

God Has Put You Here (For Such a Time as This)

By

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Esther and Daniel

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## Cast of Characters

<u>Esther:</u>	A young Hebrew girl who wants nothing more than to be Persian.
<u>Marjane:</u>	Esther's Persian best friend, and sometimes the voice of reason.
<u>Rachel:</u>	Esther's aunt who adopted her and is raising her as a Hebrew.
<u>Mordecai:</u>	Esther's uncle who always has a story about Daniel to teach her some new lesson.
<u>Taji:</u>	Marjane's mom who's maybe a little too excited about her daughter going to the palace.
<u>Haman:</u>	A self-important Persian official whose family has a blood-feud with the Hebrews.
<u>Hera:</u>	Haman's ambitious wife.
<u>Xerxes:</u>	Persia's king. Under his personable exterior, he's cold steel.
<u>Agar:</u>	Xerxes' bodyman.
<u>Sin, Tammuz, and Dagon:</u>	Persian subjects.
<u>Daniel:</u>	A Hebrew who is dedicated completely to God and won't bend.
<u>Shadrach:</u>	Daniel's friend. He's perceptive and intelligent.

(MORE)

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

<u>Meshach</u> :	Daniel's friend. He's quiet, and likes to think before he speaks.
<u>Abednego</u> :	Daniel's friend. He's impetuous and loud, and can't agree with Daniel.
<u>Tiamat</u> :	The king's main advisor; she can't stand the Hebrew boys.
<u>Kishar</u> :	The king's main mystic; she's confident and cowardly at turns.
<u>Nebuchadnezzar</u> :	Babylon's king. He's powerful and always an inch from out of control.

SUNDAY

Scene 1

*John 15:19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

*Esther's Hebrew name is Hadassah.*

*ENTER Esther LEFT*

*ENTER Rachel RIGHT*

RACHEL

Hadassah, could you find the--

*Esther slams down the basket she's carrying.  
EXIT Esther LEFT*

*ENTER Esther RIGHT, carrying simple garden tool.*

RACHEL (cont'd)

Thank you. That's exactly what I wanted.

ESTHER

Why do we have to grow these weird plants, anyway?

RACHEL

Sorry?

ESTHER

All these plants! My mother didn't have anything like these.

RACHEL

Well, she was a lot more *Persian* than we are. These are plants from home.

ESTHER

Marjane and her mother don't grow weird plants.

RACHEL

Again, we're Hebrew, and these plants are Hebrew--

ESTHER

Ugh!

*Rachel begins to work on the plant.*

RACHEL

Well, I don't know why that bothers you. I'm growing these castor plants because they're useful, and Persians don't seem to have them.

ESTHER

Mordecai told me not to eat them.

RACHEL

He was right. Until they've been pressed and heated, the seeds are very dangerous. You'll find as you get older, sometimes a thing will look terrible until you're in it, and then a blessing will emerge. God works in strange ways, sometimes.

Okay, you're bored, I get it. But the lesson is still there.

ESTHER

(incredulous; not confused)

What lesson?

RACHEL

You, living with us. It's not as bad as you seem to think.

ESTHER

Yeah, it is.

RACHEL

You're in a fierce mood today!

ESTHER

I'm mad, can't you see that?

*ENTER Mordecai RIGHT*

MORDECAI

Rachel, have you seen--ah, Hadassah. I was looking for you. Could you do your dear sweet father a favor?

ESTHER

(mumbling)

You're not my dad.

RACHEL

You might not get much out of her. She's mad.

MORDECAI

What about?

RACHEL

Castor.

*Rachel turns to place the plant at stage rear.*

*Esther and Mordecai have a brief conversation of raised eyebrows and expressive shrugs and sighs. Rachel returns, and--*

MORDECAI

Why--

RACHEL

It's too Hebrew. No, don't laugh. It's not a joke.

MORDECAI

Then I don't understand. What's wrong with the plant?

ESTHER

Nobody grows such weird plants.

MORDECAI

Ah, I think I see the problem.

RACHEL

See? It's like I said: too Hebrew.

MORDECAI

I think you may not have heard the story of Daniel. Now, there was a boy who was too Hebrew. And what did it get him! Ah! Nothing but trouble, you say. No. It blessed him. He was taken, just as your grandfather Kish was, by old Babylon. And when he saw the rich, toxic foods the Babylonians ate, do you know what he did?

ESTHER

I'll bet he didn't eat castor oil.

MORDECAI

No, you're right. He didn't. That would have made him sick. No, he ate beans and vegetables, and he grew up big and strong and helped rule the kingdom. And everybody knew he was Hebrew, too.

ESTHER

(pause)

What was that favor you wanted?

MORDECAI

Oh! I nearly forgot. There's a friend of yours at the gate.

ESTHER  
What!

*EXIT Esther RIGHT*

RACHEL  
Mordecai, do you think we're doing the right thing? You know, taking her in? She's so very different.

MORDECAI  
She's one of the people, Rachel. She grew up very different, but she's one of us, deep down. You'll see.

RACHEL  
I just wish her mother hadn't filled her head with such wild thoughts.

*ENTER Esther and Marjane RIGHT  
Esther is practically dragging Marjane behind her.*

ESTHER  
Mordecai, this is my friend Marjane. Do you think I could go over to her house for a while?

MORDECAI  
Why can't you two play over here?

*Marjane stifles a giggle.*

ESTHER  
We're not going to *play*. I mean . . . sorry. We're working on something, and we can't do it here.

MORDECAI  
Okay, Hadassah. But hurry back before sundown, remember?

ESTHER  
Oh! Thank you! Yes, I'll be back.  
(to Marjane)  
Come on, let's go.

MARJANE  
Bye! It was nice to meet you both!

*EXIT Esther and Marjane RIGHT*

MORDECAI  
Be safe!

RACHEL  
They live just down the street, Mordecai.

MORDECAI

What, and they shouldn't be safe?

RACHEL

I'm just saying that sometimes you lay it on a little thick.

MORDECAI

Like when?

RACHEL

Just sometimes you're a little much, is all.

*Rachel picks up the tools and walks off.*

MORDECAI

Do you mean that story about Daniel? He was a great man!

RACHEL

Mm-hmm.

MORDECAI

Grandfather Kish knew him, you know.

*EXIT Rachel and Mordecai LEFT*

Scene 2

*ENTER Esther and Marjane RIGHT*

*Marjane is carrying a basket with scarves/junk to make yourself pretty.*

MARJANE

Here, try this one. Catch!

ESTHER

Ooh!

MARJANE

So, your cousins are pretty weird, huh?

ESTHER

Ugh, yes! Mordecai keeps calling me "daughter."

MARJANE

What was that word he called you? Hadassah? Does it mean anything?

ESTHER

Don't worry about it. It's the name they call me.



MARJANE

But that's not your name?

ESTHER

No, it's not my name. They're not my parents, and it's not my home. As soon as I can--zing! I'll be out of there.

MARJANE

And go where?

ESTHER

I don't know. Maybe I'll be a musician in the court, or a midwife.

MARJANE

Like they'd let you around babies.

*Pulling herself up to a regal posture--*

ESTHER

Fine; I'll be queen, then.

MARJANE

Don't joke about that!

ESTHER

It's not a joke. The hunt for a queen is on, Marjane. I heard they were in the river district by the Euphrates just yesterday.

MARJANE

You think I don't know? Of course, I could be queen, but they wouldn't let you near the king with hair like that!

ESTHER

Hey!

MARJANE

It's fine; we'll fix it. Come here.

ESTHER

Thanks.

MARJANE

So, why do you hate your cousins so much. But really, though?

ESTHER

I don't hate them, but they have so many weird customs and rules. It makes life really a lot harder than it has to be.

MARJANE

So why do it?

ESTHER

I don't know; why do you paint your eyes every day?  
It's so Annihl will notice you, right?

MARJANE

Shush!

ESTHER

What, do you think he's listening?

MARJANE

I don't know; maybe.

ESTHER

So you do weird things because you know that's what he  
likes. It's not that you've got to do it, it's more  
like . . .

MARJANE

I want to.

ESTHER

Exactly. And so my cousins do all these weird things  
because they know that God likes them.

MARJANE

So what's the problem? My mother takes offerings every  
month to the temple and puts them in front of a rock  
because she thinks the rock eats it.

ESTHER

I guess other people do weird things, too, but . . .

MARJANE

I get it. Nobody else does the weird things you do.

ESTHER

Well, not nobody . . .

MARJANE

So what's the problem?

ESTHER

I guess . . .

*ENTER Taji RIGHT*

TAJI

Marjane, quickly, tidy up.

*She picks up the basket.*

MARJANE

Mom, what's happening?

TAJI

(to Esther)

Oh, you're here, too. Just help me, here.

*Taji hands the basket to Esther and turns to fuss with Marjane's hair until Marjane pushes her away. Marjane is facing LEFT; the other two are facing RIGHT.*

MARJANE

Mom, tell me what's going on!

TAJI

He's here.

MARJANE

Who?

*Esther gasps a little and hides her face behind the basket.*

*All the women bow at the waist.*

*ENTER Haman RIGHT*

HAMAN

Good afternoon; perhaps you've heard of me. I'm Haman, the Amalechite, son of Hammedatha. Hmm? No matter. What is your name, girl?

MARJANE

I'm Marjane.

HAMAN

Can you sing? Dance?

MARJANE

Uh--

TAJI

Let him hear you sing.

MARJANE

(hissed)

Mom!

*Marjane starts a song, falters, takes a deep shaky breath. As she's about to re-start, he interrupts.*

HAMAN

That's fine. You'll do. You people always want to take things with you, but you won't need anything because you're going to live in the palace. Come, girl. We're going, now.

TAJI

Oh, Marjane!

HAMAN

Fine, say your goodbyes. Don't keep me waiting. I have a lot of houses to scour today.

(to himself)

And very few prospects.

*EXIT Haman RIGHT*

TAJI

You'll be rich, and you'll never want for anything again! Just what will your father think; oh, he'll be so proud!

MARJANE

Mom, what about you?

TAJI

It's absolutely the best thing that could happen. Oh, I'm so proud of you. I'm sure you'll be chosen as queen, I'm just sure of it.

MARJANE

What if I'm not, though?

ESTHER

Don't say that; Xerxes would be crazy if he didn't choose you.

TAJI

Thank you; that's very kind.

MARJANE

Oh!

ESTHER

What?

MARJANE

What if he's already been to your house?

*Esther gasps, drops her basket, and runs.*

*EXIT Esther RIGHT*

*EXIT Marjane and Taji LEFT*

Scene 3

*ENTER Esther RIGHT*

ESTHER

Mordecai! Mordecai, has he been here? Oh, no!

*ENTER Mordecai and Rachel LEFT*

MORDECAI

Who? Has he who?

ESTHER

Haman, the Amamalam, son of Hammarami, or whatever.  
Haman!

MORDECAI

The Amalachite, son of Hammedatha?

ESTHER

Yeah--how did you know?

MORDECAI

He's the official in charge of the gates. I work for  
him. Why would he come here?

ESTHER

He's looking through our district for the next queen!

MORDECAI

Hmm. That would get him noticed by the king, you're  
right. Yes, that sounds like him.

ESTHER

Well?

MORDECAI

Hm?

ESTHER

Has he been here?

RACHEL

No, dear.

ESTHER

Oh, thank you. Finally, some good news.

RACHEL

Where are you off to?

ESTHER

I have to get ready; there's no way to know when he'll show up.

MORDECAI

Are you going to wash that stuff off your face?

RACHEL

(trying to interrupt)  
Mordecai--

ESTHER

What? No!

MORDECAI

It's almost sundown. The Sabbath is coming.

ESTHER

Again?

MORDECAI

Every week.

ESTHER

Why?

MORDECAI

We're Hebrews, Hadassah. This is how we honor God.

ESTHER

Well, I didn't want to be Hebrew. I didn't want my parents to die, and I didn't want to live with you. I want to live in the palace with Marjane!

MORDECAI

Hadassah--

ESTHER

And that's not my name.

RACHEL

Mordecai, please, think before you say something else.

*There's a long pause as Mordecai runs his hands through his hair or paces.*

ESTHER

Why are you doing this?

MORDECAI

I told you about Daniel. Well, when he was captured, they wanted to put him in a school, to build him to be a Babylonian official. Foreign food, foreign clothes,

(MORE)

MORDECAI (cont'd)

foreign gods. Well, he and his friends put God's way to the test against the foreigners'. Water instead of wine. Beans instead of cake. After just ten days, they were healthier and sharper than the Hebrews who abandoned the way.

(pause)

We live like this because it stands up to testing.

ESTHER

What if I don't want it? Why do you get to choose for me?

MORDECAI

Yeah, we choose for you right now because you live in our house. But there will come a time soon when you will make your own choices, Hadassah.

ESTHER

That's not my name. What's my name? Say it!

*There's an immense silence.*

*ENTER Haman RIGHT*

*He crosses to stand between the two groups.*

HAMAN

Good evening. Oh, Mordecai. I almost didn't recognize you, but how could I forget that face? Hm. I hope I'm not interrupting anything.

*He looks around, impassively.*

No bows?

*Esther gasps and bows, but Mordecai grabs at Rachel's elbow before she can. (She wouldn't have anyway) He's ram-rod straight and stares into Haman's eyes.*

Delightful.

(to Esther)

And you--what is your name?

ESTHER

(looking past him, to Mordecai)

Esther. My name is Esther.

HAMAN

What a curious name for a Hebrew. Mordecai, I wouldn't have expected your daughter to have such a conventional name.

MORDECAI

She's not my daughter. Esther, if you don't mind--I need a word with you. Sorry, Haman. You understand.

HAMAN

I don't think I do, actually.

*Esther, Mordecai, and Rachel cross to far LEFT.*

MORDECAI

What are you doing, girl?

ESTHER

I'm being true to myself.

MORDECAI

Yourself is Hebrew, not Persian. Remember Daniel!

ESTHER

Forget Daniel! I'm not Daniel, and I'm not Hadassah, either. I'm Esther.

RACHEL

Mordecai, you know why Haman is here. She'd be in the palace, alone. You won't be there to help.

ESTHER

Mordecai, please!

*Mordecai looks thoughtfully at Haman.*

MORDECAI

As long as you call yourself Esther, hide your true family. Haman hates me, and maybe it will go better for you if he doesn't think of me when he sees you.

RACHEL

You won't always want to be Esther. When the time comes to be Hadassah again, remember Daniel.

ESTHER

Does this mean I get to go?

HAMAN

Are you done, yet? I have a lot of houses to get to.

MORDECAI

I think we may not get a choice.

HAMAN

Mordecai, I'm taking this girl to the palace. Does that make you sad?



*Esther is increasingly excited.*

MORDECAI

I already said, she's not my daughter.

HAMAN

Well, I--oh. Hm. Are you sure this won't make you very very sad? Please say you'll be sad.

*Mordecai stands impassive.*

I'm going to take her and make the most Persian princess out of her. She'll change so much you won't even recognize her. And she'll never remember your god. Come along, Esther. We've got hearts to break.

RACHEL

Remember Daniel!

ESTHER

Bye!

MORDECAI

Don't worry, Esther! God always has a plan.

*EXIT Esther and Haman RIGHT*

*EXIT Rachel and Mordecai LEFT*

FRIDAYScene 1

*ENTER Mordecai LEFT*

*He crosses to the RIGHT. His clothing is much poorer than before. He spreads a black paste or powder on his face.*

*ENTER Rachel LEFT*

*She crosses to join him.*

RACHEL

What are you doing at home? And what are you mourning?

MORDECAI

Haman made a proclamation. He has convinced the king, somehow, that we Hebrews are a threat to him.

RACHEL

So, what? They'll take more of our freedom away? We were slaves in Egypt, Mordecai. We can survive this.

MORDECAI

No, Rachel, he means to kill us.

RACHEL

What? No.

MORDECAI

He marked a day in eleven months and made it legal to eliminate any Hebrew person.

RACHEL

Why would he--is this because you wouldn't bow to him? This is ridiculous.

MORDECAI

I should have just bowed to him, Rachel.

RACHEL

No! I won't have you talking like that. You're the one always going on about Daniel and his friends, aren't you?

*ENTER Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego LEFT*

*They remain stage LEFT. One is carrying a large parchment roll.*

MORDECAI

Rachel, this isn't like that--

RACHEL

What did the Babylonian decree say? It said:

ABEDNEGO

*Abednego steps forward and unrolls the scroll. She mouths the words as he speaks.*

The king's statue is finished, and he calls all of Babylon to honor it. It is decreed: Every official of the kingdom will gather to pray that Babylon will last forever, and when the music plays, we will all bow together. Anyone who does not will be destroyed. This is the word of King Nebuchadnezzar.

RACHEL

And what did they say to that?

MORDECAI

They said

*Mordecai mouths "I won't bow" with Abednego, or they say it together. Director's choice. This conceit finally ties the two stories together directly, and it continues through the play.*

ABEDNEGO

"I won't bow."

SHADRACH

You won't bow?

ABEDNEGO

That's right.

MESHACH

Aren't you the same Abednego who tried to talk Daniel out of being so Hebrew? And now you want to throw your life away being needlessly Hebrew.

ABEDNEGO

It's not about me anymore, Meshach. Things just get worse for us here. I can't ignore the fact anymore: this isn't our home. So I'm not going to get comfortable.

SHADRACH

We might die.

ABEDNEGO

That's right, Shadrach. But that's true whether we live like Hebrews or not. You know Tiamat has it out for us. So I intend to live the way I believe is right, whether I live or die, so that someday, people can look back at my life and say

*Abednego mouths with Mordecai.*

MORDECAI

"I wish I could be like them."

*EXIT Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego LEFT*

RACHEL

So?

MORDECAI

Oh, Rachel. I couldn't! What they did, standing up to the king like that, he wouldn't even notice me.

RACHEL

So, maybe you need to find someone who he'll notice.

(pause)

You know what you have to do. So what are you waiting for?

MORDECAI

You're right. It's worth a try.

*EXIT Mordecai and Rachel LEFT*

Scene 2

*ENTER Marjane RIGHT*

*ENTER Mordecai LEFT*

MARJANE

Ah! Who are you?

MORDECAI

Marjane, don't you know me?

MARJANE

Mordecai? What are you wearing on your face?

MORDECAI

Ash. It's to show my deep sadness.

MARJANE

Oh, no! Did something happen?

MORDECAI

Yes, I'm afraid so. Can you get Esther for me?

MARJANE

Of course; she's right here.

(stepping right)

Esther! Mordecai is here to see you.

*ENTER Esther RIGHT*

ESTHER

You can't keep coming here--what's wrong? Is Aunt Rachel okay?

MORDECAI

No one has died, not yet. You haven't heard? I'm surprised you haven't. There's a decree, Haman wrote it,

ESTHER

Mordecai.

MORDECAI

and it's awful, just awful--

ESTHER

Mordecai! Take a breath.

MORDECAI

The king gave Haman permission to write a decree that will wipe out the Hebrews, and we have less than a year to escape or die.

ESTHER

Is it true?

MORDECAI

I have held the decree in my hand, Esther.

ESTHER

What are you going to do?

MORDECAI

I . . . I don't know if I can . . . Esther, what am I supposed to do? I don't have any power, and nobody listens to me.

ESTHER

(pause)

What are you two looking at me for? Me? Well, I can't!

MORDECAI

Then why are you here? Everything happens for a reason,  
and God put you here for a reason.

ESTHER

I chose to be here. I wasn't put.

MARJANE

Really?

MORDECAI

Your Aunt reminded me of a story that helped me--

ESTHER

Let me guess, it was about Daniel?

MORDECAI

Actually, he wasn't around. His friends Shadrach,  
Meshach, and Abednego had to face something similar, a  
decree that ordered them to bow to a foreign idol, or  
they would be killed by the king. They had to make a  
real choice: to keep letting life happen to them, or to  
stand up and do the really tough thing.

ESTHER

Just . . . let me think about it.

MORDECAI

Please, Esther, you have to talk to the King. Why are  
you in the palace, if not for such a time as this?

ESTHER

Please!

MORDECAI

I'll go. Just remember that no matter what you choose,  
you'll always be my child.

*EXIT Mordecai LEFT*

*ENTER Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego LEFT*

*They mime (with minimized movements) an argument  
of Abednego vs. Shadrach and Meshach.*

ESTHER

Can you believe that? Put here for a purpose? I chose  
to be here. I worked for this. And I get to choose  
whether I'm going to be Hebrew or not. I get to choose  
whether I risk my neck for this.

MARJANE

What are you talking about?

ESTHER

What?

MARJANE

You think you chose to be queen and you just magically got it? You think you've been in control every step of the way? Well, I wanted all the same things as you, Esther, and I'm a nobody. I know you wanted to be queen, sure. But what did you do to make it happen? You said yes when Haman demanded that you come with him. You said yes when the king decided to eat with you. You said yes when Mordecai told you to reveal the murder plot. You said yes when Xerxes asked you to be queen.

ESTHER

I get to choose!

MARJANE

You've been able to sit and watch while the most incredible things happen to you. There's nothing difficult about the choices you've made.

ESTHER

How do you know what it's like to be me me, Marjane? You've never lived my life.

MARJANE

I know what it looks like from the outside. You would be stupid to say no, every time. But now that you've got a chance to really stand up and make a mark for yourself, a chance to really act like a queen, you, what? You're not going to risk your neck for it?

What's that thing your Uncle said in the story? He said,

*Marjane mouths the words with Abednego.*

ABEDNEGO

"I have to make a real choice: to keep letting life happen to me, or to stand up and do the really tough thing."

SHADRACH

Stop, stop. Please, what are you asking us to do?

ABEDNEGO

I don't know; something radical.

SHADRACH

You're saying we've got to stand up for what's right. Well, what do you want us to do? Should we skip the ceremony? Should we ask the king to send us away?

ABEDNEGO

I don't . . .

MESHACH

(pause)

Stand up.

SHADRACH

Yeah, stand up for what's right, we said that, but how?

MESHACH

No, I mean stand up. We need to not bow.

ABEDNEGO

(breathless excited)

Yeah? Yeah, I think so. I just didn't want to say it.

SHADRACH

Please, there has got to be a better way.

MESHACH

Stop letting life happen to you. Stand up and do the really tough thing.

ABEDNEGO

Stand up?

*He sticks his hand out for Shadrach, who hesitates.*

SHADRACH

If I do one difficult thing for the right reasons, it might as well be as important as this. Alright. We'll stand up when the music plays.

MESHACH

Come on. Don't look so down. God has a plan.

*EXIT Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego LEFT*

ESTHER

God has a plan.

MARJANE

And you are a part of it! I don't even follow your God and I can see that.



ESTHER

God has a plan, and he can fix this without me.

MARJANE

Esther! That's wrong! You've got to stop letting life happen to you. Make a choice, for once.

ESTHER

Why do you care what I choose or don't choose?

MARJANE

Hundreds of thousands of people, Esther. Hundreds of thousands of people will die if you do nothing. I can't believe you'd be that selfish. (i can't believe you have to think about this(before the selfish part))

*EXIT Marjane RIGHT*

ESTHER

I'm not!

(she makes a face at how that sounds)

I'm not--I'm not.(pause) I guess I am. I'm afraid of dying, or being exiled, or making everything worse. It's pretty selfish of me to put--I mean, it's just me--to put me ahead of everyone I know and love. I already know I'm not worth more than they are, but why is it suddenly my responsibility to risk everything? Mordecai said I was put here for a reason. It's not fair, but nobody ever said life was fair.

*ENTER Abednego LEFT*

I know what I should do. It's awful, but I know what to do. I just don't know how to change a king's mind.

(to Abednego)

What would you do? I guess you never faced anything quite like this. Sometimes old stories don't give you perfect answers. So I'll just . . . pray.

Marjane!

*ENTER Marjane RIGHT*

MARJANE

So, what are you going to do?

ESTHER

I don't know exactly, yet. It's not about me anymore, Marjane. Things just get worse for us here. I can't ignore the fact anymore: this isn't my home. So I'm not going to get comfortable.

My uncle likes to say that "there is a God who reveals mysteries." I want you to find Mordecai and have him pray. Get everyone to pray. I'm going to make a choice.

MARJANE

Now you've got control over your life. I'll go find your uncle and tell him the plan.

*EXIT Marjane LEFT*

ESTHER

This had better work.

ABEDNEGO

Because I'm risking my friend's lives if it doesn't work. I believe in you, God, and I have faith. But I'm going to need a lot more than faith to take the next step.

ESTHER

I need protection, God.

ABEDNEGO

I know what I need to do.

ESTHER

But I don't know how I can possibly do it.

BOTH

I need to face off against a king.

ESTHER

Help me, God. In your name, I pray.  
Tomorrow, I'll go into the throne room. And I don't know what I'll say or how I'll live, but I'll worry about that when the time comes.

ABEDNEGO

Tomorrow, I'll stand in front of the statue that contradicts you, God, and I'll defy the king's order. He has promised to kill anyone who doesn't bow. I don't know what will happen or how I'll live, but I'll let you worry about that, God.

*EXIT Esther RIGHT*

*EXIT Abednego LEFT*

### Scene 3

*ENTER Xerxes and Agar LEFT*

*ENTER Haman RIGHT*

*Xerxes sits on his throne. Haman bows low as he enters, and Xerxes motions him onward. There need to be some servants, I think, just to be ears in the room.*

HAMAN

My Lord . . .

XERXES

Well, Haman. You rarely trouble me on my throne. What's so important?

HAMAN

The law, my Lord, destroying your enemies. It's done.

XERXES

Oh, yes! The people who plotted against me, who disobey the laws of my kingdom.

HAMAN

They think they're better than you, sir.

XERXES

Well, how have you fixed, it?

HAMAN

In less than a year, our citizens will turn on these snakes and cut them to pieces. Persians will own persia once again. It is signed with your ring, and no one can stop it now.

XERXES

Well done, my servant. Persia will stand forever.

HAMAN

My Lord, another issue . . .

XERXES

I always have time for you. What's on your mind?

HAMAN

This new queen you have chosen, my Lord.

XERXES

Hm.

HAMAN

I don't like her. There's something familiar about her that worries me, like a memory of a dream about death. I don't mean she's--I just think it's very fast to--I mean, you don't even really know where she's from, my king!

*A long silence follows.*

AGAR

Haman, what are you trying to say to the king?

HAMAN

All we know about her is that she was chosen from among the people of Persia. But we know that there are spies among your people who want to overthrow your laws and gods.

AGAR

Haman! This is over the line!

HAMAN

I am concerned, my king! You cannot trust outsiders! I have been saying it for years. Who can know what her motivations actually are?

*Xerxes stands and looks CENTER BACK.  
Haman spins around to find Esther.*

*ENTER Esther CENTER BACK  
She stands at the back of the audience.  
(hissed)*

This is unbelievable, your highness!

AGAR

You have not summoned her.

HAMAN

She assumes too much.

XERXES

Silence! Since when do Agar or Haman speak for the king? I get to decide what I want to do.

ESTHER

(aside)

God, I know I haven't wanted you recently, but I need you now. Please hear our prayers.

XERXES

Why do I feel different about you, Esther? Haman is right; I shouldn't trust you. Agar is right; you're not supposed to be here.

ESTHER

You have to do what you think is right.

XERXES

You aren't going to beg for your life?

ESTHER

Only let me say what I have to say, and then you can kill me or exile me. I know my life is in your hands.

HAMAN

Don't trust her, my Lord!

AGAR

You must punish her. She broke your rules.

XERXES

Esther, come forward.

There's something more to you, my queen. You must need something very badly if you came here and risked your life to get it. What do you need? Money? Armies? Servants? Ask anything, up to half my kingdom, and I will give it to you without question.

AGAR

Xerxes!

XERXES

Agar, leave before I grow tired of you. Haman, do you have anything to say?

*EXIT Agar LEFT  
Haman looks sick.*

ESTHER

You're very kind, my king, but--I just want to say--

XERXES

Well?

ESTHER

Haman--

XERXES

What about him?

ESTHER

You and your adviser should come to a dinner in my rooms in the palace.

HAMAN

A dinner!

XERXES

We'll do it. We'll do it tonight. Haman, go make it happen.

*EXIT Haman LEFT*

What do you really want, Esther?

ESTHER

A dinner.

XERXES

We both know that's an excuse. Why won't you tell me?

ESTHER

Tonight.

*EXIT Esther CENTER BACK*

XERXES

I will get her to say what she wants. I will.

*EXIT Xerxes RIGHT*

Scene 4

*ENTER Tiamat RIGHT*

*ENTER Haman LEFT*

TIAMAT

I've set the trap. Now, I just want those idiots to fall into it. Can't you understand? I'll have control back. The king will listen to me again. What is it about these outsiders?

HAMAN

All I want is the king's respect. I thought I had earned it. I brought him the murder plot. I am going to eliminate his enemies. He gave me his signet to act for him. But he still values this queen. What is it about this outsider?

TIAMAT

It doesn't matter. They'll stand when they should bow, and they'll learn the power of our gods. They'll learn how much the King truly values me.

HAMAN

I'm going to dinner with the two of them. Maybe that's a chance to show her how much the King truly . . .

TIAMAT

And when they're just ash, I'll take it and show it to their little dream-reading friend, Daniel. And he will see how much the King truly values me.

HAMAN

She'll see how much . . . what if he actually doesn't value me? He broke his own rules for her today. He wouldn't do that for me.

*ENTER Hera RIGHT*

HERA

Why would I ever value in you?

HAMAN

Hera?

HERA

You doubt yourself so much, it's no wonder the King has forgotten how vital you are.

HAMAN

I don't!

HERA

Then do something bold. You're Haman, the son of Hammedatha, of the Amalekites. You have power. You have history, and you're acting like a coward, a mouse.

HAMAN

Then, what should I do?

HERA

What do you want?

HAMAN

I want to kill that Hebrew. I want Mordecai dead.

HERA

Then build the gallows, hang him on it, and ask permission later. Show the King how much he *really* values you.

*EXIT Tiamat LEFT*

*EXIT Hera and Haman RIGHT*

Scene 5

*ENTER Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego LEFT*

SHADRACH

It's time. Are you two really going to do it?

ABEDNEGO

Yeah, of course. Are you kidding?

SHADRACH

I just want us to be sure: we're going to die for this for sure. Is it worth dying for?

ABEDNEGO

I made my choice.

SHADRACH

So did I, it's just . . .

MESHACH

Besides, weren't we always going to do this? It was never really a choice from the beginning. I'm satisfied. If I had it to do over again, I wouldn't do anything differently. I'm glad I had you as my friends.

ABEDNEGO

It's nearly time to show what we truly want.

*ENTER Esther, Xerxes, and Haman RIGHT*

XERXES

It's nearly time to say what you really want.

ESTHER

Of course, my King, just--I want to know what Haman wants, first.

*She squirrels out and away from Xerxes' gaze.*

HAMAN

What I want is obvious, my King: to protect you from the Hebrews. I'm trying to eliminate all the Hebrews from your palace first. I have one in mind.

XERXES

Why are you looking at her like that?

HAMAN

Your foreign queen keeps strange company. I'm surprised you offered her half of your kingdom.

XERXES

And I would again. I will again!

ESTHER

Oh, that's too much. All I want is--

XERXES

Yes?

ESTHER

Only to invite you both to dinner tomorrow.

XERXES

Why do I keep the two of you around? One makes me angry, the other makes me wait. Haman, do my will, don't question me. Esther, just tell me what you want.



ESTHER

Tomorrow. I promise.

XERXES

I won't give up. There are a thousand tomorrows.

*EXIT Xerxes and Haman, followed by Esther RIGHT*

*ENTER a crowd around Meshach, Shadrach, and  
Abednego*

MESHACH

People will remember this forever.

ABEDNEGO

Now even I think you're a little optimistic, and I'm  
the one who suggested this.

SHADRACH

Yeah, if we're dead, who will remember us?

ABEDNEGO

Come on, before the music stops, you gotta tell us.

MESHACH

Tomorrow, I promise.

SHADRACH

I'm worried there won't be a tomorrow. Oh! It's time.

MESHACH

Are you ready?

ABEDNEGO

I'm surprised--I am completely ready.

*At this, the music stops, the crowd bows, but our  
boys stay standing. The crowd recoil from their  
feet.*

*ENTER Tiamat LEFT*

*She just stands with her arms crossed, satisfied.*

*ENTER Nebuchadnezzar RIGHT*

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Why?

SHADRACH

I'm a Hebrew.

MESHACH

I'm a Hebrew.

ABEDNEGO

I follow God first, and man second. That's what makes us different.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

We'll see just exactly what makes you different once we melt you down for disobeying me. Throw these disbelievers in the furnace.

TIAMAT

The furnace we used to refine the gold for the statue. The furnace that burned so hot the rocks inside flaked and turned to ash. The furnace will be the last thing you'll ever see. Goodbye, Hebrews.

*ENTER guards RIGHT*

*EXIT all LEFT*

Scene 6

*ENTER Esther, Xerxes, and Haman RIGHT*  
*They stand a moment.*

XERXES

What do you want, Esther?

HAMAN

Dinner tomorrow?

ESTHER

I'm worried there won't be a tomorrow.

XERXES

Why?

ESTHER

The last time someone told a King what I have to say, they were thrown in a furnace.

XERXES

What are you saying? What could be so dangerous?

HAMAN

Guards! Protect your king!

*ENTER Guards LEFT*

XERXES

Was Haman right about you after all? What do you want? Up to half of my kingdom--ask, and I'll give it to you, I swear it.

ESTHER

If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life--this is my petition. And spare my people--this is my request. My whole people have been praying that you would listen to me.

XERXES

What? Who-- Someone wants to kill you?

ESTHER

I'm a Hebrew. Haman wants to kill us, and me.

*EXIT Xerxes LEFT*

*The guards look quizzical and half follow him.*

HAMAN

I should have known. Castor beans! How else could you know!? You were Hebrew the whole time. I'm so sorry, if I had known--

ESTHER

You always knew, Haman. Mordecai is my uncle.

HAMAN

Of course, we're old friends. Is he Hebrew? Oh, I'll save the Hebrews. Now that I know, I can fix this. Just save me, and I'll fix this.

ESTHER

Get off!

HAMAN

Save me, now, Esther!

*ENTER Xerxes and Agar LEFT*

XERXES

(as angry as humanly possible)

Hey!

ESTHER

My King! I'm so sorry I lied to you all that time! Please! Please, spare me and my people. Forgive me.

XERXES

Not you. Haman. You're dead, I just have to figure out how to kill you. Don't think I haven't been watching you build that spike. What is it, seventy feet tall?

AGAR

He's been waiting to kill a Hebrew he hates.

ESTHER

Not Mordecai!

XERXES

Really? The man who saved my life? And my queen? Is there any good person you don't want to kill? Haman, I have to apologize to you. You were right to fear outsiders. You just had the group wrong: I should have been killing the Amalechites this whole time. Stick him on his own spike.

AGAR

With pleasure.

HAMAN

Esther! Please! You can save me! Please!

*EXIT Guards and Agar, dragging Haman RIGHT*

ESTHER

I don't understand . . . How is this possible? I thought you would kill me. You were so set on killing Hebrews, I thought--

XERXES

But I thought--Haman said--oh, it doesn't matter now. I was so focused on me, I didn't think about who I would hurt. It's funny, Esther. I must seem so blind. You and Mordecai have saved me first from poison and then from myself. And you're both Hebrew.

ESTHER

It's hard to believe this. I mean, you really aren't going to kill me, are you? This is like my uncle's stories after all. He always said Daniel could rely on God, but this!?

XERXES

Daniel? The wise man from Babylon?

ESTHER

But how did you know?

XERXES

I love Gilgamesh, but it's not the only story from old Babylon. I love all those old stories. Was it true? The lions? The dream?

ESTHER

Yes. And the furnace.

XERXES

Oh! The furnace! You said: "The last time someone told a King what I have to say, they were thrown in a furnace."

LIGHTS RED

*ENTER Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Jesus LEFT*

ESTHER

That's right. They stood for our God, and our God appeared in the flames with them.

XERXES

Do you think it really happened that way?

ESTHER

If God--if Our God was able to save our people from Haman, just like that, then I have to believe he's watching out for us. And if God is on our side, nothing is impossible for Him.

ABEDNEGO

(Yelling as though surrounded by wind)  
What's happening!?! We should be on fire!

SHADRACH

Why are we fine?

MESHACH

Nothing is impossible for Him. Abednego, Shadrach, don't you see? This is God's work! He saved us when we didn't think to ask for it!

SHADRACH

I see the king watching us outside.

ABEDNEGO

Let's walk to him. I doubt he'll question our God again.

*EXIT Abednego, Shadrach, and Meshach LEFT*

LIGHTS NORMAL

XERXES

Esther, did you really fear for your life?

ESTHER

You may be a good person, but you don't see the hate of the people around you. Haman did more damage and caused more fear than you knew.

XERXES

I'm done, then. It won't happen again. Mordecai was faithful to me when my right-hand man was threatening to kill him. That's the sort of man I want by my side.

ESTHER

Really? What are you saying?

XERXES

There's a law Haman wrote, and there's no way to repeal it. I gave him my signet. He signed in my name. But I will give Mordecai the power to write a new law, one that gives the Hebrews the right to protect themselves.

There's no furnace here, but let's make it easier for your God to show up and help your people.

ESTHER

Thank you, my king.

XERXES

Thank you, my queen.

*EXIT Esther and Xerxes RIGHT*

Scene 7

*ENTER Mordecai LEFT*

*ENTER Esther RIGHT*

MORDECAI

Esther! You've saved us.

*They rush together and hug each other.*

ESTHER

I think God may have been working ahead of time. I was the queen; you uncovered a murder plot. God was setting things up to clear the road ahead.

MORDECAI

God watches over his chosen people.

ESTHER

Uncle, I'm sorry I was so mean to you before. I was afraid of sticking out, and all I wanted was to be Persian and fit in with everyone. When I tried so hard to fit in, when I tried to change, I lost so much. I'm just so sorry. I want to be a Hebrew again.

MORDECAI

You never actually left. God will wait until you're ready, every time. No matter who you have been in your past, God is waiting for you with open arms, always.