

Barabbas

By

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DEDICATION

To Dr Bob, a true servant.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Barabbas, a thief and rebel, dreams of leading a free Judea. He is captured and sentenced to die, but on the eve of his execution, he is reprieved and a rabbi, Jesus, dies instead. Barabbas is pleased about this until rumors start that the dead rabbi has risen and is now very much alive. Jealous and resentful, Barabbas plots to expose the resurrection as a fraud, thus regaining his own position as leader, but his plot goes awry when he himself comes face to face with the living, breathing Jesus.

Few Easter plays are written from Barabbas' point of view, much less with such richly nuanced characters. From the opening, bracing violence to Barabbas' final line, "Because he died for me," this play is utterly absorbing, compelling and ultimately uplifting.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Large, flexible cast; much doubling possible.)

Barabbas: Leader of the thieves.
Ashkan: Barabbas' second-in-command.
Rachel: Loves Barabbas.
Hannah: Ashkan's wife.
Esther: Rachel's mother.
Thief: Steals purses; shares cell with Barabbas.
Jesus
Pilate
Roman Soldiers 1, 2, and 3
Bandit 1
Gossips 1, 2, and 3

Additional characters with minimal or no lines

Roman Soldiers
Barabbas' group of Bandits
Customers at the inn and marketplace
Merchants including draper, bird seller and coin trader
Prosperous Man
Prosperous Man's Bodyguards
Pilate's Servant
Musicians
Temple Priests 1 and 2

NOTE: There is some {historically-based} violence described in a few stage directions within the script. For some audiences, directors may arrange it so the actors face upstage or surround the victim so the action is implied rather than actually seen.

SETTINGS

*As far as scenery is concerned, remember less is more.
Use a few pieces to suggest a place rather than trying to be
completely authentic.*

Act I

Scene 1: At a well on an isolated road.

Scene 2: An inn in Jerusalem.

Scene 3: The temple courtyard.

Scene 4: The prison cell, Tuesday morning.

Scene 5: The prison cell, Thursday night.

Scene 6: Pilate's courtyard, a few moments later.

Scene 7: An alley, narrow and deserted, shortly later.

Scene 8: The inn, Friday morning.

Scene 9: The inn, later that day.

Act II

Scene 1: The inn, Sunday morning, early.

Scene 2: An alley, narrow and deserted.

Scene 3: The inn, days later.

Scene 4: Vignettes, separated by lighting.

Scene 5: The inn.

Scene 6: An alley.

Scene 7: The inn.

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Act I Scene 1

(AT RISE: A well on an isolated road. Three ROMAN SOLDIERS enter and approach the well. They are tired and thirsty. SOLDIER 1 pulls up the bucket, scoops a cup of water and drinks. SOLDIERS 2 and 3 watch him, their thirst obvious. They also glance around, warily. Soldier 1 hands the cup to Soldier 2, who drinks. Soldier 3 waits his turn, eagerly. Unseen by the distracted soldiers, BANDITS enter and sneak towards the well, surrounding the soldiers. The bandits are led by BARABBAS, and include ASHKAR. They sneak nearer to the soldiers. Soldier 3 drinks and Soldier 2 steps away from the well, his back to Barabbas. Barabbas stabs him. The action is casual, without passion or emotion. Soldier 2 falls. Alerted, Soldiers 1 and 3 turn. Ashkar kills Soldier 1 with the same lack of passion as Barabbas used. Soldier 3 draws his sword. The bandits encircle him, trapping him. Clearly terrified, he has no choice but to fight. Barabbas steps forward and gives a mocking bow, and they fight. Barabbas disarms and overpowers Soldier 3. He forces the soldier to his knees and puts his dagger to the captive's throat.)

JESUS: *(Offstage.)* NO!

(Startled, BANDITS wheel round towards the shout, weapons ready. BARABBAS halts the execution but does not release SOLDIER 3. JESUS enters. He moves through the bandits towards Barabbas, arms held out in supplication. Barabbas laughs, contemptuously.)

BARABBAS: Jesus of Nazareth.

JESUS: This is not the way, Barabbas.

(SOLDIER 3 fixes his gaze on JESUS.)

JESUS: *(Cont'd.)* Be merciful, that the Lord your God may show you mercy.

BARABBAS: You want this scum, Rabbi?

JESUS: Yes. I want him.

BARABBAS: Then he's yours.

(HE slits SOLDIER 3's throat and lets the dying man go. Soldier 3 crumples. JESUS gives a cry of anguish, falls to his knees and cradles the soldier. Barabbas lazily wipes his dagger clean, leads the BANDITS away and they exit. Soldier 3 reaches up and clings to Jesus' robe. Jesus comforts him. Soldier 3 dies and Jesus grieves.)

Blackout

Scene 2

(AT RISE: An inn in Jerusalem. There is a bar where drinks are served, tables and seats. A door exits to the street, a window near this. To the other side is a curtained doorway, and beyond this a private courtyard with a small table and chairs. People sit, drinking, talking, socializing. RACHEL moves among them, serving drinks. Rachel is pretty, confident and ready to smile. At the bar, ESTHER, her mother, works and talks to HANNAH, a customer who is also Ashkar's wife. Esther is careworn and down to earth. Rachel approaches the bar as they speak.)

HANNAH: I don't know what else I can do, Esther. I'm so frightened for him. It's as if Barabbas has him under some kind of spell.

ESTHER: It's the same with my Rachel. He walks in and her common sense flies away.

HANNAH: And to what end? They can't win.

RACHEL: Don't let Barabbas hear you say that.

End of Freeview

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