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# THE PURIM BASKET

BY

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NEW YORK  
BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY

*"The Jewish Book Concern"*

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# THE PURIM BASKET

## CHARACTERS

### FOR ACT I.

MRS. HERMAN.

MRS. LEVY, her mother.

LEAH HERMAN, her daughter (thirteen years old).

NORA, her servant.

### FOR ACT II.

MRS. WEIMAN.

ESTHER, her twelve-year-old daughter.

SAM, her ten-year-old son.

MOSES, her seven-year-old son.

## ACT I.

SCENE: *A pretty sitting-room. Table on which lamp is burning, in center. Chairs, etc., on the side. Curtain goes up on scene. Leah is seated in a cozy armchair near table, reading the "Book of Esther." She reads aloud:*

LEAH—"For Mordecai, the Jew, was next unto King Ahasuerus and great among the Jews, seeking the weal of his people and speaking peace to all of his seed." *(Closes book and sits meditating.)* Well, that is a wonderful story. To think of a poor young Jewish girl not only becoming queen, but such a queen! How proud Mordecai must have been of her! Let me see now, what did the Book of Esther say about King Ahasuerus' first wife—*(She opens book and settles herself back to read, when Grandma Levy comes into the room.)*

MRS. LEVY—What are you reading, dear?

LEAH—The story of Purim. Do you know,

Grandma, I think I like the story better than any. (*Grandma seats herself at table opposite. Leah rises quickly and says*):

LEAH—Sit here, Grandma; this is such a comfy chair. (*Grandma crosses and seats herself.*) I'll take this stool and (*seats herself at Grandma's feet*) we can talk. Do you remember how on every Purim eve you used to tell me this story. Now I can read it for myself. It is my favorite Bible story. It is so like a grand fairy-tale. Imagine Esther, a poor Jewish girl, being loved by a real king!

GRANDMA—Yes, it is wonderful in many ways. Imagine a poor young girl having the wisdom to save a whole race from death, as Esther did.

LEAH—I wonder whether she was very much frightened the first time she went to invite her king to banquet with her? I should have been scared to death in her place.

GRANDMA—You are a very little girl, dear, but Esther was by that time the greatest lady in the land, and she was sure of two things—first, that King Ahasuerus loved her and wanted to be just; and, secondly, that her uncle, Mordecai, was near at hand to advise her for her good, and the good of her people.

LEAH—I wouldn't have liked to have been in Haman's boots! Brother Louis would say of him: "Gee, but he had a mean disposition! Well, he got all that was coming to him, didn't he?"

GRANDMA—That sentence, too, was quite worthy of Louis. By the way, where did Louis go this evening? I forget.

LEAH—He went to Joe Lehman's Purim party. I wish some one had invited me—I like parties—

MOTHER (*entering with tray on which are Purim cakes, apples and nuts*)—Come and help yourself then. (*Places tray on table*). Grandma, put your knitting away. (*Takes cake and begins eating it. Leah does the same.*) Grandma, these are the best Hamans you ever baked.

LEAH—I don't think even the cakes named after Haman should be good, when they represent such a man. I say, "Off with his head." (*She bites his head off.*)

MOTHER—Even Louis couldn't be having a better party than this, now, could he?

LEAH—The eating is good, all right, but he is having packs of fun, and I'm not. Did you have fun on Purim, Mother?

MOTHER (*looking at Grandma*)—Did we have fun! The Jewish holidays were very dear to us, for they were our principal means of diversion. Nowadays, you children have so much to interest and amuse you, that Purim and the fun it brought with it for us would seem insignificant to you.

LEAH—Oh, no, Mother dear. But please tell me all about it, and let me judge for myself. I wish I had lived in your time! (*Leah sighs.*) I really think from the many things you have told me you had more really, truly fun than we.

MOTHER—Well, to begin with, my sisters and I loved Purim for the masquerading.

GRANDMA—I wish our families lived now in as small a radius as in those times.

MOTHER—That's it. You couldn't dress up as we did, and go from one aunt's house to another, because we are scattered over the four points of the city. Then, all our families lived in one neighborhood, and we went from house to house in fancy costume.

LEAH—Tell me how you dressed, please?

GRANDMA—Your mother looked the funniest of all my daughters. I remember you well (*turning to her daughter, who gets up and puts her arms around the old lady's neck and smooths her hair*), decked out in my house-dress, spectacles, bonnet and shawl. Your hair was twisted in a knot at the back of your head, and you made wrinkles on your face with burnt cork, to give you the appearance of being real old.

LEAH—Oh, how funny! What did you do then?

MOTHER (*seating herself beside Leah*)—Then we each filled a little basket with cakes, spools and needles and went on our way.

LEAH—Oh, it must have been grand!

MOTHER—Our aunts gave us cake and apples to eat, and bought our wares.

LEAH—Didn't they know you?

MOTHER—If they did they pretended not to. Once, I remember, we rang the bell at Aunt Eva's house. We must have looked like frights, because the maid opened the door, and when she saw the three of us old women standing there, she cried, "Howly murder" and slammed the door in our faces.

LEAH (*jumping up and throwing her arms about her mother impulsively*)—Mother, do me a favor?

MOTHER—Can't say till I hear it.

LEAH (*running to Grandma*)—You'll back me up, won't you?

GRANDMA (*kissing Leah*)—You wheedler! What is it? Out with it, and, like King Ahasuerus said, "If it be half my kingdom, I'll give it to you."

LEAH—It is—please let me—I'd love you so much for it—I want to masquerade this evening, and

go over to Joe's house to surprise Louis and the rest of the party. If I sell my wares I'll share the money with you both.

MOTHER (*laughing, and looking at Grandma*)—Shall I? (*Grandma nods approval.*)

GRANDMA—I'll call Nora to assist me in getting your costume and basket ready, while you, Rachel, tell her what you did with the money you earned from selling the contents of the basket. (*Grandma goes out calling, "Nora, come help me," etc.*)

MOTHER—Sit here, Leah. (*Leah does so, and Mother twists her hair into a knot. She then blackens a cork over the lamp to line her face, talking as she does so.*) With the money we had given to us we bought groceries and meats for our wash-woman, and the next day we filled a large hamper (we called it a "Purim basket"), and carried it to the poor soul, and made her happy.

NORA (*entering with her arms full of things. She is followed by Grandma*)—In shur'n ye'll be a purty sight wid these things on. The polaceman will be aftyr yer, so he will.

LEAH—Quit your nonsense, Nora, and help me on. (*Nora makes herself busy; all of a sudden she sees Leah's face, which has been made to look funny by Mother. Leah has put Grandma's glasses on, also her bonnet.*)

NORA—Howly murder, Miss Leah, hev you sphoylt yer purty face? Ye'll frighten the divil hisself ef yer walk the straits like that.

LEAH (*laughing, all the time being dressed by Mother and Grandma*)—To-morrow we'll walk the streets with a full basket to Mrs. Weiman's house, and then you'll sing another tune. Come, Nora, get me one of your clean gingham aprons.



(*Nora takes one off, which she has under her white one. She ties it around Leah.*)

MOTHER—Nora, will you please escort this poor old lady around to Lehman's house, and wait for her there? (*Nora and Leah are looking at each other and laughing.*) If you laugh you'll spoil it all and then you'll have no money with which to buy your Purim basket.

LEAH—May I put a dollar of my birthday money to what I get for these (*holding up basket*) for Mrs. Washwoman?

MOTHER—Yes, dear—now, go. Come, Nora! (*Mother and Grandma stand to one side, laughing, as Leah, who looks very quaint and funny, takes Nora's arm and the two march out to slow music.*)

CURTAIN.

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## ACT II.

SCENE: *A shabby room in a poor home. (Mrs. Weiman standing to the right over a tub, washing. To the left of the stage, seated on a stool, is a girl of twelve—Esther. At her feet, on the floor, are two boys—Sam, ten years old, and Moses, seven years old.)*

ESTHER—And that is the reason she was called good Queen Esther.

SAM—And you are named after her, is it not?

MOSES—Were you called Esther 'cause you're so awful nice and good and—

ESTHER (*holding up an admonishing finger*)—Here, here—no taffy, or you'll turn my head. The girls in school say I'm stuck up already. Dear knows what I'll be if two such lovely gentlemen as you pay me compliments.

SAM—Now, yer kidding us. Say, Esther, tell us, was yer called Essie after the queen?

ESTHER—I was born on Purim. That's why! Say, boys, let's pretend I'm the queen.

MOSES—Queens wear long dresses and things on their hair. I saw a picture once, and I knows.

ESTHER—A train! That's easy! (*She gets up, followed by the boys, runs to the table, pulls off cover, and ties it around her waist. In the meantime Sam is twisting a crown for her out of some paper flowers which he has taken from a vase.*)

SAM—Here, Essie, is a crown. Let me put it on your head.

ESTHER—I never yet heard a queen nicknamed. (*Turning suddenly on the boys.*) In the future please address me as Queen Esther, and beware should you forget!

SAM—May I be the king? I love you really as much as did Esther's king love her.

MOSES—I want to play, too. I'll be the fellow what sat on the horse. (*Moses turns a chair upside down and sits astride.*)

SAM—Who'll be the mean guy what wanted to kill them all. Say, mommer (*running over to the tub and addressing his mother, who has been rubbing the clothes*), will you pretend you're Ha—

ESTHER (*walking across the room with dignity*)—Mr. Haman was his name. Will you play, mamma?

MRS. WEIMAN—Bless your little hearts. Don't you see I'm head over ears in work? Mrs. Herman wants this wash back as soon as I can get it ready. I never did have no time for play. Ever since yer father died I've been working—working—working!

MOSES (*beginning to cry*)—Yer spoiled all our fun.

SAM—Mordecai, you're a cry-baby. Men doesn't cry unless they're hurt. Ain't it so, Essie—I mean my queen?

ESTHER—All you got to do, Mamma, is to answer when we talk to you, and that won't take your mind from your work. (*Esther goes up and pats Mother on cheek*). When I've finished this game I'll help you, Mumsy dear. You look tired.

MOTHER (*stops rubbing to look after Esther*)—She's as fine a girl as ever lived, and I'm mighty proud of her.

ESTHER—Now, boys, attention. Remember, I'm Queen Esther, and when I speak to you, please answer me as you would a queen.

SAM—But I'm a king. If it wasn't for me you never would be such a grand lady.

MOSES—And I'm yer uncle what brung yer up. Don't yer really think I'm the importantest one in the bunch?

ESTHER—If Mordecai really spoke like that he would not have been allowed even to sit at the gate of the palace. Make way, I'm coming. (*Advances toward Sam.*) Oh King, I come to invite you to attend my feast. Will you come?

SAM—You bet—I—I mean—yes, your queenship. I'll be there with my appetite.

ESTHER—Won't you bring Haman along, too?

MOSES—Where do I come in? I want some feast. I don't like this Mordecai business.

ESTHER—Can't you wait? You'll get the left-overs.

SAM—There ain't going to be no left-overs. I said I'd bring my appetite along.

ESTHER (*nudging Sam*)—Go over and ask Haman to come along.

MOSES—Say, won't you let me be Haman. Mommer will make a grand Mordecai.

ESTHER—Very well. Mummys won't mind—will you?

MRS. WEIMAN—I guess what you'll eat at the feast won't upset your digestion.

ESTHER—My king, what says Haman?

SAM—He says, sure he'll come. What's the hour?

ESTHER (*pretending to consult a watch*)—Let us make it at once. By the way, my king, do you like turkey or duck?

MOSES—Say, me mouth's a-watering already.

SAM—I like my dinner done brown. Use your own taste and I'll like it.

ESTHER—My king is gracious. What says Mr. Haman?

MOSES—If yer mean me, I likes anything what's good. Make it turkey.

ESTHER—Now leave me, noble gentlemen, while I set the table. (*Esther goes toward the center of room to the table, when a knock is heard on the door.*)

MRS. WEIMAN—Goodness gracious! who can that be, at this hour? (*Dries her hands on her apron. Esther goes to open the door. Boys run to the front corner of the stage. Leah enters with Nora. They are in street attire, and each carry a filled basket.*)

MRS. WEIMAN—I haven't your wash near done, if it's that you're after.

LEAH—No, Mrs. Weiman, Mother is in no hurry for it. I came to wish you "Gut Purim."

MRS. WEIMAN—That was good of you. Sam, bring the young lady a chair. Won't you sit down?

LEAH—May we put our baskets down? (*Suiting action to the word.*) Thank you. Now, Nora, set the table. (*Nora busies herself, taking the things out of the basket and placing them on the table. The boys move near her and stare at her. Mrs. Weiman stands at the other side, looking on in astonishment.*)

ESTHER—Is this a Purim feast for us. You are good to us.

SAM—It came just in time for our play. Now Moses will be glad that he changed his character from Mordecai to Haman.

MRS. WEIMAN—Oh, what a feast this will be, Esther—the right kind for your birthday.

LEAH—Is this your birthday?

ESTHER—Yes, I was born on Purim, and we always celebrate it on the anniversary of that holiday.

MRS. WEIMAN—We've had few celebrations since her father died, but now—

MOSES—Oh, look at the turkey!

SAM—Queen Esther, you're in luck. Say, let's invite Mordecai.

LEAH—Where is Mordecai, and why do they call you Queen Esther?

MOSES—We was just playing when you came in. Mommer was Mordecai, I was Haman, and Sam was the king. Won't you stay and play with us?

NORA—In shur'n yer mither said as how yer was to cum straight home, Miss.

LEAH—Yes, I must go. I trust you will spend a pleasant holiday. (*Bowing low to Esther.*) Your Majesty, I bid you farewell. Good-bye, Mrs. Weiman. (*Shakes hands all around, and goes out. fol-*

lowed by Nora. Leah, Sam, Moses and Mrs. Weiman stand around the table.)

MRS. WEIMAN (*in center*)—God has always been kind to us on Purim. It was on Purim that you, my Esther, came to brighten our home, and now He has again heard my prayer.

ESTHER—This shall be my Purim birthday party. Come, sit down and let's begin. See, Moses is all impatience!

SAM—Me, too. Let's fall to.

MRS. WEIMAN—First we'll thank God for all His kindness to us.

ESTHER—And give three cheers for Leah, who brought it around.

MOSES—Hurrah for the Hermans!

SAM—Hurrah for Purim!

ESTHER—Hurrah for my birthday!

MRS. WEIMAN—Hurrah for the Purim feast!

CURTAIN.

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