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Boston

THE STORY OF PURIM

THE PARTY

IT ALL BEGAN LONG AGO IN SHUSHAN, THE CAPITAL OF ANCIENT PERSIA IN THE 4TH CENTURY BCE.

Three years after **King Achashveros** ascended the Persian throne, he celebrated by throwing a grand party for all his subjects. Achashveros commanded his wife **Vashti** to attend the party and dance for his guests, but she refused. Achashveros was advised to find a new queen.

THE BEAUTY CONTEST

The king's advisors suggested that he host a beauty pageant. Officers were appointed to find all the beautiful ladies in the land, who were brought to him. The most beautiful one would become the new queen. **Esther**, the niece of **Mordechai**, was brought against her will. Mordechai told her to conceal her Jewish identity. Esther was chosen to be the queen.

MORDECHAI TO THE RESCUE

Shortly after Esther became queen, Mordechai overheard two of the king's chamberlains discussing a plot to assassinate the king. Mordechai had them reported, and the traitors were hanged.

THE RISE OF HAMAN

Haman, one of the King's ministers, was promoted to Prime Minister. The king issued a decree ordering everyone to bow down to Haman. When Mordechai refused to bow down, Haman was infuriated. He resolved to take revenge against all the Jews and threw lots (known as "pur" and the plural is "Purim!") to determine the day when he would implement his plan. The lot fell on the 13th day of the Hebrew month of Adar.

A royal decree was made to destroy the Jews and plunder their possessions on that date.

ESTHER TO THE RESCUE

Mordechai sent a copy of the decree to Esther and asked her to intercede with the king. Esther replied that to approach the king without being summoned was to risk death. Mordechai told her that she had no choice. Esther asked Mordechai to ask the Jews to fast and pray with her for three days and then she would approach the king.

THE FIRST FEAST

After three days of fasting, Esther entered Achashveros's chambers. King Achashveros received Esther and said that he would grant her virtually any request. Esther's request was that the king and Haman join her at two banquets. After the first banquet, Haman saw Mordechai, who once again refused to bow down to him. **Zeresh**, Haman's wife, suggested that Mordechai be hanged and the gallows were prepared.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The king couldn't sleep and asked to hear the royal chronicles. For the first time, the king learned of the assassination plot that Mordechai had revealed. That same night, Haman came to see the king about hanging Mordechai.

Before Haman could speak, the king told Haman to honor Mordechai by dressing him in royal garments, placing him on a royal stallion and to personally lead him through the streets of Shushan. Haman could not refuse.

THE SECOND FEAST

At the second banquet, Esther revealed her Jewish identity and announced that she and her people were about to be killed. Esther identified Haman as her arch enemy. The king had Haman hung on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordechai.

THINGS GET BETTER

Mordechai was then named prime minister to replace Haman. A second royal decree was made empowering the Jews to stand up to anyone who would try to harm them. With Mordechai as Prime Minister, Persia flourished.

The role of Mordechai in the history of the Persian Empire is recorded in the king's chronicles and Queen Esther is remembered for her inner strength and her commitment to the Jewish people.

THE HOLIDAY OF PURIM

Mordechai and Esther established a holiday to commemorate these amazing events and wrote a firsthand account known as "Megillat Esther," or the Scroll of Esther. The Megillah is read twice in the course of the festival: on the eve of Purim and on the day of Purim.

In addition, Esther and Mordechai initiated the Purim practices of a festive meal, the exchange of gifts of food, and the giving of monetary gifts to the poor. Jews worldwide celebrate on the 14th of Adar.

This holiday, called "Purim," is the most joyous holiday on the Jewish calendar and is known by the phrase, "Be Happy – It's Adar!"

