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# Esther's Beginning

## The Rise of a Queen

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### A Royal Search

In the grand, sprawling kingdom of King Xerxes, things were always larger than life. Picture this: a kingdom so vast that it stretched from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces in total, all ruled from the opulent city of Susa (modern-day Iran). The palace gleamed with gold, the kind of place where every wall and pillar seemed to shout, "Behold, the power of the king!"

In the third year of King Xerxes' reign, he decided to throw a series of parties. For six whole months, dignitaries from every corner of the empire feasted on the finest foods and drank from goblets that could



probably pay off the debt of a small country. And when that wasn't enough, Xerxes hosted another banquet, this time for everyone in Susa, which lasted seven days. Think of it as the ultimate after-party.

While the king and his guests reveled in their extravagant shindig, Queen Vashti held her banquet for the women in the royal palace. On the seventh day, feeling particularly high-spirited, Xerxes summoned Vashti, wanting to show off her beauty to his guests—because, apparently, flaunting his wealth wasn't enough. But Vashti refused to play along, and this wasn't the kind of kingdom where you could just say "no" to the king.

Xerxes was furious. He called his advisors, the ancient world's equivalent of a crisis PR team, and asked what to do. Their advice? Depose Queen Vashti to set an example. And so, Vashti was out, and the search for a new queen began.

### A Young Girl Named Esther

Enter Esther. She was just an ordinary Jewish girl living in Susa, or as ordinary as one could be in such extraordinary times. Orphaned at a young age, she was raised by her cousin Mordecai, a man as kind as he was wise.

When the king's decree reached their neighborhood, Esther was scooped up along with other young women and taken to the palace. Before she left, Mordecai gave her a piece of advice that would shape her destiny: "Keep your Jewish heritage a secret."

Esther, being the smart and obedient girl she was, did exactly that.

## The Palace Life

Life in the palace was like stepping into a different world. Esther received beauty treatments that made spa days look like a quick rinse at the sink. She was under the care of the king's attendants, and among them was Hegai, the head of the harem. Hegai took an instant liking to Esther, showering her with special treatment and giving her the best accommodations.

Every day, Mordecai paced near the palace gates, anxious for news about Esther. He probably looked like a father waiting outside an exam hall, hoping his kid nailed the test. And Esther? She was acing everything without even trying. When her turn came to meet King Xerxes, she didn't request anything special—she just followed Hegai's advice to keep things simple. Everyone who saw her was struck by her natural beauty and grace.

## A New Queen is Crowned

When King Xerxes finally met Esther, he was spellbound. Here was a girl who didn't need flashy jewels or fancy gowns to outshine everyone else. Her charm was enough to win the king's heart. He placed the royal crown on her head and declared her queen, celebrating with yet another lavish banquet in her honor.

Mordecai was made an official at the palace, which meant he could keep an even closer eye on Esther.

Even as queen, Esther continued to heed Mordecai's advice, just as she had when she lived under his roof. But little did they know, this was just the beginning of Esther's story. Her new role would soon thrust her into a life-or-death struggle that would determine the fate of her people.

## Reflective Questions:

- **Bravery:** Have you ever had to hide a part of who you are to protect yourself or someone else? How did it feel?
- **Kindness:** Think of a time when someone went out of their way to help you. How did their kindness impact your life?

**Stay tuned for the next episode where Mordecai discovers a dangerous plot and Esther's courage is put to the test!**