something troubling you?

Xerxes: *(restless)* I can't sleep, so I thought a walk in the garden would ease my mind. But it has not helped either. What do you suggest?

Harbonah: Master, perhaps if I read to you it will soothe your mind and banish your worries. *(King nods in agreement. Harbonah exits, returns with a scroll and begins to read)*

Narrator: Then the servant read in the Chronicles of the great King Xerxes, who ruled over all the provinces of Persia, of the two of palace guards Bigthan and Teresh who had conspired to assassinate the king and how Mordecai the Jew had uncovered the plot and saved the king's life. The servant was about to read another account when the king interrupted.

Xerxes: Stop there! You did not relate to me what happened to this man Mordecai and how he was honored for his loyalty! Now tell me.

Harbonah: *(matter-of-fact)* Nothing was done to honor him, my master.

Xerxes: *(exasperated)* How can this be! We must rectify this matter at once. I see it is already dawn. Who is in the court this morning?

Servant: Haman, my master.

Xerxes: Summon him at once. *(Servant exits then Haman struts in)*

Xerxes: Something was weighing on my mind last night so I could not sleep, but I think I know why now. So answer me. What should be done for the man whom the king delights to honor!

(Half-lights, Haman and King freeze)

Narrator: Haman that proud and insolent man could not imagine anyone beside himself who was worthy of the king's honor. Secretly he wondered if Persia would not be better off if he were king instead of Xerxes.

(Lights raised)

Haman: *(enthusiastically)* For the man that the king delights to honor, let him wear the royal robes, ride on your royal steed and wear the royal crown. Then, let one of your highest officials lead him through the city proclaiming, "This is what will happen to the one the king honors."

Xerxes: Let it be so! Do all you have said to Mordecai the Jew for he is the one who saved my life! *(Haman bows and exits in humiliation. Lights dim)*

Narrator: Haman did as the king commanded but he was tormented and filled with doubt and worry. Had he not just built the gallows to hang Mordecai, but now Mordecai was in the king's favor! Who could know where this turn of events might lead?

After Haman told his wife and friends about the events of the morning, his wife added to his misery by prophesying that he would indeed fall before Mordecai, the Jew.

Scene II (*Palace Garden – Banquet table*)

(Lights raised, Harbonah standing to the side)

Xerxes: This banquet is wonderful, Esther my queen, my love, but what is it that you have to ask me? I will grant whatever you wish even if it takes half my kingdom!

Esther: (In anguish) My King, I beg and plead with you. An enemy has sold my people, to destroy us, to slay us. If we had just been sold as slaves I would have held my peace. But how can I bear this great sorrow.
(Weeping)

Xerxes: *(enraged)* Who is this man, that he would even dare to try and kill my queen and her people!

Esther: It is this evil, scheming man, Haman! *(The king storms out in anger)*

(Haman cowers in fright then begs for mercy at Esther's side)

Haman: *(full of dread)* Please have mercy, I had no plan to harm you. I did not know you were a Jew!

Esther: Not only am I a Jew but Mordecai, is my father. And did you not seek to kill him and all the Jews, too?

Xerxes: *(enters boldly leading guards)* Guards! Seize him! *(Points to Haman, guards hold Haman then escort him off stage)*

Harbonah: *(stepping forward)*

My master, were you not aware that there is also in the house of Haman a gallows 50 cubits high that Haman meant to hang Mordecai on.

Xerxes: (*enraged*) Hang him on his own gallows! He deserves nothing less! And give all his possessions to Queen Esther. (*Lights dim*)

Scene III (*palace garden and throne*)

(*Lights raised. Esther crying, approaches the throne and bends one knee*)

Xerxes: (*king holds out the golden scepter*) Esther, rise. What is troubling you? What can I do to help you?

Esther: Oh king, I am so grateful for what you have done, for my family. You have destroyed our enemy Haman. You have honored my father, Mordecai, and elevated him to be your chief advisor. But Haman's evil plot to blot out the Jews from existence has not been stopped.

(*Weeping*) How can I bear to see my people destroyed!

Xerxes: I cannot annul the first proclamation, but you can write a new one to reverse Haman's plan and allow the Jews to defend themselves. I will seal it with my ring.

Narrator: So that is what Esther did and that day the edict went out by swift horseman, allowing the Jews to destroy all their enemies on the 13th of Adar, the day Haman had determined using the Pur – casting lots. Thus, this day, Adar 13 was called Purim, but instead of a day of death and torment, it became a day of joy and honor. And ever after according to Mordecai's instructions the Jews celebrated this day, to remember their deliverance from the hand of their enemies.