

Open Letter to the Queen Known as Esther

Your Majesty

For thousands of years men have tried
To craft you into a feminist hero
Mold you into the Woman all girls should become
So we learn to express ourselves
Only when our lives are at stake
And only after prodding by some small man
Who needs to save women to prove his worth

That I am not the biggest fan of your cousin
Must by now be common knowledge but
Unfortunately
That women don't need men to save them
Is still either perceived as news, or worse, a lie

When I was small, the men that told your story
Said you were a hero; you saved your people
Said you were courageous for revealing yourself
When you could have refrained, staying hidden

But when I read their story about you
I saw a woman who did what she needed to
In order to survive - a woman who followed
The orders of men so she wouldn't be banished or killed
A woman like most women living in a man's world
Seeing what happens to queens who do not go gentle
To the fiery hurlers of heels, to the resisters
I imagine you lived your entire life scared

You were never my role model, never my inspiration
Not because somewhere in my soul I knew
I am not a woman; I longed to become one for so long
(This is how I learned willing a dream isn't effective)
You were not - are not - my role model
Because I have never known you
Not for lack of trying - I have imagined you
The non-standard beauty
You as Fanny Brice at the pageant thrown by the king
Nose bigger than the other girls
And personality bigger too
You as a classic beauty
As Cleopatra, as Sheherezade, as Marilyn
Queen Bey or Michelle

And realized this is all they ever told me about you
That you were pretty
That you smiled on demand
And I have no sense of who you really were
Because these men wrote you as their ideal woman
A beautiful plot device
And for me you are not Hadassah hiding as the goddess Ishtar
You are Esater - which means I will be hidden -
And so you remain
Shrouded in the cloud of unknowing
I cannot model myself on you
But I identify with your desire to hide yourself
From the men who did this to you

The ones who wrote you focused on your appearance
They used you to make their story
And later other men came and were horrified
That you may have enjoyed your uncut king
Horrified that you may have loved a non-Jewish man
As someone who has been shamed for who and how I love
I identify with you

And they told us your husband raped you
And that you signed up to have your husband rape you
But rape is never and was never consensual
I know how common intimate partner abuse is
So I will not dismiss the possibility
Your husband assaulted you
As someone who was also told I was asking for it
I identify with you

No, Esther, Hidden Queen
I see through their patriarchal attempts
At portraying you
As a man, I would not be so presumptuous
To demand that you tell us your story.
I am writing because I want you to know
I am one of many who understand
They got it wrong
The book they named for you
Is not in your name.

Signed,

Your Obedient Servant

(Jay Stanton)