Little Orphan Esther and the Shushan Schemer

By

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A note from the author:

Purim Spiels have historically been a method by which marginalized Jewish communities could satirically comment on the larger societies in which they live. Purim Spiels are, by their very nature, parody, and should be approached as such.

All notes on melodies for songs are Suggestions Only. It is up to the user to make decisions about music.

Feel free to edit these scripts as you see fit. Update cultural references, add inside jokes- make them your own.

Most importantly, Have FUN!

CAST

Narrator

Achashverosh

Vashti

Mordecai

Esther

Bigthan

Teresh

NARRATOR: Welcome to the Sinai At Sundown Radio Theatre. “It’s not quite a podcast.” Brought to you by Sinai Brews. Sinai Brews, makers of kosher-style craft beers and sodas. We put the “Rah!” in Torah study. (Music Punch)

Tonight’s episode: Little Orphan Esther and the Shushan Schemer! (Music Punch)

The story you are about to hear is true! The names have remained the same for the historic record. Come with us, back in time, across the ocean, through the desert, along the path, up the river, down the street, beyond the horizon, to a place halfway around the globe; a fantastic city of music and culture, of spice and millet and, we assume, some kind of falafel; the capitol city of Shushan in Ancient Persia, where King Achashverosh has been celebrating for three straight days....

Scribe: This is the greatest party since Mesopotamia, Your Majesty!

Achashverosh: Thank you, my scribe. It is my duty as king to keep my subjects happy.

Scribe: Let it be known that King Achashverosh does surely tear the roof off!

Achash: Indeed. I will do you one better. Vashti! Oh, Vashti!

Vashti: Yes, Achashverosh?

Achash: Hello, Vashti. Are you enjoying yourself?

Vashti: Oh, yes! This is the grandest ball a girl could have dreamed of!

Achash: Well, how about you show your appreciation and perform for my guests?

Vashti: Of course! Would you like some ragtime on the bovine lyre? Or maybe some light opera? I’ve been practicing my Abba and Sullivan! (Sings) I am the very model of an ancient Persian Dancing Queen, a two-step, twirling version of a girl who’s digging on the scene...

Achash: Oh, no, not a song, Vashti. But since you mention dancing, you could do a little dance for us. You know the one I mean...

Vashti: That dance??? You want me to perform That dance? Oh, no Achashverosh. Certainly not in front of your friends.

Achash: Yes you will.

Vashti: No, I won’t.

Achash: Will.

Vashti: Won’t.

Achash: Will. When I met you you were nothing more than a small town girl in Zariaspa, using your pretty face and shaking your hips to sell flatbread to traders on the Silk Road. I’m the one who saw talent in you. I brought you here and married you.

Vashti: More like, bought me here.

Achash: I picked you out of that one-camel town and I can put you right back.

Vashti: No, you can’t because I’m going back on my own! I’d rather perform for sheep in outer Mongolia than stay here another minute with you!

(She leaves, door slam)

Scribe: Boy, you showed her, boss!

Achash: I sure did. But what am I going to do without a wife?

Scribe: Enjoy bachelorhood?

Achash: It’s nice, but I’m King of Persia. I need a queen. Mordecai! Mordecai!

Mordecai: Yes, Your Majesty?

Achash: I need to find a new wife. Arrange a beauty contest to choose the new queen! I’ll be in my chambers while you do.

Mord: Of course, Your Majesty.

Scribe: A beauty contest? Boy, King Achashverosh is sure to find a great new wife now.

Mord: There is more to greatness than beauty. King Achashverosh needs a lesson in how to treat a woman.

Scribe: Yeah, you’re right about that. No wonder you’re his second advisor.

Mord: Yes, and I know just the woman to teach him...

Narrator: And so the palace is thrown into preparations. Announcements of the contest spread throughout Persia, workmen measure and saw and join and paint catwalks and backdrops and dropwalks and catbacks. The entire empire is filled with anticipation as beautiful candidates arrive in Shushan. But Mordecai seems already assured of who will win.... (Music punch)

Mordecai: Ah, Esther, my niece. Are you ready to meet King Achashverosh?

Esther: I think so, Uncle Mordecai.

Mord: Good. Oh, Little Orphan Esther, I’ve dreamed of a day like this for you.

Esther: Thank you, Uncle Mordecai. But I’m not an orphan. I have parents just like everyone else.

Mord: But are they ever mentioned?

Esther: Well, no. But they never explicitly said you were my uncle, either.

Mord: An honorific, perhaps, Esther. But here comes the king.

Achash: Hello Mordecai. Thank you for arranging this contest.

Mord: You’re welcome, Your Majesty but I believe we can finish it now. I’d like to introduce you to my niece. King Achasverosh, this is Little Orphan Esther.

Achash: Hello, Little Orphan Esther. It’s nice to meet you.

Esther: I’m not an orphan. Your Majesty.

Achash: You’re not? But “Little Orphan Esther” has such a nice ring to it.

Esther: Well, the only ring I have is a Secret Decoder Ring.

Achash: So you’re here about another ring then? A wedding ring perhaps?

Esther: Perhaps. But I heard about what happened with Queen Vashti. I won’t tolerate being treated like that either.

Achash: But I am king! I demand to be obeyed.

Esthar: And ever since that demand, you’ve felt...?

Achash: Miserable.

Esther: Miserable.

Achas: Mordecai, your Niece, Little Orphan Esther—

Esther: I’m not an orphan.

Achash: —is as wise as she is beautiful. I cannot think of a better queen to rule Shushan with me.

Mord: Thank you, Your Majesty.

Achash: Esther, I would gladly make you my queen if you agree.

Esther: Well, I won’t turn down another ring.

Narrator: And so, King Achashverosh took Little Orphan Esther—

Esther: I’m not an orphan!

Narrator: —as his bride. And there was much rejoicing throughout Persia with many parties thrown in the happy couple’s honor. With much less dancing. But their happy marriage was soon to meet a decidedly devious difficulty. We’ll find out more after a word from our sponsors! (Music Punch)

(Student videos, Ancient Persian Tic Toc, Megillah)

Narrator: Welcome back to the Sinai At Sunset Radio Program. “Like a Zoom call, but better.” Brought to you by Savor Sinai. From latkes to hamentashen, Savor Sinai is great for noshin’.

(Music Punch)

Now that Shushan has a new queen, life begins to return to normal. Seeds are planted and grown to crops; grain is harvested and ground to flour; goods are traded up and down the silk road. Throughout Shushan the people live and work and play in perfect contentment. All except one. (Music Punch)

Haman: Look at you! Look at you all! Peasants at market. Don’t you know when you are in the presence of your betters? I’ll have you know that King Achashverosh’s first advisor walks among you now!

Townsperson: Really? Where?

Haman: Right here! In front of you! It is I, Haman, first advisor to the king! I demand you bow before me! Now!

Town: Oh, yes, of course. Sorry, sir!

Haman: Very good! And you: bow! You merchants, bow! And the farmers! Bow, tradesmen! Bow before me! My voice is as the king’s! Bow before Haman!

Haman: (Continued) Ah! My old rival, Mordecai, second advisor to King Achasherosh! It is good to see you.

Mordecai: Good morning, Haman. Why are all these people bowing in the market square?

Haman: They bow to me, of course. They bow to Haman! Just as you should, Second Advisor.

Mord: Oh, no, Haman, I cannot bow before you, even if I wanted to.

Haman: What? Why not? My voice is as the king’s!

Mord: I am a Jew and can only bow before Hashem. King Achashverosh understands this. You should, too.

Haman: Mordecai, you will bow before me!

Mord: No.

Haman: Bow!

Mord: No.

Haman: Bow!

Mord: No. I bid you good day, Haman.

Haman: Don’t you walk away from me, Mordecai! Don't you walk away! You get back here and bow to me! Don’t you walk away! ...He walked away. Very well. If Mordecai won’t bow to me because he is a Jew I’ll just have to get rid of him. Him and all the other Jews. The people of Shushan will see what happens when they don’t bow! Mwa-ha-ha-ha!

Narrator: As Haman retreats to plan his evil plot, the sun sets on Shushan. All the city settles in for the night, except for the palace, where a restless King Achashverosh is having trouble resting.

Achashverosh: Oh, I’m having trouble resting.

Narrator: He paces about, his mind full of idle thoughts. (footstep noises)

Achash: I can’t stop pacing! My mind is so full of Idle thoughts!

Narrator: Perhaps calling for a story from his scribe will help him sleep.

Achash: Perhaps a story from my scribe will help me sleep. Scribe! Oh, Scribe!

Scribe: Yes, Your Majesty.

Achash: I’m pacing. My mind is full of idle thoughts. I require a story to help me sleep.

Scribe: Of course, Your Majesty. I will read from our chronicle... (Reads headline from Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle)

Achash: No, not that Chronicle. The chronicle of ancient Persia.

Scribe: Yes, of course, Your Majesty....

(Music Punch)

Narrator: Who knows what evil lies in the heart of Shushan??? Mordecai knows! (Music Punch) This story within a story is also true. The names have stayed the same to refresh the king's memory. Deep in the royal cellars, Mordecai seeks to aid his king while two conspirators meet...

Mordecai: Where are those two attendants? King Achashverosh has called for more wine. I suppose I’ll have to find it myself...

Bigthan: Hello, Teresh.

Teresh: Well met, Bigthan. How are you this evening?

Big: Not well, actually. I have a terrible headache.

Ter: Funny. So do I.

Big: The king’s constant partying is keeping me up all night.

Ter: Yes, and we do all the work of governing Persia.

Mord: It sounds like they’re up to no good! I better listen closely.

Big: The palace is filled with debauchery!

Ter: And they callously leave the cleaning to us. There must be something we can do about it.

Big: Well, if the debauchery of the palace had made the king callous, I think we should just kill him.

Ter: Kill King Achashverosh? I love it! When?

Big: Tonight, after the party. We will wait for him in his room.

Ter: Perfect. But how will we kill him?

Big: I’ve been working on a trade missive with Egypt that gives me an idea. We’ll use an asp.

Ter: A what???

Big: An asp. You know, like a cobra. King Achashverosh will succumb to its stinging poison!

Ter: Yes! The debauchery of the palace is completely callous so the asp that we bring will kill the king with its sting!

Big: Perfect! And we’ll get that pesky court jester, too.

Ter: I will make for the royal snake pits at once!

Big: I will meet you as soon as I’m done with this missive from Egypt.

Mord: This is terrible! I must warn King Achashverosh! (Music Punch)

Achash: I remember now! Mordeca saved my life from those two and I haven’t been able to wear linen since. But I never rewarded him. No wonder I can’t sleep. Thank you, scribe!

Scribe: You’re welcome, Your Majesty. (He leaves)

Achash: I must repay my second advisor. But how? I know! I’ll ask my first advisor. Haman! Oh, Haman!

Haman: Yes, Your Majesty?

Achash: Haman, I need your help.

Haman: Anything, Your Majesty.

Achash: Good. I have just learned that I am sorely indebted to one of my subjects, a favorite advisor.

Haman: (aside) Favorite advisor, eh? He must mean me. Your Majesty, I am happy to help you settle this debt.

Achash: Wonderful! I knew I could count on you. What would you have me do to show my gratitude and admiration to my advisor?

Haman: Gratitude AND admiration? Well. There are the usual things, of course: silver, gold, jewels. But you should make your admiration known to all of Persia: throw a parade in my—-their—honor. Yes. They could ride atop your horse, wearing your crown for the day!!! Should you think me worthy, of course.

Achash: A worthy suggestion indeed! I shall see it done immediately. Oh, Mordecai is going to love riding my horse!

Haman: Mordecai?!?!? (Aside) That second advisor confounds me again! (To Achash) Mordecai, yes. I will see that he is suitably treated. While we’re on the subject, Your Majesty, I have been hard at work to expose an enemy of the crown.

Achash: An enemy of the crown? Is it the Babaylonians? The Greeks?

Haman: Oh, no, far worse. An enemy within. If you sign this edict I can eliminate them all.

Achash: Of course, Haman! Anything for my first advisor! (Signing SFX) Wait. This is in code.

Haman: For secrecy, Your Majesty.

Achash: I see. Well, let me get out my LIttle Orphan Esther Secret Decoder Ring... 72... 108... 216... 9. Ah. Who is the enemy?

Haman: That’s what the code says.

Achash: Yes, but It’s not clear. It’s in code. Who is the enemy?

Haman: That’s what it says. Who is the enemy.

Achash: I’m asking you.

Haman: I’m telling you. It’s in code.

Achash: So who is the enemy.

Haman: Yes.

Achash: Who?

Haman: Who.

Achash: I’m asking you.

Haman: It’s in code.

Achash: It’s in code.

Haman: Yes.

Achash: Who?

Haman: Yes, who.

Achash: I’m asking you.

Haman: It’s in code.

Achash: It’s in code.

Haman: Yes.

Achash: Who.

Haman: Yes. Rhyming code.

Achash: Oh... rhyming code.

Haman: Yes.

Achash: So, who is the enemy... Jews! Jews is the enemy!

Haman: Yes, Your Majesty.

Achash: Well that’s good. For a minute there, I thought this was a whole different ball game.

Narrator: And so, with a secret coded royal edict in hand, Haman, the Shushan Schemer, begins construction of a massive gallows from which he intends to hang all the Jews in Persia. Will his nefarious plan succeed? Will he kill all the Jews? Will he lose and will we eat? The answers to those and many more questions when we return! (Music Punch)

(Teen commercials, Megillah)

Narrator: Welcome back to our program, “Little Orphan Esther and the Shushan Schemer.” Brought to you by Sinai Brews. Sinai Brews, we put the “Beer” in Birkat ha’mazon. And the Woman of Sinai. During this Purim season, please stop to consider Esther, the real hero here.

When we left, Mordecai was to receive a parade in his honor but his nemesis, Haman was preparing to kill all the Jews in Persia. Upon hearing this, Mordecai rushes to see his niece, Queen Esther.

(Knock at door)

Esther: Come in. Oh, Uncle Mordecai, it’s you.

Mordecai: Hello Esther. How are you?

Esth: I’m very happy, Uncle Mordecai. Life in the palace is wonderful and I was so proud to see you on my husband’s horse yesterday, wearing his crown.

Mord: It was a great honor but it was short lived, as we both will be if we don’t figure out a way to stop Haman.

Esth: Stop Haman? Stop him from what?

Mord: He is angry that I will not bow down to him, and the King Achashverosh has honored me so now he has a royal edict to kill all the Jews in Persia.

Esth: Kill all the Jews in Persia? Just because we won’t bow to him?

Mord: Yes. Esther, we have to figure out how to stop him.

Esth: It’s obvious, isn’t it? We have to remind Achashverosh how much he admires you. Then he’ll stop Haman.

Mord: I’m not so sure. He knew Haman would kill me and signed the edict anyway.

Esth: That’s horrible. How am I supposed to love my husband now when he plans to kill you. And me.

Mord: Esther, that’s it! King Achashverosh must not realize you’re a Jew. You must let him know that Haman means to kill you, too.

Esth: But what if he doesn’t care? What if he lets Haman kill me?

Mord: I don’t think he will. He loves you very much.

Esth: It’s a frightening idea, Uncle Mordecai. What if he decides to kill me then and there?

Mord: You must trust that he loves you and you love him. You owe it to yourself to tell him.

Esth: I suppose. If I don’t tell him, I would never be able to live with myself.

Mord: And what if Haman tells him for you?

Esth: Then he’s sure to be angry. You’re right, Uncle Mordecai. I need to have courage and do this. It’s a shame you’re not my husband’s first advisor.

Mord: We’ll see...

Narrator: And we’ll be right back!

(Kid vids, Megillah)

Narrator: Welcome back to Sinai at Sunset Radio Theatre brought to you by Sinai Outdoors. Sinai Outdoors, when you want to be at shul but six feet of distance just isn’t enough. And by Sinai Game Night. Sinai Game Night: We’ll be back! We think. And now the conclusion of “Little Orphan Esther and the Shushan Schemer.”(Music Punch)

Narrator: Having decided to stop Haman’s plan, Queen Esther and Mordecai rush to the king’s throne room where Achashverosh is discussing business with his scribe and first advisor.

Achashverosh: You look very pleased today, Haman.

Haman: Oh, yes, Your Majesty. I’ve been building a large gallows to eliminate Persia’s enemies.

Achash: Yes, I recall signing the requisition forms.

Scribe: In triplicate.

(Entry noises)

Achash: Ah! Mordecai! Esther, my queen. Lovely to see you both.

Mordecai: Thank you , Your Majesty.

Esther: It’s good to see you, husband but not to see him!

Achash: Haman? Why would you say that of my first advisor?

Esth: He means to kill my uncle, Mordecai. A man you claim to admire.

Achash: Oh, that’s right. Mordecai is a Jew. I forgot.

Esth: But there’s more.

Achash: More?

Esth: I have a secret to tell you. 36... 126... 54... 18.

Achash: Oh! It’s in code! I remember that bit. Let me get out my Little Orphan Esther—

Esth: I’m not an orphan.

Achash: —Secret Decoder Ring. Let’s see... “Drink... your... Sinai... Brews...” Drink your Sinai Brews? You mean this whole thing is one big commercial???

Narrator: Yes, Sinai Brews. Makers of kosher style craft beer and sodas. Sinai Brews, growlers still available.

Esth: Achashverosh! It’s a rhyming code!

Achash: Oh, right! A rhyming code. Let’s see... “I... am... a... Jew.” Esther, you’re a Jew?

Esth: Yes.

Achash: Then that means...

Mord: Yes. Haman would kill your wife too.

Achash: Oh, that’s terrible. We can’t have that! Haman, you cannot kill the Jews.

Haman: Too bad, Your Majesty. Once it is signed, a royal edict cannot be rescinded.

Achash: Scribe, is that true?

Scribe: Yes, it is, Your Majesty.

Haman: Mwa-ha-ha!

Mord: But you can issue another edict, allowing the Jews to defend themselves.

Achash: Do it!

Scribe: Yes, Your Majesty!

Achash: And arrest Haman for attempted murder of the queen!

Scribe: Yes, Your Majesty!

Haman: What? No! Nooooo!

Achash: I’m glad that’s over. I never really liked him. So pompous. Thank you for telling me your secret, Little Or—I mean, Queen Esther.

Mord: It took real courage.

Esth: Than you for doing the right thing, Achashverosh.

Achash: It’s easy when you listen to your wife. Now, Who wants a Sinai Brew? I have a fresh growler right here...

Narrator: And so, life for the Jews got a little bit better in Persia, all thanks to Little Orphan—

Esther: I’m not an orphan!

Narrator: Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai. Join us Next time on the Sinai at Sunset Radio Show as we prepare for Passover with “Joseph Part One: Fifty Ways To Leave Your Brother.” Chag Purim Sameach and good night!