

Esther

A Musical

Based on the Old Testament Book

Script by Aaron Alsmeyer and Beth Walsman
With much valuable input from the original cast

Music and Lyrics by Aaron Alsmeyer

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CAST LIST

Name (M/F)	Description	Role Requirements
Esther (F) <i>Appears in 9 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 4, 5, 6, 7, 10</i> <i>Act II: 2, 3, 8, 9</i>	A beautiful young Jewish woman, known by her people as Hadassah, well-liked by everyone whose life she touches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 101 lines • 1 soliloquy • Solos in 6 songs • Ensemble singing
Mordecai (M) <i>Appears in 8 scenes</i> <i>Act I: Prologue, 4, 7, 10</i> <i>Act II: 1, 4, 8, 9</i>	A wise older cousin and father figure to Hadassah, deeply grounded in his faith, a bit eccentric but a great storyteller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 69 lines • 1 soliloquy • Solos in 4 songs • Ensemble singing
Xerxes (M) <i>Appears in 9 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 1, 3, 6, 7, 9</i> <i>Act II: 3, 6, 8, 9</i>	The king of Persia, easily swayed by the opinions of others, extravagant in his tastes and rash in his decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 115 lines • 1 soliloquy • Solos in 4 songs • Ensemble singing
Haman (M) <i>Appears in 11 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 1, 3, 6, 8, 9</i> <i>Act II: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</i>	A power-hungry advisor to the king, smooth and persuasive, yet prone to fits of rage when his selfish purposes are opposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 lines • 1 soliloquy • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
Zeresh (F) <i>Appears in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 8</i> <i>Act II: 4, 7</i>	The evil wife of Haman, self-confident and in control, intent on manipulating her husband to a place of honor and success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 lines • 1 soliloquy • Ensemble singing • Optional dancing
Esther's maids <i>Appear in 8 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 2, 5, 6, 7, 10</i> <i>Act II: 2, 3, 9</i>	Kiana (F) Esther's closest friend at the palace, a caring confidante who is quick to recognize the needs of those around her	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 lines • Solos in 2 songs • Ensemble singing • Dancing
	Layliya (F) A fun-loving, flighty girl with a tendency to speak before thinking, misunderstood by the other maids, but a close friend of Kiana's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 lines • Solos in 2 songs • Ensemble singing • Dancing
	Maheen (F) A no-nonsense woman, accustomed to dealing with refined royalty, hesitant to embrace Queen Esther's more compassionate approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 lines • 1 optional solo • Ensemble singing • Dancing
	Shirin (F) A hard worker, quiet, sweet, and unflinchingly loyal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 lines • Ensemble singing • Dancing
	Yaslyn (F) The optimist, always smiling, always energetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 lines • Solo in 1 song • Ensemble singing • Dancing

(Esther's maids continued)	Kyri (F)	The brainstormer, ever-ready with an idea, but a little pouty if it isn't heeded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 lines • Ensemble singing • Dancing
	Trella (F)	Endearing but confused, never quite sure what's going on, always a step behind the others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 lines • Ensemble singing • Dancing
Mehuman (M) <i>Appears in 11 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9</i> <i>Act II: 3, 6, 7, 8, 9</i>		The chief messenger for the king, compelled by a deep sense of duty to perform his tasks well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39 lines • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
Harbona (M) <i>Appears in 9 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6</i> <i>Act II: 4, 5, 8, 9</i>		A timid and well-meaning messenger with a seldom-seen poetic bent; he speaks the crucial line which seals Haman's fate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 lines • Ensemble singing
Queen Vashti (F) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 2</i>		The first wife of the king, well-spoken and reserved, but strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 lines • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
Keziah (F) <i>Appears in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 4</i> <i>Act II: 1, 9</i>		A middle-aged Jewish woman, weighed down by the weariness of life, but never too tired to be a busybody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29 lines • Ensemble singing
Rachel (F) <i>Appears in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 4</i> <i>Act II: 1, 9</i>		Keziah's elderly mother, whose oblivious perkiness perpetually gets on her daughter's nerves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 lines • Ensemble singing
Zibeon (M) <i>Appears in 2 scenes</i> <i>Act II: 1, 9</i>		A Jewish man dedicated to uniting his people against the coming enemy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 lines • Ensemble singing
Hag (F) <i>Appears in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 8</i> <i>Act II: 4, 7</i>		A close friend to Haman and Zeresh, a putrid and hateful evil woman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 lines • Ensemble singing • Optional dancing
Wretch (M) <i>Appears in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 8</i> <i>Act II: 4, 7</i>		Another close friend to Haman and Zeresh, the first to acknowledge that Haman's dark path will lead to destruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 lines • Ensemble singing • Optional dancing
Hegai (M) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 5</i>		The callused and sarcastic man in charge of the women's quarters at the palace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 lines
Teresh (M) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 7</i>		A scheming little palace guard whose bitterness drives him to plot revenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 lines

	Bigthana (M) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 7</i>	A brawny, brainless palace guard, utterly devoted to his friend Teresh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 lines
	Hathach (M) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 10</i>	A messenger for Queen Esther whose task is sensitive and extremely important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 lines
	Memucan (M) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 3</i>	An advisor to the king, sober and very wise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 lines
	Attendant (M) <i>Appears in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act II: 6, 7, 8</i>	A servant who assists Mehuman at various times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No lines
	Judah (M) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: 4</i>	A young Jewish boy (7 or 8 years old), son of Keziah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child • 11 lines
	Young Esther (F) <i>Appears in 1 scene</i> <i>Act I: Prologue</i>	The title character at 5 or 6 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child • 2 lines
Other roles	Men and women of the kingdom <i>Appear in various scenes throughout Act I</i>	Five messengers in addition to Mehuman and Harbona; six advisors in addition to Memucan; any number of nobles, officials, guards, noblewomen, beautiful young women, and townspeople.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various 1-3 line roles • 2 male solos • 1 male duet • 1 female solo • 3 optional female solos • Ensemble singing
	Friends of Haman and Zeresh <i>Appear in 3 scenes</i> <i>Act I: 8</i> <i>Act II: 4, 7</i>	Any number of dark, horrid, sniveling accomplices to the evil couple's plots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensemble singing • Optional dancing
	Jews <i>Appear in 2 scenes</i> <i>Act II: 1, 9</i>	Any number of Jewish men, women, and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various 1-3 line roles • 1 optional solo (male or female) • Ensemble singing

SCENE LIST

PLACE: *City of Susa, Persian Empire*

TIME: *Fourth century B.C.*

ACT I

- PROLOGUE:** Inside a dark Jewish home
- SCENE 1:** King Xerxes' garden courtyard, years later
- SCENE 2:** Queen Vashti's banquet hall
- SCENE 3:** King Xerxes' garden courtyard
- SCENE 4:** The Jewish part of town
- SCENE 5:** The women's quarters of the palace, one year later
- SCENE 6:** King Xerxes' throne room
- SCENE 7:** In front of the palace gate
- SCENE 8:** The house of Haman
- SCENE 9:** King Xerxes' throne room
- SCENE 10:** In front of the palace gate

ACT II

- SCENE 1:** The Jewish part of town
- SCENE 2:** Queen Esther's quarters
- SCENE 3:** King Xerxes' throne room
- SCENE 4:** In front of the palace gate; The house of Haman
- SCENE 5:** King Xerxes' garden courtyard
- SCENE 6:** King Xerxes' bedroom
- SCENE 7:** The house of Haman
- SCENE 8:** King Xerxes' throne room
- SCENE 9:** The Jewish part of town

SONG LIST

ACT I

Scene 1

The One Hundred and Eighty-seventh Night Xerxes and the men of the kingdom

Scene 2

Queen Vashti's Reprise Queen Vashti and the women of the kingdom

Scene 4

Who Is This Girl? Esther, Mordecai, guards, and women

Scene 5

Brand New Women of the palace and Esther

Scene 6

Something to Be Explored Xerxes and Esther

Scene 7

Take This Message Mordecai, Kiana, Layliya, Esther, Mehuman, and Xerxes

Scene 8

The Casting of the Pur Haman, Zeresh, and their friends

Scene 10

For Such a Time as This / If I Perish Esther and Mordecai

ACT II

Scene 2

One More Moment Esther and her maids

Scene 3

Preparing the Banquet Instrumental

Scene 6

The Man the King Wants to Honor Xerxes and Haman

Scene 9

If the Lord Had Not Been on Our Side Jews

Act I

PROLOGUE

Esther 2:5-7

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Young Esther, Esther's dead mother, Mordecai*

SCENE: *Inside a dark Jewish home, somewhere in Persia, fourth century B.C.*

Prologue music begins with the lights down. As the first line is being said, lights come up slowly to reveal YOUNG ESTHER kneeling beside the still form of her dead MOTHER, who is covered with a blanket. The scene remains dimly lit throughout, like a vague memory.

ESTHER (*Crying desperately*) Wake up! ... Wake up! ... Why won't you answer me?
Mother?

(MORDECAI enters and quietly approaches her.)

MORDECAI Hadassah...

(*He kneels beside her.*)

ESTHER Wake up!

MORDECAI (*Gently*) Hadassah, you can't wake her up. She's resting with your father now. (*He takes her in his arms and she buries her head in his shoulder, still sobbing.*) I'll take care of you ... I'll take care of you.

(*Lights down on MORDECAI as he leans his head on hers.*)

SCENE 1
Esther 1:1-11

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Mehuman, Harbona, five other messengers, Haman, other nobles, officials, and men of the kingdom*

SCENE: *Years later, in King Xerxes' garden courtyard, extravagantly decorated with richly colored tapestries hanging from marble pillars by large gold rings.*

As the lights come up and the intro music for THE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVENTH NIGHT begins, some men are seated on couches of gold and silver, talking loudly and drinking from gold goblets. Others are scattered here and there, carousing, laughing, drinking, enjoying to the fullest the last night of a very long celebration. XERXES, who lives for moments like this, moves from one group to another, soaking in the praises and adoration of his admirers. Soon a NOBLE steps forward and begins singing, and all join him presently.

NOBLE (*Sings*)

Here in one of the lushest gardens in Persia we gather

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

NOBLE

Feasting on the choicest morsels King Xerxes can offer

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

XERXES

I can't get enough of the food and the wine
And I'm glad for one more opportunity with my friends
To display the riches and wealth of my kingdom

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
The one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
The one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
Great King Xerxes! Show us your treasures!
Infinite pleasures from the palace's vault!
Every precious item that is in your possession
Feeds the obsession for the king we exalt!
(*Two MESSENGERS have retrieved a large trunk filled with gems, gold statuettes, gold and silver coins, bracelets, rings, etc. As he sings, XERXES pulls items out and allows the MEN to admire them one by one.*)

XERXES

This one was a present from my grandfather Cyrus.
He would inspire us with his relics of old!

MEN

Old! Old! Old!

XERXES

These came from the wondrous temple of Bel
When the priest who defended it fell
And we captured the statue of gold!

MEN (*Yell*) Gold!

(During the instrumental section, the MEN all pore over the treasures, passing them to each other, grabbing them from each other, and trying on bracelets, necklaces, and crowns. Presently their attentions turn to singing again.)

OFFICIAL (*Sings*)

Three years you have reigned as king and we can't help but marvel

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

OFFICIAL

As we hear accounts of Xerxian armies in battle

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

XERXES

I think of these years and I cannot count
The successes that flood to my memory
And I'm joyous that men like you can remember them with me

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
The one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
The one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
Great King Xerxes! Tell us of glories!
Tales and stories of your glorious reign!
One more story never hurt anyone
And I haven't heard anyone even try to complain!

XERXES

When the Babylonians tried to rebel
And the Egyptians did the same
I was there in defense of my fame.

MEN

Fame! Fame! Fame!

XERXES

Squelching the rebellion with my army unstoppable—
It was merely a game, but it spread my indelible name.

MEN (*Yell*) Name!

(During the short instrumental section, the MEN mock-fight each other, reliving past battles together. All end up “dead” on the floor, except for XERXES and the DUO who sings the next verse.)

DUO (*Sings*)

Now as we've done many times before, we will look to the future

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

DUO

Here on the brink of our next bold conquest, we stand with our leader

MEN

For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

XERXES

We will go to war for a year or more,
But I know we'll return with a victory
When the Greeks are defeated in this campaign we are planning
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

MEN

The one hundred and eighty-seventh night!

ALL

The one hundred and eighty-seventh night!
Night! Night! Night! Night!

(As the song ends, all of the MEN stand at the front of the stage with a resolute stance, eager to destroy their enemies. The song ends with a mighty cheer, with shouts of “Persia!” “Xerxes!” etc. scattered throughout. Slowly the MEN quiet down as XERXES prepares to address them. Throughout his speech, the MEN continue to respond enthusiastically to his statements.)

XERXES (*Speaks*) Thank you! Yes, thank you all! Princes, nobles, commanders, men of the citadel of Susa: the sun has set on our celebration. We have feasted together for six months—

OFFICIAL (*Interrupts with a loud cry, slightly inebriated*) The time passed too quickly!

XERXES (*Annoyed with the interruption, he waves his hand nonchalantly, and two MESSENGERS quickly and quietly escort the bewildered OFFICIAL out.*) Yes!

And when six months of feasting were complete, we decided to feast for seven more days! During this time, you have seen countless examples of the wealth of this kingdom, but there is one treasure that I have yet to unveil. And on this, the one hundred eighty-seventh and final night of our festivities, I present my most prized possession, the envy of all the rulers of all the kingdoms to the ends of the earth! *(Everyone bursts into applause and XERXES silences them again with a raised hand. He motions to MEHUMAN, HARBONA, and five other MESSENGERS, who huddle around him as he talks animatedly in hushed tones. When he has finished his instructions, the MESSENGERS stand ready to complete their task, awaiting only his command...)* Go!

(The MESSENGERS exit eagerly.)

NOBLE Where are they going?

XERXES *(Obviously enjoying this)* Patience, friend. When my messengers return, then you will see... and your eyes will rejoice!

(Lights down as the MEN all look at each other with wonder and anticipation.)

SCENE 2
Esther 1:9-12

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Queen Vashti, Vashti's maids (later to be Esther's maids), various noblewomen, Mehuman, Harbona, five other messengers*

SCENE: *An elegant banquet hall set with low round tables.*

As the lights come up and the intro music for QUEEN VASHTI'S REPRISE begins, VASHTI is mingling pleasantly with her WOMEN. They all conduct themselves reservedly and with decorum, in stark contrast to the MEN at XERXES' banquet.

WOMEN (*Sing*)

As the women of the kingdom, we feel we must counter the men
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.
We enjoy ourselves immensely, yet prove we are calmer than them
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.

VASHTI

Every single word we speak to encourage and never condemn.

WOMEN

Our Queen Vashti is the perfect example again and again
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night,
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night,
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.
(OPTIONAL: *The following stanza can be given as a solo to MAHEEN.*)
Second stanza much the same as the first; we're content with the tune
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.
Who could ever ask for more than fine ladies with which to commune
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night?

VASHTI

Though we eat and drink and sing like we've done nearly all afternoon,

WOMEN

With maturity we realize we all must be off to bed soon
(*End of optional MAHEEN solo*)
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night,
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night,
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.
(*Sometime during the following stanza, the MESSENGERS begin walking down the aisle toward the queen's banquet, making more and more commotion the closer they get. The WOMEN attempt to remain composed, but have to sing louder and louder until they are almost shouting the last few words so as to be heard over the noise.*)
No distraction will distract us from banqueting just as we please
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.

Ours the life of resolution to bask in our comfort and ease
For the one hundred and eighty-seventh night.

VASHTI

Camaraderie is sweet, every one of my maidens agrees.

WOMEN

We must treasure times we have quiet moments together like these.
(The MESSENGERS have arrived on stage and are enthusiastically debating amongst themselves who should have the honor of talking directly to VASHTI about the king's request.)

VASHTI *(Speaks loudly)* Silence! *(The MESSENGERS are instantly silent and line up haphazardly, with MEHUMAN closest to the queen and HARBONA at the opposite end of the line. VASHTI is stern and unimpressed with their lack of professionalism.)* If you have a message for me, please state it.

MEHUMAN *(Brimming with excitement)* Queen Vashti, the king has sent for you!
(The other MESSENGERS nod to assert that this is indeed the message.)

VASHTI *(Coldly)* The king... has sent for me?

MEHUMAN Yes, and he requests that you wear your royal crown. *(Leans and speaks more quietly to SECOND MESSENGER)* Fetch the queen's royal crown.
(SECOND MESSENGER rushes to talk to MAHEEN about the crown. MAHEEN, the most refined and traditional of the MAIDS, is immediately responsive, as if she's very used to obeying commands.)

VASHTI Is the king in high spirits from wine?

MEHUMAN *(Distractedly)* Yes, and you'll need your royal robes. *(To THIRD MESSENGER)* Get the robes.
(THIRD MESSENGER hurries to talk to SHIRIN about the robes. SHIRIN, loyal and hard-working, also complies quickly.)

VASHTI And all of his friends are still with him?

MEHUMAN Yes, and you should add a few more jewel-studded rings. *(To FOURTH MESSENGER)* Get some rings.
(FOURTH MESSENGER runs to talk to TRELLEA about the rings. TRELLEA looks a bit confused, starts to comply, then returns quickly to FOURTH MESSENGER to clarify her assignment. Once he explains again, she rushes to obey.)

VASHTI *(Pointedly)* So the king would like me to dress up and parade myself before a group of wild, drunken men?

MEHUMAN *(Taken aback for a moment)* Umm... Yes... And some silver anklets

would be nice.

(MEHUMAN *turns to speak to the FIFTH MESSENGER, but before he has the chance, VASHTI turns to address MAHEEN and the other MAIDS who have lined up next to her with her accessories.*)

VASHTI Ladies, thank you, but I will not be needing any of these things. I will not be going before the king this evening.

(*A stunned silence follows. TRELLA, who is holding a tray of rings, lets the rings slide off onto the floor. She starts picking them up, but all of the other MAIDS rush to VASHTI'S side with a flurry of concerned pleas. The LADIES in the background all chatter excitedly.*)

MAIDS AND LADIES (*All speaking at once, these and similar statements ad lib, until silenced by VASHTI*) My queen! What are you saying? What did she say? She will be hanged! The king will kill her! This is suicide!

MESSENGERS (*Likewise, all speaking at once, these and similar statements ad lib, until silenced by VASHTI*) The queen is mad! How can she say such a thing? She's been drinking too much herself! How can we deliver such a message to the king? Insubordination!

VASHTI (*Raises her hands calmly*) Silence! (*ALL are immediately quiet. To MEHUMAN*) Will there be anything else?

(*After a moment of quiet tension, MEHUMAN speaks up.*)

MEHUMAN (*Gently and very soberly*) My queen, the *king* has requested this. You must go.

VASHTI (*With a tinge of anger, but still very much composed*) Mehuman, the king is a drunken fool to ask such a thing. I will not go. You may leave now.

(*She watches MEHUMAN and the other MESSENGERS as they exit in disbelief.*)

MAHEEN (*Concerned for the queen's honor*) My queen, it's not too late to change your mind. This is simply not done.

VASHTI (*Weighs this, but does not turn toward MAHEEN*) I know.

MAHEEN The king will be furious.

VASHTI Maheen, trust me. There are worse things than the wrath of the king.

KIANA (*Concerned for the queen's safety*) What will he do?

VASHTI (*Still looking off into the distance, she speaks after some thought.*) We will find out soon enough.

(*Lights down.*)

SCENE 3
Esther 1:12-22

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Mehuman, Harbona, five other messengers, Haman, Memucan, six other advisors, other nobles, officials, and men of the kingdom*
SCENE: *Xerxes' garden courtyard, where the festivities are still in full swing.*

Lights up. The seven MESSENGERS nervously sneak into a corner of the courtyard and quietly deliberate with one another, arguing over which of them will have to deliver the awful news to the king. Before too long, XERXES notices them and comes up beside their huddle.

XERXES (*Loudly, sensing he will not like the answer*) Where is the queen?
(*The MESSENGERS are startled and quickly scramble to push HARBONA, the flightiest and most nervous of them all, before the king.*)

HARBONA (*Looks back at the others for reassurance, then faces XERXES with terror in his eyes.*) My king...

XERXES (*Getting angrier*) Where... is... THE QUEEN?

HARBONA She...she is not coming. She has...she has refused.

XERXES (*After a moment of shocked disbelief, XERXES roars*) OUT! ALL OF YOU!
OUT!!! (*XERXES stomps around the stage, throwing things and knocking over benches and tables. ALL begin to rush out frantically while XERXES yells unintelligibly. Finally, XERXES drops to his knees, not knowing what to do with his uncontrollable anger. Meanwhile, everybody—except HAMAN, in an inconspicuous corner—has rushed out, pushing HARBONA out of the way and leaving him as the last one to leave. He trips on his way out and struggles to get up when XERXES addresses him.*) Harbona! (*HARBONA walks toward the king, trembling. XERXES speaks directly, controlling himself for the moment.*)
Harbona, you must bring the wise men to me immediately, the men who understand the times.

HARBONA My king...my...the...the who?

XERXES The wise men! My counselors!

HARBONA My king...your—
(*HAMAN has been standing nearby in the shadows, having deliberately remained when the king told everybody to leave. Now, he comes forward quickly and speaks to HARBONA.*)

HAMAN (*In sinister tones*) Young fool! Curse you for your ignorance! Can you not understand when the king speaks plainly to you? Now go at once!
(*HARBONA runs out. HAMAN now turns to face XERXES.*)

XERXES (*Indignant, yet curious about the brazen nature of this man*) Who are you?

HAMAN (*Smoothly*) My name is Haman, son of Hammedatha.

XERXES (*Pauses, taken aback by HAMAN'S confidence, then raises his voice*) Why do you remain in my presence?

HAMAN (*Maintains a calm soothing air*) King Xerxes, I am not a rebellious man. I knew that you would seek counsel from your wise men, for it is customary to do so at such a time. I only ask that I may stay and observe.

XERXES (*Stares with disbelief at the man's forwardness, but is unable to counter his cunning words*) You may stay. But remain silent! (*HAMAN nods and takes a place in the back. XERXES paces slowly, collecting his thoughts as the ADVISORS enter solemnly. When they have all gathered, XERXES addresses them.*) Men, I have been publicly humiliated. Tell me, according to the law, what must be done to Queen Vashti? She has disobeyed the command of King Xerxes. My command!

(The group of ADVISORS ponders silently, now and then leaning to speak to each other in hushed tones. Their behavior is thoughtful and deliberate. Soon MEMUCAN steps forward.)

MEMUCAN Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king, but against every man under the king's rule. Unless swift action is taken, the queen's example will be followed by the women of the nobility. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

XERXES (*Stops pacing and bursts out angrily*) That's EXACTLY what it is! DISRESPECT! What can we... (*Sighs, closes his eyes and rubs his forehead, reeling himself in again. Speaks more quietly.*) What do you suggest, Memucan?

MEMUCAN If it pleases the king, let him issue a decree, written in the laws of Persia and Media, a decree that cannot be reversed. A decree that will cause women to respect their husbands...

(Weighty pause while XERXES ponders this.)

XERXES (*Eyes still closed, rubbing his forehead as if he has a headache, hating this entire situation*) Go on.

MEMUCAN (*Speaks with carefully measured words*) Queen Vashti may never again enter into the presence of the king. Her royal position should be given to someone who is better than she.

(Other ADVISORS nod soberly. XERXES hangs his head. After a moment, he lifts his head and voices his decision.)

XERXES Let it be done as you have said. (MEMUCAN dips his head respectfully, then quietly exits with the other ADVISORS and HAMAN. XERXES, broken and defeated, steps down center for his soliloquy. This is the first of five soliloquies in the performance, each spoken by one of the five lead characters at a crucial point in the story for that character.) What other choice do I have? I can't let her get away with this. Her actions would speak across the entire kingdom... and not just about her, but about me. I've always known that advisors would fail me and nobles would turn on me. But my own queen! Just as I'm setting out to conquer the Greeks and prove my strength to the world! Why now? (*Recalling to himself the words of the decree*) "Queen Vashti's position should be given to someone better than she." Someone "better?" How am I to know who's "better?" How can a king look at a whole line of flawless beauties and see past their smiling façades? How can I look in a woman's eyes and know that she won't betray me years later? Is there such a woman? (*Sighs*) Maybe when I see her... it will become clear.

(Lights down.)

SCENE 4
Esther 2:1-10

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Esther, Mordecai, Judah, Keziah, Rachel, guards and women*

SCENE: *In front of Mordecai's house, in the Jewish part of the city. This is clearly not a rich neighborhood, but it is well-kept.*

ESTHER, *now a beautiful young woman, is in the front yard, kneeling as she was in the prologue, looking at a scrape on young JUDAH'S knee. MORDECAI enters with a concerned look, much as he did in the prologue, but having obviously aged since then.*

MORDECAI Hadassah...

ESTHER Cousin Mordecai! I didn't expect you home so soon.

MORDECAI (*Soberly*) Something came up.

ESTHER (*Lightly, not grasping the depth of MORDECAI'S tone*) Something came up here too. Judah was running through our yard on his way home and scraped himself up pretty well.

MORDECAI (*Kneels down to talk to JUDAH, momentarily putting aside the serious issue on his mind and assuming a comfortable grandfatherly air*) Oh, you certainly do have a lot of scrapes here.

JUDAH Most of those are old ones.

MORDECAI I guess that's just part of being a little boy.

ESTHER Judah, I bet if you ask Mordecai really nicely, he might tell you one of his stories.

JUDAH Oh please, please! A story about King David!

MORDECAI (*Grinning wryly*) I might know one or two stories about King David.

ESTHER (*With a knowing smile*) One or two?
(*ESTHER begins working on chores in the background, but obviously enjoys the story, as one who has grown up with her cousin's storytelling.*)

MORDECAI (*Chuckles, then takes on the role of an expert storyteller*) Well, there was this one time, King David was getting ready to go fight his evil enemies, the Philistines, and he asked the Lord, "Will you deliver them into my hand?" And the Lord said, (*in a deeper voice*) "Go. I will deliver them into your hand." So the Lord—

JUDAH (*With wonder*) Does God really talk like that?

MORDECAI Well, maybe something like that. So the Lord gave King David a great victory. But not too long after, do you know what happened?

JUDAH What?

MORDECAI AND ESTHER (*She chimes in playfully, obviously familiar with his stories.*)
Those stubborn Philistines tried it again.

MORDECAI (*Laughs*) Yes. Hadassah must have heard this one before. So King David prayed again, and the Lord said, “Go. But this time sneak up on them through the forest, and when you hear the sound of marching in the *tops* of the trees, then you’ll know it’s time to attack!”

JUDAH (*Thoroughly captivated*) Who was in the tops of the trees?

MORDECAI It was the Lord’s army!

JUDAH God really came and fought the Philistines?

MORDECAI That’s right! And King David got to fight right alongside Him.

JUDAH (*Jumps up and swings an imaginary sword*) Someday I’m going to fight, too!
Like King David!

MORDECAI (*Laughs*) Ah, you just keep waiting, Judah. Someday another great King will come from David’s line... maybe in your lifetime.

JUDAH I hope so!

KEZIAH (*Calling from offstage*) Judah! Judah!

JUDAH I’m here, Mama!
(KEZIAH, *a plain middle-aged woman, enters. She is followed closely by her tottering elderly mother, RACHEL. ESTHER is still in the background, not readily noticeable.*)

KEZIAH Judah! My ankles are swollen from wandering all over looking for you!

JUDAH I’m sorry, Mama.

MORDECAI (*Stands*) Hello, Keziah. Rachel. How are you both?

RACHEL (*Cheerfully*) My ankles feel fine!
(RACHEL *stands on one foot, then the other, wobbling somewhat.* ESTHER

begins to come forward to see what is going on.)

KEZIAH (*Patronizing*) Yes, Mother. (*To MORDECAI*) Ask her one question and she'll give you an entire recitation. I'll get her home now so she doesn't... Oh! Hadassah! I didn't see you there! (*Dramatic but heartfelt sympathy*) I'm so sorry, dear! We really should leave you two alone.

ESTHER Leave us alone? Sorry for what?

MORDECAI (*Concerned, wanting to say something before KEZIAH blurts out the news*)
Oh, Hadassah—

KEZIAH (*Gasps*) You mean Mordecai didn't tell you? The king's decree! They'll be coming to take you away at any moment! A pretty young thing like you!

RACHEL You don't seem concerned that they'll take *me* away!

ESTHER (*Growing uneasy*) What? Who are you talking about?

MORDECAI (*Again trying to get a word in*) Hadassah, I'm sorry, but—

RACHEL (*Trying to be comforting*) Now wait just a minute! You're going to get the poor girl all worried sick. It'll be all right. She'll probably eat better at the palace than any of us here. Especially with the way Keziah cooks!

KEZIAH Mother, please—

ESTHER The palace?! Why the palace?

KEZIAH You really haven't heard a word of this? The king is taking all the beautiful women of the kingdom, and he's going to choose one... to be queen!
(*Stunned silence.*)

RACHEL (*Oblivious to the gravity of the moment*) Last night Keziah made something for dinner, and I couldn't even tell if it was bread or meat!

KEZIAH Mother!

ESTHER What happens to all the women who don't become queen?

KEZIAH Oh, I think they just live at the palace after that. I'm so sorry, dear. We'll miss you terribly, of course.

RACHEL At least you'll be able to recognize your food!

KEZIAH Okay, Mother, I'm taking you home now. Mordecai, you really should talk to

that girl! Come on, Judah.

JUDAH Bye!

MORDECAI Goodbye, Judah. (KEZIAH, RACHEL, and JUDAH exit. MORDECAI turns to face a tearful ESTHER. He speaks tenderly but with some apprehension.)
Hadassah...

ESTHER (*Hurt and confused*) Mordecai, why didn't you tell me?

MORDECAI (*His heart breaking*) Hadassah, I... I came home to tell you, but I didn't want to say it while the boy was still here.

ESTHER (*Overcome with emotion*) Oh, Mordecai...
(*She begins sobbing uncontrollably, reaches for MORDECAI, and collapses into his arms.*)

MORDECAI I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. One edict from the king... and now... oh, time is short. I hardly know where to begin.

ESTHER (*Looks up at him with fear in her eyes*) Mordecai, what do I do?

MORDECAI First, you must tell no one that you are a Jew. For your own protection. Many people in this land hate us.

ESTHER (*With sorrowful realization*) I can no longer be a Jew.

MORDECAI And you must not use your Hebrew name. You are to leave behind the name Hadassah. From hence forth, you will be called... Esther.
(*Cue for the intro music to WHO IS THIS GIRL?*)

ESTHER (*As if speaking a foreign word*) ...Esther?

MORDECAI (*Trying to reassure her*) Yes. It means, "a star." It will be your Persian name.
(*ESTHER walks down center, dazed and confused. MORDECAI sits on a nearby bench.*)

ESTHER (*Sings*)
Who, who is this girl?
I've never met her.
You call her Esther.
And how, how can I learn,
When I don't know her,
Learn how to be her?
And how can you calmly tell me

My life here is over?
And why must I go so quickly?
No time to say goodbye.
I don't know what this is all about
And I won't know how to begin
To behave with a king.
I won't know what to do.

(As she finishes her verse, ESTHER sits beside MORDECAI and buries her head in his shoulder as he puts his arm around her. When the instrumental section begins, one or two GUARDS cross the stage, escorting a few sad and forlorn young WOMEN. MORDECAI sees them, but ESTHER has her eyes closed and does not notice. MORDECAI holds her that much tighter, wanting to keep her there for just a little longer. The GUARDS and WOMEN exit, and MORDECAI looks into ESTHER'S eyes as he sings.)

MORDECAI

When I took you in
To be my daughter
I was much younger.
And though I'm older now,
And maybe wiser,
I too have questions.
Like why must you of all people
Be so blessed with beauty,
A gift that you did not ask for
And could not refuse?
I don't know what I can tell you now
That you have not already heard,
Since I've poured
My whole life into you.

(Stands and walks downstage)

And though much will be said
Of your hair and your eyes and your skin,
Please realize
That the things on the outside
Are only important to men,
Not to God.

(ESTHER stands and comes to join him.)

So take these words as you leave me
And hold to them, cling to them,
Now and always,
Whatever may come:
Follow after wisdom,
Do not turn to man's foolish ways,
Trust the Lord with your heart,
And you'll know what to do.

(As MORDECAI finishes, more GUARDS and WOMEN enter and begin to cross

slowly, singing as they walk. A final GUARD comes to stand beside ESTHER and looks at her silently, waiting for her to follow. ESTHER looks at the GUARD and then back at MORDECAI pleadingly. She hugs her cousin, then slowly follows the GUARD offstage as the last of the GUARDS and WOMEN are exiting. MORDECAI stands watching helplessly.)

MORDECAI (*Calling after her with a trembling voice*) Be strong and of good courage!
For the Lord our God will be with you wherever you go!
(*Lights down on MORDECAI as he breaks down sobbing, head in his hands.*)

SCENE 5
Esther 2:8-15

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Hegai, Harbona, Esther, Esther's maids, other women*
SCENE: *One year later, in the women's quarters of the palace.*

Lights up on a line of WOMEN (with HARBONA standing awkwardly at the end of the line) being checked in by HEGAI, the man in charge of all the new girls in the palace. HEGAI is a cynical sort, having spent so much time in this role, and he performs this particular task with rote boredom. A number of other WOMEN are in the background going through beauty treatments, but they are largely in shadow at this point. Alternatively, the WOMEN in the background could be fully lit but frozen in time as a tableau.

HEGAI (*Monotonously*) My name is Hegai, and I'll be in charge while you're here.
Your name?

DELYAR Delyar.

HEGAI (*As he writes the name on his scroll*) Now, I won't actually remember that.
Hundreds of girls to keep track of. Been flooding in here for over a year now,
ever since the king... well, never mind. Your room is across the courtyard in the
northwest wing. (*DELYAR leaves and joins the WOMEN in the background while*
RHODA steps up in line.) Your name?

RHODA Rhoda.

HEGAI (*Sighs*) Okay, you'll be in the Rhoda wing. It's almost full. (*RHODA leaves*
while TARA steps up, followed closely by JALILEH and ZIVAR.) Your name?

TARA (*With great exuberance*) Tara! And this is Jalileh and Zivar!

TARA, JALILEH, AND ZIVAR (*In unison*) We'd like to request a room together!

HEGAI (*Looks at them with annoyance, then points to each in turn*) South wing. North
wing. Northeast wing.
(*TARA leaves, dejected. JALILEH and ZIVAR hug each other excitedly.*)

JALILEH Yay! North and northeast!

ZIVAR We'll be neighbors!
(*They rush past HEGAI, but JALILEH turns back to him and holds up a*
banana right in his face.)

JALILEH Can we have snacks in our rooms?

HEGAI (*Grabs the banana*) Get out of here! (*JALILEH and ZIVAR leave giggling and*

PARIROO *steps up*. HEGAI *shoves the banana into her hands*.) Here, peel this.
Your name?

PARIROO (*Begins peeling the banana as she answers*) Pariroo.

HEGAI (*Sarcastically*) And how long will you be staying with us? Oh, that's right.
Forever! Southwest wing. (HEGAI *grabs the banana and PARIROO leaves as he yells after her*.) Enjoy your stay! (HEGAI *chuckles sardonically, takes a bite of banana, and begins speaking to the next person in line without even looking up from his scroll*.) Your name?

HARBONA (*Clears his throat, intimidated*) Harbona.
(*Cue for the intro music to BRAND NEW*.)

HEGAI (*Looks up slowly*) Something's not right about this. Didn't anybody tell you about the dress code?

HARBONA I've... I've been sent by the king to check on the young ladies who have most recently arrived.

HEGAI (*Considers this, then assumes a professional air*) Oh... follow me. (HEGAI *turns, with HARBONA following closely, and the lighting changes to reveal a very busy scene full of WOMEN beautifying each other. Alternatively, the tableau comes alive at this point. There are three distinct groups, and HEGAI talks about each of them in turn throughout the song, very much as if he's giving a tour of a factory that manufactures beautiful ladies. After the WOMEN sing their initial choral section, HEGAI begins the first part of the tour by indicating a group of WOMEN who are dabbing at each other's faces and arms with sponges and cloths*.) You'll see women in all stages of the preparation process. We're getting new girls brought in all the time. The first step, as you can see here to your immediate left (*or "right," depending on blocking*), is to saturate the new arrivals in oil of myrrh. This step takes approximately six months.

BEAUTIFYING WOMEN (OPTIONAL: *Any of the group verses can be sung as a solo if preferred*.)

You think you're delicate now.
You think you're beautiful now.
You think you're elegant now.
But wait and see
And when the year is through,
When we're all done with you,
You'll be brand new!

YASLYN
She soaks in purified myrrh.
Six months resembles a blur,
But I'm resoundingly sure

That she'll agree

That when we're through with her,

She's not just prettier.

She is brand new!

(HEGAI and HARBONA move to the next group of WOMEN, who are applying perfumes and spices to one another.)

HEGAI (*Speaks*) After the oil of myrrh, we proceed to step two: perfumes, spices, and cosmetics. The ladies you see here are currently undergoing this phase, which takes roughly another six months.

BEAUTIFYING WOMEN (*Sing*)

You have no definite clue

Which spices complement you,

But it is evident to

The rest of us

That when the year is through,

And we're all done with you,

You'll be brand new!

WOMEN BEING BEAUTIFIED

Though it's a terrible wait

To face our dubious fate,

Accommodations are great

And we can say

That when they're through with us,

In just a dozen months,

We'll be brand new!

(HEGAI and HARBONA move to the next group of WOMEN, who are trying on necklaces, bracelets, tiaras, and rings.)

HEGAI (*Speaks*) Finally, when a girl has completed the full year of treatments, we give her anything she wants to take with her to the palace when she goes to meet the king.

LADY BEING BEAUTIFIED (*Sings*)

All these magnificent things!

Barrettes and ornament rings!

No wonder everyone sings!

I can't believe

The person now I see.

I never thought I'd be

A brand new me!

(At this point, the feel of the music changes and the WOMEN begin to stand and mingle with each other, losing the feel of distinct groups. WOMEN are admiring each other's makeup, accessories, etc., and cleaning up from a long

day of beautifying. HEGAI and HARBONA move downstage as the tour concludes.)

HEGAI (*Speaks*) So the women here are all very much the same. Some take a little more perfume than others; some take a little more spices than others. But other than that, there's very little difference. Although there are exceptions. Esther, for example... (*He allows himself to reveal a fondness for ESTHER under his callous exterior.*) Over the last year, she's earned herself the nicest room, the choicest food... and I even gave her seven maidens of her own who are assigned just to take care of her! And nobody would deny that she deserves it. Everybody likes Esther. In fact, there she is now!

(ESTHER enters now as the WOMEN sing a choral melody. She walks among them, and it is obvious that she has made a point to become friends with as many as possible. She begins to sing to different ones in turn.)

ESTHER (*Sings*)

Whatever you've done with your hair you should continue.

I heard your favorite bread is on this evening's menu.

My dear, I hope that if I tell you once again, you

Will believe your parents miss you too.

(Going down center, now singing more to herself than anyone else.)

A thousand faces fill the scene,

With only one belonging to the future queen.

What will the others be?

And each expression seems to show

That we will never truly know

That we're worth something

To somebody.

I wish we all could know.

(Begins mingling with the WOMEN again. The first two lines are directed toward her maid TRELLE.)

Please take some flowers to the ladies in the southwest hall

And ask Anoosheh if her rash is clearing up at all.

(TRELLE nods eagerly, begins to walk away, then halts for a moment, confused. She asks another LADY for directions, then exits, slightly more confident. Meanwhile, ESTHER sings her last two lines to one of the new arrivals.)

I haven't met you; would you care to join me on the walking path

When you're finished with your bath?

(After ESTHER sings, she starts to walk towards HEGAI and HARBONA.

During the following conversation, all of the other WOMEN finish gathering

their things and exit. The only ones that remain are MAHEEN, SHIRIN,

YASLYN, KYRI, KIANA, and LAYLIYA, who linger close to ESTHER in case they are needed.)

HARBONA (*Hides behind HEGAI and talks as if he's seeing a movie star.*) Oh, she's

coming over here!

ESTHER Hegai...

HEGAI Esther, meet Harbona.

ESTHER (*Warmly*) Hello, Harbona.

HARBONA (*Blurting out words haphazardly*) No, the honor is all mine.

HEGAI Yeah, yeah. (*To ESTHER*) Did you have something to tell me?

ESTHER (*Genuinely*) Well, the women in the northwest wing are nearly suffocating because of the lack of breeze. And do you remember the girl who just arrived from Sardis? The others are mistreating her because of her strange customs.

HEGAI (*Sighs and jots down some notes*) I'll see what I can do. (*Pauses, then looks up*) How about the new girl in southwest?

ESTHER Oh... (*Turns to KIANA*) Kiana, have you spoken with her today?

KIANA Yes, it's going to take some time for her to get over a man she thought she was going to marry.

HEGAI Right, thanks. (*He's writing notes and HARBONA starts looking over his shoulder. HEGAI becomes uncomfortably aware of him. To HARBONA*) Do you need someone to show you the exit?

HARBONA Actually, I was also told to fetch one of the young ladies who is fully prepared to... meet the king.

HEGAI I see. (*Turns slowly*) Esther... will you be needing anything to take with you to the palace this evening?

ESTHER (*Startled*) Me?

HEGAI You.
(*ESTHER'S MAIDS—including TRELLEA, who has now returned from her errand—all gasp and start to gather around ESTHER excitedly.*)

YASLYN (*Giddily*) Oh, my lady!

KYRI (*Always quick with an idea*) Oh, we should do your hair like you had it the other night!

YASLYN Except with more jewels! Oh, this is so exciting!

LAYLIYA (*Prone to speak without thinking*) Exciting?! I'd be terrified! But don't be terrified... but I'd be terrified.

ESTHER (*Overwhelmed*) Ladies, wait, please... (*After a moment, she turns to HEGAI.*) I will take only what you advise me.

HEGAI Uh, all right. The dress is good. Some sandals... and... add some rings. (*To the MAIDS, who are listening all too eagerly*) Got that? (*The MAIDS nod and scurry off, talking excitedly. To HARBONA*) You can wait in my quarters while Esther's maids prepare her to go.

ESTHER Hegai, if I don't see you again before I go, thank you for everything.

HEGAI Oh... you're welcome. (*To HARBONA quietly as they exit the other direction.*) A remarkable girl.
(*ESTHER has remained onstage, lost in thought, and presently walks down center for her soliloquy.*)

ESTHER (*A little melancholy*) What other choice do I have? Hegai told me to go, so I have to go. I hate to leave. I'm just beginning to feel like myself again. Like I have a place here. I'm beginning to feel close to a lot of the women. Especially my maids, but others too. Sometimes we stay up late, each telling our own stories of home. What we had to leave behind to be here. Of course, I can't tell everything. I have to be content with knowing others, but not being completely known. (*Pause*) But now I'm being torn away again. After I meet the king, I'll have to go live in some other part of the palace with all his... other wives. Unless... I'm chosen queen. Then I don't know what happens. The king wouldn't be anything like the husband I've always imagined. How can you get close enough to a king to treat him as a husband? (*Pause*) But why am I even thinking about this? There are hundreds of girls. Only the *Lord* knows who will be queen. (*Sighs, with resolve*) And that's enough for me to know, for now.
(*Lights down.*)

SCENE 6
Esther 2:16-18

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, Mehuman, Harbona, Esther, Esther's maids, various male and female nobles, servants, and onlookers*

SCENE: *The next day, in the king's throne room.*

XERXES *is on his throne surrounded by an eager crowd of ONLOOKERS while his NOBLES and various SERVANTS are hustling around and talking enthusiastically to each other. MEHUMAN and HARBONA rush to consult with SHIRIN, MAHEEN, and KYRI.*

MEHUMAN Shirin! Is she ready?

SHIRIN Kiana and Layliya are almost finished with her.

MEHUMAN She certainly must have made a good impression. The king only met her last night!

MAHEEN Yes, she's a sweet girl... but I'm afraid she's no Vashti.

KYRI Maybe that's the idea.

MAHEEN Perhaps. I certainly don't see Vashti's strength in her.

SHIRIN I think she may surprise you.
(YASLYN and TRELLEA enter.)

YASLYN (*Out of breath*) They're ready!!

MEHUMAN (*To HARBONA*) Tell the king.
(*They all scatter to take their places for the ceremony. HAMAN enters and grabs HARBONA'S arm roughly as he tries to run past.*)

HAMAN You! What's going on here?

HARBONA I... I'm in a hurry!

HAMAN (*Disgustedly*) I mean besides that.

HARBONA The king... he's about to make to make an announcement!
(*HARBONA rushes away before HAMAN can say anything else, then speaks a few words to XERXES quietly. XERXES immediately stands and addresses the crowd.*)

XERXES (*Ceremoniously, but with great joy*) Citizens of Persia... It is time! Rise... and look upon your new queen. Queen... Esther! (*Cue to begin intro music for SOMETHING TO BE EXPLORED. ESTHER enters in royal robes, attended by KIANA*)

and LAYLIYA, who fix her robes as she comes to stand near XERXES.) Only the king of the greatest empire in the world is deserving of beauty as measureless as yours.

(Sings to her as if there is no one else in the room)

Precious as gifts of India,
Rare as the snow in Syria,
Like the Nile River glorious
Is this romance.
I've always known, and yet not quite,
I wanted something more.
Someone that I cannot comprehend
With just one glance.

How did you read this mind, this thought?
What I need I cannot afford.
Someone with something that cannot be bought,
Something to be explored.

(During the instrumental section, MEHUMAN hands XERXES his wine goblet. XERXES takes a drink, then extends the goblet to ESTHER, and they both hold it as they walk around it twice. ESTHER then takes the goblet and drinks the wine to seal her commitment to her new husband.)

ESTHER

Strength like the trees of Lebanon,
Fame like the ancient Solomon,
Eyes like the pools of Heshbon,
Stirring and deep.
Can such a king be human too?
Seems that the answer lies in you.
Everything I see is pointing to
Wonderful secrets you keep.
I can see you have more to give
That so many have just ignored.
Past the thin surface where few dare to live,
Something to be explored.

XERXES

What lies beyond the farthest seas?
What joy can desert flowers bring?
Who designed the course of Pleiades
So long ago?

ESTHER

What tinge of blue was Adam's sky?
What song do stars of morning sing?
What did Moses see on Sinai,
Making him glow?

XERXES AND ESTHER

How many mysteries yet unknown
Via wisdom or wealth or sword?
We have the chance to solve one of our own.
Something to be explored.
Something to be explored.

(As the song ends, MEHUMAN brings the queen's crown forward. XERXES crowns ESTHER and everyone applauds enthusiastically. A crowd immediately rushes toward XERXES to congratulate him. While they surround XERXES and he eats up the attention, ESTHER'S MAIDS have quietly come to be with ESTHER. HARBONA shyly approaches them.)

HARBONA My... my queen?

ESTHER *(Glad to see someone she recognizes)* Harbona!

HARBONA Yes... I just wanted to say... I'm... I'm glad you won! I mean, I'm glad you were chosen... to be queen.

ESTHER *(Kindly)* Thank you.

HARBONA *(Awkwardly)* You're very lovely. What is your... nationality?

ESTHER Oh... it's actually... really complicated. And it wouldn't be that interesting anyway.
(At this point, HAMAN notices that HARBONA is the only one talking to ESTHER, and he seizes his opportunity to make an impression on the new queen.)

HAMAN That's right, young man. Why don't you stop bothering the queen with stupid questions?

ESTHER *(A little defensively)* He wasn't bothering me.

HAMAN *(Backpedals, still speaking smoothly)* Oh, I know he wasn't bothering you, Queen Esther. But he has important work to do. *(Turns to HARBONA, sickeningly polite)* You may leave us now. *(HARBONA walks away. Turning back to ESTHER)* Queen Esther, my name is Haman, son of Hammedatha. I just want to be the first to congratulate you. Truly the king has chosen well.

ESTHER *(Remaining congenial)* All this attention is very overwhelming.

HAMAN You must know, your position is one to be envied. To be at the right hand of the king of the entire world...

ESTHER Yes, the king has been very kind to me. It's an honor.

HAMAN (*Lost in his thoughts*) So much power. I'm sure it's intoxicating.

ESTHER (*Becoming a little uncomfortable*) Power? I guess I hadn't thought about it much.

HAMAN Of course, I understand.

ESTHER ...You do?
(*XERXES suddenly interrupts and steals the scene again from where he has been talking to the others.*)

XERXES What a marvelous idea! (*Rushes to ESTHER and grabs her hand*) My queen, tell me what you think of this! We will proclaim today a holiday! We will feast together! And with generosity that matches my excitement at this moment, I will give gifts to my nobles, my officials, and all who are in my favor!

HAMAN (*Always quick to appear supportive of the king*) A wonderful idea! A queen such as yours is well worth celebrating!

XERXES Exactly! Why do we wait? Let the celebration begin!
(*Lights down on the crowd cheering, applauding, pouring wine, etc.*)

SCENE 7
Esther 2:19-23

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Teresh, Bigthana, Mordecai, Esther's maids, Esther, Mehuman, and Xerxes*

SCENE: *A quiet evening in front of the king's gate. Few people are out at this time.*

TERESH and BIGTHANA, *guards of the royal gate, are pacing back and forth restlessly. TERESH, a scheming little man, does the most pacing because he does the most thinking. BIGTHANA, brawny and brainless, only paces to stay close to TERESH, and frequently gets in his way. Throughout the dialogue, an inconspicuous pile of rags lies in a dark corner, hiding MORDECAI from view. The audience should be unaware of his presence until he emerges later.*

TERESH (*In a mocking voice*) "I will give gifts to my nobles, my officials, and all who are in my favor!" Rot! May the king rot!

BIGTHANA (*With all the disgust he can muster*) Yeah! But I hope he gives us our wages first!

TERESH (*Pays no attention to BIGTHANA'S comment as he continues ranting*) For years, we labor for the king, standing at the gate, guarding the doorway! (*Notices that BIGTHANA is distracted*) Bigthana! Are you listening?! For years, the king promises us two prime pieces of land as payment for our service. Empty promises! A mere week ago, he turns around and generously divides *our* land amongst the nobles at his banquet! *Why?*

BIGTHANA (*Trying to honestly answer the question*) Because you keep falling asleep at your post!

TERESH Shut up!

BIGTHANA Sorry, Teresh. You told me to quit bringing that up.

TERESH It's injustice! Pure injustice!

BIGTHANA There was also that time you let foreign spies into the palace.

TERESH Bigthana!

BIGTHANA Sorry. Do you want me to quit bringing that up too?

TERESH Yes! The time for talk has ended. There is only one way to deal with a tyrant like King Xerxes. He must be... assassinated. (*Pause*) Well? Do you agree?

BIGTHANA (*Pauses thoughtfully, trying not to show that he doesn't know what*

“assassinated” means) I agree.

TERESH Okay. Now how do we do it?
(*Just as TERESH finishes this line and is rubbing his hands together gleefully, BIGTHANA clears his throat and indicates that TRELLE has entered. BIGTHANA and TERESH assume their guardlike positions again as TRELLE wanders past aimlessly.*)

TRELLE Um, do you know how to get to the palace?

TERESH (*Annoyed by the interruption*) Right through that gate, lady.

TRELLE Oh... right.
(*TRELLE exits. BIGTHANA and TERESH look around to make sure no one else is coming as they continue their plotting.*)

TERESH Now, I’ve put some thought into it already. We have to come up with a way to kill him quickly and quietly and—

BIGTHANA (*Surprised, he grabs TERESH’S shoulders*) We’re going to kill him?

TERESH (*Exasperated at his friend’s ignorance*) Yes!

BIGTHANA (*In a scolding voice*) Teresh!

TERESH That’s what I was saying! It’s the only way to deal with an unjust king!

BIGTHANA Well, I suppose you’re right.

TERESH Of course I am! Now, we’ve got to do it at night, when he’s all alone.

BIGTHANA Oh, I know! Let’s burn down the palace!

TERESH NO! We need something simple... quick... effective.

BIGTHANA Ooh! How about we put a tiger in his room?

TERESH Where in the world would we get a tiger?

BIGTHANA We could use a catapult! The tiger would come flying through his bedroom window!

TERESH Bigthana...

BIGTHANA And we wouldn’t feed it for a whole day, so it would be *really* hungry!

TERESH No! Listen! We get a knife. Simple. We sneak through the courtyard. Quietly. You lift me to the lowest branch of the tree by his room. I climb in. I slit his throat. Effective!

BIGTHANA Hmm.

TERESH It's the best way. I'll bring the knife. We'll meet in the courtyard after the evening watch. Let's go.

BIGTHANA (*As they exit*) Maybe we could... ride away on a tiger!

TERESH No!

BIGTHANA I really liked the tiger idea.
(*TERESH and BIGTHANA have exited, and the inconspicuous pile of rags starts to come to life. It is MORDECAI! He stealthily emerges from his hiding place, where he has been listening the entire time!*)

MORDECAI (*Frantically, talking to himself*) The king is in danger! I must tell Hadassah immediately!
(*Cue for TAKE THIS MESSAGE intro to begin. MORDECAI is walking this way and that, trying to figure out what to do when MAHEEN, SHIRIN, YASLYN, and KYRI enter, headed toward the palace.*)

SHIRIN I wonder what happened to Trella?

MAHEEN Oh, that girl...

MORDECAI (*Seeing them, he approaches hurriedly*) Ladies! Excuse me!
(*The MAIDS look up at him, startled, then turn their gaze away and quicken their pace.*)

MAHEEN Don't talk to him, ladies. Keep walking.

MORDECAI You must speak to... (*Catches himself before calling her "Hadassah"*)
Queen Esther for me! Ladies?

KYRI (*Glances back at him, then turns her head away quickly*) I think he needs a bath.

MAHEEN Stop looking at him, Kyri.
(*The four MAIDS exit and MORDECAI turns away, exasperated. He then notices KIANA and LAYLIYA, who have just entered and are also walking toward the palace.*)

MORDECAI Oh, ladies! Ladies, please! You must listen to me! My name is Mordecai.
(*KIANA and LAYLIYA regard him cautiously, but slow down to hear what he*

has to say.)

KIANA (*Hesitantly*) What do you want?

(Lighting changes so that only the side of the stage where MORDECAI, KIANA, and LAYLIYA are standing is lit as MORDECAI begins to sing.)

MORDECAI (*Sings*)

I like to sit beside the gate each evening,
When nobody knows I'm there.

Often I will hear things that are useful later
Uttered by the gabby people passing unaware.

Take this message to Queen Esther:

Tell her that King Xerxes may be murdered in his bed.

Teresh and Bigthana were discussing the arrangements,

So she should tell her husband if she doesn't want him dead.

(Speaks)

You must hurry! *(As they're running off)* Thank you!

(The lights on MORDECAI go down and spotlights follow KIANA and LAYLIYA as they rush to the other side of the stage. Lights go up to reveal ESTHER, surprised to see them in such a panic.)

KIANA AND LAYLIYA (*Out of breath*) My queen! My queen!

ESTHER Ladies! What is it?

KIANA AND LAYLIYA (*Sing*)

When we were gathered with the other women,
Someone stopped us in our tracks.

KIANA

He said his name was Mordecai.

(ESTHER has a noticeable reaction to this.)

LAYLIYA

He said the king is gonna die,

KIANA AND LAYLIYA

'Cause he heard two men plotting
As he hid behind their backs.

ESTHER

Take your message to King Xerxes.

You have information that he surely needs to know!

Likely he will have a friendly talk with these assassins,

But make sure you give credit to the man who told you so!

(Speaks)

Quickly!

KIANA Come, Layliya! (*Lights go down on ESTHER as KIANA and LAYLIYA rush to the other side of the stage, where lights come up to reveal MEHUMAN.*)
Mehuman?

MEHUMAN Yes?

KIANA AND LAYLIYA (*Sing*)
We need a messenger who's fast and faithful!

MEHUMAN
I'm the right man for the task!

KIANA
Mordecai told us and we told Esther

LAYLIYA
And she said to pass it on 'cause it's important

KIANA AND LAYLIYA
Which is why we've come to ask,
Take this message to King Xerxes:

LAYLIYA
Two of his own guards have rather sinister intent!

KIANA
Teresh and Bigthana want to slay the king at bedtime,

LAYLIYA
And also please make mention of the man from whom we're sent!

MEHUMAN (*Speaks, flustered*) Dear oh dear! I must be on my way!
(*Lights go down on KIANA and LAYLIYA, and the spotlight follows MEHUMAN across the stage as lights come up on XERXES.*)

XERXES Mehuman?

MEHUMAN (*Kneels before the king as he sings*)
My king, it looks like you're alive and that means
I did not arrive too late.
Someone by the name of Mordecai reported
Teresh and Bigthana have been planning your demise by the front gate!
(*The music stops.*)

XERXES (*Speaks after a pause*) Really?

MEHUMAN Truly.

XERXES (*Contemplates this for a moment, then sings*)

Take this message to Bigthana and Teresh:

If they want to kill me they should learn to do it right.

Next time they should have their conversation where it can't be heard and

Then they won't get executed like they will tonight!

(XERXES and MEHUMAN exit together and the music shifts to something like a funeral dirge. Presently, MEHUMAN enters again, leading TERESH and BIGTHANA, who are tied with ropes and have black hoods covering their heads. They are led out slowly, down the aisle. The lights go down abruptly as soon as a three-measure drum solo is over, ending the scene.)

SCENE 8

Esther 3:1-7

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Haman, Zeresh, and a number of their friends*

SCENE: *In the house of Haman, unwelcoming and eerily lit.*

ZERESH *calmly strides to the door to greet her FRIENDS, who are just entering. ZERESH is cool, contemplative, and collected in all of her dealings. Her FRIENDS, meanwhile, are slimy and conniving wretches and hags.*

ZERESH Friends, welcome.

HAG Good evening, Zeresh.

WRETCH We came as soon as we received your message!

ZERESH Thank you. Haman insisted that we do this tonight. He will be home soon.

HAG Yes, you told us what we are called to do, but you didn't say why.

WRETCH Does this have something to do with the assassination attempt on the king?

ZERESH No. This is a much more personal matter... for my husband.

HAG Ah, so this is because of Haman's new position!

ZERESH Yes. It is true that he has received much honor since the king promoted him...

HAG I can only imagine! He's higher than any other noble or official in the kingdom! Everyone he passes bows at his feet!

WRETCH What a thrill it must be.

ZERESH You're right. The king did command that everyone... *should* bow.

HAG Should?

ZERESH There is one—

HAMAN (*From offstage*) Zeresh! ZERESH! (HAMAN *enters in a burst of rage. As he does, his FRIENDS all kneel immediately and remain bowed. ZERESH bows slightly, then stands tall as he storms towards her.*) He did it again! He DID IT AGAIN!

ZERESH (*Speaks to him soothingly*) Haman, your friends are here.

HAMAN *My friends* know how to respect the king's top official! Everyone in the

kingdom knows! But THAT MAN...

WRETCH There is one who refuses to bow?

HAMAN He's not fit to be called a man. He's a dog! They say his name is Mordecai. And they say... he is a Jew.

HAG (*With a touch of evil glee*) Haman... are we going to kill him?

HAMAN (*Screams with a sudden jerk reaction*) NO! (*Pauses, looks at his friend, and speaks more quietly*) Yes. But not just him. We'll kill them all!

WRETCH (*Scared*) Who?

HAMAN The Jews! He has brought this on himself. We will destroy him, yes, but we will also wipe out HIS ENTIRE RACE! (*HAMAN takes a minute to calm down a little and wipes his mouth as if he's a wild animal with rabies.*) That is why I have asked you all here tonight.

(*Cue for intro music to THE CASTING OF THE PUR. HAMAN nods to ZERESH, who steps forward to address the group.*)

ZERESH (*Slowly and ceremoniously*) We will now cast the Pur, to determine which day of which month the Jews will be destroyed. Let the preparations begin! (*During the chant, HAMAN watches solemnly as ZERESH and their FRIENDS prepare to cast the Pur. These actions can be choreographed as a macabre dance, or simply performed as stage directions. Two FRIENDS bring forward a long trough. Another brings forward a large jar with a narrow neck, filled with water, and sets it next to the trough. Another brings a bundle of sticks and hands them to ZERESH, who moves slowly toward the jar holding the sticks high in the air. She continues to hold the sticks high over the jar, looking up at them as the chant concludes.*)

BASSES (*Sing*)
Vi-ya

TENORS
Vi-ya-xa-na*

Vi-ya

WOMEN
Vi-ya-xa-na

Mā-ha

TENORS
O-wa-ya-u-vā

Vi-ya

WOMEN
Vi-ya-xa-na

Vi-ya

TENORS
Vi-ya-xa-na

(BASSES)

Vi-ya

WOMEN

Vi-ya-xa-na

Mā-ha

TENORS

O-wa-ya-u-vā

Vi-ya

WOMEN

Vi-ya-xa-na

Gar-ma

TENORS

Gar-ma-pa-da

Gar-ma

WOMEN

Gar-ma-pa-da

Mā-ha

TENORS

O-u-ra-vā-ha-ra

Gar-ma

WOMEN

Gar-ma-pa-da

Gar-ma

TENORS

Gar-ma-pa-da

Gar-ma

WOMEN

Gar-ma-pa-da

Mā-ha

TENORS

O-u-ra-vā-ha-ra

Gar-ma

WOMEN

Gar-ma-pa-da

Za-na

TENORS AND WOMEN

Vr-ka-za-na

Za-na

Vr-ka-za-na

Mā-ha

O-āi-gra-cis

ALL

Vr-ka-za-na

(Just after the last note is sung, ZERESH drops the sticks into the jar of water. Silence now prevails. ZERESH turns and nods to a FRIEND, who comes forward and picks up the jar, then walks along the trough and pours the contents of the jar into the trough. When this is complete, ZERESH moves along the side of the trough, interpreting the message revealed in the arrangement of the sticks. All others are eagerly leaning forward, trying to see what the message is.)

ZERESH (*Speaks*) The thirteenth day... of the twelfth month... (*She looks at HAMAN,*

who has come to stand next to her.) ...the month of Adar.

HAMAN The thirteenth day of the month of Adar. (*Ominous pause*) So be it. (HAMAN *walks down center to begin his soliloquy as ZERESH and their FRIENDS exit.*) What other choice do I have? I'm acting in the best interest of the kingdom. This is Persia! We don't need the Jews... their language, and their culture... and their God. Who do they think they are anyway? Saying they know the only God. Saying He won't let them bow to anyone else. Mordecai brought this on himself! He thinks he's above the law! And if his people are eradicated from the face of the earth, then it's *his* fault. Oh, I hope the king agrees to this. (*Pause*) He will. The fool. I just have to phrase it right. (*Imagining what he will say to the king*) "My king, having considered this carefully, I believe it is not in your best interest to allow these people to remain in this land." (*Now mocking the king*) "Very good, Haman. Please settle this matter appropriately. And pass the wine." Yes... I just hope he agrees quickly so that we can start preparing. I hope that I can leave the palace this very day with good news to bring to Zeresh. And I hope... (*Thinks for a moment with an evil glint in his eye*) I hope that the Jews die slowly.
(*Lights down.*)

* The lyrics for the chant are derived from ancient Persian names of months. Approximate meanings are as follows: Ouravāhara = "month of strong spring"; Oāigracis = "Garlic-collecting month"; Garmapada = "heat-station month"; Vrkazana = "month of wolf killing"; Owayauvā = "The terrible one"; Viyaxana = "Digging-up month"; Māha = old Persian word for "month"

Sources: Panaino, Antonio. "Calendars, Pre-Islamic," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, IV/6-7, pp. 658-677; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/calendars> (accessed online 8/4/2015).

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SCENE 9
Esther 3:8-15

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Mehuman, and Haman*
SCENE: *The king's throne room.*

XERXES is seated at a low table, studying some scrolls. MEHUMAN enters.

XERXES Who is in the court?

MEHUMAN My king, it is Haman.

XERXES Show him in. (MEHUMAN *exits*. *A moment later, HAMAN enters.*) Haman!

HAMAN King Xerxes.

XERXES (*With his usual elaborate pompousness*) Tell me what you think of this! I've decided to expand my fleet. As my riches increase, so should my naval power. The question is... how many additional ships should be built?

HAMAN (*Playing the game expertly*) My king, I think you have an idea in mind.

XERXES Yes, actually, I was thinking of adding seventy supply ships and... (*Dramatic pause*) ...fifty triremes.

HAMAN (*Feeding the king's pride*) Fifty triremes! My king! So many?

XERXES I know. I know it's aggressive. But a king that wishes to remain great must think towards the future.

HAMAN Well, this will certainly prove that the world's greatest kingdom is only increasing in might!

XERXES Yes, very good.
(*In XERXES' mind, the conversation is over now that HAMAN has given approval of his plans. XERXES now becomes preoccupied with his scrolls, jotting down notes and muttering to himself throughout the following exchange.*)

HAMAN King Xerxes, I would like to discuss another matter of importance with you...

XERXES (*Distracted*) Yes?

HAMAN There is a certain race scattered throughout the land that insists upon causing trouble for the rest of your people. They do not follow our customs. They follow the laws of only one God, a God they call Jehovah.

XERXES (*Flippantly*) People worship many gods in this land.

HAMAN (*Trying hard to conceal his anger*) But *these* people, under the pretense of following their God, blatantly disobey the commands of the king. I have seen it with my own eyes. And for this, I believe it is not in your best interest to allow them to remain in this land.

XERXES (*Momentarily looks up from his work*) These people should be sent away?

HAMAN Not exactly. They should be destroyed. (*XERXES looks thoughtful for a moment, then turns his attention back to the scrolls, continuing to show only minimal response.*) A proclamation must be sent, telling your people to destroy this race, young and old, men, women and children. I personally will donate ten thousand talents of silver for whoever takes care of this business. But... it must be done on the thirteenth day of Adar.

XERXES (*Sighs, looks at HAMAN for a moment, then stands and takes off his ring*) Haman, keep the money. Take my signet ring and do with these people what seems best to you.

HAMAN (*This is more than he possibly could have hoped for. Shocked, he bows and takes the ring reverently.*) Oh, my king. Thank you.

XERXES (*Still distracted*) Thank you.
(*XERXES turns and exits, looking over a small scroll as he walks. HAMAN steps down center, overjoyed with evil excitement and newfound power. He holds up his hand where the new ring rests. The lighting turns eerie.*)

HAMAN (*Loudly, like a proclamation*) The ring of King Xerxes is now the ring of Haman, son of Hammedatha... (*Yells*) The enemy of the Jews!
(*HAMAN runs off, laughing wildly. Lights down.*)

SCENE 10

Esther 4:1-16

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Mordecai, Esther's maids, Hathach, Esther, and a few townspeople*

SCENE: *In front of the king's gate, not long after.*

The lights come up to reveal some TOWNSPEOPLE going about their business. MORDECAI is upstage, intently reading a scroll. TRELLA enters, looking lost, and approaches a BYSTANDER.

TRELLA Excuse me, did you happen to notice if I walked past here a few minutes ago?

BYSTANDER Um... I didn't notice.

TRELLA Oh, never mind! There's the palace.
(TRELLA exits. MORDECAI has finished reading and moves downstage, still staring at the scroll with dazed eyes.)

MORDECAI (*Devastated, scarcely able to form sentences*) The thirteenth day of the month of Adar. Sealed with the king's own signet ring. (MORDECAI drops the scroll and cries aloud as he rends his clothes.) No! Oh, no! No! My people! My people! O Lord! Your people! Your people!
(*As MORDECAI is saying these lines, KIANA and LAYLIYA enter, unnoticed by him. They slow down when they see MORDECAI and whisper excitedly to each other, recognizing him from earlier. They then exit quickly in the direction of the palace. Meanwhile, MORDECAI wanders the stage in agony. His legs can barely carry him. He stumbles to a pile of garbage and rips out some sackcloth, with which he drapes himself. Then he wanders to the remains of a fire and drops to his knees, covering himself with the ashes. He is moaning periodically. Throughout these actions, nearby TOWNSPEOPLE look at him curiously and begin to exit, a few at a time. Just after KIANA and LAYLIYA exit, MAHEEN, SHIRIN, YASLYN, and KYRI enter, walking toward the palace.*)

SHIRIN Where do you suppose Trella went?

YASLYN (*Pointing to MORDECAI as if he's a circus sideshow*) Look, Maheen, it's that strange man.

MAHEEN Look away, Yaslyn.

KYRI Maybe we could give him some perfumes.

MAHEEN Leave him alone. Keep walking.
(*The four MAIDS exit.*)

MORDECAI (*Now lifts his head and looks toward Heaven pleadingly*) Why, Lord?

Why do the heathen rage? And the people imagine a vain thing? Haman!
(MORDECAI now turns his head suddenly and points toward the palace gate, as if HAMAN is standing right there.) You are doing this for my sake! You are doing this to all of my people... because I won't bow to you! But still... I will not bow. I will not! God forbid that I should justify you! My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go!

(MORDECAI collapses again, shaking and bowing his head in fervent prayer. All TOWNSPEOPLE are gone by now. KIANA and LAYLIYA enter again and cautiously approach MORDECAI. LAYLIYA is carrying some neatly folded clothes.)

KIANA (Gently) Mordecai? (MORDECAI remains silent and does not look up at them.) Mordecai, the queen is concerned for you. (MORDECAI still does not answer, and the MAIDS look at each other, not sure what to do.) She has sent you some new clothes.

LAYLIYA She says that you need not remain in sackcloth and rags.

MORDECAI (Lifts his head for the first time since they arrived, but still does not speak to them.) O Lord! Your children! The children of Abraham! Oh...
(Hangs his head again, sobbing)

KIANA (Pause) Mordecai?
(He does not respond. KIANA nods to LAYLIYA, who carefully sets the clothes down next to MORDECAI. They turn to go.)

MORDECAI (Suddenly) No! Ladies! Take them, please. I don't want them. I must remain clothed as I am, a man in mourning. (Startled, LAYLIYA grabs the clothes and the MAIDS hurry off. MORDECAI continues to cry out to Heaven, his hands raised and his eyes closed in prayer. Lighting changes slowly until only MORDECAI'S side of the stage is lit.) O Lord, you promised! You promised Abraham! You told him to count the stars, and so would be the number of his descendants. But here we are, the children of Abraham! Will you not remember us now? Please... my God... remember my dear Hadassah. (He breaks down, hanging his head again. After a moment, he raises his head slowly and speaks as if groping for something.) The stars of Abraham's night sky. The stars. A star... (Sudden realization, looks up, his eyes wide open) Esther... Esther! Hadassah. Esther! (He stands quickly and turns to see HATHACH, who has just entered. MORDECAI speaks before HATHACH has a chance. His voice is now rushed, with an air of growing excitement.) Who are you?

HATHACH (Calm and polite) My name is Hathach. I am a messenger, a servant of the queen.

MORDECAI Queen Esther!

HATHACH Yes. She is concerned for you, sir. She has sent me to find out why you are grieving.

MORDECAI (*Grabs HATHACH'S shoulder impulsively*) Oh, Hathach! I'm glad you've come. This is a desperate hour. I am a Jew... a servant of the one God, Jehovah. He is my defender! (*Growing more excited, he speaks his thoughts more to himself than to HATHACH, even as the thoughts are coming to him.*) Oh... oh, don't you see? The Lord... He had His solution in place even before the problem began. Hathach! (*Gearing himself up, turning it over in his mind, about to say something very serious.*)

HATHACH Yes sir?

MORDECAI (*He picks up the scroll from where he dropped it and places it in HATHACH'S hands purposefully.*) This is what I need you to do. All that I am about to say to you, you must speak to no one, except for the queen.
(*As he starts to mime a conversation with HATHACH, the lights slowly go down on the two of them as lights simultaneously go up on the other side of the stage to reveal ESTHER, seated and looking concerned. MORDECAI remains on the dark side of the stage, kneeling again, but HATHACH crosses and enters the light where ESTHER is. He kneels.*)

HATHACH My queen.

ESTHER Hathach, did you find the man, Mordecai?

HATHACH I did.

ESTHER Tell me...

HATHACH My queen, he gave me this. (*Holds up the scroll.*) On the thirteenth day of Adar, a certain race of people is to be destroyed. Ten thousand talents of silver have been promised to whoever will carry out this destruction.

ESTHER (*Genuinely disturbed*) This is... terrible!

HATHACH My queen, there is more. The people to be destroyed... are Mordecai's people, the Jews.

ESTHER (*Stunned pause, holding on to a thin hope that he is mistaken*) No!... No!
The king would not do such a thing!
(*She stands, grabs the scroll, and immediately looks at the seal.*)

HATHACH It is sealed with the king's ring. But it was written by Haman. (*ESTHER falls to her knees and buries her head in her hands, beginning to cry.*) My queen, I am sorry.

ESTHER No... no, you don't understand. (*Struggling to speak*) I must communicate with Mordecai further. I will need you to go to him again. But first I have to tell you something you must promise not to tell another soul.

HATHACH My queen, I already know.

ESTHER What?

HATHACH (*Gently*) Your real name. It is Hadassah. Mordecai told me. And he told me that he is your cousin. This means... you are one of them.

ESTHER (*After a pause, with some relief*) Yes... yes, I am a Jew. Oh, it feels so good to say it! But now... now it means death. (*Looks at HATHACH hopefully.*) Did my cousin say anything more?

HATHACH He did. And this may be the most difficult part. He urges you to go before the king and plead for your people.

ESTHER (*A sudden look of fear*) Before the king? (*HATHACH nods.*) I... I can't. The queen may only go when she has been called. He could have me killed for this!

HATHACH (*After a pause*) So, what message shall I take to Mordecai?
(*FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS / IF I PERISH intro music begins as ESTHER stands and slowly walks forward, pondering what she wants to say. HATHACH stands not far away, listening carefully.*)

ESTHER (*Sings*)

Dearest cousin, do you not know
What every servant under the king knows?
That anyone who dares to come before the king in his courts
Without being summoned is put to death
With one exception: If the king holds out his golden scepter
He spares his life. But I've not been called for thirty days
And if I go now, I'll perish.

(*She turns and nods to HATHACH. The lights slowly go down on her as they come up on MORDECAI, and HATHACH walks into his presence. As the music plays, he mimes that he is delivering ESTHER'S message to MORDECAI. When he is finished, MORDECAI steps forward and sings his message to her, while HATHACH listens.*)

MORDECAI

Oh Hadassah, do not think that
You can escape the plight of your people.
And if you choose to remain in the apparent comfort of silence,
Safe in the palace, then you will die,
As will your family; and the Jews will be saved another way.

But who knows? Maybe you have come to royalty
For such a time as this.

(He turns and nods to HATHACH. The lights slowly go down on MORDECAI as they come up on ESTHER, and HATHACH walks into her presence. As the music plays, he mimes that he is delivering MORDECAI'S message to ESTHER. When he is finished, ESTHER steps forward and sings her final message, while HATHACH listens.)

ESTHER

Go, dear Mordecai, and gather
All of the Jews in Susa together
And fast for me; and neither eat nor drink for three days and nights
And I and my maidens will do the same.
And when it's over, I will go to the king
Even though it is not according to the law.
And if I perish, I perish.

(She nods to HATHACH. This time the lights stay on her while lights slowly come up on MORDECAI. HATHACH again approaches MORDECAI and mimes that he is delivering the final message. MORDECAI nods, clearly relieved, and HATHACH exits. MORDECAI then steps forward, and he and ESTHER sing together from opposite sides of the stage. They do not look at each other, since they are in different places.)

ESTHER

Who,
Who is this girl?
You called her Esther.
I think I know now that she
Has found her place
Has found a calling, a purpose,
But still I'm scared.

MORDECAI

I never knew
When I
First called you Esther,
What it would cost you.
You had a choice
That few could face,
But you remembered
The things I taught you.

BOTH

And how I wish I could see you
At this crucial moment

ESTHER

I stand in the darkness,
Afraid just yet to move.

MORDECAI

You stand alone in the darkness,
Afraid to move.

BOTH

For moving means moving forward

To a fate we cannot foresee.

ESTHER

Like you said I would,
I know what to do
And if I perish, I perish.

MORDECAI

But at least you know
What to do
At such a time as this.

(As their duet ends, ESTHER sits back down, looking offstage sadly.

MORDECAI turns his head and looks in her direction, as if he can see her in his mind's eye, then turns away painfully and looks offstage. After he turns away, ESTHER similarly turns and looks in his direction, then looks away again. Lights down slowly on Act I.)

- Intermission -

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES IN THIS SCENE: *Psalm 2:1, Job 27:5-6, Genesis 15:5*

Act II

SCENE 1

Esther 4:17

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Mordecai, Zibeon, Keziah, Rachel, other Jews*

SCENE: *In the Jewish part of the city, the next morning.*

Jews are seen gathered in small groups, some in sackcloth and ashes. All have mournful expressions. Some are weeping quietly, some are crying loudly, and some are trying to comfort others. MORDECAI enters.

MORDECAI Friends... *(All turn to look. ZIBEON, obviously an old friend, approaches MORDECAI while others gather closer to hear what news he may bring.)*

ZIBEON Mordecai! *(He hugs him.)*

KEZIAH *(Queen of the busybodies, she cuts to the chase.)* Is there news from the palace?

JEWS *(Echoing KEZIAH'S question ad lib until MORDECAI speaks again)* Yes, is there news? Yes, what have you learned from the palace? What's going on?

MORDECAI *(Speaking as though heavily burdened)* News, yes. From Queen Esther. You know her better as my cousin Hadassah.

KEZIAH Yes, Hadassah.

RACHEL Your cousin is in the palace by the king's side! What is *she* doing about this?

ZIBEON Can she help us?

JEWS *(Chiming in ad lib)* Can she? Is there any hope? What can she do for us?

MORDECAI Please... Please, everybody listen. Wait... you don't understand. *(The rest of the JEWS quiet down for a moment.)* It's very difficult for her.

RACHEL Why?

MORDECAI Because... if she goes before the king to speak about this matter, she may die.

KEZIAH If she does not go, we will all die!
(Others moan in agony. Throughout the three characters' following conversation, they all speak very quickly, spilling out lines one on top of

another.)

ZIBEON This is true, Mordecai. On that day, when they come to destroy us, we will fall. We cannot fight back!

KEZIAH Any of us who tries to fight would soon be hunted down by the king's own army—

RACHEL Because we're "defying the king's proclamation."

KEZIAH And they have all that money from the treasury to spend on weapons!

ZIBEON Even if we wanted to fight, we haven't fought for years. We are farmers and tradesmen, scattered, unorganized—

KEZIAH Nobody would sell us weapons or armor!

RACHEL Because they'd be "defying the king's proclamation!"

KEZIAH You just said that, Mother.

RACHEL It was relevant again. Different context.

ZIBEON Would you two stop?! This is no time to fight amongst ourselves!

KEZIAH What else can we do? If Hadassah does not speak up for us, we'll all die!

RACHEL (*Snarkily*) You already said that, Keziah.

KEZIAH That's because it's *true!*

ZIBEON Ladies!

WOMAN (*Wailing*) We're all going to die!

JEWS (*Moaning and crying out ad lib in agreement with this dismal assessment*) She's right! This is the end! We'll all be slaughtered! They'll come and destroy us all!

MORDECAI Please! Everybody! Everybody listen! *Listen!* (*The JEWS finally stop and let MORDECAI speak. He addresses them now, firmly yet controlled, with great purpose.*) You act as if we do not have the Lord Almighty as our protector! He is the Rock, and we are the children of Jacob, the Lord's inheritance! He has always led us, instructed us, and kept us as the apple of His eye. Surely He will protect us now.

(*Silence as MORDECAI'S words sink in.*)

ZIBEON (*Humbled*) Mordecai, we spoke hastily.

MORDECAI After I heard the news, I too went through a time of doubt. But the Lord has renewed me! May He renew us all.

KEZIAH (*After a pause, much more calmly*) Tell us Mordecai, what message do you bring?

MORDECAI Hadassah—Queen Esther—will be fasting for the next three days, along with her maids. She asks that we do the same.

ZIBEON What is the purpose of this fast?

MORDECAI In three days, she will go before the king to plead our case, and ask for the king's mercy on us. (*All are very relieved—not cheering, but breathing grateful sighs, looking toward Heaven thankfully, looking at one another with hope.*) But as I said, she could lose her life for approaching the king when she hasn't been called. That's why she needs you now. Will you fast and pray with me? (*Some say "yes" quietly, but most just resolutely nod their agreement.*) In the days of Moses, the Lord said He would protect His people and deliver our enemies to us, *if we would remain holy. So I beg you... be holy. Don't be frightened. Don't be discouraged. The Lord our God is with us.*

(The JEWS all begin to disperse again, some praying, others gathering back into smaller groups. MORDECAI drops to his knees in prayer as the lights go down.)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES IN THIS SCENE: *Deuteronomy 32:4, 9; 23:14; Joshua 1:9*

SCENE 2

Esther 5:1

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Esther, Esther's maids*

SCENE: *Esther's room, three days later.*

Nervous energy permeates the room. ESTHER is seated, surrounded by MAHEEN, KIANA, TRELLE, LAYLIYA, and SHIRIN, all busily preparing her to go to the king.

SHIRIN That looks just about right.

KIANA Trella, can you go find a mirror?
(TRELLE nods and starts to turn one direction, then realizes her mistake and exits the other direction. Meanwhile, YASLYN and KYRI enter, arguing about the necklaces they are holding.)

YASLYN But this one matches her dress better!

KYRI It doesn't need to match the dress. I think bringing out her eyes is more important!

YASLYN He won't be able to see her eyes from far away.

SHIRIN *(To ESTHER)* Can you tilt your head forward?

KYRI *(Approaching ESTHER)* My queen, which one do you like?

ESTHER *(Unaware of the disagreement that just took place)* Ummm... that one matches my dress.
(She picks YASLYN'S necklace and KYRI looks a little pouty. TRELLE enters holding a small mirror and hands it to KIANA.)

KIANA Thank you. *(With trembling hands, she holds the mirror up in front of ESTHER.)* Here.

ESTHER *(Takes KIANA'S hand to steady her)* Kiana, you're trembling!

KIANA *(Trying to cover up her anxious feelings)* Oh... it's just because I haven't eaten for three days.

ESTHER *(With concern)* Oh, Kiana... one way or the other our fasting will be over soon.

LAYLIYA I'd be willing to fast for three weeks if it meant you didn't have to do this now!

KYRI Me too!

ESTHER Thank you, but I can't put this off another day.

KIANA (*Now kneels by ESTHER'S side*) My queen, how can you be so calm?

ESTHER I know I shouldn't be calm. I still don't know how I'm going to do this. I don't think even at *this* moment I have the strength to go before the king... but right now I know I can at least stand up and take the first step toward the palace.

LAYLIYA (*Kneels at ESTHER'S other side*) Still, I don't think I would be as calm as you are.

SHIRIN Can you lift your chin a little more?

ESTHER I'm much more prepared for this now than I would have been at one time.

KIANA What made the difference?

ESTHER Well, I think it was... just being in situations where I had no choice but to be strong. Ever since I was little, I knew in my head where I was supposed to find courage, but my heart didn't know until I started facing... more difficult days.

LAYLIYA Like when you left your cousin to come here?

ESTHER Yes, that was the hardest one. I missed him terribly. I learned so much from him. He taught me about the God who made the heavens and the earth and that—

LAYLIYA The Hebrew God?

ESTHER (*Sounding hopeful, getting lost in her fond memories of childhood*) Yes, and he told me stories about how God protected King David... And he taught me that God would be *my* protector too. I guess my cousin also had to go through a lot of hardship to understand that so well.

LAYLIYA (*Speaking without thinking, as usual*) Now maybe you'll understand it as well as he does... *if* you live through this.

YASLYN Oh, it's going to be so *romantic* if the king decides not to have you killed!

KIANA *Girls!*

ESTHER (*Chuckles a little, in spite of herself*) It's okay, Kiana. (*Pauses soberly now*) I understand the risk.

KIANA (*Trying to reassure herself as much as ESTHER*) But surely the king will spare your life! At least long enough to hear your request.

ESTHER I've played the scenario over in my mind so many times, but I just don't know. I'd like to believe the king really loves me... but I think he also loved Vashti.

KIANA Her situation was different. Surely he will respect a queen who disobeys by *coming* to him rather than by *not* coming to him.

ESTHER (*Pause*) Well, there's only one sure way to know.

MAHEEN (*Has been silent up to this point, but now speaks directly, allowing her growing love for ESTHER to shine through her stern exterior*) My queen... I don't give compliments very often. I want you to know that I admire you. I haven't always, you know.

ESTHER (*Deeply touched by this*) Thank you, Maheen. I admire all of you. You've all been so brave during this time. It really helps me. (*Sighs. Stands slowly.*) I have to go now.

(KIANA and LAYLIYA stand quickly. All of the MAIDS are clearly distressed, somehow caught off guard now that the dreadful moment is finally here.)

LAYLIYA My queen! Now?

KIANA We're not ready!
(*Cue to begin intro music for ONE MORE MOMENT.*)

ESTHER (*Looks down at her dress, a little puzzled*) But I *am* ready.

KIANA But *we're* not ready.
(*Sings*)
Have just a drink of water
Or test another pair of shoes.
Stay for a little longer.
We don't care what excuse you use.

LAYLIYA
For if the worst should happen,
You'd be our second queen to lose.

KIANA
I know you have a mission,
A calling you cannot deny.
But can your endangered people
Wait one more moment till you try?

KIANA AND LAYLIYA
We need that one more moment,

For we don't know if this is
Goodbye.

(The music becomes more upbeat and reminiscent of ESTHER'S early days at the palace. ESTHER attempts to cheer them up a little before she leaves.)

ESTHER

Remember all the times we had when I first came here?

KIANA

I knew when you arrived, it wouldn't be the same here.

ESTHER

But I can say that I became what I became here
Thanks to you, and several others too.

(She looks around at the other MAIDS standing with her.)

LAYLIYA

A hundred memories come to mind,
And yet I cannot seem to find
The words to say.
You know them anyway.

ESTHER

The time you thought you lost your ring...

LAYLIYA

The time we raced each other to the southwest wing...

KIANA

The time that Hegai fell...

ESTHER

And broke his goblet thing!

KIANA

He didn't take it well.

(There is a short instrumental section, during which ESTHER and the MAIDS are talking, laughing, and doing impressions of each other and HEGAI as they relive the memories. Gradually, closer to the end of this section, KIANA isolates herself slightly and becomes melancholy again. The others become solemn again too as the reality of the near future hits them, and the music slows to its former tempo.)

You made a hard decision
In which we did not have a voice.
We want to help you do this,
Though we still struggle with your choice.

LAYLIYA

We're holding to a hope that
We'll yet have reason to rejoice.

ALL MAIDS

We know you have a mission,
A calling you cannot deny.
Can your endangered people
Wait one more moment till you try?
We need that one more moment,
For we don't know if this is
Goodbye.

(ESTHER starts to hug each of the MAIDS in turn. All are crying and trying to comfort one another as the lights slowly fade out.)

SCENE 3

Esther 5:1-8

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, Mehuman, Esther, Esther's maids*

SCENE: *The king's throne room.*

XERXES is seated on the throne and HAMAN is sitting on a low chair next to the throne. They each have a glass of wine in hand. MEHUMAN stands nearby, waiting for orders. XERXES is cheerfully giving an account of one of his war tales.

XERXES So the Greeks were defeated at Thermopylae, and I knew that my strategy had been justified, even though a number of my advisors disagreed with my plan.

HAMAN Now, are these advisors that I would know?

XERXES Actually, those advisors are no longer with us.

HAMAN So exactly what strategy did they have in mind—

XERXES (*Interrupts*) Wait... who is that? (*Stands. Looks off beyond the audience, straining his eyes. Speaks indignantly, hardly believing what he is saying.*)
There's a woman in the court. Mehuman!

MEHUMAN My king?

XERXES Who is in the court?

MEHUMAN (*Thinking this is a mighty strange question, but wanting to be respectful*)
There is nobody in the court... I...
(*He is cut off suddenly as he looks offstage, in the direction the other two are staring.*)

XERXES (*Shocked and pleasantly surprised*) Oh! It's...
(*Cue for instrumental music, ESTHER APPROACHES THE KING.*)

MEHUMAN It's...
(*XERXES ceremoniously reaches for his gold scepter and holds it up high. ESTHER, in her royal robes, walks up the aisle approaching the throne. She walks onto the stage, slowly and respectfully, with her head slightly lowered. She comes to the scepter and kneels as she touches its tip. HAMAN and MEHUMAN continue to look at the queen in utter shock. XERXES and ESTHER stay in the same position for a moment. Then ESTHER looks up at XERXES.*)

XERXES (*Addresses the two men, but never takes his eyes off his queen*) Leave us.
(*HAMAN and MEHUMAN exit quickly. XERXES sits back down.*)

ESTHER My king.

XERXES My dear queen Esther! What is it? Whatever your request, it shall be given to you, up to half my kingdom!

ESTHER (*Speaking slowly and a little timidly*) My king, I ask... this. Let the king... and Haman... come to the banquet I have prepared for you today.

XERXES (*After a pause*) Of course! (*He loves banquets.*) My dear queen Esther, of course! Mehuman! (*MEHUMAN enters immediately.*) Quickly! Tell Haman to get ready at once! He has been invited to a banquet!

MEHUMAN Yes, my king. (*He exits.*)

XERXES (*Looks at ESTHER with glee*) I love banquets!

ESTHER (*Smiles*) I know. Shall I make the preparations?

XERXES Please do!

(*XERXES takes ESTHER'S hand and helps her up, then leads her offstage. Instrumental music, PREPARING THE BANQUET, begins as the lights dim a little. The cello begins to play a repeating figure as MAHEEN enters, striding purposefully. She surveys the stage floor, trying to determine the best place for the table. After a moment, she motions to KIANA and LAYLIYA offstage. As the viola starts a repeating figure to complement the cello's, KIANA and LAYLIYA enter, carrying a low table. They set it down where MAHEEN indicates. KIANA then motions to the other four offstage. As the violin joins in with its melody, SHIRIN, YASLYN, KYRI, and TRELLA enter, each holding a corner of a beautiful tablecloth. Finally, as the rest of the instruments join the piece, a choreographed sequence begins wherein the table is set. Pillows are set down for each of the three banqueters, and plates and wine glasses are set on the table. Suddenly SHIRIN notes with dismay that the glass set at the king's place looks just like the other two. She sends TRELLA out quickly with the glass and she returns shortly with a different glass, the same one used during the queen's coronation. Soon, the music becomes a bit more driving, and it is evident that the guests are about to arrive. XERXES is seen first, walking slowly and with pomp, as the "187th Night" theme enters with full force. YASLYN brings him a wine pitcher and he sniffs the top. After he nods his approval, she pours it for him. When he sees the wine glass they have brought, he picks it up slowly, then turns toward ESTHER, who has just entered. As the music shifts to the light instrumental section from "Something to Be Explored," she comes toward him and they perform the same ceremonial dance that took place with the wine glass during her coronation. XERXES and ESTHER then dance for a moment, both holding the glass. As their love theme ends, XERXES sits down and the music transitions to ESTHER'S theme as she is seated and her wine is poured. The music then becomes ominous while HAMAN enters and is seated, and his wine likewise is*)

poured. When the upbeat preparation music begins again, the MAIDS bring in platters of food and set them before the three. The music is slowly fading out, much as it faded in at the beginning of this sequence, and each of the MAIDS leaves in turn. MAHEEN is the last to leave, giving a satisfied nod with the final notes of the piece. XERXES, ESTHER, and HAMAN are left alone to feast. XERXES is seated in the middle, facing the audience, and ESTHER and HAMAN are on either side of him, facing each other.)

HAMAN (*Dripping with refinement*) Queen Esther, thank you for inviting me. It's been so long since we've had a chance to... talk.

ESTHER (*Sweet and polite, but with hidden meaning behind her words*) Oh, but I realize how busy you and the king have been, writing decrees and... things.

XERXES Yes, yes. It's impossible for one man alone to run a kingdom this size without plenty of competent help at his side.

ESTHER I imagine it is.

HAMAN (*Pauses, starting to feel that ESTHER may be hinting at something more significant*) Of course, my role continues to be purely advisory in nature.

ESTHER Still, I'm sure you've been everything the king would want in an advisor. You could never have reached such a position if you were not.

HAMAN (*Realizing this is a mind game, he plays cunningly*) My own merits aside, it's only by the king's grace that I've come to this position.

XERXES (*Oblivious to the tense undercurrent*) Granted.

ESTHER (*Sees HAMAN'S hand as he reaches for something on the table*) Now Haman, is it customary for someone who is purely in an advisory role to wear the king's ring?

HAMAN Oh, I... well, I'm not entirely familiar with what is customary. I only know... that it is a great honor and pleasure to wear the king's ring.

XERXES (*Still oblivious*) Very few men have had such an honor, but there is no one in my kingdom that I would sooner entrust it to!

HAMAN Thank you.

ESTHER So, I'm sure that the ring carries with it some degree of power. Do you ever find it to be... intoxicating? To any extent?

HAMAN (*Weighing his response carefully. Since she used the same words that he once*

spoke to her, he now uses the same words she once spoke to him.) Actually, I hadn't thought too much about the power associated with it.

ESTHER (*The conversation deepens, yet continues to retain its polite air.*) Really? Because it's the same seal that's seen on *all* of the great proclamations that come out of the palace.

HAMAN (*Speaks immediately*) Generally it's just being used to seal the routine everyday documents that go into running such a large kingdom.

ESTHER (*Decides to let the matter rest for the moment*) I see.

HAMAN (*Trying to size up her response*) Yes.

XERXES (*Breaking the silence*) My dear Esther, this wine is exquisite!

ESTHER Thank you, my king.

XERXES (*He puts down his glass and looks at ESTHER purposefully.*) My queen, you did not approach my royal throne today merely to invite me to a banquet. I know you must have a further request. Even to the half of my kingdom it shall be performed! (*HAMAN has a noticeable response to this statement. He would love to have the king give him a blank check like this!*) Tell me...

ESTHER My request is... (*She glances at HAMAN and back at XERXES.*) If I have found favor in the sight of the king... and if it please the king... (*Pauses again as the two men wait expectantly. She is trying to make a decision.*) Let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them again... tomorrow. Then... I will tell you.

XERXES (*Looks at her for a moment, then stands and walks to her seat*) My dear, how can I say anything but... I accept!

HAMAN As do I.

XERXES Good! We will eat together again tomorrow!
(*Lights down.*)

SCENE 4
Esther 5:9-14

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Haman, Harbona, Mordecai, Zeresh, Haman's friends*
SCENE: *In front of the king's gate. Partway through the scene, the location will shift to Haman's home.*

HAMAN *is walking home after the banquet, talking to himself with a self-satisfied air. MORDECAI is sitting cross-legged, unlit and inconspicuous, on the opposite side of the stage, eating a piece of bread.*

HAMAN What a day! Imagine it! Me! Son of Hammedatha! Seated at the same table as the king and queen! Hammedatha never rose to such heights of prestige. Yes! *(Laughs. Meanwhile, HARBONA enters timidly, attempting to walk past HAMAN without being noticed.)* You! Young fool!

HARBONA *(Turns, startled)* Sir? *(HAMAN turns to face him, puts his hands on his hips majestically and gives him a stern look.)* Oh! *(HARBONA gets the hint and drops to the ground, bowing face-down before HAMAN.)*

HAMAN *(Laughs heartily)* Yes! Learn your place in the world, you sniveling scum! Bow at the feet of Haman! Now, get out of my sight. *(Continues laughing as HARBONA scurries out)* All will bow soon! All will—You!
(Lights have followed HAMAN to the other side of the stage, where he now nearly stumbles over MORDECAI where he sits eating quietly. The two of them look at each other significantly for a moment, then HAMAN backs up and puts his hands on his hips, silently soliciting MORDECAI to bow as HARBONA did.)

MORDECAI *(After a pause)* Excuse me.
(MORDECAI scoots forward slightly, so as to not be in HAMAN'S way, then continues his meal nonchalantly.)

HAMAN *(After taking a moment to collect his irate thoughts, he starts to walk past, behind MORDECAI. As he does so, however, he slows and leans down slightly.)* I hope your Jehovah is satisfied that you are bringing about the destruction of your sorry race! *(MORDECAI stops eating and stares straight forward, not betraying his emotions. He does not turn to look behind him as HAMAN moves closer and pours on the vitriol.)* Oh, yes. You know what you've done. Just look at what you've accomplished with your heroic stand. The blood of the Jews will fill the streets. *(Now hunched right behind MORDECAI, almost whispering in his ear, with mock sadness)* Women. Children. Oh yes, this is a great sacrifice you are making to your God Jehovah. I'm sure He is very pleased.

MORDECAI *(Stands slowly. HAMAN too rises from his hunched position until they are standing eye-to-eye. Speaks quietly, but with the strength of conviction in his voice.)* I pity the man who strikes against the apple of God's eye.
(MORDECAI turns and exits. HAMAN stares after him, furious. He clenches

his fists, looking like he will explode, but restrains himself from running after MORDECAI in a rage. Rather, he turns and calls angrily for his wife as he storms through the door leading into his house.)

HAMAN Zeresh! Zeresh! (HAMAN stops short when he sees his FRIENDS gathered in the house. They all bow reverently when they see him.) Where is my wife?

HAG She is here.
(ZERESH enters just then, characteristically composed and relaxed.)

HAMAN Come, all of you! I have something to tell you.

WRETCH We heard some rumors about a banquet—

HAMAN (*Interrupts with a burst of anger*) Just LISTEN!
(HAMAN closes his eyes and clenches his fists, realizing he has come undone momentarily.)

HAG Haman, you look distraught, old friend.

HAMAN (*Sardonically*) Distraught? Distraught! Why should a man like me ever be distraught?!

HAG Well, I'm sorry for saying so, but—

HAMAN (*Speaking quickly, with a strange look in his eyes*) You're looking at one of the wealthiest men in the kingdom! The head of one of the most respected families! I've managed my resources well... I've raised my sons to be successful...

WRETCH Yes, of course, Haman. We just wondered—

HAMAN I have achieved a greater status than any other royal official... I've been personally honored by the king on numerous occasions... I've even been granted use of the king's own signet ring!

HAG Truly you are a wonder—

HAMAN Stop! There is more. Today, the queen approached the royal throne *without* being summoned! (*His FRIENDS gasp. ZERESH continues to look on silently, with a calculating gaze. She knows her husband better than to be led along by his narrative.*) Why would she do that? Because she had prepared a banquet for the king... and his top advisor.
(HAMAN indicates himself smugly.)

WRETCH Oh, Haman! Surely not!

HAMAN Yes! And not just today. The queen has asked me to join them again tomorrow! A private banquet for three: The king, the queen, and Haman!
(His FRIENDS applaud, but it doesn't last long, because now HAMAN comes unglued. It is as if he has gone through all of this just to make his pent-up tirade seem that much more dramatic.) AND YET! This is all NOTHING!
NOTHING! I gain nothing and it all means nothing to me as long as that man, that Jew, MORDECAI... as long as I see him by the king's gate! I hate him! I... hate... him.

(His tantrum has taken him to a remote corner of the stage, away from the others, most of whom are left not knowing what to say. HAMAN is standing, staring off into space with an incensed gaze, as ZERESH approaches him coolly.)

ZERESH (Slowly and soothingly) My husband...

HAMAN (Still looking away from her, but now taking on a victimized persona) Zeresh.

ZERESH (She holds her hand out, as if she controls him when she speaks.) Be comforted. All the Jews will be destroyed. On the thirteenth day of Adar.

HAMAN It's too long! I can't wait! I want *that* man destroyed NOW!

ZERESH Yes... you can do that.

HAMAN But... but...
(He now turns to look at her.)

ZERESH Calm yourself. Haman, let us build a gallows, a *tall* gallows... seventy-five feet high! (She turns and indicates his FRIENDS, somewhat condescendingly.) Your friends will do this.

WRETCH Yes, we would love to help!

ZERESH Go to the king first thing in the morning. Ask that Mordecai be hanged on the gallows immediately. After this is done, you can go to the banquet joyous once more!

HAMAN (Letting it sink in, his mood improving) Mordecai will hang tomorrow!

ZERESH Yes, my husband. And now... go to bed. Sleep in peace tonight.

HAMAN (Almost laughing with joy) How can I sleep? I am too excited! (To his FRIENDS) See that the gallows is built right away— tonight! (The FRIENDS hurry out.) Oh, I cannot wait to speak to Xerxes in the morning!
(HAMAN rushes out.)

ZERESH (*Steps forward to deliver her soliloquy, coldly and methodically*) What other choice do we have? Mordecai must be removed from this situation. For my husband is becoming obsessed and allowing his hatred to control him. Hatred should not control a person. Haman must regain his focus, and if this may be accomplished by a gallows for a Jew, so be it. (*Pause*) For we must keep on course. Haman is to become one of the prominent names in the whole of history. Attached to this name will be a legacy: This man was confident, ambitious, passionate. When people remember Haman, they will remember what kind of man he was. And they will remember Zeresh, the wife of Haman. A woman holds a unique kind of power, the ability to influence a man. A man may hold a nation in the palm of his hand, but only a woman can hold that man in her grasp. This arrangement has worked well for us over the years. And if all goes as planned, our names will never die. (*Loudly*) We will be immortal!
(*Lights down.*)

SCENE 5

Esther 5:14

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Harbona, Haman*

SCENE: *The king's garden courtyard, before dawn.*

HARBONA *is strolling through the garden, more peaceful than we've ever seen him. He's obviously enjoying the night air, the stars, the peace.*

HAMAN (*To himself just before he enters*) Never has there been such a gallows built! (*Enters*) Seventy-five feet high! (*Sees HARBONA*) What are you doing here? (*HARBONA is obviously very disappointed to have his peace interrupted, but he immediately bows just as he was forced to do earlier.*) Answer me! What are you doing out here at this time?

HARBONA (*Still crouched, he starts to answer HAMAN'S question, but cannot be understood with his face against the ground.*) I enjoy taking walks in the quiet hours of the morning before—

HAMAN Young fool! Speak clearly.

HARBONA (*Stands. Almost forgets that HAMAN is there as he starts to wax poetic. Apparently, this is the true HARBONA, the one that others seldom see.*) I enjoy taking walks in the quiet hours of the morning after the dew has set. The stars are the perfect backdrop for the silhouettes of fronds swaying gently in the night air. And if I tarry long enough, birds begin to alight and whisper to the garden, "Daylight approaches."

HAMAN (*After a pause*) Well, you certainly make the garden uglier for your presence. (*Can't help but bring up his own reason for being out*) I am on my way to see the king!

HARBONA (*Suddenly nervous and flighty again, the HARBONA we have become accustomed to*) But... the king... he won't be up yet!

HAMAN IDIOT! You think I don't know that? I plan to wait for him and see him first thing in the morning. I'm building a gallows seventy-five feet high and I'm requesting that he hang that man Mordecai before the day is through!

HARBONA Hang...?!?!? Mordecai...?!?!?

HAMAN (*Gets in HARBONA'S face*) Stop being obnoxious! I'd put you up there with him if it wasn't such a waste of my time to *think* about you! (*HAMAN strides off with great purpose, leaving HARBONA frazzled. He looks around helplessly, then finally looks at the stars as if looking for the answer there. Lights fade out.*)

SCENE 6
Esther 6:1-10

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, Mehuman, and one other attendant*
SCENE: *The king's bedroom.*

Lights come up on a royal bed with a royal lump under the royal covers. The lump turns. It turns again. It keeps turning. Finally, XERXES kicks the covers off and lies face up on his bed, clearly agitated.

XERXES I'm hot! So hot! *(He lies there for another moment.)* Ouch! *(He swats a mosquito.)* Ouch! *(Another.)* Mosquitoes! *(He pulls the covers back over himself. After a minute he throws them off again.)* I can't sleep! Mehuman! I can't sleep! Come in here!

MEHUMAN *(Stumbles in, obviously having been awakened)* My king?

XERXES I can't sleep!

MEHUMAN *(After a pause)* I'm sorry.

XERXES See if you can create a breeze in here. It's too hot!

MEHUMAN How do I do that?

XERXES I don't know... Run around a few times to get some air moving. And try to swat some mosquitoes while you're at it.

MEHUMAN *(Not sure if he's serious)* My king?

XERXES You may begin. *(MEHUMAN begins jogging around the bed, trying to grab mosquitoes inconspicuously as he goes. XERXES tries to lie down and get back to sleep. It isn't long before he sits up again.)* Stop! This is ridiculous! It's not helping at all. I need something to put me to sleep!

MEHUMAN My king, I have been learning some new songs on my harp that I could—

XERXES *(Frantically wanting to change the subject)* No! ... I know! Bring the book of records.

MEHUMAN *(A little dejectedly)* Yes, my king.
(MEHUMAN exits.)

XERXES *(After sitting on the bed a moment)* Ouch! *(He tries to swat at a mosquito.)* Stop that! Do you hear me? Where are you? *(He grabs two pillows and beats the mosquito with them. MEHUMAN returns with another ATTENDANT, and*

XERXES *quickly gets back under the covers, as if he has been lying calmly the entire time. The ATTENDANT is carrying a large armload of scrolls, almost too many for one person to handle.*) Mehuman?

MEHUMAN I brought the records from the seventh year of your reign, my king.

XERXES Ah yes... a very good year. Proceed.
(MEHUMAN *looks at the ends of the scrolls being held by the ATTENDANT, finds the scroll he wants, and pulls it out. MEHUMAN opens the scroll and reads in a monotone voice, frequently peering over at XERXES to see if he is asleep yet. He also periodically glances back at the ATTENDANT, who is standing very uncomfortably as he tries to maintain his precarious grasp on the large number of scrolls. XERXES, meanwhile, tosses and turns once in a while as he tries to get to sleep.*)

MEHUMAN (*Clearing his throat and reading*) The tenth month of the seventh year of the reign of King Xerxes. Day 1: Royal holiday proclaimed. Banquet held to honor Queen Esther. Day 2: King returned to business of managing kingdom. Taxes remitted. Day 3: Royal holiday proclaimed. Banquet held to celebrate remission of taxes. Day 4: Army officials summarized recent inventory of weapons holdings. Day 5: Mordecai reported attempt by two guards to assassinate king. Guards hanged on gallows. Day 6: King met with advisors to discuss purchase of weapons for army. Day 7: Royal holiday proclaimed. Banquet held to celebrate discussion of new weapons for—

XERXES (*Sits up suddenly*) Wait! (MEHUMAN *looks up from his scroll.*) Can you repeat what you said before?

MEHUMAN When?

XERXES A couple days ago.

MEHUMAN Uh... (*Looks back over what he has just read. The other ATTENDANT tries to look over MEHUMAN'S shoulder.*) King met with advisors to discuss purchase of weapons for—

XERXES No, not that. Before that.

MEHUMAN Army officials summarized recent inventory—

XERXES No! That part about two guards being hanged on a gallows.

MEHUMAN Oh! Day 5: Mordecai reported attempt by two guards to assassinate king. Guards hanged on gallows.

XERXES Mordecai... Who is this man, Mordecai?

MEHUMAN Uh... I don't know much about him. He's often found sitting at the king's gate. I presume that's where he heard the guards' plans.

XERXES What has been done to honor him for this act?

MEHUMAN Oh... *(He glances over the rest of the scroll he is holding, mumbling to himself as the ATTENDANT looks over his shoulder.)* Uh... Um... *(He looks up at the king again.)* Nothing has been done for him.

XERXES *(Jumping out of bed)* What? This man saved my life! He needs to be honored! Go! See if there is anybody in the court who may advise me!

MEHUMAN At this hour?

XERXES Quickly! *(MEHUMAN rushes out, with the ATTENDANT shuffling behind. While they are gone, XERXES is pacing about, talking to himself, apparently trying to figure out something important. MEHUMAN and the ATTENDANT, still holding his scrolls, return.)* Who is in the court?

MEHUMAN Haman is standing in the court. Why he has come so early, I have no idea. Apparently he has something very important to ask you.

XERXES Never mind that. Bring him in!
(MEHUMAN and the ATTENDANT exit again. A moment later, HAMAN strides in with purpose.)

HAMAN King Xerxes—

XERXES Haman! Tell me, what should I do for a man that I want to honor?

HAMAN *(Caught off guard)* A what?
(Cue for intro music to THE MAN THE KING WANTS TO HONOR)

XERXES There is a certain man that I would like to honor. How should I do this?

HAMAN *(Thrilled to hear this, assuming the king is referring to him)* Oh! A man you would like to honor? No doubt a great man, one who has proven his worth to you?

XERXES A hero. Noble. Selfless!

HAMAN Yes, yes. I understand. You are having trouble deciding just how to reward such a man for all he has done for you?

XERXES Exactly!
(*Sings*)
This is a man that has proved he is loyal.

HAMAN
You want to give him the treatment that's royal.

XERXES
How do I honor a man that's so worthy of honor
That he should be honored?
(*Their excitement builds, one off of the other, as they speak.*)
So tell me...

HAMAN Okay, for the man that the king wishes to honor...

XERXES Yes?

HAMAN Let the royal apparel be brought!

XERXES Ah!

HAMAN The robe that the king himself wears!

XERXES We should be writing this down. (*Hands him a small scroll*) Here.

HAMAN (*Writes as he speaks*) So the royal apparel is brought out, the robe that the king actually wears, and it is used to array this man... the man that *you* want to honor.

XERXES All right, I think I understand! See if this sounds right...
(*Sings*)

He'll wear my robe,
The one that I wear when I sit on my throne,
The one with all the velvet on the cuffs
And yards of opulent foreign material shoulder to floor
With the accents of gems lining the hems.

BOTH
This is the man that the king wants to honor.
This is the man that the king wants to honor.
That's how you honor a man that's so worthy of honor
That he should be honored!

XERXES (*Speaks*) This is brilliant! But surely more should be done for this man?

HAMAN Oh, yes! He should also ride your horse!

XERXES (*Pauses, quizzically*) My horse?

HAMAN The mighty steed that the king himself rides, looking its very best and being led by one of your most prestigious noblemen!

XERXES Wonderful! Now let me see if I can say this correctly... (*We think for a moment that he is about to launch into another verse*) ...but first, tell me what you've already written...

HAMAN (*Sings*)
He'll wear the
Robe that you wear when you sit on the throne
With the velvety cuffs and the hems with the gems
And the opulent foreign material shoulder to floor

XERXES
And he'll ride a steed,
With one of my noblemen taking the lead,
All dressed up in his finest
And the horse will be an Arabian with a tiara that matches its crest
And its flanks will have class with armor of brass.

BOTH
This is the man that the king wants to honor.
This is the man that the king wants to honor.
That's how you honor a man that's so worthy of honor
That he should be honored!

XERXES (*Speaks*) Good! What next?

HAMAN Well, once the man is clothed in your robe and seated on your horse, the nobleman will lead the horse through the streets of the city—

XERXES So that his worth may be displayed for the people!

HAMAN Exactly! The nobleman will shout as he walks, proclaiming that this is what is done for a man the king wishes to honor!

XERXES It's all coming together now! Let me see if I have understood you completely...
(*Acts as if he's about to start the next verse*)

HAMAN Okay, but first wouldn't you like to review the notes we've taken already?

XERXES Oh... yes.

HAMAN (*Sings*)

He'll wear the robe that you wear when you sit on the throne

XERXES

With the velvety cuffs and the hems with the gems

HAMAN

And the opulent foreign material shoulder to floor

XERXES

And he'll ride on a steed, an Arabian horse,
With a man in the lead in his finest, of course

HAMAN

And the horse will be decked with the brass with the class
And a crest on its head with tiara to match...

XERXES

And they'll walk the road,
Performing a truly spectacular show,
And all the crowds of people that they pass
Will unmistakably know that they're witnessing somebody grand,
But in case they can't tell, the noble will yell

BOTH

This is the man that the king wants to honor.
This is the man that the king wants to honor.
That's how you honor a man that's so worthy of honor
That he should be honored!

XERXES (*Speaks, playfully*) Okay, let's practice! I'll act like I'm the nobleman, and
you be the man that the king wants to honor!

HAMAN (*Overjoyed*) Me??!

XERXES Of course! Now, you're wearing a royal robe, and I'm leading your horse...
(*Acts as if he's majestically leading a horse carrying HAMAN, who accepts the
role eagerly. Sings.*)

This is the man that the king wants to honor...

(*Yells*)

Switch!

(*They switch roles each time they alternate lines.*)

HAMAN (*Sings*)

This is the man that the king wants to honor!

XERXES

This is the man that the king wants to honor!

HAMAN

This is the man that the king wants to honor!

XERXES (*Their role-playing is done, and they now bounce the vocal line back and forth playfully.*)

This is...

HAMAN

The man that...

XERXES

The king wants...

HAMAN

To honor!

XERXES

This is...

HAMAN

The man that...

XERXES

The king wants...

HAMAN

To honor!

BOTH

That's how you honor a man that's so worthy of honor—

XERXES (*Speaks excitedly before they can finish the line*) Haman!

HAMAN (*Expectantly*) Yes...?

XERXES You're probably wondering just who this man is, the man that I wish to honor in such a manner...

HAMAN I think I may have a guess...

XERXES Make haste! Take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do all of these things for Mordecai, the Jew, who sits at the king's gate! Do not fail to do any of the things that you have suggested for him!

(HAMAN'S countenance and entire manner change, of course, as soon as the king says the name "Mordecai." He is crestfallen, but XERXES remains oblivious and cheerful.)

HAMAN My king...?

XERXES Go! Hurry! *(As HAMAN exits sullenly, XERXES struts around the bedroom, humming with the music. Finally, he wanders back to his bed and flings himself down on top of the covers, with one final utterance at the break in the music.)*
Now I'll never get to sleep!
(At this, the orchestra plays its last notes as the lights go down on XERXES sprawled across his bed.)

SCENE 7
Esther 6:11-14

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Haman, Zeresh, Haman's friends, Mehuman and another attendant*

SCENE: *The house of Haman.*

ZERESH and her FRIENDS are sitting at home peacefully. The silence is suddenly shattered...

HAMAN (*Desperately, from offstage*) Zeresh! Zeresh!!!
(ZERESH stands as HAMAN enters, a half-crazed shell of a man. His FRIENDS bow when they see him, but cannot help looking concerned and a little frightened by his appearance.)

ZERESH Haman...

HAMAN Zeresh!

ZERESH My husband, what is it?

HAMAN (*Barely coherent*) Oh, the people calling... Zeresh... Their voices... His name... That name! Ah... the man the king wants to honor! Oh, that name!

ZERESH (*Disturbed at her husband's outburst, but not yet compromising her calm soothing manner*) What? Who?

HAMAN (*Talking like a lunatic*) That man! He sits by the king's gate... Day and night he sits... He says hello in the morning! He says good-bye at night!

ZERESH (*Finding that she is unable to calm her husband as she usually does, she starts to panic, her voice escalating.*) Haman, who are you talking about?

HAMAN (*Snaps at her*) If you ever walked by the gate, you would know! He's always there! He must not sleep! No, he doesn't sleep! You know how I know?! Because he is always awake! I see him... in my dreams... He torments me! He must... like it!!!

ZERESH (*Yelling*) Haman, stop it! Stop it!

HAMAN (*Yelling right back*) I won't stop! You don't know what I've been through! It was like one of my dreams. But it was real! It was real!

ZERESH (*Screaming*) Tell me what happened!

HAMAN (*Screaming right back*) He sat on a horse and I led him through the city! "This is the man the king wants to honor! This is the man the king wants to

honor!” And the people screamed his name in my ears! ... Mor - de - cai! (*At this, he doubles over and hunches down, hiding his face. He is shivering. ZERESH stands over him, now fully understanding his behavior, but uncharacteristically not sure how to handle it. She leans down and puts her hands around him, trying to comfort him. He addresses her miserably.*) Zeresh...

ZERESH Yes?

HAMAN Why am I so cold?

ZERESH (*Pausing, scared*) I don't know.

HAMAN Zeresh...

ZERESH What is it?

HAMAN (*After a pause*) What does all this mean?
(*ZERESH does not know what to say. She turns and looks at their FRIENDS, who are still kneeling and looking on in horror. Finally, someone stands and walks closer.*)

WRETCH (*Solemnly*) Haman, if this Mordecai is a Jew, then this was only the beginning. You will surely continue to fall before him... to your ruin.
(*HAMAN looks up, terrified, breathing heavily. He looks over at another FRIEND, who nods his agreement with what was just said. He then looks at the others, hoping to find some reassurance somewhere. There is none. Finally he looks at ZERESH. She too nods, sadly and soberly. At this point, MEHUMAN and another ATTENDANT enter. They are not sure how to handle what they are seeing, but proclaim their message dutifully.*)

MEHUMAN Uh... We have come to take Haman to the banquet...

HAMAN (*Rises slowly*) I am coming.
(*Lights down.*)

SCENE 8

Esther 7:1 – 8:15

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, Esther, Harbona, Mehuman, another attendant, and Mordecai*

SCENE: *The king's throne room.*

XERXES, HAMAN, and ESTHER are reclining on couches, having just finished their second banquet together. All three hold wine glasses, but only XERXES is sipping wine, not entirely sure why there is so much tension in the room.

XERXES Haman! You have been uncharacteristically quiet this day! Is something on your mind?

HAMAN (*Speaks softly*) No, my king.

XERXES (*Having failed to strike a conversation on that front, he turns.*) Esther! My fair queen Esther! The banquet was lovely, once again.

ESTHER (*Also quiet*) Thank you.

XERXES (*Pause during which HAMAN and ESTHER are deep in thought and XERXES is feeling awkward. Finally turns to HAMAN again.*) Well, did you enjoy your walk through the city?

HAMAN (*Barely hiding his disgust*) Of course.

XERXES (*Another pause. Turns to ESTHER*) Now, my queen, you must tell me. What is your request? It shall be performed, even up to half my kingdom!

ESTHER (*Slowly and deliberately*) Oh, my king... if I have found favor in your sight... (*She stands, suddenly speaking loudly and forcefully.*) ...then let my request be for my life, for my people! For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed! Even if we had only been sold into slavery, I would have held my tongue. For such a matter would not be worth distressing the king! But this...!

XERXES (*Seething with anger, he stands slowly.*) Who is he? Where is the man that would DARE to do such a thing?

ESTHER (*She points directly across the table.*) The enemy you seek... is this wicked Haman!

(*She now sits, relieved, but still looking straight at HAMAN. XERXES turns very slowly and looks at HAMAN, filled with rage. HAMAN is paralyzed with fear. XERXES moves slightly closer, looking like he could strangle him right then and there.*)

HAMAN No... No! (*XERXES stands there only a second, then suddenly runs offstage!*)

HAMAN *immediately gets up and rushes at ESTHER, a wild and terrified look in his eyes.*) Esther! Queen Esther, you have to help me! Save me! Save me, I pray! You've got to save me! *(He is right on top of her, shaking her somewhat violently.)* Esther! Please! Save me!

ESTHER *(Screaming as he is shaking her and yelling at her)* No! No! Get off of me! *(Etc. This does not go on very long before XERXES comes rushing back in, followed closely by MEHUMAN and another ATTENDANT. HARBONA enters too, a little after the others, and watches inconspicuously until his crucial line.)*

XERXES *(Yelling furiously)* Will he even molest the queen while I am in the house with her?! *(MEHUMAN and the ATTENDANT pull HAMAN up and put a cloth over his head. They drag him to XERXES, then drop him to his knees. ESTHER flees to a corner of the stage.)* What is to be done with such a man?

HARBONA *(After a brief pause, he steps forward and clears his throat nervously.)* My king, I happen to know of a gallows... seventy-five feet high, next to Haman's house. He built it for Mordecai, the man who saved you.

XERXES *(Turns slowly and looks straight at HARBONA)* Hang him on it!

HARBONA Right away, my king. *(He walks briskly toward MEHUMAN and the ATTENDANT.)* Come. *(They start to leave, HARBONA leading the way and the other two dragging HAMAN out. XERXES stops them right before they exit.)*

XERXES Wait! *(They stop.)* My ring! *(He walks over to them and pulls his signet ring from the trembling HAMAN'S hand. Then with merely a nod, he indicates that they should take him away. It is now that HAMAN really begins to struggle, and we hear him crying out as he is taken off.)*

HAMAN No! Please! King Xerxes, pleeeaaasse!

XERXES *(After all the others are gone, he begins pacing about, talking partly to himself and partly to ESTHER.)* Evil infecting my house! Let his estate be taken from his wife and sons! Here and now, I proclaim that all of Haman's goods belong to Esther the queen.

ESTHER *(Slowly approaching him, still a little shaken)* My king... *(XERXES is now much calmer. He sits down on the couch, his anger subsiding. ESTHER comes and sits at his side.)*

XERXES *(Sighs with relief and looks at ESTHER with tenderness)* My dear queen, I'm ready to listen. Tell me everything.

ESTHER (*Emotionally drained*) Oh, how do I begin? I have kept these secrets for so long. I am a Jew. Before I came to the palace, I was told not to reveal my heritage, because the Jews are hated by so many.

XERXES Who gave you these instructions?

ESTHER My cousin. He took me in and raised me after my parents died. (*Smiles*) I believe you know who he is...

XERXES I do?

ESTHER Yes, he is Mordecai, son of Jair.

XERXES Mordecai! The man who sits by the gate!

ESTHER Yes.

XERXES He saved my life!

ESTHER He did.

XERXES We just honored him for that! Haman took him all through the city and yelled for everyone to hear... (*Moment of realization*) Actually...

ESTHER What?

XERXES I bet Haman didn't like that very much. (*After a pause. Stands excitedly.*) You know what we need to do now?

ESTHER What?

XERXES (*Calling offstage*) Mehuman! (*MEHUMAN enters promptly while XERXES turns to speak to ESTHER for a moment*) I want your cousin to meet me! (*Turns and speaks to MEHUMAN*) Bring me that man that sits by the gate. (*MEHUMAN nods and leaves as XERXES talks to ESTHER again.*) It's all making sense now! Haman must have *hated* Mordecai. He probably walked past him every day on his way to and from the palace!

ESTHER Cousin Mordecai is a man of great principle. I think Haman had a personal grudge against him.

XERXES That sick and malicious Haman! I thought he could be trusted. It's so hard to find loyal advisors who don't make evil twisted plans behind my back! How will I ever replace him?

(*MEHUMAN enters with MORDECAI.*)

MEHUMAN My king, Mordecai is here.
(MEHUMAN *exits.*)

XERXES Mordecai! Of course, Mordecai! My good man, I want to thank you personally for thwarting the plans of my wayward guards.

MORDECAI Oh... (*Chuckles a little*) Everyone seems to remember that all of a sudden. I'd almost forgotten it myself.

XERXES (*Now very serious*) Mordecai, I would like to give you something that is extremely important. (*He takes off his ring again and hands it to MORDECAI ceremoniously.*) With this, you now have the role of primary advisor to the king. You are second in command, answering only to me.

MORDECAI (*Innocently, in stark contrast to HAMAN*) Oh... Thank you. This is quite a ring!
(MORDECAI *puts the ring on.*)

XERXES The finest. Now, I presume you would like to visit with... your cousin. Please excuse me.
(XERXES *exits briskly.*)

MORDECAI (*To XERXES as he leaves*) Yes... (*Now turns to ESTHER. They hug, not having seen one another since before she approached the king's throne.*) My dear Hadassah.

ESTHER Mordecai.

MORDECAI (*Overwhelmed, not sure what to say*) Thank you.

ESTHER For what?

MORDECAI For doing what was necessary.

ESTHER Thank you for raising me in such a way that I could. (MORDECAI *just nods and they look at each other for a moment as people who have gone through a great trial together, but don't necessarily need words to communicate. Presently, she breaks the silence.*) Mordecai? How would you like to take over Haman's estate?

MORDECAI (*Starts to address her question, but is distracted by another thought*) Well, I—

ESTHER (*Laughs*) I wouldn't even know what to do with an estate!

MORDECAI (*Sighs and looks at her soberly*) Hadassah, we can't think about that yet. There is still work to be done.

ESTHER What do you mean?

MORDECAI Haman now hangs for his crime against the Jews. But the proclamation to destroy our people is still in place.

ESTHER (*Taken aback*) What? But now that Haman is dead, can't the law just be cancelled?

MORDECAI It has been sealed with the king's ring. It is a law of the Medes and Persians, and cannot be reversed.

ESTHER But... our people! What will we do?
(*XERXES enters again, full of life. He is followed by MEHUMAN, another ATTENDANT, and a very happy HARBONA. They are carrying royal robes of blue and white and purple, and a large gold crown, and they immediately begin to adorn MORDECAI, who is a little perplexed by the attention. Meanwhile, XERXES sits on his throne talking very loudly.*)

XERXES What a glorious occasion! Haman has been hanged, the queen's long-lost heritage has been revealed, and I finally have a trustworthy advisor!

ESTHER (*Approaching the throne, as if carrying a heavy weight*) My king—

XERXES My queen, I have a wonderful idea for how we can celebrate! Let's have a banquet!

ESTHER (*Quietly but purposefully*) Xerxes...

XERXES (*Surprised, as this is the first time she has ever said his name to his face. Realizing she is upset, he speaks tenderly.*) Esther?
(*She falls to her knees before him, weeping.*)

ESTHER (*As fast as she can get the words out*) What is to be done with my people? You have to stop the plans that Haman made while he lived! You must stop the coming attack!
(*She begins to cry uncontrollably.*)

XERXES (*Not sure what else to do, he holds out his scepter to her.*) Esther.
(*She looks up, stands, and touches the end of the scepter hopefully.*)

ESTHER (*More calmly now*) If it please the king, let it be written to reverse the decree of Haman! For how can I bear the evil that will come upon my people, my family?

(By this time, MORDECAI has been arrayed royally, and has come closer to to join his cousin as she stands before the king.)

XERXES *(Stands and comes closer to ESTHER and MORDECAI, now speaking to both of them)* I have given you the estate of Haman, and he has been hanged for his crimes. Now, you must write a law on behalf of the Jews, however you please, and seal it with the king's ring. *(MORDECAI holds up his hand and looks significantly at the ring it now bears.)* For when a law is written in this way, no man may reverse it.

(ESTHER and MORDECAI and the others all look at each other with a new excitement, but not sure what to say. Finally ESTHER throws her arms around XERXES in a burst of gratitude.)

ESTHER Oh, thank you, my king! Thank you!

XERXES *(After they hug for a moment, they part slightly and look into each other's eyes.)* I love you. *(She smiles, greatly reassured. Now, as if XERXES doesn't want the others to see too much of his tender side, he yells in his characteristic pompous manner.)* Mehuman!

MEHUMAN *(Steps forward)* Yes, my king?

XERXES Remain here with Mordecai as he writes his decree. Be ready, as soon as he is finished, to deliver it to the scribes.

MEHUMAN Yes, my king!
(MEHUMAN quickly retrieves an empty scroll for MORDECAI.)

XERXES *(Speaks to ESTHER and touches her face gently.)* Everything's going to be all right.
(XERXES exits, signaling HARBONA and the other ATTENDANT to follow. MEHUMAN hands MORDECAI the scroll. MORDECAI takes it with some trepidation, feeling the weight of responsibility.)

MORDECAI I suppose I have a law to write...
(Looks at the blank page, obviously overwhelmed)

MEHUMAN *(After a moment)* If I might make a suggestion... It should start like this:
(Clears his throat and gestures dramatically) "Whereas..."

MORDECAI *(After he realizes that MEHUMAN has finished)* "Whereas?" What does that mean exactly?

MEHUMAN I'm not sure. But they always start like that.
(MORDECAI looks over at ESTHER, who smiles and shrugs.)

MORDECAI All right, see what you think of this...
(MORDECAI *bends intently over his work while MEHUMAN and ESTHER peer over his shoulders in anticipation. Lights down.*)

SCENE 9

Esther 8:16 – 10:3

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Keziah, Rachel, Zibeon, Keturah, other Jewish men and women, Mordecai, Esther, Harbona, Xerxes, Mehuman, Esther's maids*

SCENE: *In the Jewish part of the city.*

There is a group of WOMEN on stage looking off into the distance (beyond the audience), waiting anxiously for the MEN to return.

KEZIAH Oh mother, it's getting late! When will those men be home?!

RACHEL Keziah, for the second to last time, I *don't know*.

KEZIAH *Second* to last time?

RACHEL I fully expect you to ask again!

KEZIAH Rrgh! You exasperate me!

RACHEL It keeps you young! And me!

KEZIAH I just wish we knew what was happening out there!

RACHEL We'll find out soon enough.

KEZIAH But when will they *be* here?!

RACHEL Ha! Didn't I tell you? And I *still* don't know!

KEZIAH Mother, please...

WOMAN Someone's coming!
(ZIBEON *comes running down the aisle and onto the stage.*)

RACHEL It's Zibeon!
(ZIBEON *hugs his wife KETURAH joyfully.*)

ZIBEON Oh, Keturah!

KETURAH Zibeon!
(KEZIAH *doesn't give them much of a chance to embrace before she butts in.*)

KEZIAH What happened? Tell us!

ZIBEON (*Out of breath, but excited*) They came! It was a large number, but there was fear in their eyes! We stood up to them! Oh, you would have been so proud of

how we fought!

WOMAN *(Still looking off into the distance)* Bilhan! Dishon! *(Two more MEN are running down the aisles and coming on stage. They are joyfully greeted and hugged. Other MEN continue to arrive, entering from the aisles, throughout the remainder of the conversation. All are similarly welcomed.)*

KEZIAH *(With growing excitement)* Are you saying we won?

ZIBEON Yes! And the Jews are continuing to win victories all over the kingdom! I've even heard that many Persians are turning to the one true God because of what has happened!

WOMAN Oh, praise the Lord for being our protector!

RACHEL And for putting two of our own people in positions of power!

KEZIAH We should celebrate!

ZIBEON We will! Tonight! At the first feast of Purim!
(MORDECAI and ESTHER enter from offstage, followed closely by ESTHER'S MAIDS, feeling a little out of place in this part of town.)

RACHEL Mordecai and Hadassah!
(Their arrival is met with a great cheer and more hugs. The crowd lifts MORDECAI and ESTHER above their heads and begin to shout in unison.)

ALL JEWS Cursed be Haman! Blessed be Mordecai! Cursed be Zeresh, the wife of Haman! Blessed be Esther! *(MEHUMAN and HARBONA enter, watching the celebration.)* Cursed be all idolaters! Blessed be all Israelites! *(Seeing HARBONA, the JEWS quickly grab him and lift him to their shoulders as well.)* And blessed be Harbona who hanged Haman!
(A mighty cheer arises. In the midst of the cheering, XERXES enters. Whispers of "The king!" etc., rustle through the crowd and they hurriedly set MORDECAI, ESTHER, and HARBONA down, giving the king their rapt attention.)

XERXES Friends, I would be thrilled to host your people at the palace, in honor of Queen Esther, her cousin Mordecai, and your victory over the last two days. Come and observe your first annual feast of Purim!
(Another big cheer, which dies down into excited chatter. Intro music for IF THE LORD HAD NOT BEEN ON OUR SIDE begins. KEZIAH approaches MORDECAI and ESTHER as the other JEWS start to gather for a dance.)

KEZIAH Mordecai! Hadassah! *(She hugs ESTHER, then says with great joy)* Our people have been saved! You did it!

MORDECAI No! The Lord our God... Jehovah did it!

(At this, the JEWS start clapping their hands. They all participate in the dancing and singing, including ESTHER and MORDECAI, who eventually succeed in involving XERXES, MEHUMAN, HARBONA, and the MAIDS in the festivities as well.)

ALL JEWS (OPTIONAL: *The first two lines can be sung as a solo.*)

If the Lord had not been on our side,
O let all of Israel say,
If it had not been the Lord who was on our side
When men rose up against us,
Then they would have swallowed us up,
When their wrath was kindled at us.
Then the waters would have overwhelmed us all
And the torrent would have swept over us.
The raging waters would have swept us away.

(Shout)

Hey!

(Sing)

O blessed be the Lord who has not
Let us be a prey to their teeth.
Our souls have flown like a bird
From the snare of the fowler.
The snare is broken and we have escaped.
Our help is in the name of the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth,
Who turned mourning into dancing
And turned sackcloth into joy.

(Shout)

Hey!

(The group dances offstage toward the palace, talking excitedly as the final notes are played. MORDECAI, at the end of the dance formation, breaks off and walks downstage, a little out of breath, to deliver his soliloquy. His soliloquy is less introspective and more narrative than the others, in keeping with his love of storytelling.)

MORDECAI What other choice did we have? We couldn't *reverse* the decree that had been made, so we wrote another decree that *balanced* it. It gave the Jews in every city the right to gather together and fight back against any who came to attack them. On the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, the Jews struck down their attackers with the sword, but did not touch any of their plunder. And when the Jews had rest from their enemies, we established the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar as days of feasting and rejoicing, to be celebrated each year by giving gifts to one another and to the poor. And because the day of battle had originally

been determined by Haman with the casting of the Pur, we called the celebration “Purim.” Purim is to be remembered always among the Jews. Like our other festivals, it exists for a specific purpose. For whether we choose to remember them or not, some things will always be true. God *will* protect His children. God *will* always be the victor in the end. God *will* have His glory, and it cannot be taken away from Him. These things... we choose to remember.

(He pauses as he ponders these things. ESTHER enters.)

ESTHER Mordecai! I wondered where you had gone.

MORDECAI I’m getting kind of tired. It’s been an eventful day!

ESTHER I know! And you’ve been doing so much writing lately. Decrees... letters... I can’t begin to keep track of it all!

MORDECAI Somebody needs to make a record of everything that’s been going on. These things are *important*. And I’m not sure anyone else in the palace has the same perspective I have.

ESTHER You do tend to bring your own uniqueness to palace life.

MORDECAI I suppose so. I’m just a simple man, accustomed to simple things.

ESTHER Well, you’ll have to get used to grand and glorious things now. Simple or not, you *are* second in command in the whole kingdom.

MORDECAI *(Sighs, again feeling the weight of responsibility)* I know. Don’t get me wrong... I am honored to be here, and I’ll do my very best. But I can’t see how people envy this and try to get here at all costs.

ESTHER Oh, Mordecai, you know you’ve always loved being around the palace. Talking to people coming in and out. Catching glimpses of important guests...

MORDECAI But I always enjoyed being around the palace the same way that somebody might enjoy... *(Trying to think of an analogy)* ...watching colorful birds in a cage!

ESTHER *(Looking at him quizzically)* Watching... birds?

MORDECAI You know! Flapping around a lot and squawking noisily. It’s such a curious and entertaining sight, but never once does it occur to you that you’d really like to be in there with them!

ESTHER *(Laughs)* Oh, it’s not all that bad. It’s taken me a while, but I’ve really come to find my place here. I know you will too!

MORDECAI You're right. (*Looks at her meaningfully*) But even if I *can* come inside the palace whenever I please, and wear this big signet ring, and tell people what to do, I never want to forget where I came from. So if you ever need me...

ESTHER Which I probably will.

MORDECAI ...and if I ever happen to have a little spare time...

ESTHER Which may not be very often.

MORDECAI ...you know where to find me.

ESTHER (*Pauses, with a knowing smile*) At the gate?
(*Cue for instrumental music, FINALE, to begin*)

MORDECAI At the gate. (*He laughs.*) Good night, dear Hadassah.

ESTHER Good night, cousin.
(*They hug each other and MORDECAI exits. ESTHER stays a moment longer, watching him leave, then turns and slowly exits the opposite way as the lights slowly fade out.*)

- Curtain -

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES FOR 'IF THE LORD HAD NOT BEEN ON OUR SIDE': *Psalm 124, Psalm 30:11*

NOTE: *The cheer given by the Jews when they lift Mordecai, Esther, and Harbona up on their shoulders is a traditional cheer, not referenced in Scripture, but used during the feast of Purim throughout the ages.*

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