

EXCERPTS FROM ESTHER

ACT ONE SCENE 3- THE THRONE ROOM

MEMUCAN, XERXES, HARBONA, VASHTI

(3 MEN, 1 WOMAN)

(The Throne Room with XERXES on the central throne. QUEEN VASHTI and the King's Prime Minister, the Magi MEMUCAN, are seated on side thrones. The King's eunuch, HARBONA is standing to their side. Two of the Magi, CARPAS and ADMATHA are also in attendance.)

MEMUCAN

King Xerxes, your military leaders and nobles from every province have feasted on the unquestionable glory of your kingdom. May I congratulate you once again, Harbona, and the people of Susa for hosting these 180 days of Imperial hospitality.

XERXES

Thank you, Memucan, loyal friend

HARBONA

Your majesty's attendants, the cooks, the stewards, and your servants, the people of Susa are all to be commended.

MEMUCAN

If only the Greeks could have witnessed this.

XERXES

The Greeks? Why would I invite my enemies?

MEMUCAN

How could they question your excellency? As the light of your glory falls on the long face of the earth, extending from the Far East to the West, the Greeks cause the only shadow.

XERXES

Do you have some wisdom for me, Memucan?

MEMUCAN

Our military advisors have asked to meet with you. If the Greeks can be defeated, truly you will be king of ALL kings.

VASHTI

My Lord, may I have permission to speak?

(XERXES extends his scepter)

XERXES

Indeed, Queen Vashti, speak.

VASHTI

Your strength, your majesty, is found not in brutal force but in your wisdom to keep peace.

MEMUCAN

(annoyed by Vashti's intrusion) May I remind you that you have often spoken of avenging your father's humiliation at the Battle of Marathon.

VASHTI

Truly you have already avenged this defeat by uniting and expanding your kingdom.

MEMUCAN

The Greeks still glory in their victory at Marathon.

VASHTI

But your glory outshines any victory they have achieved. And besides, the Greeks have not threatened any of our provinces with war.

MEMUCAN

Who is to say that the Greeks will not attack us if we do not attack them first while we can? Today our armies are strong, our kingdom is united and the spirits of our leaders run high.

VASHTI

Persia is a champion of freedom and peace. For six months we have been celebrating the splendor, liberality, and civility of your majesty's kingdom. There is a spirit of unity in the 127 provinces. Let us not put this at risk. It is not military strength alone that makes Persia a great empire.

MEMUCAN

But without military glory, all her other glories are in danger. Let us strike now while the Greeks are unsuspecting. Our armies are strong. Our leaders are still here in Susa. The people are willing to act on your command.

.....

XERXES and VASHTI (1 MAN, 1 WOMAN)

XERXES

Queen Vashti?

VASHTI

How can I please the King?

XERXES

Let us honor the people of Susa and our military commanders with a 7 day feast.

VASHTI

Very well, my king. But I too have a request.

XERXES

Tell me what it is, beloved, and I will grant it to you, up to half the kingdom.

VASHTI

If it pleases the king, may I have a banquet for the women so they can appreciate that in Persia we can eat and drink in peace and we will not be interrupted by drunken generals at a war council?

XERXES

It shall be done! Is there anything else you request?

VASHTI

If it pleases the king, do not force the commanders to keep pace with your drinking, but have each drink freely according to their own conscience or custom. In this you will show that you are set apart, for there is no king like you.

XERXES

You have my word, my Queen... Memucan! Send orders that all the people of Susa, from the least to the greatest, are to be honored with a feast in the palace garden. And set a table for my princes and generals. Queen Vashti will also hold a special banquet for the noble women where they can eat and drink in peace.

MEMUCAN

May it be as you command, my lord!

(BLACKOUT; CROSSFADE)

ACT ONE SCENE 5 (*VASHTI'S BANQUET*)

VASHTI & HARBONA

(1 WOMAN, 1 MAN)

(Female dancers are entertaining QUEEN VASHTI and her guests. THE SEVEN EUNUCHS, MEHUMAN, BIZTHA, HARBONA, BIGTHA, ABAGTHA, ZITHAR AND CARCAS, ENTER IN THE MIDST OF THE QUEEN'S BANQUET.)

VASHTI

What is the meaning of this interruption? Are we at war?

HARBONA

No, your Highness, the king has requested that you, Vashti, the Queen, appear before his guests immediately wearing the crown that he made for you.

VASHTI

The King gave me his word that he would not do this.

HARBONA

His Majesty's desire was that his guests behold your beauty, on this, the final day of the feast. For you are Persia's greatest jewel.

VASHTI

Am I one of his concubines that he can summon me at will? Am I a mere ornament to put on show?

HARBONA

I am sure that His Excellency has honorable intentions for Vashti, the Queen.

VASHTI

I am not Vashti, the Queen, I am QUEEN VASHTI! Does the King fail to recognize that my blood is as royal as his own?

HARBONA

I'm certain he does, your majesty. We all know that you are the Grand-daughter of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

VASHTI

And is it fitting that in Persia, the blind lead the blind and in a drunken stupor serve the goddess Ishtar, feeding their lust for women and their lust for war?

HARBONA

Your majesty... Do you know how serious...

VASHTI

You tell the King that I will not come. He promised me that I could host my banquet in peace and I will hold him to his word.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 1 SCENE 9 MORDECAI'S HOME

MORDECAI and YOUNG HADASSAH

(1 MAN; 1 GIRL)

(MORDECAI has taken a myrtle branch from a tree and examining it. He calls for HADASSAH-YOUNG ESTHER by whistling the first notes of the HADASSAH)

YOUNG ESTHER

Did you call for me papa?

MORDECAI

Hadassah, come here. Look what I have in my hand.

YOUNG ESTHER

What is it papa?

MORDECAI

A 'Hadassah branch'! Your namesake!

YOUNG ESTHER

Why have I been named after a tree, papa Mordecai? Could I not have been named after a flower?

MORDECAI

O the Hadassah tree has a most beautiful flower. But it is most well-known for its branches! They grow straight and strong! *(He holds her hands up over her head)*. The Hadassah branch is chosen to provide cover for the temporary shelters we build at the Feast of Tabernacles. It is a reminder of God's favor and protection as He brought us out of Egypt and made us dwell in booths as our people journeyed through the wilderness.³

YOUNG ESTHER

And the flower?

³ Lev. 23:43; Nehemiah 8:15

MORDECAI

The flower is shaped like .. *(He shows her a Hadassah branch with a star-like flower)*

YOUNG ESTHER

(with appreciation for its beauty) A star!

MORDECAI

Yes a star. *(foreshadows the name 'Esther'; Music starts)*

MUSIC SOUND CUE: 07 HADASSAH

The perfect adornment for a bride. Your mother wore one on the day she and your father were married.

YOUNG ESTHER

Was she beautiful, papa Mordecai?

MORDECAI

Very beautiful. I am sure that you will grow up to be like her in many ways.

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MORDECAI

O Hadassah there are times I wish you were not so pretty.

YOUNG ESTHER

Why is that?

MORDECAI

Your beauty could betray you into the hands of scoundrels.

YOUNG ESTHER

Do not worry, dear papa Mordecai.

ACT 2 SCENE 1.3- OUTSIDE THE KING'S GATE

HATACH, MORDECAI

(TWO MEN)

(LIGHTS ON MORDECAI OUTSIDE THE WALL)

HATACH

The queen has sent you a change of clothes. She asks that you take off your sackcloth and put these on at once, and make yourself presentable. She wishes to see you.

MORDECAI

Tell the Queen I can no more put off my sackcloth than deny my grief. No, send these fine robes back to the Queen. We are ashes, we are undone and soon to be reduced to dust.

(MORDECAI throws the bundle of clothes away towards HATACH who takes them back to the Queen.)

ACT 2 SCENE 1.5

HATACH

The Queen wants to know what causes your grief.

MORDECAI

(Handing the scroll to HATACH) Ask her to read the edict and tell her that 10,000 talents is the price of our lives to the King.

HATACH

What do you mean?

MORDECAI

We have 11 months before we die. Urge the Queen to go into the King's presence and plead for her people. Make sure to tell her this, "Do not think in your heart that you will escape the fate of all the Jews because you are in the King's Palace. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place..."

ACT 1 SCENE 11- THE ENTRANCE TO THE HAREM

ASPATHA, PARSHANDATHA, PARMASHTA, DALPHON, HAMAN (5 MEN)

ASPATHA

Have you ever seen so many beauties?

PARSHANDATHA

What would it be like to have such authority that you could summon any woman at any time?

HAMAN

Would you like such power my son?

PARSHANDATHA

To be Emperor?

HAMAN

To command whomever and whatever you will. Only the seven princes have unrestricted access to the King. They have the power to turn the King's will. Take notice.

ASPATHA

Don't worry father. The ten sons of Haman will soon replace the seven subordinates of Xerxes!

PARSHANDATHA

I will show the King how my services are indispensable to his cause.

HAMAN

You must all do so, my sons.

PARSHANDATHA

The Jews, why would the King even consider?

HAMAN

Our ancient enemies..

ASPATHA

(amused) Look how they are herded like sheep for the slaughter.

HAMAN

For hundreds of years they were slaves to the Egyptians. Suddenly they were liberated through the questionable negotiations of their leader, Moses. Somehow, they escaped, crossing the Red Sea. Then over 2 million strong, they headed for their ancestral home in Israel.

PARSHANDATHA

That would mean that they traveled through the land of our forefathers.

HAMAN

They claimed their God would take vengeance upon our people because we attacked those who lagged behind, the infirm, and elderly, women and children.

DALPHON

What difference does it make? They are an inferior race altogether.

HAMAN

Their loyalties are divided.

PARMASHTA

All we need to do is turn the law of Persia against them.

HAMAN

We must show that they are a people to be feared.

ACT 2 SCENE 7 – THE KINGS' BEDCHAMBER

HARBONA, XERXES

(TWO MEN)

XERXES

Servant! I cannot sleep. What is that hammering?

HARBONA

I believe you ordered some renovations for the courtyard?

XERXES

Yes, but it's the middle of the night...

HARBONA

I believe it is one of Haman's projects. You have so many servants who go out of their way to please your majesty. I'm sure that it will be impressive, whatever it is they are building.

Perhaps I should read from the book of memorable deeds, the annals of our history? With due respect, my lord, I have found that my reading has put you to sleep on many occasions.

XERXES

Whatever you think might help, Harbona. Proceed!

HARBONA

"In the tenth month, two of the king's doorkeepers, Bigthan and Teresh, attempted to kill King Ahasuerus. The plot was discovered by a certain Mordecai the Jew. By his brave action the life of our king was saved. The eunuchs were executed under the laws of Persia."

XERXES

Is there anything else?

HARBONA

On that subject? No, your majesty.

XERXES

Did I fail to honor the One who saved my life?

HARBONA

There is nothing more in the records.

XERXES

Call for Haman!

HEGAI and ARAFEEN (1 MAN, 1 WOMAN and YOUNG GIRL)

HEGAI

My name is Hegai, chief eunuch in charge of the Palace of the Women. From now on you will do as I say.

In the next 12 months you will be trained in royal etiquette, and given beauty treatments-

ARAFEEN

6 months with the oil of myrrh, defoliating your skin....

HEGAI

It will remind you that you are putting off the skin of your old life and are being prepared for another.

ARAFEEN

No roughness can remain on your skin for you are to be smooth as silk to the touch.

HEGAI

This will be followed by 6 months saturating your skin with oils and spices.

ARAFEEN

Their fragrance will not just be upon you, but will be as if it comes from within you.

HEGAI

If and when you are summoned to the King you will be allowed only one night to please him,

ARAFEEN

You can bring one gift from our treasury to offer for his good graces.

HEGAI

Now we must begin to learn the ways of a queen.

ACT 1 SCENE 11.B TRANSITION SCENE

ESTHER AND ARAFEEN

(TWO WOMEN)

ARAFEEN

(examining Esther) You have a fine chin. High cheek bones. Good. Hold your head high. That's better. Hold out your hands. Your hands are rough.

ESTHER

I help my cousin as much as I can. And I clean.

ARAFEEN

You clean?

ESTHER

For our neighbor who is bedridden.

ARAFEEN

Your skin. I see sunburn.

ESTHER

I work outside with the children.

ARAFEEN

Your hair. Terrible.

ESTHER

Sorry.

ARAFEEN

No worry. Your bones are good. Hands, skin, hair we can fix. Bones we cannot fix.

ESTHER

What are you looking for?

ARAFEEN

It is not what I am looking for. It is what he is looking for?

ESTHER

And...

ARAFEEN

He is looking for the next Queen of Persia.

ESTHER

Who must have good bones, skin, hair...

ARAFEEN

In the end we don't know what He will find in a woman that will make him choose her as his queen. To be beautiful in form and face is a start.

ESTHER

My people marry once, and for life. How deep can a man's love for a woman be if he must continually sample every beauty he desires in the kingdom?

ARAFEEN

Esther, you speak of love. The King speaks of preference. And it is towards that end that we prepare each woman who is to spend one night with the king.

ESTHER

Arafeen, what is the King like?

ARAFEEN

I know that he is a man who needs more than comfort. Vashti was that kind of woman.

ESTHER

Then why did he dismiss her?

ARAFEEN

We are not free to speak of such things.

ACT 2 SCENE 1.2

(Lights on the QUEEN'S CHAMBER; Mordecai wails in grief)

ESTHER

What is that sound?

ARAFEEN

There is a man who is wailing with grief in the courtyard.

ESTHER

Do you know who it is?

ARAFEEN

It is that man who told you of the plot to kill the king.

ESTHER

Mordecai? Do you know what afflicts him?

ARAFEEN

I don't know. He wails as one who has lost a loved one.

ESTHER

Perhaps he needs assurance that his loved one is well. Summon Hatach to bring him a change of clothes and tell him to put off his sackcloth. No one can enter the King's courts unless he is properly clothed. Tell him that the Queen asks that he make himself presentable and seeks to meet with him. Perhaps this will bring him comfort.

ARAFEEN

Yes, your majesty.