

THE FINAL EXCHANGE

By Robert J. Hammett

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DEDICATION

To Phil and Polly Conner. Thank you for never giving up on me.

STORY OF THE PLAY

An incarcerated Barabbas is being attacked on three different sides: A Roman soldier set on avenging his brother's death, a crazy man he has to share a cell with, and his own memories of a life full of anger and doubt that has plagued him for as long as he can remember. If the soldier doesn't kill him, he is painfully aware of his own impending crucifixion just a few days away. In the middle of all this turmoil, a voice of reason and hope presents itself in the form of a cranky old cleaning woman. She reaches out to Barabbas, but unfortunately, her mission of mercy falls on deaf ears, as Barabbas will have nothing to do with her. A race against time is being run. The salvation of one man's soul appears to be the prize, but just as you think you know the price that must be paid, not everyone is who they appear to be.

Setting: The jail cell should be SR and the crosses, SL.

Props: Bowl and cup.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 2 w, 1 child, voice)

BARABBAS: 30 – 45-year-old man that goes through a metamorphosis. At first he is an angry man with no love for anyone, including himself. Then he starts to open up and shows a wide display of emotions such as regret, frustration, angst, fear, etc.

CRAZY MAN: A smaller man around 18 - 30 years of age. He is a mystery (possessed) until the end of the play. His character must be a constant source of annoyance to Barabbas, but never tries to be the center of attention until the showdown at the end. The best way to play this part is to make the character part child, part scared puppy dog, and part lunatic. The biggest challenge for the actor will be to switch from personality to personality.

JESUS: Mid-thirties. He is already on the cross when Barabbas makes his way to the hill. He should be bloody and torn.

WOMAN: Small, fearless, and strangely annoying woman, 40 - 50 years old. It is as if she is holding a secret, and she can't let Barabbas learn the truth (she is an angel) until the final card can be played. She will take a lot of verbal abuse from Barabbas, but will not retaliate. When talking to God, her character is obedient to a task, but shows many signs of confusion as to the specifics of the task. A symptom of not knowing the entire picture will infiltrate the audience. This is important to the plot. She will start to mellow as her relationship with Barabbas strengthens. She will lend the only voice of reason through the entire performance.

ROMAN SOLDIER: Commanding and angry, in his late 20's. He has only two pursuits: dedication to the Roman Empire, and to avenge his brother's death at the hands of Barabbas.

SARAH: 25 – 35 years old. Barabbas' helper in their cause.

YOUNG CHILD: 12 - 16-year-old street child.

VOICE: From offstage.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: BARABBAS is standing CS with a SPOTLIGHT coming down on him as if he is being interrogated. He is looking around as if he were hearing voices. Optional effect: smoke across the whole stage.)

BARABBAS: *(To audience.)* You can't lay that at my feet. I just did what I had to do to get the people to see the slavery they were under. I never thought that they would hunt us down. *(Turns SR to another voice.)* Don't blame me for your mother, I don't even know who she was. You can't blame me for all of this. *(Turns SL, points to the darkness. Fear starts to show on his face.)* That ... that can't be for me. I was just speaking my mind. It's not my fault it got out of hand. I don't deserve that. No, not that. *(Angry.)* Not that!

VOICE: *(Offstage or over the sound system.)* You incited a riot, Barabbas. *(Barabbas looks up, then in different directions, trying to find the speaker.)* You moved forces into play that should never have been moved, and now, people are dead. You are an enemy of the state, and must pay for your crimes.

BARABBAS: *(Looking back to audience, anger showing.)* It had to be done. We were dying in the streets. If you would've stood beside me, maybe we could have stood a chance. You are apathetic in your attitude. To think that it will all be made right, it is a fool's illusion. Our God is not going to deliver us again. We've used up all the miracles He has to give out. It was time to fight!

CHILD: *(Standing SR, a LIGHT comes up on him/her.)* And what about my mother? Was she just a casualty of your little war? I don't have anyone now. At least before, I had her. You ... you stole her from me. She was killed because of you, you ... murderer.

BARABBAS: *(To Child.)* No. No, it wasn't me. I didn't have anything to do with that. She shouldn't have been in the street that day. Didn't she see what was happening?

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BARABBAS: *(Cont'd.)* Why can't you see what is happening to our people? We are dying!

SOLDIER: *(Comes out of the darkness directly behind Barabbas and grabs him by the back of the neck.)* Yes, you are correct about that. You are dying, but not in the way that you think. There is blood on your hands, and it is time for a reckoning. Are you ready to pay for your sins, Barabbas? Are you ready to die for your cause?

BARABBAS: *(Frightened.)* No, not that. I don't deserve that. It is not meant for me. Why are you doing this? Why won't you answer me? I only did what I had to do. Answer me!

(LIGHTS go out. BARABBAS and SOLDIER take their places on and near the cross at SL. Barabbas is on the cross when the LIGHTS come up. The Soldier is finishing the final nail in his right wrist. Barabbas is crying out in pain.)

BARABBAS: *(On the cross.)* No ... no. Can't you see? It's not supposed to be me. *(Yelling.)* It's not supposed to be me.

(LIGHTS out. End of scene.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: LIGHT up on CRAZY MAN standing over the head of Barabbas' cot as he sleeps. Black lights, positioned to light up the Crazy Man's florescent face make-up, will be the only lights on until Barabbas wakes up from his nightmare that the Crazy Man is delivering. Barabbas tosses and moans in his bed, quietly saying "No, no, no." Barabbas wakes and shouts a loud "No," and the cell LIGHTS come up full. The Crazy Man jumps onto the bed as Barabbas rolls out of it and crawls over to the other side of the cell cowering. Realizing it was only a bad nightmare, Barabbas strikes out in anger and kicks over his eating bowl and cup. Crazy Man jumps behind the bed and pretends to cower from an angry Barabbas. It is important that the Crazy Man pokes and jabs at Barabbas whenever he can, but not to the point that it takes away from some of the important plot lines.)

BARABBAS: *(To Crazy Man.)* What are you looking at?

(CRAZY MAN looks at him from across the cell.)

WOMAN: *(From offstage.)* I see that you are being chased by the demons that fill your dreams.

BARABBAS: *(Startled, looking around,.)* What? Who is ...? Come into the light.

WOMAN: *(Stepping from behind SR wall that represents the outside of the building and into the light.)* Come into the light! *(Walking out a little farther, pondering the question for emphasis.)* Yes ... I suppose it will all come down to that. But before you can come into the light, you must first be willing to leave the darkness behind. *(She stops at the left side of the cell looking at Barabbas.)*

BARABBAS: Oh, you're talking like a crazy woman. Bad enough I'm stuck in this cell with a lunatic, but now I have an old woman coming down to harass me. Will there be no end to my torment?

End of Freeview

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