

Hoist with His Own Pitard

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*"Hoist with his own pitard" is a phrase from Shakespeare's play **Hamlet**. A pitard was a small bomb used to blow holes in castle walls during an attack. If the man using the bomb was careless... well, he could get thrown up into the air (or hoist) when the bomb exploded. The phrase means that someone sets a trap for another person, but gets caught in it himself.*

The book of Esther tells us about a man named Haman, whose hatred for the Jews—and for one Jew in particular—nearly caused the death of every Jew in the Persian Empire. But Haman's plan backfired because no one knew that King Xerxes's beloved new queen, a brave young woman named Esther, was also a Jew.

The entire book tells us how the Jews were saved and how that event gave birth to the holiday they call Purim. But this story, about how Haman fell into his own trap, is told in Esther 5-7.

Haman was feeling pretty proud of himself.

He'd teach that Mordecai not to disrespect him!
King Xerxes had just promoted him to the post of prime minister,
but that Jew refused to bow to him. How dare he!
Haman didn't care that Mordecai was also an official of the king—
after all, the other officials bowed down when he passed by.
Well, now he'd convinced the king that ALL the Jews were against him
and the king had issued an order to let Haman wipe them out.
Now it was just a matter of time and preparation.

Of course, the Jews weren't against King Xerxes at all.

Mordecai himself had prevented an attempt to kill the king
and it was in the royal records, if anyone cared to look.
Haman had not.

Nor did Haman—or any other official, for that matter—

know that the king's new queen was a Jew.
And not just any Jew, but the adopted daughter of Mordecai!
When the king had first chosen her as part of his royal harem,
Mordecai had advised her to keep her race and family ties secret,
because the Jews had often been mistreated by the previous rulers.
And when the time came to choose a new queen
Xerxes fell madly in love with her, and chose her to rule with him.

When Mordecai heard about Haman's plan, he became very depressed.

Esther sent messengers to find out what was wrong with him,
and he told her about the king's order, begging her to talk to the king.
It was dangerous to approach the king unless he called her,
but she knew she had to do something.
So she asked Mordecai and all the Jews to pray for her,
that she might get a chance to talk to the king.

Three days later she got her chance.

She put on her royal robes and walked into the inner court of the palace,
where Xerxes could see her.

And the king was pleased to see her, and he invited her into his presence.

“What do you want, my queen? I will give it to you,
even if it’s half my kingdom!”

“If it pleases Your Majesty,” she said, “please come today to a banquet
I have prepared for you and Haman.”

Xerxes was pleased, and sent immediately for Haman to come.

And afterward, as they all sat drinking wine together, Xerxes smiled and said,

“Now, Esther, tell me what you *really* want. As I said, I will give it to you,
even if it’s half my kingdom.”

And Esther said, “This is my deepest wish.

Tomorrow I will prepare another banquet for you.

If you are truly pleased with me, come to it, both you and Haman.

I will tell you my request then.”

Haman went home, completely full of himself!

He bragged to his family about the honors he was receiving...

but said he couldn’t enjoy them because of Mordecai.

So his wife suggested he build a gallows, so he could hang Mordecai,
and he could ask the king’s permission before the banquet.

But God was moving to protect Esther, Mordecai and the Jews.

That night King Xerxes had trouble sleeping, so he asked his attendants
to bring some of his empire’s historical records and read to him.

And as they read to him, he discovered how Mordecai had saved his life.

“Has this man Mordecai ever been rewarded for his service?” he asked.

The attendants checked the records. “No, Your Majesty.”

Haman had just entered the royal courts, hoping to see the king
and ask for permission to hang Mordecai.

Xerxes heard him and asked the attendants, “Who is out there?”

“Haman,” they said.

So the king called him in and asked, “Haman,
how should I honor a man who truly pleases me?”

And Haman, so sure that the king meant him, said,

“You should clothe him in one of your own robes,
sit him on your own horse, and

have a prince lead the horse through the middle of the city, shouting,

“This is what happens to those the king wishes to honor!”

That pleased the king. So he told Haman to do this for Mordecai,
and to make sure he did it exactly as they discussed!

After he had done so, Haman went home, humiliated.
His wife suggested that it might be a bad time to try and hang Mordecai...

But things got worse.

When Haman arrived at the banquet, the king repeated his promise to Esther:
“Now, my queen, tell me what you *really* want. As I said, I will give it to you,
even if it’s half my kingdom.”

And Esther said,
“If I have pleased you, Your Majesty, I beg you to save me and my people
from the evil man who would destroy us.”

The king was outraged! “Who would DARE to move against my queen?”
And Esther pointed at Haman. “Haman is the wicked man who has done it.”

At that, Haman turned white with fear.
When Xerxes rushed into the royal garden to call his attendants,
Haman fell on his hands and knees before Esther, begging her to help him.
But when the king came back in, he roared,
“Will you even assault my queen here in the palace as I watch?”
Then the attendants dragged Haman away
and hanged him on the very gallows he had intended for Mordecai.

The Jews—and Queen Esther—weren’t safe just because Haman had been hanged.
The decree of a Persian king could not be revoked,
even if the king himself desired to do so.
But King Xerxes loved Queen Esther very much
and determined that he would find a way to save both her and her people.

That, however, is another story.