

Scene 8

The throne room.
One week later. Afternoon.

(XERXES and ESTHER sit on their thrones. XERXES looks through a pile of papers.)

XERXES
You're sure you want to be here for an ordinary meeting?

ESTHER
I don't want to leave your side for one minute.

XERXES
I feel the same way.

(He kisses her.)

ESTHER
Besides, I want to see you and your advisers at work!

XERXES
It's really not very interesting.

ESTHER
I may think otherwise.

(Beat.)

XERXES
Esther, may I ask you something?

ESTHER
Of course.

XERXES
Why didn't you want to tell me about your nightmare last night?

ESTHER
It was... disturbing. I didn't want to trouble you.

XERXES
I'm your husband. You can tell me anything.

ESTHER
I appreciate that.

XERXES

Was it about me?

ESTHER

No. It's a dream I've had many times. It was about my parents. It was more like a memory. The night they...

XERXES

Were taken from you?

(ESTHER nods.)

ESTHER

A band of men tore through our neighborhood. We heard screams and glass breaking. Mama told me to hide under the bed. I did. Our door was broken down. The lamps were out, but I saw shadows steal into the room. Then...

(ESTHER breaks down in tears. XERXES embraces her.)

XERXES

I'm sorry.

ESTHER

I've always wondered who they were. I guess I'll never know.

XERXES

If you have that dream again, wake me. You shouldn't suffer in the darkness alone.

ESTHER

Thank you.

XERXES

Can I get you some wine?

ESTHER

Yes, please.

(He pours.)

XERXES

I dream about my father all the time. Very real dreams. It's almost as though his spirit is still with me.

(XERXES hands her wine in a silver goblet. She is startled at what she sees.)

ESTHER

Is this Hebrew?

XERXES

Probably. We got the goblets when we looted Belshazzar's palace. He looted the temple in Jerusalem.

ESTHER

These are sacred to the Jews.

XERXES

Yes, but not to us.

ESTHER

Xerxes, there's something I've been meaning to tell you. It's important to me. I think you should know...

XERXES

Yes?

(HAMAN, BIGTHANA, and TERESH enter, conferring.)

HAMAN

Good afternoon, Your Majesty. (sees ESTHER) Oh, Your Majesties.

XERXES

Esther, this is my vizier, Teresh, and my advisers, Bigthana and Haman.

ESTHER

It's a pleasure.

TERESH

Likewise.

HAMAN

My king, you made a magnificent choice in your bride.

BIGTHANA

I couldn't agree more.

XERXES

Esther will be sitting in on our work today.

TERESH

I warn you, it will be dull.

XERXES

I've already told her.

TERESH

Very well.

HAMAN

I'd like to begin, if I may. The first matter to discuss concerns the Jews who work here.

(ESTHER catches her breath.)

TERESH

The Jews again, Haman?

BIGTHANA

We've already banned them from owning weapons, even though we never caught that would-be assassin.

HAMAN

They are more dangerous than you know. Those who work at the palace must be dismissed. I've already drawn up an edict-

ESTHER

I grew up with Jewish neighbors. They were law-abiding people.

HAMAN

My queen, I don't expect you to understand the devious nature of this tribe. They may seem harmless to you, but they've conquered many other nations. They claim that one day they'll have a king who rules the entire world!

ESTHER

They have nothing against the Persians.

HAMAN

I've studied the situation thoroughly.

(HAMAN hands XERXES the edict.)

ESTHER

Don't sign it, Your Majesty.

HAMAN

After one week on the throne, the queen is already trying to run the empire!

ESTHER

I merely think the king should look into the matter before making a decision.

HAMAN

It's not your place to advise His Majesty!

XERXES (to his advisers)

Give us a moment.

(XERXES takes ESTHER aside. The advisers talk amongst themselves.)

XERXES (cont.)

You must not defy my adviser.

ESTHER

I don't trust him.

XERXES

Why not?

ESTHER

He's biased, blinded by hatred.

XERXES

How can you say that? You barely know him!

ESTHER

I heard that he's an Amalekite. Is that right?

XERXES

Yes.

ESTHER

The Amalekites hate the Jews--have always hated the Jews.

XERXES

I've known Haman my whole life! I trust his judgment. So should you.

ESTHER

I thought you like it when I speak my mind.

XERXES

Only when you have something wise to say!