

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

one-act
version

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NOTES ON THE one-act VERSION

1. This version has been altered from the original Broadway-style two-act version of *Esther: A Musical Based on the Old Testament Book*. This version is designed to be performed in one continuous act with eleven scenes, and will likely run approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. If you would prefer to perform in two acts with an intermission, we recommend placing the intermission between scenes 6 and 7.
2. Notable differences between the full-length version and the one-act version:
 - **Eleven total scenes** (as opposed to one prologue and nineteen scenes). The scenes that remain have been consolidated and streamlined.
 - **Seven songs** (as opposed to eleven songs and one instrumental/dance number). The songs that remain in the one-act version are unchanged, with the exception that Harbona sings a solo in “Take This Message,” replacing Mehuman.
 - **Fewer characters.** Mehuman, Zibeon, Judah, Young Esther, and a number of smaller roles have been replaced or removed. The characters that remain have fewer lines and, for the most part, fewer solos. The notable exception to this is Harbona, who serves as a consolidation of Mehuman and Harbona from the original version.
3. Those who perform the one-act version will rent a CD of accompaniment tracks. This is the same accompaniment CD used for the full-length version, but the script will indicate in boxed text which tracks are to be used and when. Please note that the sequence of tracks used in this version are not always in numerical order. In a few cases, the accompaniment tracks will serve a slightly different purpose than they do in the full-length version (i.e., a “scene change” track may be used to accompany action on stage).
4. With this adaptation, every effort has been made to create a version of *Esther* that is accessible to more schools and organizations, yet faithful to the spirit of the original show (and ultimately, the Biblical narrative). It is our prayer that this version of *Esther* will serve to invite new audiences to experience this remarkable story of God’s redemption and deliverance!

CAST LIST

Name (M/F)	Description	Role Requirements
Esther (F) <i>Appears in 7 scenes (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11)</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"> • 62 spoken lines • Solos in 5 songs
Mordecai (M) <i>Appears in 4 scenes (2, 5, 7, 11)</i>	A wise older cousin and father figure to Hadassah, deeply grounded in his faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33 spoken lines • Solos in 3 songs
Xerxes (M) <i>Appears in 6 scenes (1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11)</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"> • 92 spoken lines • Solos in 4 songs • Ensemble singing
Haman (M) <i>Appears in 7 scenes (1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11)</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"> • 53 spoken lines • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
Zeresh (F) <i>Appears in 2 scenes (6, 9)</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"> • 11 spoken lines
Esther's maids <i>Appear in 3 scenes (3, 4, 8)</i> <i>Kiana and Layliya appear in 2 additional scenes (1, 5)</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"> • 5 spoken lines • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
	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"> • 3 spoken lines • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
	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"> • 1 spoken line • Ensemble singing
	Shirin (F) A hard worker, quiet, sweet, and unflinchingly loyal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 spoken line • Ensemble singing
	Yaslyn (F) The optimist, always smiling, always energetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 spoken lines • Solo in 1 song • Ensemble singing

(Esther's maids continued)	Kyri (F)	Quick with an idea, but a little pouty if it isn't heeded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 spoken lines • Ensemble singing
	Trella (F)	Endearing but perpetually confused, always a step behind the others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for physical humor • Ensemble singing
Harbona (M)* <i>Appears in 7 scenes (1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11)</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"> • 40 spoken lines • Solos in 1 song • Ensemble singing
Queen Vashti (F) <i>Appears in 1 scene (1)</i>		The first wife of the king, well-spoken and reserved, but strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 spoken lines
Keziah (F) <i>Appears in 1 scene (2)</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"> • 8 spoken lines
Rachel (F) <i>Appears in 1 scene (2)</i>		Keziah's elderly mother, whose oblivious perkiness perpetually gets on her daughter's nerves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 spoken lines
Hag (F) <i>Appears in 2 scenes (6, 9)</i>		A close friend to Haman and Zeresh, a putrid and hateful evil woman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 spoken lines
Wretch (M/F) <i>Appears in 2 scenes (6, 9)</i>		Another close friend to Haman and Zeresh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 spoken lines
Hegai (M)* <i>Appears in 1 scene (3)</i>		The callused and sarcastic man in charge of the women's quarters at the palace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 spoken lines
Teresh (M)* <i>Appears in 1 scene (5)</i>		A scheming little palace guard whose bitterness drives him to plot revenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 spoken lines
Bigthana (M)* <i>Appears in 1 scene (5)</i>		A brawny, brainless palace guard, utterly devoted to his friend Teresh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 spoken lines

Hathach (M)* <i>Appears in 1 scene (7)</i>	A messenger for Queen Esther whose task is sensitive and extremely important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 spoken lines
Memucan (M)* <i>Appears in 1 scene (1)</i>	An advisor to the king, sober and very wise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 spoken lines
Attendant (M)* <i>Appears in 2 scenes (10, 11)</i>	A servant who assists Harbona at various times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for physical humor
Other roles	Men and women of the kingdom <i>Appear in various scenes throughout the show</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three 1-line roles (Official, Noble, Rhoda) • Two male solos (Noble, Official) • One male duet • One female solo (Lady Being Beautified) • Three optional female solos • Ensemble singing

*These roles are written in the script (as in the Biblical account) as male, but could be portrayed by females, with minimal alterations to dialogue or stage directions.

SCENE LIST

PLACE: *City of Susa, Persian Empire*

TIME: *Fourth century B.C.*

SCENE 1:	King Xerxes' garden courtyard
SCENE 2:	The Jewish part of town
SCENE 3:	The women's quarters of the palace, one year later
SCENE 4:	King Xerxes' throne room
SCENE 5:	In front of the palace gate
SCENE 6:	The house of Haman
SCENE 7:	In front of the palace gate
SCENE 8:	King Xerxes' throne room
SCENE 9:	The house of Haman
SCENE 10:	King Xerxes' bedroom
SCENE 11:	King Xerxes' throne room

SONG LIST

Scene 1

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

Scene 2

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

Scene 3

Brand New Women of the palace and Esther

Scene 4

Something to Be Explored Xerxes and Esther

Scene 5

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

Scene 7

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

Scene 10

The Man the King Wants to Honor Xerxes and Haman

SCENE 1
Esther 1:1-22

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Harbona, Haman, Memucan, other men of the kingdom (nobles, officials, messengers, advisors), Queen Vashti, Kiana, Layliya*

SCENE: *King Xerxes' garden courtyard, extravagantly decorated with richly colored tapestries hanging from marble pillars by large gold rings. The king's throne is upstage right.*

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.

CD track 2

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.)

Esther (One-Act Version): Scene 1

XERXES

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

MEN

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!

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 and nobles, we have feasted together for over 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. During this time, you have seen countless examples of the wealth of this kingdom, but there is one treasure I have yet to unveil. And on this, the one hundred and eighty-seventh night of our festivities, I shall present my most prized possession! (*Everyone bursts into applause and XERXES silences them again with a raised hand. He motions dramatically to HARBONA and six 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 quickly down the aisle.*)

NOBLE Where are they going?

XERXES (*Obviously enjoying this*) Patience, friend. When my messengers return, then you will see... and your eyes will rejoice!
(*XERXES sits on his throne and the MEN take seats near him as the lights shift downstage left, where QUEEN VASHTI calmly enters, flanked by her maidens KIANA and LAYLIYA. Optionally, CD track 3 may be used as incidental music during this transition. It can be faded down as the MESSENGERS enter again from the aisle and approach VASHTI.*)

optional: CD track 3

MESSENGERS (*Frantically, ad lib yelling as they enter again from the aisle.*) Queen Vashti! Queen Vashti! Queen Vashti!
(*They stop just short of running into the queen and her maidens. QUEEN VASHTI gives them an icy stare, and the MESSENGERS immediately bow.*)

VASHTI (*Coldly*) You may speak.

HARBONA (*Clears his throat timidly*) My queen, the king has sent for you.
(*The other MESSENGERS nod to assert that this is indeed the message.*)

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

HARBONA Yes, and he requests that you wear your royal crown.

VASHTI (*Considers this briefly*) Is the king in high spirits from wine?

HARBONA Yes! And you'll need your royal robes.

VASHTI And all of his friends are still with him?

HARBONA Yes, and you should add a few more jewel-studded rings.

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

HARBONA (*Taken aback for a moment*) Umm... Yes... And some silver anklets would be nice.

VASHTI (*Looks at her maidens, then back at HARBONA*) Thank you for bearing this message. You may inform the king that I will not be leaving my chambers this evening.

HARBONA (*Stunned*) What?
(*Others murmur to each other in hushed tones.*)

KIANA (*Shocked*) My queen!

VASHTI (*Raises her hands calmly*) Silence! (*ALL are immediately quiet. To HARBONA*) You may leave us.
(*She watches HARBONA and the other MESSENGERS as they exit down the aisle in disbelief.*)

KIANA (*Concerned for the queen's safety*) My queen, this is simply not done. The king will be furious.

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

LAYLIYA (*With wide-eyed innocence*) What will he do?

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

(*VASHTI, KIANA, AND LAYLIYA exit as lights shift upstage again, where XERXES is seated on his throne, bantering pleasantly with the other MEN. Optionally, CD track 5 may be used as incidental music during this transition. It can be faded down as the MESSENGERS enter from the aisle again and approach XERXES, who sees the sheepish looks on their faces and rises slowly.*)

optional: CD track 5

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

XERXES (*After a moment of shocked disbelief, XERXES roars*) OUT! ALL OF YOU! OUT!!! (*ALL begin to rush out frantically, except for HAMBANA, who remains standing inconspicuously in a corner. XERXES stomps around and yells unintelligibly. Meanwhile, everybody else has exited, 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.

HARBONA My king... the... the who?
(*HAMAN now steps forward quickly and speaks to HARBONA.*)

HAMAN (*In sinister tones*) Young fool! 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 only ask that I may stay and observe as you seek wise counsel.

XERXES (*Stares with disbelief at the man's forwardness, but is unable to counter his confident 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, there will be no end of disrespect and discord.

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

Esther (One-Act Version): Scene 1

MEMUCAN (*Looks significantly at his fellow ADVISORS, then back to the king. 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 (*Solemnly, with grief in his voice*) Let it be done as you have said.
(*Lights down. Cue for scene change music.*)

CD track 6

SCENE 2
Esther 2:1-10

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Esther, Mordecai, 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, *a beautiful young Jewish woman, is in the front yard, folding clothes or performing a similar household task.* MORDECAI, *a weathered Jewish man in his 60's, enters with a weary, weighed-down demeanor.*

MORDECAI Hadassah...

ESTHER (*Cheerfully*) Cousin Mordecai! I didn't expect you home so soon.

MORDECAI (*Soberly*) Something came up.

ESTHER (*Noting the depth of MORDECAI'S tone, she stops her work and looks at him with concern.*) What is it?

KEZIAH (*Calls from offstage just as MORDECAI is about to speak*) Hadassah!
Hadassah! (*KEZIAH, a plain middle-aged busybody, enters with a labored half-run. She stops and leans on ESTHER'S shoulder, catching her breath. Her mother RACHEL, a plucky senior citizen, totters in just after her.*) Oh dear Hadassah, my ankles are swelling like goat bladders, but I simply *had* to come! Oh! Mordecai, shalom!

MORDECAI (*Politely, but a little distractedly*) Shalom, Keziah. Rachel. How are you both?

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

KEZIAH (*Patronizingly*) Yes, Mother. (*To MORDECAI*) Ask her one question and she'll give you an entire recitation... (*Brushing her mother aside and returning to the reason for her visit*) Now Hadassah, I just had to see you one more time before you go. I'm *so sorry*, dear!

ESTHER (*Confused*) Go? 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?

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

RACHEL (*Trying to be comforting*) Now wait just a minute! (*Moves toward ESTHER and pats her shoulder.*) 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.

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! Goodbye now!

RACHEL Goodbye!

MORDECAI Farewell, you two. (*KEZIAH AND RACHEL exit. MORDECAI turns to face a tearful ESTHER. He speaks tenderly but with some apprehension.*)
Hadassah...

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

MORDECAI I'm so sorry. One edict from the king... and now... 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. 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. From hence forth, you will be called... Esther.

(*Cue for the intro music to WHO IS THIS GIRL?*)

CD track 7

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.
Cue for scene change music.)*

CD track 8

SCENE 3
Esther 2:8-15

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Hegai, Harbona, Esther, Esther's maids, Rhoda, other women*

SCENE: *One year later, in the women's quarters of the palace.*

Lights up on RHODA (with HARBONA standing awkwardly behind her) 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?

RHODA Rhoda.

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. (*RHODA leaves and joins the WOMEN in the background while HARBONA approaches. HEGAI speaks without even looking up.*) Your name?

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

CD track 9

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

HARBONA (*With characteristic nervousness*) 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, 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 Anooosheh if her rash is clearing up at all.

(TRELLA 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 talks with her MAIDENS while all of the other WOMEN finish gathering their things and exit. HEGAI AND HARBONA, meanwhile, have come full circle and returned to where they began. Having finished his duties as tour guide, HEGAI is now distractedly jotting down notes on a small scroll. He looks up and realizes HARBONA is looking over his shoulder.)

HEGAI *(Impatiently, eager to be done with the intrusion)* Do you need someone to show you to the exit?

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

HEGAI Ah. Hmm... *(Glances toward ESTHER, then approaches her, with HARBONA not far behind.)* Esther...

ESTHER *(Pleasantly)* Hegai!

HEGAI Meet Harbona.

ESTHER *(Warmly)* Hello, Harbona.

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

HEGAI Yeah, yeah. Esther... will you be needing anything to take with you to the palace this evening?

ESTHER *(Startled)* Me?

HEGAI You.
(ESTHER'S MAIDS—including TRELLA, 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!

Esther (One-Act Version): Scene 3

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

HEGAI Well, the dress is good. Some new sandals... and... add some rings.
(*The MAIDS nod and hurriedly usher ESTHER away. Quietly, to HARBONA*)
A remarkable girl.
(*Lights down. Cue for scene change music.*)

CD track 10

SCENE 4
Esther 2:16-18

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, 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. HARBONA rushes to consult with SHIRIN, MAHEEN, and KYRI.*

HARBONA (*Fussily*) Shirin! Is she ready?

SHIRIN Kiana and Layliya are almost finished with her.

HARBONA 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.
(YASLYN and TRELLEA enter.)

YASLYN (*Out of breath*) They're ready!!
(HARBONA turns to approach the throne as the others 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!
(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... 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,

CD track 11

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, HARBONA 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, HARBONA 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. HAMAN approaches them.)

HAMAN (*Smoothly*) 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?
(*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. Cue for scene change music.*)

CD track 12

SCENE 5
Esther 2:19-23

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Teresh, Bigthana, Mordecai, Kiana, Layliya, Esther, Harbona, and Xerxes*

SCENE: *A quiet evening in front of the king's gate.*

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!” Apparently that doesn’t include his faithful guards who stand watch every single night! 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*) It’s injustice! Pure injustice! There’s only one way to deal with a tyrant like King Xerxes. He must be... assassinated. (*Notices that BIGTHANA is distracted*) Bigthana! (*BIGTHANA stands at attention again.*) Do you agree?

BIGTHANA (*Quickly, trying not to let on that he hasn’t the faintest clue what they’re talking about.*) I agree.

TERESH Good. Now, we have to come up with a way to kill him quickly and quietly—

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 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...

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

BIGTHANA Hmm.

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

(Cue for TAKE THIS MESSAGE intro to begin.)

CD track 13

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

TERESH No!

(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! *(MORDECAI is walking this way and that, trying to figure out what to do when KIANA AND LAYLIYA enter, headed toward the palace.)* Oh, ladies! Ladies, please! You must speak to Queen Esther for me! *(They seem leery.)* 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 HARBONA.)*
Harbona?

HARBONA *(Startled)* Yes?

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

HARBONA *(Determined to rise to the occasion)*
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!

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

XERXES Harbona?

HARBONA (*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?

HARBONA 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 HARBONA exit together and the music shifts to something like a funeral dirge. Presently, HARBONA 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. Cue for scene change music.*)

CD track 14

SCENE 6

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. One of them carries a large jar of water with a quantity of sticks floating in it. Another carries a small, ornately-carved trough.*

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.

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 (*Shocked*) There is one who refuses to bow?

HAMAN (*Bitterly, more controlled, turns to the WRETCH*) There is one who refuses to bow. Every time I walk by the palace gate. Everyone else kneels as I pass. Except for him. 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*) NOT just him! *All of them!* 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.

(HAMAN *nods* to ZERESH, *who steps forward to address the group. They stand.*)

ZERESH (*Slowly and ceremoniously*) We will now cast the Pur, to determine which day of which month the Jews will be destroyed. (*Gestures toward those who are holding the jar and the trough.*) Come. (*Cue to begin CD track 16.*

HAMAN and ZERESH *watch as their FRIENDS come forward. They set the trough down center, then reverently pour the water and sticks into the trough. ZERESH then steps forward and 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.*)
The thirteenth day... of the twelfth month... (*She looks at HAMAN, who has come to stand next to her.*) ...the month of Adar.

CD
track 16

HAMAN The thirteenth day of the month of Adar. (*Ominous pause*) So be it.
(*Lights down. Cue for scene change music.*)

CD
track 17

SCENE 7
Esther 4:1-16

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Mordecai, Hathach, Esther*
SCENE: *In front of the king's gate, not long after.*

The lights come up to reveal MORDECAI down right, on his knees in an attitude of mourning. His sackcloth and disheveled hair suggest that he has been in this position for some time. Next to him on the ground lies a small scroll. He suddenly looks up and cries out to Heaven, apparently continuing an ongoing conversation with the Almighty.

MORDECAI Why, Lord? Why do the heathen rage? And the people imagine a vain thing? (MORDECAI now holds the scroll up and looks at it bitterly as he talks to himself, more quietly.) Haman is doing this for my sake! He is doing this to all of my people... because I won't bow to him! (Pauses. With resolve.) But still... I will not bow. My righteousness I hold fast, and I will not let it go! (Suddenly cries again toward Heaven) O Lord, you promised Abraham! You told him to count the stars, and so would be the number of his descendants. But here we are, all to be destroyed! (More quietly) Even 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... Hadassah. Esther! (He stands quickly and turns to see HATHACH, a young messenger 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 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 true God... (Growing more excited, he speaks his thoughts as they come to him, more to himself than to HATHACH.) Oh... oh, don't you see? The Lord 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?

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, enters the light where ESTHER is, and kneels.)

HATHACH My queen.

ESTHER Hathach, did you find the man, Mordecai?

HATHACH I did. *(Expectant pause)* 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 HATHACH 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 need you to speak to Mordecai again. But first I need to tell you something you must promise not to tell another soul.

HATHACH My queen, I already know.

ESTHER *(Guardedly)* What?

HATHACH *(Gently)* Mordecai 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... it means death. *(Looks at HATHACH hopefully.)* Did he say anything more?

HATHACH Yes. *(Hesitant pause, then speaks quickly)* 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. Cue for scene change music.)

CD track 20

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

SCENE 8

Esther 5:1-8

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

SCENE: *The king's throne room.*

XERXES *is seated on the throne, and HAMAN, who now wears the signet ring formerly worn by the king, is sitting on a low chair next to the throne. They each have a glass of wine in hand. HARBONA 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. Harbona!

HARBONA My king?

XERXES Who is in the court?

HARBONA *(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.)

CD track 23

HARBONA 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 HARBONA 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)* Leave us.
(HAMAN and HARBONA 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! Harbona! (*HARBONA enters immediately.*) Quickly! Tell Haman to come at once! He has been invited to a banquet!

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

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

ESTHER (*Smiles*) I know.

(*Cue to start CD track 25. ESTHER nods toward someone offstage. ESTHER'S MAIDS enter, carrying a low round table, three pillows, and the makings of a small feast. XERXES AND ESTHER watch as the MAIDS set up quickly and gracefully. HAMAN enters when the music turns ominous, and as the MAIDS exit, XERXES takes his seat on the pillow in the middle, facing the audience. ESTHER AND HAMAN then take seats on either side of the king, facing each other. The three begin to eat.*)

CD track 25

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.
(*HAMAN looks up at her suddenly, noting the hint of accusation in her voice. XERXES speaks before he can formulate a response.*)

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

HAMAN (*Grateful for the shift in focus*) My king, you are too kind.

ESTHER (*Calculating, never taking her gaze from HAMAN*) So much power. Do you ever find it to be... intoxicating? To any extent?

HAMAN (*Looks at her coldly and hesitates, realizing she used the same word that he had once spoken to her*) Actually, I hadn't thought too much about—

XERXES (*Interrupts, oblivious to the tension*) 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 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 I shall prepare 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. Cue for scene change music.)

CD track 27

SCENE 9
Esther 5:9-14

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Haman, Zeresh, Haman's friends*
SCENE: *Haman's home.*

HAMAN'S FRIENDS *are gathered in his living space. We hear HAMAN bellowing angrily offstage just before he enters.*

HAMAN Zeresh! ZERESH! (HAMAN stops short when he sees his FRIENDS gathered in the house. They all bow reverently when they see him. He is clearly on edge.)
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 say.

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 (*Smiles, sardonically*) Distraught? Distraught! Why should a man like me ever be distraught?!

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

HAMAN (*Speaking quickly, self-importantly, but 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 have achieved a greater status than any other royal official... (*Holds up his hand with the ring significantly*) 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! *(This is clearly the climax, and his FRIENDS applaud. This doesn't last long, however, 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* sits by the king's gate! Day and night he sits, refusing to bow—

WRETCH *(Lamely)* Are you talking about Mordecai?

HAMAN *(Snaps)* Yes! He's always there! He must not sleep! *(Very fast, bordering on mania)* No, he doesn't sleep! You know how I know?! Because he is *always awake!*

ZERESH *(Starting to become concerned, she speaks calmly but sternly.)* Haman, calm down...

HAMAN *(Turns and yells at her)* I won't! This was my day! *My moment!* This perfect moment with the most powerful people in the land! *(Reliving the moment)* I leave the palace, basking in glory, *(Looking up gloriously, he slowly lowers his head and his demeanor)* and the first person I lay my eyes upon... *(Spits out the words bitterly)* is that *wretched Jew!* *(Retreats to a corner of the stage, sulkily)* I hate him! I... hate... him.

ZERESH *(Approaching him soothingly, trying to regain control of her husband)* Be comforted, my husband. All the Jews will be destroyed. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth—

HAMAN *(Petulantly)* 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'm 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 as the lights go down.*
Cue for scene change music.)

CD track 26

SCENE 10

Esther 6:1-11

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, Harbona, and one other attendant*

SCENE: *The king's bedroom.*

XERXES (*Calling out, before lights up*) Harbona! (*Pause*) Harbona!!!

HARBONA (*Lights come up slowly on the royal bedroom as HARBONA stumbles in, obviously having just been awakened, to find XERXES sitting up in his bed. Speaks as if still half-asleep.*) My king?

XERXES I can't sleep!

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

XERXES I need your help. I need something to put me to sleep!

HARBONA 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.

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

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

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

XERXES Ah yes... Proceed.
(*HARBONA looks at the ends of the scrolls being held by the ATTENDANT, finds the scroll he wants, and pulls it out. HARBONA 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.*)

HARBONA (*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: Mordecai reported attempt by two guards to assassinate king. Guards hung on gallows. Day 5: King met with advisors to discuss military weapon acquisitions. Day 6: Royal holiday proclaimed. Banquet held to celebrate discussion—

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

HARBONA When?

XERXES A couple days ago.

HARBONA Uh... (*Looks back over what he has just read. The other ATTENDANT tries to look over HARBONA'S shoulder.*) King met with advisors...?

XERXES No, not that. Something about two guards on a gallows?

HARBONA Oh! Day 4: Mordecai reported attempt by two guards to assassinate king.

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

HARBONA 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?

HARBONA Oh... (*He glances over the rest of the scroll he is holding, mumbling to himself as the ATTENDANT looks over his shoulder.*) 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!

HARBONA At this hour?

XERXES Quickly! (*HARBONA 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. 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*)

CD
track 28

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. Cue for scene change music.)

CD track 29

SCENE 11
Esther 7:1 – 8:15

CHARACTERS NEEDED: *Xerxes, Haman, Esther, Harbona, 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 ad lib as he is shaking her and yelling*) No! No! Get off of me! (*Etc. This does not go on very long before XERXES comes rushing back in, followed closely by HARBONA and another ATTENDANT.*)

XERXES (*Yelling furiously*) Will he even molest the queen while I am in the house with her?! (*HARBONA 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 clears his throat nervously.*) My king, I happen to know of a gallows, next to Haman's house. He built it for Mordecai, the man who saved you.

XERXES (*Takes a moment while this sinks in, then speaks authoritatively*) Hang him on it!

HARBONA Right away, my king. (*He looks toward the other ATTENDANT.*) Come. (*They begin to exit, dragging HAMAN along. 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 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, Mordecai.

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*) Harbona! (*HARBONA enters, looking much more confident and less anxious than we've ever seen him, while XERXES turns to speak to ESTHER for a moment*) I want your cousin to meet me! (*Turns and speaks to HARBONA*) Bring me that man that sits by the gate. (*HARBONA 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?

(*HARBONA enters with MORDECAI.*)

HARBONA My king, Mordecai is here.
(*HARBONA 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.

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 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 HARBONA and another ATTENDANT, carrying royal robes of blue and white and purple, and a large gold crown. 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.*) Harbona!

HARBONA (*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.

HARBONA Yes, my king!
(*HARBONA 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 the other ATTENDANT to follow. HARBONA hands MORDECAI the scroll. MORDECAI takes it with some trepidation. MORDECAI AND ESTHER step down center and stare at the rolled-up parchment for a beat, paralyzed by the weight of newly-gained responsibility. HARBONA respectfully takes a step or two backwards to wait.*)

ESTHER (*Helpfully, trying to break him from his reverie*) So, if we're unable to cancel the decree...

MORDECAI (*Slowly, as the idea forms*) ...Then we must balance it. (*Looks at her, starts to speak more quickly, picking up enthusiasm*) We'll write another decree that gives the Jews in every city the right to defend themselves...

ESTHER (*Continues his thought, catching the infectious enthusiasm*) ...To fight back against any who come to attack us! And if the Lord should give us the victory...

MORDECAI (*Back and forth very quickly now*) ...Then we'll celebrate!

ESTHER Of course!

MORDECAI Every year, at the same time!

ESTHER Yes!

MORDECAI And because this all started with Haman, with the casting of the Pur, we'll call the celebration... (*Searching for a word*) We'll call it...

MORDECAI AND ESTHER (*Together*) Purim!
(*They laugh excitedly.*)

MORDECAI Yes, Purim. (*The momentum of their exchange has now slowed, and MORDECAI opens the scroll. They look overwhelmed as they are struck again by the reality of the blank parchment in front of them.*) How to begin...

HARBONA (*Steps forward timidly after a moment and clears his throat*) If I might make a suggestion... (*MORDECAI AND ESTHER turn to look at him.*) It should start like this: (*Clears his throat again and gestures dramatically*) "Whereas..."

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

HARBONA 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...
(*Cue to begin FINALE music. MORDECAI bends intently over his work while HARBONA and ESTHER peer over his shoulders in anticipation. Lights down.*)

CD track 33

- Curtain -

(*Use BOWS AND EXIT MUSIC during the curtain call.*)

CD track 34

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