

## The Book of Esther (Subversive Edition)

*“Rava said: ‘It is one’s duty to make oneself fragrant with wine on Purim until one cannot tell the difference between ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordecai.’”*

*– Babylonian Talmud Megillah 7b*

Now it came to pass in the days of King Ahasuerus,  
(this is Ahasuerus who reigned  
over the great Persian empire in 486 BCE)  
that the King made a feast unto all the men of his kingdom  
and Vashti the Queen held a feast for the women.

On the seventh day,  
when the heart of the King was merry with wine,  
he demanded that Vashti the Queen dance before him  
wearing nothing but her royal crown.  
But Vashti refused to come at the King’s command.

Thereupon the King asked his wise men,  
“What shall we do to the Queen Vashti;  
she has disobeyed an order of King Ahasuerus!”  
Their answer: “Vashti has not merely insulted the King,  
but all the people of Persia.”

The King’s men went to summon the Queen,  
but she was nowhere to be found.  
Some say she was executed,  
others say she was imprisoned,  
still others say she fled the empire.

The legends of her fearlessness however,  
are told yet to this day.  
(On many a moonlit night, they say,  
Vashti’s songs and laughter can be heard  
ringing out across the shores of the Southern Persian Sea).

The King sent out a royal command  
Throughout all the provinces of his kingdom,  
to all the maidens of the land:  
Come to the palace!  
The one that most pleases the King  
shall replace Vashti as Queen.

Now the Jews had lived in Persia for a century –  
ever since the Great Destruction

and they enjoyed freedom and prosperity throughout the land.

In those days there was a certain Jew,  
whose name was Mordechai.  
Although he lacked for nothing,  
he could not find peace,  
for the memory of his ancestors' exile  
burned within him  
like a fire that raged without end.

Mordechai's niece Esther  
decided that she would go to the King's palace.  
When she told Mordechai, he smiled within.  
"If Esther does indeed become Queen," he thought to himself,  
"I may finally avenge the wrongs done to my ancestors  
and bring ruin upon the people of Persia."

When Esther went into the King's house  
King Ahasuerus proclaimed:  
"This one shall be my Queen.  
Together we shall rule over all Persia."

When Mordechai learned his niece  
would soon be crowned as Queen,  
he said to her:

"This is just the moment  
for which we have been waiting!  
You must tell me everything  
you hear from the King's palace  
so that we may move against it.

For we know it is but a matter of time  
before the Persian empire makes good  
on its plans to destroy our people.  
Be true to your kin!  
Who knows, maybe you have been made Queen  
for such a time as this?"

But Esther said to Mordechai,  
"This I will not do, for Persia is our home.  
We dwell here in security and enjoy  
a bounty of blessings in this land.  
If I were as to do as you instruct me,  
it would bring hatred and retaliation  
against the Jewish people."

And so Esther married King Ahasuerus  
and joined him in his palace.  
Esther did not hide her Jewish identity  
from the King or anyone else who lived in the land.  
The Jews of Persia rejoiced –  
for although many of their kin  
had held high and respected positions  
in the King's court,  
they were proud that one of their own  
had become Queen of all Persia!

Sometime later,  
Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite  
to a place of highest honor in his court.  
Though the Jews had been taught  
to fear his ancestors,  
Haman was a man of compassion and wisdom,  
held in great esteem by all who know him.

When Mordechai learned of Haman's rise  
in the King's court  
he was filled with loathing and dread.  
He gathered with four conspirators  
and together they plotted Haman's downfall  
by striking a mighty blow against his people.

After a time, the King's ardor for Esther waned  
and soon she came to learn  
that she was but one of the king's many consorts.  
When Ahasuerus saw her face fall he said to her:  
"Why are you downcast? Many are my wives,  
but only one is my Queen."

Esther did not remain sad for long.  
She and Haman came to know one another  
and trust one another  
and soon they became lovers.  
When night fell they would steal away to his bed  
while the King was fast asleep  
in the chambers of his concubines.

In due time, one of Mordechai's co-conspirators  
came to regret the terrible plans they had made,  
and he requested an audience with the Queen.  
Bowling low to Esther, he said,

“Please forgive me, your highness,  
for I have committed a grievous wrong.  
Mordechai has set a terrible plot in motion:  
In one day, on the thirteenth day  
of the twelfth month of Adar,  
he plans to murder Haman while he worships.  
None will be spared and all who are gathered in prayer  
with him will be slain.”

That evening, Esther lay awake  
with great anguish.  
If she remained silent, she would allow  
the death of many innocents  
and the Jews of Persia would be in grave danger.  
But could she betray her own kin?  
If she told the King of Mordechai’s plot  
he would most certainly be put to death.

With morning soon to break  
Esther finally knew what she must do.  
Leaving the palace quietly before dawn,  
she rode to Mordechai’s home  
and told him thus:

“I know what you have planned,  
so hear me now:  
Although you are my own flesh and blood,  
I am prepared to tell the king  
of your evil plot.  
If you attack Haman and his people,  
you will bring nothing but bloodshed and sorrow  
to our people and all of Persia as well.”

Then coming closer she said to him:

“We are Jews, but Persia is our home.  
As a Jew, as a Persian, and as your Queen:  
I swear that as I stand here before you now,  
I will turn you in before I allow you  
to bring ruin upon us all.”

Thereupon Esther returned to the palace  
as the sun rose on the thirteenth of Adar.

That morning, Esther woke with a start  
because Haman had already left  
for his morning prayers.

When he returned, she she gave thanks to God  
for she knew that Mordechai had turned away  
from his wicked plan.

As Esther embraced her love, she marveled  
at how quickly her sorrow had turned to joy  
her fear into power,  
her anguish into hope.

(So may it be for us  
and for all who dwell on earth).

(Rabbi Brant Rosen)