

The new whole megillah...

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Our story is set in the city of Shushan, in what is today the lovely country of Iran in the third year of the reign of King Ahasueros. Joining Ahasueros in the cast will be a host of your favorite Purim characters: (*building in intensity*) brave Esther, Liberated Vashti, wise Mordechai, the little-appreciated palace guard...and...well I guess that's it. Oh, I almost forgot about Mordecai's tailor Bindelman...and Haman!! (noise!)

So it was the third year of Ahasueros' reign. On one occasion, the king held a party at his Persia Beach estate that lasted for seven days. At the end of the party, he called for his queen, Vashti, to come dance before him and the princes of his realm.

"Oh Vashti!" he said.

"Oh Vaaaashti!"

(*angry this time*) Vashti!!!

In time she informed him that she thanked him for the invite, but was very tired, plus had her book club, but if he wanted, he could get in touch in the morning for bagels.

Now, do you think this is something you're allowed to say when you're called by the king? Of course not. The king's advisors worried that other women would take example from Vashti so the king brought her before him at his long table, waved his stubby finger, and said, "You're fired, I mean, banished!" Out went Vashti, and an announcement was made all across Shushan that a new Queen was to be chosen.

Now this is a good time to Boo, even though I didn't say you-know-who's name.

Now as some of you may know, there's someone we haven't talked about much yet. She was a beautiful Jewish girl of about 17 who lived with her Uncle on a small street in Shushan. And her name was.... [kids say Esther], actually her name was Judy—but living across the street was another beautiful girl, and her name was [kids say] Esther!

Now Esther lived in the protection of her wise Uncle Bernie—ah--Mordechai. Their ancestors had been carried away from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar during the Babylonian Exile. In the old country, Mordechai was called Menachem. When he got to Babylonia he wanted to assimilate, which is a fancy word for blend in. First he changed his name to Mendel, but that didn't work. Then he tried out Marvin. Nope.

Then he chose the name Mordechai, which means “follower of Marduk,” who was the Babylonian god. It stuck. But everyone knew that Morty was a really a Jew all the time.

Now Mordechai understood that Esther had to enter the contest and go before the king, but he advised her to keep the fact that she was Jewish on the down low, because Mordechai, being wise, fair, brilliant, cunning, and not-at-all dumb, knew that there were bad people, bad billionaires and meshugena advisers like that guy we mentioned earlier. *(pause)* The guy who you make all the noise for. *(pause)*. Oh fine, Haman.

Thousands of women turned out for the first day of “Shushan’s Got Talent,” women from far and wide, but the King only had eyes for Esther and of course he chose her. Unfortunately Esther didn’t really *want* to win the competition, but she couldn’t say no—literally. So they were married. And that could’ve been the end of our story, were it not for the wicked workings of one very, bad, man, by the name of, you might have guessed, Haman.

For a while everything was fine. Esther was queen; Mordechai was happy, Ahasueros was enjoying life, and even Judy was happy. She became a Judge.

Then it happened that one day, Mordechai overheard, at the front gate of the palace, two guards saying that they didn’t like King Ahasueros and that they were going to [whisper] decapitate him. Which is a fancy way of saying, cut his head off, and thereby kill him.

So what would you do if you overheard someone planning on hurting the king? *(take responses)*... being a concerned citizen, if you had a strong conscience, were wise, fair, brilliant, cunning, and not-at-all dumb, like Mordechai, you’d want to get word to the King. So Mordechai did, through his niece, Queen Esther. The plot was discovered, the king was saved, and the good deed was recorded in the Shushan Book of Good Deeds. We’re going to leave that story for now, but I don’t want you to totally forget it, because it *might just* become important later.

Now around the same time Mordechai’s deed was getting recorded, Haman got a promotion. The King ordered that everyone of his servants around his gate bow to Haman, as a sign of respect. And everyone did, except one wise, fair, brilliant, cunning, and not-at-all dumb man, Mordechai. Mordechai didn’t think he should have to bow to anyone, much less someone as despicable as Haman.

“Who is this scoundrel?” asked Haman.

“It’s Mordechai, the Jew,” replied his henchman.

“Now I’m the least anti-semitic person you’ve ever seen in your life,” said Haman. “But still, the Jews must pay!”

And because Haman liked to randomize the days when his most evil acts would happen, he had his servants cast lots, or “Pur” to select the day the Jews would be put to death. The 13th day of the first month was chosen, and so Haman went to the King. And the King said sure, all the Jews can be killed, and you can take this ring, and from it purchase the silver that will be used to pay all those who rise up and kill the Jews. Anything else?’

‘No, that’s it for now,’ said Haman.

When Mordechai heard this, he tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth and ashes, which is what Jews did when they were very, very sad. Which is really kind of crazy, because now you’ve ruined good clothes, which is going to make you even more sad!

Anyway, Mordechai didn’t challenge tradition and he tore his clothes and put on ashes and cried before the Kings’ gate along with the other Jews. When Esther heard the wailing, she sent her servant to Mordechai to find out what the ruckus was about. When the servant came back, he showed her the decree Mordechai had provided. And Mordechai charged her with asking an audience of the King to beg him not to do this.

Now what do you think Esther did? Actually, the first response she sent to Uncle Morty was “If you think I am going to go into the King’s inner court, and get my head chopped off, you are crazy.”

When Mordechai got Esther’s response, he said “Esther, if you think you’re going to keep your head by staying silent, *you* are crazy. They’re not going to stop with just the poor Jews, or even the medium-rich-Jews like myself. They will come for you too, dear niece. They will come for you too.”

So, risking her life, Esther went before the King, in his inner court. She walked up to him and asked for an audience. [cringe] And the King stood up, glared down at her from his throne, and said, “Anything you want, my dear Esther.”

“Oh King, oh great king, oh greatest king, oh greatest unpopular king of all times ...”

“What do you want?” he interrupted.

“I would love to host a party for you, and your top advisor, whose name I don't want to mention. Haman. Would you come? I will tell you then what I want.”

“Why didn’t you just say so?”

That night the King and Haman, who was very proud to be singled out by Esther, arrived promptly for Esther’s banquet.

And the king said, "Name anything you want, dear Esther, be it half my kingdom, and I will give it to you. The smaller half, of course. But still..."

"All that I would like, my King, is that you and your top advisor, Haman, join me tomorrow for an even lovelier party."

"Well of course," said the King. "Of course," said Haman. And so the trap was set.

Now it happened that the King couldn't sleep that night. He tossed and turned, counted his money, wrote a few decrees, then started flipping through the Spring Nissan Issue of the Book of Good Deeds. And you'll never guess what he came upon...the good act of Mordechai who had revealed the plot against the king.

"Quick!" he called, summon my advisors. What has been done to reward this man, Mordechai? "Uh, nothing," they said.

"He didn't even get a hat that says 'Make Persia Great Again' or a tee-shirt says 'I saved the King?' Well for Marduk's sake, get me an advisor who can fix this."

It just so happened that Haman was walking into the court at that moment. "Haman, just the person I wanted to see. Listen, if you had someone you really wanted to honor for his incredible service, and do it publically, what would you do?"

Haman straightened his three-pointed hat and said proudly, "It's an excellent question. I would put him in your clothes, your rich, velvety clothes—then have him paraded through the streets on horseback, for everyone to see how rich and powerful he is."

"That's perfect!" said the King. "Listen, I want you to go get my best horse, dress Mordechai up in my finest robes, and then lead him around town for everyone to see how rich and powerful he is!"

"ah—buh, Mordechai?"

So Haman led Mordechai around; and if he didn't hate Mordechai with every single bone in his body before, now he really did.

"It's alright," he said, "I will build a gallows for Mordechai 1,000 cubits high, and I'll get Babylonia to pay for it!" In the end it was 50 cubits high and came out of his own pocket.

The next day came, and with it, the feast Esther had prepared.

"Tell me, my Queen," said the merry King, "I will give you anything you desire"

"I only want justice," she said. "Tell me, if someone were planning on killing not only me, but my whole people, what would you have done to them?"

"Why I'd have them killed instead. Who is this wicked person who would do such a thing?"

"Who? Your fellow dinner guest. Haman. He plans to use your silver to have all of the Jews, my people, killed on a single day. Yes, now you know my secret. I am a Jew. My name, husband, is not really Esther, but Hadassah, and someday they're going to name a hospital after me where everyone can come for free!"

"Uh-oh," thought Haman. (Aside from wanting to kill the Jews he was also at that moment trying to repeal and replace the Persia Affordable Care Act). He tried to grab Esther, but that only inflamed the King more!

"Instead of hanging the Jews, we'll hang Haman instead. Haman will hang! I just wish there were a gallows already ready so we didn't have to wait."

"Good news, Sir," said an eager guard. "One has been already been built outside the palace!"

And so the gallows Haman had prepared for Mordechai, became the instrument of his own demise. And while they were at it, they also hung Haman's ten sons, whose names are traditionally recited in one breath. Their names were Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridal, and Viagra, I mean Vaizatha. Whew, it's a good thing Haman didn't have a last name.

And so, the King reversed the order for the 13th of Adar, and said the Jews had his authority to destroy their oppressors that day. The end.

Actually that's not quite the end of the story. As retribution for Haman's plan, the Jews ended up killing not just Haman's sons, but also 75,000 Persians, and not just the Alt-Right ones. Or the whole story could be made up. There's really no need to dwell on that now. The point is that because of the courage of Mordechai and Esther, and their faith that telling the truth was the best option, our people were able to turn the tables on those who sought to destroy them. Justice was served, the three-cornered hat of Haman was turned into a delicious pastry, Esther's name went down in history with her scroll, and, on the 13th of Adar, the day Haman randomly selected for our people to be killed, we celebrate our pluck and our humanity during the great festival of Purim. Finally, Persia was made whole again. Now what is everyone sitting around for. Go eat!!