

A man with a grey beard and a black cap is looking to the right. He is wearing a dark, heavy coat with a white fur collar. The background is a blurred crowd of people in a dimly lit setting, possibly a market or a public square. The overall tone is dramatic and historical.

*The Jew of Malta*

# *The Jew of Malta*

after Christopher Marlowe

revised and slightly modernised

by Christian Lanciai (2001, translated 2018)

*Dramatis personae:*

Farnese, guvernor of Malta  
Lodovico, his son  
Suleiman, Turkish ambassador  
Barabas, a rich Jew  
Abigail, his daughter  
Aaron,  
Amos  
and Abraham, Barabas three Jewish friends  
Fra Giacomo  
Fra Bernardino  
An abbess  
Mathias, Abigail's lover  
Katherine, his mother  
Vice Admiral Martin del Bosco  
Ithamar, turkish slave  
Bellamira, beautiful prostitute  
Piglia-Borza, a thief  
A Maltese knight  
Turks

knights in Farnese's council  
Turkish and Maltese attendants

The action is Malta 1564-65.

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## *The Jew of Malta*

### Act I scene 1.

*Farnese* Gentlemen, we have a problem  
*1st knight* Let's hear it.  
*Farnese* The Turk.  
*2nd knight* It's always the Turk.  
*Farnese* For many years we have honestly been paying tribute to the Turks according to the treaty, and he has honoured our reliability and punctuality by constantly raising the amount. Much will have more, and the Turk wants everything. We can no longer afford to bend to the Turk.  
*1st knight* What is the alternative?  
*Farnese* That the Turks take Malta, like they drove us out from Rhodes.  
2 A dreary situation.  
3 We must collect money.  
*Farnese* The amount now demanded by the Turks is more than any Christian holds on Malta. I seem to remember that there was a certain Jew who betrayed Rhodes to the Sultan. Have we no Jews on Malta?  
2 Yes, and they are rich.  
3 The richest one, a certain Barabas, holds more than the entire rest of the island.  
1 Can't we ask the Jews to help us?  
*Farnese* They will never give anything willingly.  
3 Then we will have to make them. Necessity has no law, and the Jews are outlawed anyway.  
*Farnese* Can I count on your support, gentlemen, in this delicate matter?  
*All knights (exchanging glances and nodding)* Yes.  
*Farnese* Then we have some backbone. Paolo, show the Turkish delegation in.  
*(1<sup>st</sup> knight opens to let in a group of impressive Turks)*  
*Suleiman* Most honourable lord and governor of Malta, we profess our sincerest regard. *(bows with veneration, and rich gifts are carried forth)*  
*Farnese* For generous and sumptuous presents, we thank you. What can we do for you?  
*Suleiman* I think you might very well know, most honourable effendi. You have not paid last year's tribute, which with interest now exceeds and doubles all your previous debts.  
*Farnese* We have problems with our economy, and we beg you to forbear with our concerns. Our good will is not lacking, but what we do lack is means.  
*Suleiman* The Sultan's patience is drawing to a close in reaching the highest level of pain.  
*Farnese* We must ask for a respite.  
*Suleiman* How long?  
*Farnese* A month.

*Suleriman* We must warn you, most venerable and honoured knights. If the tribute isn't provided, the Sultan will invade Malta by force.

*Farnese* We do take your warning most seriously and ask only for a month's respite.

*Suleiman* A month is short.

*Farnese* The more benevolently it should be granted us.

*Suleiman* The Sultan's patience is infinite but sinister. You will have your month but not a day longer.

*Farnese* We are deeply thankful for the Sultan's patient grace. (*The Turks bow their way out.*)

1 The Sultan is serious. He longs for a reason to crush us.

*Farnese* We can manage. We got a month. The fate of Malta depends on the Jews.

4 The most unreliable people in the world.

3 But they have money and are reliable in business.

2 Do you think they will help us?

*Farnese* They must. And they are not unreasonable.

1 Good luck governor Farnese. You have our full support.

*Farnese* Thank you.

## Scene 2. At home with Barabas

*Barabas* Welcome, brothers. What can I do for you?

*Aaron* Barabas, we have a problem.

*Barabas* We always have but they can always be solved. How can I solve yours?

*Amos* It's about the Turk.

*Barabas* The Turk is our friend. How could he cause a problem?

*Abraham* By well informed sources we have heard that the Sultan intends to invade Malta.

*Barabas* And how could it affect us? How does it concern us?

*Aaron* We don't know what position to take. Shall we help the Christians against the Turk or the Turk against the Christians?

*Barabas* Dear Aaron, have you forgotten the golden rule? When it comes to Muslims and Christians there is only one valid rule: wage on the winner whoever he is.

*Amos* We think the Christians will make a hard resistance, and it is not at all certain that the Turk will prevail.

*Barabas* You mean, Amos, that it is impossible to guess who the winner will be.

*Abraham* Malta is very well fortified, but the Turkish fleet is overwhelming. The risk is that we Jews will be stuck in between.

*Barabas* Ah, now I see! Why then not increase the weights in one scale to make it weigh down the other?

*All three* Which one?

*Barabas* The Turk, of course! The Turks always treated us well. When Ferdinand and Isabel exiled and exterminated all Jews from Spain, the Sultan opened the gates

of Constantinople to us, welcomed us and gave us civil rights. As a consequence we helped the Sultan economically to become a super power. What did the Christians ever provide us with except meaningless persecutions?

*Aaron* Barabas is right! I knew it!

*Amos* But the Christians could demand our economical support against the Turk.

*Barabas* Let's cross that bridge when we reach it.

*Abraham* Barabas, you are an example to all Jews across the entire Mediterranean. Out of nothing you have created a fantastic fleet of commerce shipping cargo over the entire Levant from Alexandria to Venice and from Malta to Constantinople. You alone are worth more than all Malta. So I sincerely hope your advice really is the right one.

*Barabas* Let each one be his own counsellor, dear brother Abraham. I can only give you suggestions to good advice. How you use it is entirely your own business.

*Aaron* We are satisfied, Barabas. Come, brothers, let's go.

*Amos* Thank you, Barabas.

*Barabas* You are welcome, and most welcome back.

*Abraham* When the hour of need is come, we will meet again.

*Barabas* Farewell, good Abraham. You can always trust me. We always stuck together, didn't we? *(The three Jews leave.)*

*Abigail* What did the three Jews want, father?

*Barabas* They are worried about the Sultan's invasion plans. But it's nothing to worry about. I calmed them down considerably.

*Abigail* What happens if there is a war and the Turks come here?

*Barabas* Are you worried as well, dear Abigail?

*Abigail* No woman ever wants war.

*Barabas* Dearest daughter, all we need to worry about is invidious attacks by the Christians. Everything else is just a game of fleas in the dust.

*Abigail* What can the Christians do to us?

*Barabas* Anything. We never know in advance.

*Abigail* Thanks for being here, father. You are security itself.

*Barabas (embracing her)* At least for the time being.

*Abigail* As long as you live, father, and as long as I live.

*Barabas* If the Christians start troubling us, I will set the Turks on them.

*Abigail* Do you have such power?

*Barabas* It's growing every day, Abigail, and it will be all yours one day. All I have is a loan from you and your future.

*Abigail* You administer it well.

*Barabas* To use life to good ends and to leave it in a better state than you found it, is the primary duty of every Jew.

*Abigail* And a Jewess'?

*Barabas* The continuity of the Jewish people.

*Abigail* Then I will need a husband.

*Barabas* The whole world is full of them. That will be the simplest thing of all.

*Abigail* But I can only have the right one.  
*Barabas* No one will be good enough for you except the best one.  
*Abigail* He doesn't need to be perfect, as long as he is right.  
*Barabas* You will get whatever you want, my love.

Scene 3.

*Farnese* Gentlemen, I have asked four of the leading Jews of the city here today to persuade them to help us. Therefore I have asked you to attend, in case there would be a problem.

*1st knight* We trust you, Farnese.

3 You will manage them all right.

2 Just don't provoke them, for then it will grow difficult.

*Farnese* I know how to take them on. It will be a pure business deal – nothing else.

4 We will back you up a hundred percent.

*Farnese* Thank you. Then we are all set. Let in the Jews, Paolo.

*(The four Jews are showed in by the 1<sup>st</sup> knight. They are very humble except Barabas, who is more self-confident.)*

*Farnese* Gentlemen, we asked you here to help us out of a difficult crisis.

*Abraham* Have the Turks declared war?

*Farnese* No, it's not that bad, but that's all we want. It's naturally to the interest of all of us and to the world that there will be no Turkish invasion.

*Barabas* How can it be avoided?

*Farnese* In the ordinary way. We pay tribute.

*Amos* Then the matter is settled. You don't need us.

*Farnese* Unfortunately we do. That's why we invited you here. Our resources are exhausted. The treasures of Malta are spent. You are the only ones on Malta who can help us.

*Aaron* How much?

*Farnese* Fifty thousand crowns.

*Barabas* Impossible.

*Abraham* Your grace, none among us own that much.

*Farnese* You own it together and more.

*Barabas* With all respect, governor, but it's absurd. You have no legal right to demand half our fortune to bribe the Sultan.

*Farnese* We must. Necessity has no law, and you stand outside the law.

*Amos* You mean to expropriate our resources by arbitrary confiscation?

*Farnese* You have no choice. You have to sacrifice half of what you own.

*Aaron* And if we refuse?

*Farnese* Then we'll have to do like they do in Spain. You must convert to Christianity or die. That's the only way for you to get away with it.

*Abraham* Then our fortunes will be taxed instead.

*Farnese* Of course. It's your choice.

*Amos (to the others)* If we become Christians and liable to taxation we shall never be free again.

*Farnese* You had better cooperate. It's a one time occurrence.

*Aaron (to the others)* Hadn't we better accept? Do we have any choice?

*Abraham* We accept.

*Barabas* Speak for yourselves. I will not accept.

*Farnese* So you three accept, and you, Barabas, will not accept?

*Abraham* Barabas, you are taking a great risk.

*Barabas* I am used to high stakes and gambles.

*Amos* We three accept.

*Farnese* That's wise of you. Barabas, you are the richest man on the island, and half of your fortune would have been enough for the tribute. But you have chosen not to cooperate. Therefore we must confiscate all your property.

*Barabas* Wait! You shall have half!

*Farnese* Too late, Barabas. You have lost the game. My lords, you have my authority to implement the collection of half the property of these three gentlemen and the entire property of the fourth. The state is in danger. See to it.

*(The knights rise and leave.)*

*Barabas* Do you call this justice? Is robbery the basis of your Christianity?

*Farnese* No, Barabas. View it as a game that you lost. You knew you were taking a risk. You can't accuse us for the state being in danger. And it is better for one man to be ruined than for the whole people to perish. Wasn't those the words of your own high priest? And you still have your freedom. You can start from another beginning.

*Barabas* How could I start from a new beginning at my age? This is not fair play. Nothing can be multiplied by nothing.

*Farnese* You rose from nothing. If you now want to please yourself with nothing, suit yourself. Everything is up to you. It is not my fault that you belong to a people that preferred to remain beyond the law.

*Barabas* Don't confuse religion with ordinary human justice. You have no right to in the name of religion consider yourselves superior to us. Certain Jews are certainly as mean as all Christians, but to condemn my whole tribe for the sake of a Christian prejudice is indefensible. Am I to be punished for the sins of my forefathers? Is that fair? What misdeeds did I do to be punished thus? Can you blame or burden me with any single fault?

*Farnese* It's the course of the law. Away with you, damned Barabas! Don't you think we know your kind? If you really are totally honest, you have something to fall back on, and could you earn your daily bread in an honourable way. But you became rich only by greed, and nothing is more liable to provoke general loathing.

*Barabas* But theft is worse and criminal, and such a crime can only lead to worse crimes. For it must raise the furies of revenge to an irrevocable life of nightmares, not for the robbed victim but for his perpetrators.

*Farnese* And now he threatens! Barabas, you are only making your own situation worse. Let his house be confiscated and turned into a holy nunnery! Thus we transform the prison of his musty greed into sacred ground for pious aspirations.

*Barabas* Why don't you take my life also together with everything else?

*Farnese* Your just punishment will be to be able to go on living for your greed but without your property, Barabas, for your foolishly proud pettiness. We don't care about your blood. We are finished with you. Come, Paolo. We have spilt enough time and patience on the putrid breath of these niggardly Jews.

*(leaves with Paolo, 1st knight)*

*Aaron* That was unnecessary, Barabas.

*Amos* For once you have made a fool of yourself.

*Barabas* Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!

*Abraham* Patience, Barabas. We have funds, and we will soon get you on your feet again.

*Barabas* Patience? How can you witness such an injustice and keep quiet? I didn't make my riches for nothing. They cost me many years' hard work and bitterly consistent trouble.

*Aron* We have been hit ourselves, Barabas. We can only give you our compassion.

*Barabas* You gave in, you dogs! Joined together our resistance could have had some effect!

*Amos* Think of Job, Barabas. He got everything back as a reward for his persistence in his good faith.

*Barabas* Leave me alone from your sanctimonious commiseration! Go back to your own homes that you still have left, and leave me to my homelessness! A nunnery! No one could have found out a grosser insult!

*Abraham* Come, let's go. Whatever we say, it will only eke his pain.

*Amos* It will pass. He will get over it by time.

*Aron* Farewell, Barabas. Look us up whenever you feel like it.

*(The three Jews leave.)*

*Barabas* A foundered ship, a wreck, a smashed jar – what more am I without money? But I still have my slyness, and there is that within me that can make a whole world founder. A wise man never offends Barabas, and only fools get away with it and will face a bitter prospect; for there is no revenge more awesome than the carefully premeditated scheme which only progresses with slowness to smother its victims in a hopelessness without end against which my temporary ruin shall be but a trifle.

*Abigail (rushes in, desperate and in tears)* Father, they told me I could find you here. What has happened? They came home, drove me out of the house and carried off all our property! What is this disaster that has befallen us?

*Barabas* The Christians want it like that, my dear, and think they are right. I can't give them right. They wanted to force me to become a Christian. When I refused, they expropriated all my property. That's why we suddenly are without a home.

*Abigail* But how can they do such a thing? Aren't they human? Aren't they Christian?

*Barabas* They have done like that all over Spain, my dear, and without justifiable reason. Here at least they had reason. They needed money.

*Abigail* But it's robbery!

*Barabas* Yes, my dear, it's robbery, but don't worry. We'll manage somehow. I have some hidden resources in other places. But first of all I have a sack of gold and jewels concealed under the floor in the cellar. If only we could save it!

*Abigail* They are now making a nunnery out of our home. None of us can any more be let in.

*Barabas* I have a plan.

*Abigail* Tell me!

*Barabas* All we want is our right, Abigail. We will not do any harm. We will only take care of what is ours. Become a nun, Abigail. Join the order, and they will receive you with open arms for converting from jewry. By being saved you will save us both.

*Abigail* Don't you think they might become suspicious?

*Barabas* Never, if you play your part well and are fully consistent. Then when we have obtained the sack, you can repent and leave the order. Many nuns do. You are not forsworn to their religion for life, which you are if you become a Muslim.

*Abigail* Can't I be punished and executed if I leave?

*Barabas* Only Muslims execute renegades. You will not even be punished. That's the advantage of Christianity. You can become a Christian if you must, but when you don't need to be any more, you can just leave.

*Abigail* How weird this matter of religion is!

*Barabas* Yes, they tangle themselves into rules that only smother the root of truth they originally came from, with the only consequence that they all lose their original purpose and meaning, which only is to further man and her imagination and constructive creativity.

*Abigail* I will do as you say, father. I will be a nun.

*Barabas* Good, my daughter. Thus you save your own future.

*Abigail* All will be well again since I have such a wise father.

*Barabas* I hope I may remain so.

*Abigail* I am sure you will. (*kisses him*) Now straight to the abbess! (*out*)

*Barabas* The crisis seems to be over, but there will always be new turns. Brace yourself, Barabas, keep your hand steady on the helm, for there is nothing more capricious than the way in which the winds of destiny constantly change direction. You will always be blown out in the end, and if not in other ways, at least finally out of life. (*exit*)

Act II scene 1. Home of Barabas

*Giacomo* This used to be the home of the greedy Jew Barabas, that we now have taken over. Admit, dear reverend abbess, that it is better fitted out as a sacred nunnery.

*Abbess* Of course, fra Giacomo. But I am afraid it will take some time before we have managed to exorcise his house from all his old evil thoughts of foul play for greed to some cleanness.

*Bernardino* He was the greediest of all Jews on Malta, so considerable exertions could really be needed to cope with all remnants in the air of the evil pagan Jew's dark perversions and infernal intrigues.

*Abbess* We shall sprinkle holy water in buckets in every room on a daily basis, since we must consider that nuns are to live and sleep here. They mustn't be troubled by unholy nightmares of any dangerous kind.

*Bernardino* Who knows what tribulations of spirit could affect you in a Jewish house?

*Giacomo* A former Jewish house. In future there shall never have been anything else here but a sacred convent.

*Abbess* But who comes here? *(enter Abigail as a nun)*

*Abigail* Most sacred gracious mother, after having sincerely regretted all the crimes of my forefathers through the centuries, I have subjected myself and been accepted by the only sanctifying church to be admitted to your holy orders. Thus I humbly request to be allowed to do altar service here in your holy convent.

*Abbess* Is this not Abigail, the Jew Barabas' own and only daughter?

*Giacomo* It certainly is. This sacred conversion is a supremely great victory to the church! That's what I always said: it is far from predestined that all Jews must forever be doomed and lost! Abigail here is indeed a brilliant example of how even a Jew could become a holy virgin!

*Bernardino* Ferdinand and Isabel already proved the matter by converting hundreds och thousands of lost Jews by burning them at the stake if they didn't convert willingly.

*Giacomo* This is a wonderful moment in the history of Malta and the holy church! Welcome to the community of the holy ones, dear girl!

*Abigail (curtseys humbly)* I thank you from the depth of my heart for your high grace, noble gentlemen and gracious abbess, and reckon it as an honour and a privilege to ast last have been baptized.

*Giacomo* But who comes here?

*Bernardino* The Jew himself.

*Barabas (playacting)* What is it I see? My own daughter covered in a veil of dishonour! Woe me, what is this? How could you have deserted the faith of your ancestors? *(aside to her)* Is the coast clear?

*Abigail (playacting)* O father, I have converted to become a nun completely by the conviction of my heart, since I must prefer holiness to belong to a cursed race. *(aside to him)* O father, our way has been rolled out for us on red carpets.

*Barabas (playacting)* How dare you, wicked cursed child? How dare you forget your own father and his sacrifices for your welfare? How dare you reject the most honourable and oldest, the only unalterable religion? *(to her)* Good girl. The sack is in the cellar under the floor by the wine barrels.

*Abigail (playacting)* My conscience urged me thereto, and it denounces both father and tradition and old lousy habits. I have excluded Satan from my life! Go thou and do likewise, if you are my father! *(to him)* The coast will be clear tonight.

*Barabas (playacting)* Corrupted accursed girl! I hereby must denounce you! Avaunt, aborted witch, out of your angry father's sight! I shall never ever forgive you! *(to her)* I will return after midnight behind the wall. *(playacting)* I never want to see you again, you monster of ingratitude and outrageous disgrace! *(leaves)*

*Abigail (playacting)* Oh father, if only you could understand! Then you would turn into a holy Christian like me! *(cries)*

*(aside)* We almost did it too well.

*Giacomo* What a proud moment, my dear lady abbess, for your victory in your house! Its former owner's own daughter becomes your primary maid and servant!

*Abbess* How wondrous are not the ways of our Lord!

*Bernardino* Sister, we are sincerely touched by your pathos. Imagine that such a hopeless and lost Jew could turn into such a paragon of a Christian saint!

*Abigail* I am not a saint yet. Just you wait.

*Abbess* Yes, my child, we have a long way ahead of us of repentance and atonement and obsequies. If we are to be convincing enough as saints, we should commit ourselves immediately to prayers and mortification. *(leaves with Abigail)*

*Giacomo* It's almost a pity for such a lovely virgin.

*Bernardino* Now she will remain a virgin, and there is nothing we can do about it. *(leaves)*

*Giacomo* Nothing? I am not so sure. For a secure virginity nothing is impossible. All she needs is a wooer of some grace to make her enter other thoughts.

*Mathias (enters)* Wasn't this the place of the Jew Barabas?

*Giacomo* It was his residence. Who are you?

*Mathias* Mathias. What happened to the Jew's daughter?

*Giacomo* This is a nunnery now, and she is a nun herself.

*Mathias* No! It can't be true! What a waste! Tell me it isn't true!

*Giacomo* My friend, your name says nothing. Who are you?

*Mathias* I loved the rich Jew's daughter.

*Giacomo* So you are a suitor. Nothing could be better! But that Jew is nowadays ruined. Do you still love his daughter?

*Mathias* If! That she has become a nun will only spur my love to fiercer heat! And I can't believe that she took the veil without having been forced.

*Giacomo* No Jewish maid did ever so spontaneously and fain convert to our holiest church to accept the veil with greater pleasure and truer joy.

*Mathias* Something is not right here. Did then the Jew agree to her conversion?

*Giacomo* No, he swore and cursed his daughter and condemned her with an all too convincing demonstrative efficiency.  
*Mathias* That settles it. Then I will never have her.  
*Giacomo* Don't be too sure. She is still beautiful, and you have rivals.  
*Mathias* Perhaps she will regret it?  
*Giacomo* Even God has occasionally shown regrets. And why then not a saint?  
*Mathias* This sounds intriguing. What more do you know?  
*Giacomo* Come, and we will discuss our possibilities. (*takes him aside*)

Scene 2. The governor's palace.

*Farnese* We wonder at your visit, Don Bosco. You have entered our harbour without permission, you sail alone without a fleet – do you need a port of refuge? What is your destination?  
*Bosco* I was on my way to you, lord governor, in a matter of extreme importance. I am Vice Admiral of Spain, my name is Martin del Bosco, and I am here to deliver interesting news at your service.  
*Farnese (to a knight)* Is he really Martin del Bosco?  
*1st knight* Yes, he is without doubt.  
*Farnese* Well, our most honoured guest and Vice Admiral Martin del Bosco, what do you have to tell us?  
*Bosco* The Turks are defeated. Below deck I have a cargo of prisoners taken in a naval battle where a Turkish fleet was completely annihilated including their admiral.  
*Farnese* That's welcome news indeed. What do you intend to do with your prisoners?  
*Bosco* The normal procedure is to sell them as slaves. I would be glad to sell them to you.  
*Farnese* Unfortunately we have a deal with the Sultan which makes that option impossible. We are paying regular tribute to the Sublime Porte, which is a warrant to us for peace throughout the eastern Mediterranean.  
*1st knight (can't keep still, to del Bosco)* Noble Vice Admiral, that peace is worrisome in its expensive painfulness. Now we have the chance. Persuade the governor to unite with you and Spain and break the peace with Constantinople.  
*Bosco* Gentlemen, you surprise me. Didn't the Knights of St. John receive Malta to organize the island into a fortress and unassailable stronghold against the cruel Turk and his overbearing forces? And still I hear that you cringe to the Osman dog and bribe him to leave you in peace, like a vassal! This is not acceptable. Aren't you free Christians? Are you allowing the Muslims to trample you down into heathen thralldom?  
*Farnese* We have no choice. They annihilated us on Rhodes. Malta is no more than a devastated fragment of a wreck.  
*Bosco* How much do you owe the Turk?  
*Farnese* A hundred thousand crowns with interest.

*Bosco* My lord the king of Spain intends to exile you from Malta. My advice is: keep that money. In my turn I will convince the king to send a fleet for your support. Together we will then be able to liberate the entire western Mediterranean from Turkish piracy.

*Farnese* That's a fair and decent offer. Some lucky star sent you to us in the right moment. Remain and be our general! Together we could really deliver all the Mediterranean from a murderous Turkish domination.

*Bosco* Be well aware of the risks, though. On Rhodes the knights of St. John adopted an equally spiteful attitude against the Turks. They fought defending the island to their last man, and no one survived to tell the tale.

*Farnese* We will do the same now and with joy, if necessary. The honour of glory is acquired by blood and not by money.

*Bosco* That's the spirit! This time I think you will prevail.

*(clasps Farnese's hand: the alliance is sealed.)*

### Scene 3. The market.

*Lodovico* I heard, Barabas, that your enchanting and beautiful daughter has left the convent.

*Barabas* Yes. Are you also one of her suitors?

*Lodovico* I must admit that I did since long admire her.

*Barabas* Lodovico, you are lucky. She had enough of sanctimony in there, so she resumed her previous routines.

*Lodovico* Not only my father the governor is surprised in observing how you managed to acquire a new house and home so shortly after having been ruined.

*Barabas* Lodovico, I am only a business man, and sometimes you are lucky.

*Lodovico* Your daughter is still the loveliest maid on Malta, and now after having left the convent she is more attractive than anyone else. Do you think I could stand a chance?

*Barabas* As a son of the governor you stand any chance. But you have rivals, be aware of that! But tell me, dear Lodovico, where do all these new slaves come from? We never had any slaves for sale here at the market previously.

*Lodovico* It appears to have been a capture from an important victory recently over Turkish galleys.

*Barabas* These slaves are Turks then? That's just what I need! What is the last price, marketeer?

*Knight* Two hundred crowns.

*Barabas* That's expensive! Are they all equally expensive?

*Knight* Not at all. A Turk is cheaper than a Negro, since a Negro is a better collaborator with greter patience. Turks are more unreliable.

*Barabas* And how much then is an ordinary Turkish dogslave?

*Knight* A hundred crowns.

*Barabas* This one looks modest enough. What do you think, slave, about working with a Jew? Have you got a name?

*Knight* His name is Ithamar, but I must warn you. He is rather furtive.

*Barabas* What do you think, Ithamar? Can you work for me and take my orders?

*Ithamar* Noble lord, I will be a most humble and obedient dogs slave to you, for I would rather serve a Jew than arrogant Christian bullies, who would only practice cruelty.

*Barabas* Here is my man. I buy him at once. Release him from his shackles. He shall be the manager of my house.

*Ithamar* My lord, we understand each other. I will always obey you.

*Barabas* As a reward you shall always be treated fairly. Come along with me.

*Lodovico* When may I meet your famous daughter?

*Barabas* Whenever you wish, and whenever it suits her. But you have competitors, Lodovico. I am only informing you. But I would gladly put in a word for you.

*Lodovico* You enliven me with happiness at once!

*Barabas* Just play your cards well, and I will play mine. Good luck, my dear Lodovico.

*Lodovico* I am almost like drifting on clouds! (*leaves*)

*Barabas* That knave, that fool, that vain idiot, Ithamar, is the son of my arch enemy, the governor of our Malta, who without right confiscated all my property. I hope I will be able to trust you in precarious intrigues against unbearable cursed Christian bullies and villains?

*Ithamar* As I said, master, we understand each other.

*Barabas* Splendid! Let's go. But wait! There's that poor lover Mathias. He and Abigail have something in common, which could threaten our plans. Here we are already challenged by the incomprehensible mechanisms of capricious destiny. Let's quietly listen to what they might be up to. (*they retreat discreetly into the background*)

*Mathias (with his mother)* Apparently Lodovico has something going on with Barabas. It must concern Abigail. Oh mother, I fear the most dark and fearful intrigues!

*Katherine* Have nothing to do with Barabas the Jew! His whole family and tribe are lost to perdition.

*Mathias* But his daughter loves me, and it is mutual.

*Katherine* She is just as dangerously possessed as he. They are both doomed. The governor did right in expropriating everything he owned. They did like that in Spain, and it should be done everywhere to all Jews.

*Mathias* Mother, you are prejudicial.

*Katherine* No, I only know what the whole world knows. Everybody knows, that every Jew is just a greedy devil.

*Mathias* Mother, leave me with her. I borrowed books from his library, and I am indebted to him.

*Katherine* Beware, my son! It will end up badly! If he as much as lends you the tip of a handkerchief, he will bind you to him like a slave for life by his usury!

*Mathias* It's a debt of honour. – Father Barabas, I have read your book with great interest.

*Barabas* That gives me pleasure. Keep it.

*Mathias* May I keep the book?

*Barabas* Of course. I only lend doublets, since I never get back any book I lent anyway.

*Mathias* Thus speaks a blessed, generous and noble heart.

*Barabas* Thank you, my son.

*Mathias* How is your daughter?

*Barabas* Only well.

*Mathias* When may I see her?

*Barabas* Whenever you want, if she wants.

*Mathias* I heard about your successful recovery after the disaster.

*Barabas* Yes. Luckily for my daughter and all her suitors, she didn't have to stay long in her nunnery.

*Mathias* The nuns appear to be angry and disappointed.

*Barabas* Let them be. There are other things needed than practised sanctimony.

*Mathias* They think you have robbed them and cheated them, making Abigail take the veil only to collect your hidden treasures.

*Barabas* Let them believe what they please, since they are only paid for believing. I couldn't care less about what they think.

*Mathias* For me the only important thing is the welfare of Abigail.

*Barabas* She never felt better.

*Mathias* Thanks for the book, father Barabas.

*Barabas* Thank you on behalf of the book that it found a worthy reader, who has sense enough to understand and appreciate constructive reading. (*exit Mathias*)

*Katherine* What did I tell you, poor son? He is only there to cheat you! And the daughter is of the same treacherous ilk of only deceit! (*leaves with Mathias*)

*Barabas* My good Ithamar, here we have a conflict. To have my revenge on the governor I must have his son for my son-in-law. But my daughter loves the modest and harmless Mathias, and he loves her. Here we have a human problem. How shall we solve it?

*Ithamar* Two suitors – two birds with one stone. What about that?

*Barabas* My friend, I seem to have purchased a demon in a bottle, a gold mine of intrigue and cleverness! I knew that my intuition was correct! There is no one in the world you can trust except yourself, and even he you can only trust with long antennae. Come! You shall meet Abigail, my invaluable wonderful daughter.

Scene 4. Abigail.

*Abigail* Father was ruined by foul play, but as if by a miracle he landed on his feet by his own cunning. I cheated a convent by saving his concealed reserves disguised as a nun – of course it was a nasty deceit, but it was by all means justified. If the state causes harm without right, it gives you the right to arbitrarily take the law into your own hands as a means of self-defense, for there are always higher laws than the mundane ones. Father is at it again, and he is making progress. We have a new house, and I have new suitors. But I have no love except the son of father's arch enemy. Mathias, you are everything to me, but father doesn't want to hear of it, and that's the problem.

*Barabas (enters)* Abigail, meet our new servant and factotum, Ithamar the Turk.

*Ithamar* I am your servant and slave, my mistress.

*Abigail* Humility always wins by being sympathetic, as long as it is genuine. *(greets him. He kisses her hand.)*

*Barabas* My daughter, Lodovico is eager for you. You must win him.

*Abigail* But my heart belongs to Mathias, and you know it, father.

*Barabas* Still Lodovico must be encouraged. He is after all the governor's own son. You must win him.

*Abigail* What do you ask of me?

*Barabas* That you obey me.

*Abigail* You know that I do.

*Barabas* So do it.

*Abigail* What shall I do with Lodovico?

*Barabas* Oil him. Make him believe the most of it. Receive him privately. Give him all licence. Give him everything, except your virginity.

*Abigail* That is reserved for whom I love. Father, I will humour you in all matters, for such easy terms are easy to follow. A woman can give everything and promise anything if only she isn't violated.

*Barabas* That's right, sweet daughter! We understand each other.

*Ithamar* Here is another suitor.

*Barabas* But isn't it Mathias himself? I will intercept him.

*(hurries out to intercept Mathias)* Dearest Mathias, are you looking for my daughter? Wait a little.

*Mathias* Yes, how could you guess it, father Barabas?

*Barabas* Since I know that she loves you and that you love her. It can't be concealed. It's too evident. But we have a problem, my friend. Don Lodovico, the governor's own son, is also chasing her, sends her love letters and drowns her with presents, convinced that she will be his own.

*Mathias* Lodovico! That infamous villain!

*Barabas* He is only soft in his love. You know how love works. Forbear with the delusional fool! He is only the victim of his own pottiness.

*Mathias* But Abigail is mine! He must not come near her!

*Barabas* Look, there he takes her out. (*Lodovico is seen taking out Abigail.*) What about that?

*Mathias* He is a crook, an arch villain and a wicked bandit!

*Barabas* Yes, mildly speaking, but you can do better, can't you?

*Mathias* If he importunes her with one word I shall challenge him to a duel of life or death!

*Barabas* But Lodovico is a an undefeated and dangerous swordsman. What if it will cost you your life?

*Mathias* I will gladly die, if it only is for Abigail!

*Barabas* That's the spirit, dear son-in-law! But what would you say if Lodovico marries her?

*Mathias* He mustn't!

*Barabas* But his father is the governor of Malta. He has so much power and influence, that nothing can be denied him.

*Mathias* But surely you can't mean to give your daughter to such a knave?

*Barabas* My friend, his power is greater. The governor already bereft me of my house and all my property. If he wants to steal Abigail from us, we have no possibility to say no.

*Mathias* I am sure that two can play at that game!

*Barabas* So you are prepared to take my defense against the governor?

*Mathias* Yes, for the sake of Abigail, my own and her future!

*Barabas* You could be exiled and sentenced to death for opposing the governor.

*Mathias* Barabas, I don't care a damn!

*Barabas* You are on our side? We can trust you?

*Mathias* Absolutely!

*Barabas* Good! Then I accept you as my son-in-law, which is a promise.

*Mathias* Thank you, good father!

*Barabas* Then we have to resolve the knotty problem of Lodovico.

*Mathias* Leave the damned rascal to me! (*rushes out*)

*Barabas* What do you think, Ithamar?

*Ithamar* To divide is to rule. No power is greater than the capacity to cause a division.

*Barabas* And it's only about Christians.

*Ithamar* As usual they will have to blame themselves for their own stupidity.

*Barabas* Yes, we can't stop them, can we?

*Ithamar* My lord, leave them to me. I will watch them, so that they don't act stupid.

*Barabas* Do so, my good Ithamar. I trust you blindly until you betray me.

*Ithamar* I never will, Barabas, as long as you give me wages.

*Barabas* I will, Ithamar, as long as you deserve it.

*Ithamar* Then we are agreed. (*leaves*)

*Barabas* A talent like a gift of God! He reads my mind and is almost too good to be true. All I need to do is to wash my hands. I am absolutely innocent. All things will happen by themselves. My only profession and craft as a good businessman is to profit by the situation.

Act III scene 1.

*Piglia-Borza* Shouldn't I profit by the situation? Bellamira, these are golden times!

*Bellamira* Not for me. I never made so miserably bad business.

*Piglia-Borza* It's not my fault.

*Bellamira* No, but you are getting on my nerves. You keep hanging here all the time.

*Piglia-Borza* Of course, since you are mine! I have no one else! Now as you are without customers I couldn't enjoy the opportunity more of being here in bed with you!

*Bellamira* That doesn't make us rich.

*Piglia-Borza* There are other means. Have you forgotten that I am a craftsman?

*Bellamira* I can't see that you manage any handiwork here in my bed.

*Piglia-Borza* I mean outside. I am after all a thief! I am an expert! If there is anything I can do, it is to unnoticeably snatch purses out of pompous patrons' pockets!

*Bellamira* Do it then! Support me! I am out of work!

*Piglia-Borza* What about this? (*presents a stuffed purse*)

*Bellamira* My prince! Where did you get it?

*Piglia-Borza* A Jew happened to pass by. He was too thick, so I relieved his graciousness from something of his overweight.

*Bellamira* They say that it's the fault of the Jews that I am out of work, that the Jews set the Turks on Malta.

*Piglia-Borza* That's typical of them. They want nothing as much as the end of Christianity. But quiet! Someone is coming! (*steals up to the window*) It's the Jew's new slave, a Turkish prisoner. He has seen me and followed me here. Hide the purse, quickly! I had better get lost. (*disappears. Enter Ithamar.*)

*Bellamira* Who are you, and what do you want?

*Ithamar* No harm, my lovely. I serve Barabas, who I saw robbed by a simple thief. I followed him here. He can be nowhere else.

*Bellamira* There is no one here, as you well can see. I am broke. The war took every customer away from me. This place used to be thronged with wealthy merchants.

*Ithamar* No thieves?

*Bellamira* None, unless you are one yourself.

*Ithamar* No, I am honest. But what are you?

*Bellamira* An honest business lady.

*Ithamar* Yes, I can see that. You are lovely.

*Bellamira* That's my profession. Or else I wouldn't be worth much.

*Mathias (outside)* Halt, Lodovico!

*Lodovico* That's me. What pimp is that, who sullies my name by using it in a sultry mouth?

*Ithamar* I'll be back later, my beauty. Now for my duties. (*leaves Bellamira*)

*Mathias* The betrothed of the virgin you violated! (*pulls his sword*)

*Lodovico* Oho! That miserable bumpkin and bastard Mathias!

*Mathias* You villain! You dare insult my origin?

*Lodovico* It's no insult to call a bastard by his right name but a matter of fact, you poor bumpkin!

*Mathias* Is that what you say, you rotten gadfly of a lowborn mad dog's excrements!

*Lodovico* Save your compliments, that only make you awkwardly stumble with your stuttering and staggering blathermouth, you blundering blackguard! Your laughable lack of language surpasses the qualified gaga of demented old whores!

*Mathias* And all you produce by your mouth is shit, which should come out the other way, you imbecile preacher farting worse than horses! Shit down your pants, and you will do better!

*Lodovico* No need, the way you keep spurting diarrhoeas!

*Mathias* Cretin! Defend yourself!

*Lodovico* Against you, ignominious cockroach? Don't you know that cockroaches don't know how to fight?

*Mathias* Then I will kill you unarmed!

*Lodovico* As you wish! Since you asked for it! *(They fight.)*

*Ithamar* Now is my opportunity. All to please the one I serve. He will then be under an obligation of gratitude for the rest of his life. *(steals up behind the fighters)*

*Lodovico* Die, poor loser! *(nails Mathias)*

*Mathias* I die! My beloved, farewell! May my destroyer be accursed forever!

*Ithamar (aside)* I will promptly send him after you to hell. *(pierces Lodovico from behind)*

*Lodovico* I am lost! Invidious ambush! Brother Mathias of destiny, it's not fair play to bring seconds to the duel without informing the opponent! It's against the rules!

*Mathias* What are you talking about? Are you delirious? If anyone broke the rules, it was you, who violated my right as Abigail's betrothed!

*Lodovico* What do you mean? Who nailed me from behind if not your partner?

*Mathias* Die, you perfidious villain! We'll settle the matter in hell! *(dies)*

*Lodovico* So we die even, and none of us will get the bride. Maybe it's just as well. *(dies)*

*Ithamar* Full score! This will make the Jew happy! *(calls)* Alarm! Alarm! There is a duel going on here! *(runs away. People flock around the corpses.)*

*Knight* But it is Lodovico!

*A citizen* Katherine! Could it be your son Mathias?

*Katherine* My son! My son! *(throws herself over Mathias' body)* It's that lousy Jew's fault!

*The citizen* So it was really your son! I am so sorry, mistress Katherine.

*Knight* Governor, this looks really bad.

*Farnese* What is it?

*Knight* It's Lodovico, your own son.

*Farnese* Make way, move over, let me through! *(reaches Lodovico)*

My son! It cannot be true! This must not be! The villain behind this shall be tortured to death!

*Knight* Lord governor, unfortunately he is already dead. Look for yourself. They have duelled in fury and given each other mortal wounds.

*Farnese* It must not be true!

*Katherine* You already said that, you old fool. But the Jew is behind this, and I demand that he be punished!

*Farnese* We already struck him to a maximum by unfair expropriation, which by time proved utterly unnecessary.

*Katherine* Was it? From where did he then get his new villa and his new monopoly?

*Farnese* But by what right do you charge him with causing the evil tragedy that here has struck us?

*Katherine* I know why they fought! They fought for the Jew's daughter!

*Farnese* So that was the motive, backfiring passion of love. Yes, my Lodovico had really a weakness for the Jewess. There was even a rumour that he intended proposal. But everyone knew that she belonged to Mathias. And here they both lie now as victims of their own folly. The matter is regrettably clear. We have nothing to do but to bury our sons.

*Katherine* But I demand revenge!

*Farnese* You have no right of it. If you insist on demanding it you'll have to do it alone. I must place the safety of Malta first. There is a war going on. I advise you, mistress Katherine, to bury your son in peace and then to think more of Malta and life than of yourself.

Carry them out into the cathedral! This is a day of sorrow, for the first fallen in the new war did not fall gloriously in battle but by their own hands. This was my only son. I will not be available now for some time, for I must work out my inconsolability first, which will take a lot of effort, for such a sorrow is more difficult to bury than a mere body. (*can't bear it any longer and retires.*)

*Katherine* Still I must suspect the greedy Jew, for he is the only one who profited from the quarrel: now he can keep his fatal daughter. Who can endure such profitable success of death? Not the ones who had to pay for it.

(*follows the others, carrying the bodies to the cathedral.*)

## Scene 2. Home of Barabas

*Barabas* What joy, and what relief! It's all too wonderful to be taken for granted for something true! And how duellists manage to take each others' lives just by swords! It's a magnificent, incredible stroke of good luck!

*Ithamar* Are you satisfied, master?

*Barabas* If I am! I may keep Abigail at home, she is in mourning now and will not hear of any other suitor, so she can run my entire household. Everything has come out for the best and far better than I had dared to hope for and even less wished for!

*Ithamar* Then I am also satisfied, master.

*Barabas* (*struck by a sudden suspicion*) Did you have anything to do with this?

*Ithamar* Not in the least. The duel was completely managed by Lodovico and Mathias by themselves.

*Barabas* Of course. Here is now my daughter.

*Abigail* O father, I am comfortless unto the lowest depths of despair!

*Barabas* Of course, my daughter.

*Abigail* We had just decided to get married, and then he gets mixed up in a duel with that loathsome Lodovico!

*Barabas* Yes, it's absolutely horrible.

*Abigail* I have decided, father.

*Barabas* To remain a virgin?

*Abigail* Yes.

*Barabas* Forever here with me in my house?

*Abigail* I want to be dead to the entire world. The nunnery is the best possibility. There all are virgins, there you are left in peace, and you are allowed to be alone and retire from life as much as you want.

*Barabas* My daughter, this is shocking and dire news! Didn't you have enough of the nunnery the first time? Isn't such a decision rather sudden?

*Abigail* The first time, I became a nun just to please you. You got your sack of money. That mission was carried through and completed, but the death of my Mathias has shaken me to the core. I have reconsidered. I now wish to become a nun for serious.

*Barabas* Alas, my child, don't you see the hypocrisy and deceit and delusion which is all that Christianity consists of?

*Abigail* There certainly is much and enough of that in it, but we lack celibacy in jewry, which I find appropriate in my case. That is what decides the matter.

*Barabas* No more suitors? No more flair and pleasures? No money, luxury and delightful surplus? Only callous white walls and sterile morbid meditations? Only contemplation of your navel and fruitless introspection? No love, no future family and no children? Only full time bleak boredom in the void?

*Abigail* Father, I have made up my mind.

*Barabas* Grant yourself some respite at least! You don't jump into barrels and set out down waterfalls without calculating the risks!

*Abigail* I have made up my mind.

*Barabas* This is a fatal and cruel disappointment, a greater defeat than both the deaths of Lodovico and Mathias!

*Abigail* Alas, don't remind me of it! (*cries*)

*Barabas (embraces her)* Alas, my daughter, weren't we happy together? Didn't I give you the best of homes, the best possible education and the safest possible environment for your growth and cultivation? And you wish to throw all that away for taking the veil! It's not fair! Those robbers, who took our home!

*Abigail* I am sorry, father. The death of Mathias has decided my destination, and none of them can be altered any more.

*Barabas* Defeat! It all ended up a defeat! What then did I live for, if you will not take over and continue my life's work?

*Abigail* Give it to my convent.

*Barabas* Never! I would rather give it to the Turk!

*Abigail* Father, you wished for Mathias' death.

*Barabas* You can't judge my thoughts. Lodovico's death was more to my interest.

*Abigail* So you wished the death of both? Perhaps you even instigated the duel?

*Barabas* Abigail, don't be absurd. The duel was a private settlement between them. No one can be charged with the violence they practised on each other except themselves.

*Abigail* But you wished for it, father.

*Barabas* I only wished for revenge on those villains who expropriated all my property without right! And it was even unnecessary, for now Malta is engaged in war with the Turk anyway. But did they return a single brick to me? No! They not even apologised!

*Abigail* Perhaps then you wish for the Turks to conquer Malta.

*Barabas* I don't give a damn about Turks, Christians or Muslims! They are all the same kind of rotten robbers and conceited bandits!

*Abigail* So let me get out of their way and disappear in my convent.

*Barabas* Get thee to a nunnery then, accursed daughter! But never believe for a moment that I could accept it!

*Abigail* You are my father, and I understand you. But it's about my life, not yours.

*Barabas* Your life, that you wish to throw away on chalked walls, old spinsters, brainwash and superstition!

*Abigail* Here is now Fra Giacomo, whom I have been waiting for.

*Giacomo* My daughter, welcome back. (*offers his hand for her to kiss. She kneels to him, like offering herself in total subordination.*)

*Abigail* Monsignore, it's an honour for me to be welcomed back, although I already once have deserted you.

*Giacomo* A prodigal daughter is even more than a prodigal son, when she returns home to her family.

*Barabas* I can't bear it! (*leaves*)

*Giacomo* Your father seems not to have endorsed your decision.

*Abigail* He is my father and reacts as such. He will remain a Jew. Please forbear with him! He is only reacting naturally.

*Giacomo* But he is a Jew and doomed as such. Abigail, the sooner you leave this house, the better. Come with me now at once.

*Abigail* Yes, I will go with you.

*Giacomo* That's right, good girl. You are now a daughter of Jesus and not of the cursed house of Barabas.

*Abigail* But wasn't Jesus a Jew as well?

*Giacomo* That is not relevant. That's an entirely different matter. Come now, let's go. (*leaves with Abigail*)

*Ithamar* A miscalculation, my good employer, which no one of us could foresee. But perhaps we could remedy even this damage? Perhaps a trusted and loyal Turkish slave could accomplish more and greater miracles than any Christian.

*Appropriate moment for a possible intermission.*

Scene 3. The palace of the governor.

*Farnese* Welcome, ambassadors of Constantinople!

*Messenger* Unfortunately I bring no good news.

*Farnese* We are prepared for the worst. Out with it!

*Messenger* You have not paid your tribute. You were allowed a month's consideration. Suleiman sends his deep regrets, but he is now obliged to obtain your tribute by force.

*Farnese* So let him try to get it by force.

*Messenger* But you haven't paid it although you had means to, by extortion of the Jews of Malta. Why haven't you paid it?

*Farnese* Because we don't give a damn about the Sultan. He could stick up his fleet, his armada, his slaves and his extorted tribute up in his arse!

*Messenger (offended)* Such language is alien to all diplomacy. You must consider the consequences of such inconsiderate speech. The answer to such an unfriendly retort could only be open war.

*Farnese* Let your Sultan try to subjugate us. We will give him a prompt answer with a vengeance with fire in his breeches to make him implode. You can tell him that.

*Messenger* This means war!

*Farnese* So it has all this month. Haven't you noticed how we have mobilized? No merchant ships have arrived here any more, well aware of the state of conflict between ourselves and the Sublime Porte. I wonder at the Sultan not having done it in his trousers yet.

*Messenger* This is too much! Next time we will answer with blunderbuss, scimitars and cannons!

*Farnese* Just let it off. It's only a sign of health when farts are heard in public.

*Messenger* You are completely obscene!

*Farnese* Isn't the Sultan with his thousand harem ladies? Double standards and morals is nothing to us any more, circumcised lackey! Go home and kiss your master's slippers and his arse, which you have been paid for. Malta does not cringe to Islam any more. We don't buy it any more.

Scene 4. The convent.

*Giacomo* This is absolutely terrible. All nuns are dying, and no one can explain it. It's a monstrous epidemic.

*Bernardino* The only one who hasn't been touched is Abigail.

*Giacomo* And how can you explain it?

*Bernardino* She is a saint.

*Giacomo* Let me then be the devil's advocate. She used to own this house together with her father.

*Bernardino* What is your hint?

*Giacomo* Only, that there could be a motive for revenge. She might have wished to return the house to her father.

*Bernardino* Impossible. He has completely denounced her. She is saintliness personified and more pious than anyone else.

*Giacomo* Still it's a bit suspicious that she alone has been untouched by the epidemic, isn't it?

*Bernardino* Here she is herself. Let her answer your insinuations herself.

*(enter Abigail as a nun in white robes)*

*Giacomo* How are you, Abigail? You look a bit pale and not quite well.

*Abigail* The epidemic has reached me. I am going the same way as everyone else here in the convent. None of us nuns will get away. We are all poisoned.

*Bernardino and Giacomo (shocked)* Poisoned?

*Abigail* That's what I believe.

*Bernardino* But who and why would anyone do a thing like that?

*Abigail* I can't understand it myself. But I can only find one motive, which is, I am ashamed to say, with my own father.

*Giacomo* The greedy Jew Barabas?

*Abigail* You took his house and home away from him with all his riches without any right. Naturally he became possessed by the bitter demon of revenge, but still I managed to help him up on his feet again. He became rich again and felt rather recompensed. Then my beloved Mathias died, and I took the veil to never take it off again. That made him angry, and the mad black angel of revenge possessed him again.

*Giacomo* So he would sacrifice even his own daughter for his own personal revenge? That would be supremely unnatural and makes no sense.

*Abigail* I can't believe it myself, but no other theory or explanation is possible.

*Giacomo* This is absolutely terrible!

*Bernardino* Still you can continue along these lines and start adding two and two.

*Giacomo* What do you mean?

*Bernardino* Who would have had any interest in the death of both Lodovico and Mathias?

*Giacomo* No one but the Jew.

*Abigail* Would he then have caused the death of both my beloved and Lodovico? It's impossible! My father is after all human.

*Bernardino* Is he? Wasn't he highly motivated to cause the governor excessive damage after having been bereft of all his assets?

*Abigail* But my beloved Mathias! No one wished to harm him except Lodovico only.

*Giacomo* Yes, it doesn't hold water, Bernardino, even if it would be true.

*Bernardino* I know it is true. That Jew is possessed by his desire of revenge and worse, far more dangerous than any inhuman demon let loose!

*Abigail* Don't abuse my father by ridiculous exaggerations! He couldn't have carried through the mass murder of all my holy sisters here including me!

*Both* And why not?

*Abigail* You are trying to make it an act of wishful thinking! That's not fair! You are blinded by your own partiality!

*Giacomo* Sister, take it easy. Nothing can be proved, but everything must be investigated.

*Abigail* I declare my father to be absolutely innocent, and I will die with that for my last testimony! (*faints*)

*Bernardino* She is gliding through our hands.

*Giacomo* We have lost her, like all the nuns. We must get to the bottom of this.

*Bernardino* Absolutely. It's a case for the holy inquisition.

*Giacomo* We don't have it on Malta.

*Bernardino* Don't we? That's a pity.

*Giacomo* We must first deal with the Turkish danger. Then we can start investigating the possible mass murders by Jews.

*Bernardino* Abigail's testimony is final. There is not a shred of evidence.

*Giacomo* In the lack of definite proof we have to resort to circumstantial evidence, and, Bernardino, you have to admit that they are overwhelming.

*Bernardino* We can't ignore them. That's for sure. But if it is true it's a strange case indeed of an obsession of revenge running amuck with its holder beyond all human reason and rational sense.

*Giacomo* So let's carry out the poor girl to the other victims. I don't think she will wake up any more.

*Bernardino* At least she died a good Christian, saved and sanctified for the church.

*Giacomo* Yes, we succeeded at that at least.

#### Act IV scene 1.

*Barabas* But how is it possible? Is there no explanation at all to such an epidemic tragedy?

*Ithamar* You could see it as an act of God for a punishment. That convent, remember, was stolen property from you.

*Barabas* But Abigail, my own daughter!

*Ithamar* Didn't she abandon God and turn into a cursed Christian?

*Barabas* Yes, but not by sin but by the deepest and sincerest sorrow. She found a convent the best place for contemplation where to cry out her grief and loss of Mathias.

*Ithamar* But here are now three knaves and rotten scoundrels.

*Barabas* It's Don Giacomo and the governor himself. Leave them to me, my good Ithamar. We have some business in common.

*Farnese* Barabas, I come to you concerning this great new calamity and grief, which has fallen even upon you.

*Giacomo* Your daughter was a pearl and a pride to our new nunnery. The disaster touches all of us but perhaps you most of all.

*Barabas* Abigail was everything to me. Now I have nothing. But did you come only for condolences? What can I do for you?

*Bernardino* We investigate the great tragedy of the convent and have already reached incredible results.

*Barabas* Tell me!

*Ithamar (listens without being noticed)* They can never trace it to me.

*Bernardino* We are hoping for your cooperation, Barabas. This matter concerns all of Malta.

*Barabas* But me most of all.

*Farnese* We take that for granted, Barabas.

*Giacomo* Whatever people say, we will stick to the naked truth only.

*Barabas* You know something I don't know. So let me know it.

*Bernardino* The epidemic was not natural. All the nuns were cruelly poisoned.

*Barabas* Poisoned? But how and why?

*Giacomo* That's the riddle. But people talk, and you should know what they say.

*Barabas* I don't know what they say. Tell me!

*Bernardino* People are saying that you yourself put poison in their food to avenge both that we took your house from you and that Abigail, your daughter, converted to the only sanctifying religion.

*Barabas* This is infamous! How far can the stupid prejudice of people go to poison their minds to unreasonable recklessness!

*Farnese* That's pinpointing our problem: evidently no limits to how far.

*Giacomo* And they have already condemned you and are ready to burn you and have you mangled to death.

*Barabas* And can't you talk sense into them? You have the power in the country and all responsibility.

*Giacomo* We have no law protecting any Jew.

*Barabas* Gentlemen, I have been struck by the most traumatic sorrow of my life, my own and only daughter's untimely death, and you are inhuman enough to come here accusing me of the most outrageously unnatural murder!

*Bernardino* A motive has been found with you and nowhere else.

*Giacomo* You must admit, Barabas, that it looks bad for you.

*Ithamar (invisible, aside)* Now I have really put my master in a jam.

*Farnese* We can't believe that you could be guilty. Not even a Jew could be so incredibly unnatural to murder his own daughter for converting to our Christian church. That's what we think. But people demand retaliation for the other nuns and have by their prejudice pronounced you guilty.

*Barabas* What then do you ask of me?

*Giacomo* There is only one solution.

*Barabas* Well?

*Bernardino* You have money.

*Barabas* Shall I pay for my innocence?

*Farnese* Yes, that's your only way out. You must prove your trustworthiness by standing faithfully on our side against the Turks.

*Giacomo* Therefore you must become a Christian.

*Barabas* I understand. Will that satisfy the people? How much must I pay?

*Farnese* Half is enough this time.

*Barabas* Good. I agree to cooperate just to be left in peace with my sorrow. I convert, and I leave half of my assets to you. Is that enough? May I then live on with my human dignity preserved and intact?

*Farnese* You may, Barabas. We are sorry to have disturbed you.

*Giacomo* But unfortunately we had to convince ourselves.

*Barabas* Well, are you convinced enough now?

*Bernardino* For the time being. But the last word is always with the people. (*the three leave*)

*Barabas* Damned sanctimonious blackmailers and hypocrites! They never visit a Jew except to humiliate him! And that accounts for all Christians. They never do business with him except to pull him down to their level. Here they come trampling on my dead daughter's body, and I am obliged to pay them and humour them by pretending christianity. This is going too far!

*Ithamar* Master, I understand your grievous predicament.

*Barabas* And have you any bright ideas?

*Ithamar* Revenge.

*Barabas* How?

*Ithamar* Help the Turk.

*Barabas* It's tempting enough. But could I get away with it?

*Ithamar* Only trust me. When the Turks have taken Malta, you will be the sole survivor as the last Christian.

*Barabas* Can you make it?

*Ithamar* Of course! I am a Turk! I guarantee your success; but not without payment.

*Barabas* And what is your price?

*Ithamar* Make me your heir.

*Barabas* I have no other. I have nothing to lose. Why not?

*Ithamar* So we have an agreement?

*Barabas* Consider yourself a son in the house. But you must obey me in everything.

*Ithamar* Of course.

*Barabas* Tell me what intrigue you have figured out.

*Ithamar* We should start with the evil monk Bernardino, for he is the most avaricious. Everyone wants your money. Tell them that you give it to Giacomo. That will turn Bernardino dark with anger.

*Barabas* You mean that I would gain control by turning them against each other?

*Ithamar* What could be easier? Cultivate greed in the human passion, and you will have a monster at your service capable of anything.

*Barabas* You know something about human nature.

*Ithamar* I am your slave and see everything from below. Most people only look from above and get the more dazed the higher up they believe themselves to be in relation to others.

*Barabas* We shall try your advice, my cunning servant. As I see it, the Christian lords have in their dealings with me only dug their own graves.

*Ithamar* So let them fall. All they need is a push.

*Barabas* Let us try the experiment and see if you are right.

*Ithamar* I am always right.

*Barabas* But we Jews don't believe anything until we see a practical result.

*Ithamar* My lord, you will have the front seat in the honorary box for the performance.

*Barabas* Let's see how your direction will work.

## Scene 2.

*Bernardino* It can't be true! The Jew's donations were supposed to go to us!

*Giacomo* I had the governor's word of honour, that everything would go to the Order of St. John.

*Bernardino* But it's not fair! The Jew's daughter was a nun of our own order!

*Giacomo* But we had the right to all the money. Your abbess can go fishing elsewhere.

*Bernardino* Then you are a robber and miser with no sense of shame!

*Giacomo* What did you say? And what are you? A philanthropist? Don't you think that we know how you make extra money as a procurer?

*Bernardino* Are you trying to be smart? Try throwing stones in a glass house! I am well aware of your embezzling business behind the governor's back!

*Giacomo* What do you know? You know nothing! If you as much as whispers a word of that you are dead!

*Bernardino* Just hand over the Jew's money to my convent, and everyone will be satisfied.

*Giacomo* Never! I would rather die!

*Bernardino* Since you asked for it! (*pulls his sword*)

*Giacomo* You false and miserable monk, you go too far! I happen to be unarmed for now, and you owe your thanks for your life only to that!

*Bernardino* But I am not! (*threatens to kill him*) And there is no one to watch us here!

*Giacomo* Accursed murderous priest! Next time we meet we shall settle things!

*Bernardino* I'll be delighted! Be armed then and not a coward, stupid procurer!

*Giacomo* Who is the worst procurer among us? I will reveal your procuring business to the abbess!

*Bernardino* You are the only one with interests in it and my greatest customer!

*Giacomo* But you choose the victims, corrupted rotter! Now I have completely lost my self control, and it's all your fault!

*Bernardino* Get lost then, before it gets worse!

*Giacomo* I will only go home to fetch my weapons!

*Bernardino* Hurry! I'll wait!

*Giacomo* Then you will be dead, and the convent will be one devil the poorer!

*Berbardino* You will be the dead devil in that case!

*Giacomo* Bandit!

*Bernardino* Blackguard! (*Giacomo disappears.*)

He only thinks of the profits. Is then greed the main driving force in the world and not God? If it's greed, then God doesn't seem very interested in interfering.

(*Ithamar and Barabas are seen concealed behind horses.*)

*Ithamar* Now, my lord, we have the chance. He is alone.

*Barabas* Quickly then! That's the only recipe of happiness in life: grab chance the moment it's offered you!

*Ithamar* I will attack him and keep him busy while you take his temperature.

*Barabas* Yes, on to him! (*They attack Bernardino concealed by hoods.*)

*Bernardino* Help, thieves, bandits! I have nothing on me! Save me! There is nothing here!

*Barabas* This is no robbery, you chief of robbers, but only some restitution for all your lifetime's robberies! (*throws a noose around his neck and strangles him while Ithamar holds him firm.*)

*Ithamar* There. Now he is dead. How did it feel?

*Barabas* Like an act of mercy to please God. He will prostitute no more nuns.

*Ithamar* So let's leave.

*Barabas* One moment. Don Giacomo could return here. We must not miss that chance. Put the precious prelate here comfortably to wait for the other. (*They put him on a bench.*)

*Ithamar* Is that all right?

*Barabas* Yes, there he sits at ease in peace, as if he slept in the soundest dreams. I hear another chap coming. It could only be Giacomo.

*Ithamar* Come! Let's hide! (*They hide.*)

*Giacomo (returns)* There's that bandit sitting sound asleep! Now I have my chance! They will think that robbers battered that freak to death. Nothing would suit me better. Here you are, Bernardino! Here and here! (*Thrusts his sword into him.*) Now bleed to death like a bloody sieve, and let your corruption pour out of you in the drains!

*Ithamar (to Barabas)* Now is my chance! (*pretends to be passing by*)

But what is this? Someone is beating a pious priest to death! Help, murder! Here is some villainy going on!

*Giacomo* Shut up, you stupid slave! He quarrelled with me, so I only give him what he deserved!

*Barabas (coming on)* What is this?

*Ithamar* My lord, I happened to pass by and saw this cruel fellow beat an innocent priest to death!

*Barabas* But it's Don Giacomo!

*Giacomo (aside)* Now I am done for. Barabas has recognized me. – Barabas, I just had a small quarrel with our friend. He outraged me by his insults. I only tickled him a little when he provoked me. Look, he pulled the sword himself! He started the duel! I was forced to defend myself!

*Barabas* But he is dead!

*Giacomo* He mustn't be! You don't die from some tickling. We just had a row for a joke.

*Barabas* Whether by mistake or not, you killed him, my dear noble Don Giacomo.

*Giacomo* It must not be true.

*Barabas* It is.

*Ithamar* What do we do now?

*Giacomo* This must not come out. I promise you, on my word of honour, that I never intended to kill him!

*Barabas* Tell that to the court, noble Don Giacomo.

*Giacomo* Only you know about it. Spare me! My life is ruined if this comes out!

*Ithamar* He has run him through with his sword, here and here. (*exmines the body*)

*Barabas* You seem unharmed yourself, Don Giacomo, as if you took him by surprise. Then this isn't just manslaughter but homicide.

*Ithamar* It looks rather like some butchery, no, the rudest execution!

*Barabas* What were you thinking of, Don Giacomo?

*Giacomo* It was self defense, I promise!

*Ithamar* Here are two priests piously and efficiently beating each other to death, and then you force my lord here, a totally innocent Jew, to become an equally corrupt Christian! Where are your manners?

*Barabas* I was just on my way to you to fulfill my conversion, but this makes me back down and pull back my ears.

*Giacomo* But you still intend to bequeath half your property to us as promised, I hope?

*Barabas* I promised nothing, but you tried to force me. I see now that you hardly have that power any more, for two holy prelates in a duel with one ending up dead is a heavier scandal than obvious and natural feelings of revenge in a Jew. The court will settle this matter, noble Don Giacomo, tomorrow!

*Giacomo* Spare me!

*Barabas* I have no power and no right, for I am beyond the law. Only the court can judge you, Don Giacomo. Give me a hand here, slave! We must bring this corpse to the police! (*He and Ithamar carry away the body.*)

*Giacomo (in despair)* I am lost!

Scene 3. The governor's palace.

*Farnese* This is terrible, brother Giacomo! Two leading prelates involved in a duel with weapons, and one dead with wounds like in a sieve, the other unharmed without as much as a scratch! This is the most unheard of scandal that ever occurred here in the streets of Malta! You must understand, that there can be only one possible punishment?

*Giacomo (pinioned)* I am lost, and I know it.

*Farnese* Knights, what do you say?

*1st knight* He must die.

*2nd knight* But it's of the highest importance that this will not come out. What will become of the church, if this scandal is made public?

*Farnese* Thanks to the Jew's prudence we can handle this affair discreetly. No one knows about it except us.

*3rd knight* But I wish to hear what Don Giacomo could have to say for his defense of what he has done.

*Farnese* Don Giacomo, we are waiting.

*Giacomo* I have nothing to say for my defense. What I have done, I have done, and it cannot be defended. I and Bernardino entered into an impossible conflict, we provoked each other to madness and couldn't control ourselves, and the consequence was a disaster. I plead guilty. I can't do otherwise. But behind this is something else. What was the reason for our quarrel? Barabas', the Jew's money. He was ready to become a Christian and give us half of his riches in donations. For some reason he promised us both the full sum. Then we found ourselves quarrelling about who had the right of it. So greed opened to us like a trap, and in our blind folly we went down in it to our destruction. We both have to pay for it. But behind this was yet another matter: the evil started with the ruining of Barabas, when we unrightfully took his property and turned him over to naked poverty.

*Farnese* But like a cat he landed safely on his four feet.

*Giacomo* We still acted unrightfully. We needed the money for a tribute to the Turk, which never was paid.

*Farnese* Instead it has been used for better purposes: rearmament of the fleet and the fortification of all Malta in expectancy of the Turkish invasion.

*Giacomo* That may be so, but I have now confessed to you all what burdened my conscience, and I was not alone in originating this tangled mess of guilt.

*Farnese* Still, Giacomo, I suspect some angry scheme which you haven't discerned yourself. Tell me, why do you think the Jew promised you both his donation? Why is it Barabas and no one else that witnesses your quarrel and fight? From all of this I must conclude that there are obvious reasons to suspect Barabas of infernal intriguing calculations.

*Giacomo* We would never have had to suffer them if we didn't from the start confiscate his property without right.

*1st knight* He is only a Jew. Have we not the right to do what we like with such a creature?

*2nd* He is no better than a Turk. The whole world knows, that Turkey is the only nation in the world to welcome Hebrews and give them civil rights. No other country is that presumptuous.

*3rd knight* He might well be in league with the Sublime Porte and serve here as their agent.

*4th knight* We have seen well enough his penchant for intrigue.

*Farnese* Enough! I regret, noble Don Giacomo, that your sentence must be passed as inevitable. Out with him! Do you prefer the sword or hanging?

*Giacomo* St. Paul himself was decapitated with honour.

*Farnese* So be it! May the law have its course, and may our Christian faith not keep us from doing justice. Don Giacomo, you shall have a priest before your execution. Take the miserable murderer away!

*(Fra Giacomo is brought out.)*

Now to that other matter. What do you think about Barabas?

*1st knight* Don Giacomo was right, and we should take his warnings seriously.

*2nd knight* He is dangerous, and we must watch out with him.

*3rd knight* From where did he get his riches when everything was taken away from him?

*4th knight* The poisoning of the saintly nuns has still not reached any satisfactory explanation.

*Farnese* And I agree with the general sentiment. Let's be on our guard, especially now as we are expecting a Turkish attack at any moment.

#### Scene 4.

*Ithamar* Don Giacomo has had his neck cut off with honour. This is almost going far too easily. I must recuperate from this success and make a visit down to earth. This I think was the place of that lovely courtesan. *(pulls the bell string)*

*Bellamira (waking up with Piglia-Borza)* A customer! A customer!

*Piglia-Borza* Let him be. You have me.

*Bellamira* But you have no money. I'll just go and see who it is.

*(gets up taking on a nightgown)*

It's that Turk.

*Piglia-Borza* The bloke in the service of that extremely rich Jew?

*Bellamira* Yes.

*Piglia-Borza* Then you can surely squeeze him for some money. Let him in at once.

*Bellamira (lets in Ithamar)* Welcome, comrade!

*Ithamar (enters)* I could not resist the temptation.

*Bellamira* You did the right thing. That's why I exist.

*Piglia-Borza* Do you have any money?

*Ithamar* Not much, but I am in the service of the Jew.

*Piglia-Borza* Make him finance you then. Bellamira is the most beautiful and most demanded of her trade in town and does not offer her services for nothing.

*Ithamar* What is her price?

*Piglia-Borza* Three hundred crowns.

*Ithamar* I could get three thousand from my employer. I am his heir, since he took his only daughter's life himself.

*Piglia-Borza* This is welcome news. Then you could both press him for money and take out some inheritance in advance.

*Ithamar* Why not?

*Piglia-Borza* Settle the matter immediately! Write him a letter and tell him you need money.

*Ithamar* He will not be happy. I could be deleted from his will.

*Piglia-Borza* Try him. A few hundred is a modest beginning, and he must accept it. Then we could press the matter further.

*Ithamar* Well, let's try. And I did actually serve him well.  
(sits down to write)

*Piglia-Borza* Write: I need money at once. Send me three hundred crowns.

*Ithamar* So blunt and commanding? He will never agree.

*Piglia-Borza* Go on: 'Or else I go to the police with all I know.'

*Bellamira* Then he can't refuse.

*Ithamar* That is called a threat.

*Piglia-Borza* No, it's just a business offer which he can't refuse. Write it down, and I will deliver it to him at once!

*Ithamar* (looking at Bellamira and turns on.) As you wish. (writes)

## Scene 5.

*Barabas* (reads the letter) Who are you, swindler?

*Piglia-Borza* A servant of a most virtuous and honourable lady.

*Barabas* I believe you. I know the notorious but lovely Bellamira. So my servant has fallen in love with her and needs money like everyone else. Well, he can get ten crowns. (gives him ten crowns)

*Piglia-Borza* That's not what he asks for.

*Barabas* And do you think I am stupid? Do you think I can take any form of blackmail seriously? He may go to the authorities and tell what he knows, but I can strike him out of my will. Who will be the happier for that?

*Piglia-Borza* I will then bring him your answer with the ten crowns.

*Barabas* You will do right therein, and don't feel welcome back.  
(*Piglia-Borza* leaves.)

What a nitwit! My servant might now be lost. Well, he has only himself to blame. The world is full of cheats like him. If I only pay a salary, I could get anyone to murder for me whoever I would wish.

Scene 6.

*Bellamira* Well, what did he say? Did you get any money?

*Piglia-Borza* First he turned sour. Then he gave me ten crowns. (*gives them over*)

*Bellamira (upset)* Is that all?

*Piglia-Borza* Yes, that is all.

*Bellamira* When he is a millionaire! It's an insult!

*Piglia-Borza* He said, that if you went to the police, Ithamar, you would be stricken out of the will.

*Ithamar* That's what I thought.

*Bellamira* This will not do. We must anticipate him. Why don't we fix him at once? Then our friend here would have all his millions directly.

*Ithamar* He is well guarded. He must then be tricked to come here in some way. No, I believe more in the blackmail method.

*Piglia-Borza* Do you have any catch on him?

*Ithamar* If I have. I know everything about him. I have his whole career on my five fingers. I can testify to all his crimes. First he made his daughter steal all the riches of the convent...

*Piglia-Borza (makes a note of it)* Item one.

*Ithamar* Then he poisoned all the nuns of the convent including his daughter for persisting to remain a nun.

*Piglia-Borza (noting)* Item two.

*Ithamar* But before that he had strangled Don Bernardino, for which crime Don Giacomo was executed for a punishment. They both had it coming and deserved it, but nonetheless Barabas caused the death of both, and I was an eyewitness.

*Piglia-Borza (notes)* Item three.

*Ithamar* But before that he had caused the death of the governor's son and young Mathias, his daughter's suitors. I witnessed the duel myself. When one had been run through, the Jew ran the other through himself, since he wanted to keep his daughter for himself. Did you get it all?

*Piglia-Borza* Item four. Some merit list of a mass murderer! And such a villain is allowed to go free with no limit to his riches without anyone relieving him of his overload!

*Bellamira* Let's get on with it! Let's press him at once!

*Ithamar* How much do you want?

*Bellamira* Some hundred thousand. When they are finished we can ask for more.

*Piglia-Borza* Good. I will sum up his merit list to some three hundred thousand. Then he will be obliged to accept our business offer or take the consequences of the deficit. The case is clear.

*Bellamira* Go at it at once, *Piglia-Borza*!

*Piglia-Borza* I will run for it.

*(A guitar is heard.)*

*Bellamira* Wait!

*Piglia-Borza* Make up your mind!

*Bellamira* Do you hear the musician?

*Piglia-Borza* Does my lady suggest the fool?

*Bellamira* He is no fool just for pulling strings.

*Piglia-Borza* Only I must pull your strings.

*Bellamira* But these are different strings.

*Piglia-Borza* But obviously she wants the player pulling them.

*Bellamira* Yes, fetch him at once!

*Piglia-Borza* *(goes out on the balcony)* You there with the guitar!

*Barabas* *(enters disguised as a musician with an enormous hat and a fantastic bouquet)*

Who? Me?

*Piglia-Borza* Yes, you exactly!

*Barabas* What about me?

*Piglia-Borza* Get up here with your guitar! The lady here desires some music.

*Barabas* *(bowing deep, sweeping his hat)* I shall be delighted to be at your service, my good gentlefolks!

*Piglia-Borza* *(to the others)* He is coming up.

*Bellamira* At last we'll have some fun for a change!

*Piglia-Borza* Weren't you always pleased with me?

*Bellamira* You were always boring as you never had any money.

*Ithamar* Give him a break. I haven't started the action yet.

*Bellamira* All you have done so far is to bring ten crowns. Let's have some music now!

*Barabas* *(flashing his hat)* At your service, madame! I shall only have to tune the guitar first. *(tests the guitar)*

*Piglia-Borza* He seems to be French.

*Bellamira* Have you been long here on Malta?

*Barabas* Just a few months.

*Piglia-Borza* Do you know anything about the Jew *Barabas*?

*Barabas* No, he never invited me to come and play. Should I know something? Do you know something?

*Bellamira* *Ithamar* here knows everything. He is his heir.

*Barabas* Well, then he should be well informed.

*Bellamira* Tell him, *Ithamar*! *(watches the Jew's bouquet)*

*Ithamar* He is the greatest knave around the Mediterranean. First he manipulated his two son-in-law candidates into a duel with each other. One was the governor's son, and when one of them died he himself pierced the other to death.

Barabas Not bad! Can it be proved?

Ithamar I saw it myself.

Barabas (*aside*) You did it yourself, you treacherous dog.

Bellamira You are carrying a sumptuously splendid bouquet on your hat. Could it possibly be for me?

Barabas Of course, my lovely! Anything for a beautiful lady! (*offers her the bouquet most chivalrously*)

Bellamira (*smells them*) Mmmm! They smell marvellously!

Barabas (*aside*) They are intended to.

Bellamira Tell me more, Ithamar!

Ithamar Then he poisoned all the nuns of the entire convent including his own daughter as a revenge for her becoming a nun.

Piglia-Borza May I smell it, Bellamira? (*Bellamira hands over the bouquet.*) Mmmm! (*smells*)

Barabas (*aside*) I had some inkling but couldn't believe it. So you did that as well, you infernal servant! But there you committed your fatal transgression. My daughter was no game.

Bellamira Tell me more, Ithamar! (*yawns*)

Ithamar Not the way you yawn. Am I that boring?

Bellamira It must be the flowers. They smelled so sweet and lovely.

Ithamar May I? (*takes over the flowers and smells them*)

Piglia-Borza Absolutely stunning.

Barabas Do you want to listen to Ithamar's gossip or to my music?

Bellamira Tell me more, Ithamar. (*gets drowsy*)

Ithamar And then he... (*yawns*)

Piglia-Borza Don't you agree? Their sweetness is absolutely benumbing. (*yawns*)

Ithamar I begin to suspect something behind this.

Bellamira (*drowsy*) How was it with the priestly duellists? (*falls asleep*)

Barabas You just keep falling asleep. Don't you want to hear my music?

Piglia-Borza Yes, we would love to, but... (*falls asleep*)

Ithamar Who are you, musician?

Barabas Don't you know, Ithamar, that you can never fool a musician?

Ithamar Now I know! You are the Jew himself!

Barabas Too late, Ithamar. You have all three inhaled the poison which I perfumed with irresistible scents. Your boons behind my back are finished now! You are not just disinherited. You are dead!

Ithamar (*going out*) He anticipated us... (*falls asleep*)

Barabas Your sleep is eternal. I remove the evidence (*takes care of the bouquet*) and disappear. I have never been here. Good night! You made a good try, but there is no enterprise more risky than to wage on shortcuts and fast money by blackmail, and least of all against Jews. Enjoy your sweet death if you can, as your well earned wages! (*leaves*)

(*The scene remains. After Barabas' disappearance, Del Bosco turns up, sounding the bell.*)

*Del Bosco* Alas, no one at home! But they told me the best strumpet in town lived here. But the door is open? (*enters*) Anyone here? (*calls*) Hallo! (*silence*) No answer. There is a strange sweet smell here. (*comes across the three bodies.*)

What do I see? O horror! What terrifying sight! By my grandmother's ghost! This is absolutely terrible! (*collects himself*) All three are dead. What manner of murderous iniquity is this? Dear me, what a waste of such splendid beauty! (*clasps his hands over Bellamira*) But this one is a notorious pickpocket. And who is this? A Turk! I have seen him before. He served Barabas. But here is some paper. Let me see. (*reads aloud with steadily increasing astonishment*) Item one. He made his daughter steal all the riches of the convent. Item two. He poisoned all the nuns of the convent including his daughter for persisting to remain a nun. – But this is outrageously awful! And it's written by a dead man's hand! And the list is long! Only murders upon mass murders, infernal intrigues, and three fresh bodies to verify it! Flagrant evidence galore! That Jew is only spreading death around him! This must be of interest to the governor. I must run to his headquarters at once! My first duty now is to avenge the irreparable loss of the only proper courtesan with the highest reputation in the city! (*out*)

Act V scene 1. The governor's palace.

*Farnese* But this is absolutely terrible! We owe you a great amount of gratitude for tracking down these outrageous crimes! At last all these unsolved problems and grotesque mysteries have found a solution! Imagine, that he alone was guilty of them all!

*Del Bosco* But he will have a fair trial, I hope? I find it next to impossible to believe that one lone Jew could be guilty of such unheard of crimes exceeding all credible cruelty.

*Farnese* Of course we shall hear him out. He has been imprisoned and will have a fair trial, but these are hard times – the Turkish armada has now been sighted off Sicily, and we are to expect a most horrible siege. There might perhaps be space and time only for a court martial to the Jew.

*Knight* Most noble knights and governor, I beg to present Barabas, the worst villain that ever lived.

(*enter Barabas brought in chains*)

*Farnese* Barabas, you wicked devil and impertinent swine, so we finally got you at last!

*Barabas* Save your flattery for the Turk, who needs and deserves it better.

*Farnese* You have been found guilty of the worst crimes ever committed on Malta: multiple murder, all nuns in a convent including your own daughter Abigail, and my own son, besides priests and barons, all innocent, and who knows how many more!

*Barabas (calmly)* What is your evidence?

*Farnese* An overwhelming mass! Barabas, even the dead testify against you from the other side of the grave! Read! (*holds the paper to Barabas, who has to read it with his hands pinioned.*)

*Barabas* By whom did you find the paper?

*Del Bosco* A most respectable lady, whose noble cavalier must have noted the list on your own servant's dictation! All three were dead, obviously poisoned by you!

*Barabas (calmly)* What is your evidence?

*Farnese* Don't you see, Barabas, there is no need for any more evidence, when the whole world testifies against you! And there can be no stronger evidence than a testimony by a dead man's hand!

*Barabas* The respectable lady in question appears then to have been Bellamira, the most industrious courtesan in town. Who did what with her, who found the note?

*Farnese* We ask the questions! The hearing is run by us!

*1st knight* Excuse me, but he actually has a right to his defense, impartiality and an advocate. Lord governor, you are not unbiassed, since you lost your own son in these intricacies. Barabas asked you a question, and it should be easy to answer.

*Farnese* Well, don Bosco, answer the question of the accused!

*Del Bosco* I was only making a respectable visit.

*Barabas* To the worst whore in town? No one went to her except on business, or what?

*Farnese* Del Bosco?

*Bosco* Yes, I guess that's correct.

*Barabas* So you found the paper in such a fantastic company: the whore, the pimp and the Turk. Did you know that they tried to press me for money? I have a letter from them for evidence. I claim, that they dictated that writing for the purpose of pressing me for money.

*1st knight* But your own servant? Your Turk?

*Barabas* I had deleted him from my will. He was the brain in the plot. They hoped to anticipate my altering the will. Instead I intercepted them. His motive was clear.

*2nd* But the nuns in the convent and your daughter?

*Barabas* This is the most infamous and inhuman accusation. A father can never bring himself to bereave his own daughter of her life, no matter what she might have done. Tyrants have disposed of sons for jealousy of mad power, but never in the human history has a father taken the life of his own daughter by his own will. Not even our Bible mentions anything such. The terrible poisoning of all the nuns in the convent was executed by Ithamar, my own servant, without my knowing it. That Turk thought he thereby could improve his position with me, as a kind of aborted flattery.

*1st knight* I am convinced. Barabas' explanation is more plausible than that he himself would have done such a thing.

*Farnese* Well, what about Mathias and my son, then?

*Barabas* Both proposed to Abigail, my daughter. Therefore they were angry with each other. I have an alibi that I had nothing to do with the duel. I never wanted Mathias to die, since he was loved by my daughter.

*1st knight* That is also reasonable and convincing.

*3rd knight* Well, what about the duel between the prelates? How do you explain that two priests furiously attack each other in a fight for life or death, who usually only dedicate themselves to peace?

*Barabas* Don Giacomo accepted his guilt and was punished. I have nothing more to say about it.

*2nd knight* Well, what do you have to say about the three corpses in the whorehouse? Who had any motive of killing them but you?

*Barabas* There you are. I had reasons enough to wish them out of this world, but you can't bind me to any crime.

*Farnese* Shall we then accept that they died by themselves?

*Barabas* Do you have any other more demonstrable theory?

*Bosco (to himself)* That Jew is too sleek. They will never get at his money.

*Farnese* I am the governor and highest judge on the island, and I decide the following. We know you since of old, Barabas. You never lived for anything but your own wealth. You didn't want to contribute when Malta was in danger, and that's where the problems started. Then the terrible crimes started occurring. I sincerely believe that Abigail, your daughter, first became a nun to help you get back something of your lost wealth. Only that could at all explain that you landed on your feet after having lost everything. I don't think you caused the death of your daughter or of any nun. Like your defender I think that your servant did all that behind your back. Neither can you be charged for the duel between Lodovico and Mathias. I know how Lodovico loved your daughter, who promised herself to his rival. But you can't be absolved from all responsibility in the fight between the priests. Neither can I believe in your innocence in the death of your servant and his fellow blackmailers. I find Barabas of Malta guilty of at least the death of four people, and that three of them were crooks is not alleviating circumstance. So you are pronounced guilty. All your property will be confiscated, and you will be hanged.

*Bosco* It's fair.

*Barabas* It isn't fair! You can't prove anything! You can't judge me on the sole ground that I can't prove myself innocent!

*Farnese* I have passed your sentence, and it stands firm. Take the poor devil away. He is outside the law anyway and has no right of appeal. (*Barabas is taken away.*)

So I hope we at last will never see that knave again, and that he doesn't resurrect yet again with all his riches.

*Messenger* Lord governor! The Turkish fleet has been sighted!

*Farnese* That was about time. At last we may fight.

*Knight (enters, sinister)* Lord governor, a sad tiding.

*Farnese* Well?

*Knight* The Jew Barabas is dead. He must have taken poison himself.

*Farnese* He always manages to intercept us. So he outwitted us unto the end.

*Knight* What shall we do with his body?

*Farnese* We can't have it here. We can't give his paganism a Christian burial. Throw his body to the Turks! He was after all an agent in their service.

*Knight* Shall we then just drop it over the wall?

*Farnese* Yes. It's a dog's burial, and he was after all less than dog to us. Throw him to the Turks as a rotting corpse for a present to welcome them. Nothing would be more appropriate.

*Knight (clicks his heels and salutes to acknowledge order received and leaves.)*

*Farnese* So we are rid of the inside enemy. Now we have only the outside enemy to think of. Take your positions for the defense! (*All break up.*)

## Scene 2.

*Barabas* That's what I thought, that they wouldn't like to keep a Jewish corpse in Malta. So here I am now, completely free and at large, just in time to welcome the Turkish armada and their invasion.

*Suleiman (enter with Turks)* And who do we find here? A spy?

*Barabas (politely bowing)* At your service, most gracious lord.

*Suleiman* Who are you?

*Barabas* A Jew, Barabas, just the right man to guide you and to give you the keys to the city.

*Suleiman* Barabas, who was plundered by the governor, so that his tribute to us with your money should be paid, which it never was?

*Barabas* The very man, at your service.

*Suleiman* And what then are you doing here?

*Barabas* You will have no other reception committee. They just threw me out of the city, for they did not want to have a Jewish corpse on their hands when you came for a visit. So therefore they threw me to you.

*Suleiman* This I don't understand. Does that mean that you were dead?

*Barabas* No, but well sentenced to death. I then took a herb and anticipated them, seemed like dead, and then I was passed on here as a body, and more like me and live again I was in good time for your embarkment.

*Suleiman* I call that some strike of luck. So you can then give us the city?

*Barabas* I know all about its bastions, gates and fortifications, and I can lead you to the heart of its massive defense system by the back door, so you can swiftly take them aback. It should be an easy game.

*Suleiman* I believe so. If they are foolish enough to mishandle a Jew, they should know, that God himself can take revenge by the double and multiple on everyone who dares to inflict anything on anyone of his people!

*Barabas* That's right, my good Turk! So let's go to it at once!

Scene 3.

Turks march in with Farnese and the knights as prisoners in chains.

*Suleiman* Well, you proud Christian dogs, how do you feel now? Wouldn't it have been better to keep your promise to us and pay your tribute? On your knees, you unreliable cheats and indefensible opportunists! You are now slaves, who used to be so eager to make us slaves!

*Farnese* We have nothing to say. We are prisoners and can only obey.

*Suleiman* Serves you right, you false breaker of promises! I deliver you all with warm hands to our new governor. Welcome, Barabas, and may now your property be multiplied as thanks for having delivered Malta to us!

*Farnese* Barabas, you insidious traitor!

*Suleiman* Shut up, slave! You are now the property of your new governor Barabas, who has the power to do with you whatever he pleases.

*Barabas* I thank you, Suleiman, for your generosity and my exoneration, and I will govern Malta according to common sense and liberal tolerance and without stupid persecution of alien and different religions.

*Suleiman* Thereby we transfer our highest authority to you with the keys of Malta and these prisoners. (*The keys of Malta are solemnly carried to Barabas on a red velvet cushion with tufts.*) You have given us proof of extraordinary loyalty. We trust you completely and confer on you all our responsibility. That's all. Back to our camp! (*The Turks march off.*)

*Farnese* So you are now the governor with all that it means. You have been given the highest power over Malta and are now richer than ever before. I guess we have nothing else to look forward to than eternal darkness in a dungeon, if we are allowed any life at all?

*Barabas* Gentlemen, nothing is more dangerous than to pass judgement by your prejudice. You were always prejudicial and therefore rather blind. I need you. As a governor I am not loved by the people, we are rather more hated than even the Turks. I suggest a coup. What if I give you Suleiman for a prisoner with his highest officers in your hands, so that Malta for all future will be free from Turkey?

*Farnese* Barabas, you never cease to astonish me. If this could be carried through, all Christianity would be grateful to you, and you would naturally not only keep your riches but also your position as governor.

*Barabas* I ask for nothing more. Then that's settled. You shall have my instructions. I never failed before, so I could but win also now. (*leaves*)

*1st knight* Do you think he is serious?

*2nd knight* A Jew is always serious when he means business.

*3rd knight* He could make it. That's for sure.

*Farnese* So all we have to do is to wait for the redemption and that everything will return to normal.

#### Scene 4. The Turkish camp

*Suleiman* This went smoothly enough, didn't it, gentlemen?

*1st Turk* Yes, great general.

*Suleiman* Malta is now subdued for all future, and we leave it in good hands and sensible care to a highly knowledgeable Jew who has proved himself more constructive and liberal than any Christian. We have seldom reached such a perfect political settlement.

*2nd Turk* Great admiral, a messenger.

*Messenger* From Barabas, your governor of Malta. He greets you and wishes to see you with your staff on a banquet with him before you sail.

*Suleiman* That's decent of him. But can he afford such a feast? Malta is bombed to pieces by all wars, and there is hardly any food on the island. We do not wish to complicate his situation further by helping him rebuild the city.

*Messenger* Barabas always has extra secret resources.

*Suleiman* Where does he wish to meet us?

*Messenger* In the nunnery at the outskirts of the city.

*Suleiman* Tell him that we are honoured and that my whole command including myself will attend.

*Messenger* Most welcome then. (*leaves*)

*Suleiman* What about that? I call that a royal gesture. He wants to celebrate us with a farewell banquet!

#### Scene 5.

*Barabas* What do you give me for my trouble?

*Farnese* What about a hundred thousand crowns?

*Barabas* That's reasonable. Agreed. (*They shake hands*)

*Farnese* But please repeat the entire plan once more, so that you don't miss anything.

*Barabas* So, as the Turkish army enters the fortress and is seated at the festive banquet, the whole floor will explode, having been carefully mined. None of them will come out of that death trap alive. You immediately capture and take all survivors prisoners. But for Suleiman and his generals, I have prepared a far juicier surprise. As they pass the gallery to my party at the convent, you just swiftly cut the line here, and whoever is up on the balcony will then hopelessly fall down all the way to the cellar to drown there in a tub, which I prepared to be heated by a fire. They will all die in a minute, fried like frogs to rags of flesh.

*Farnese* But how do I know when to cut the line?

*Barabas* As soon as you see Suleiman cross the bridge. You can see it very clearly from here.

*Farnese* Then I am ready. (*to the knights*) Be ready for the signal!

*Barabas* And I will go to receive my Turkish delegation for the banquet.

(*Farnese and his knights conceal themselves. The Turks arrive.*)

Most gracious effendi, most welcome to this final banquet! I hope it shall please you to the highest!

*Suleiman* We know that much of your hospitality, great Barabas, that no one is ever disappointed. You always led a life of high moral standards and virtue and consequently only fair play. From the Christians we always had only trouble as they insisted on constantly giving us hell, but we always found that we could trust you as an honourable neutral, true and good honest Jew.

*Barabas* And I am sure you will all be happy and satisfied with our politics and that our collaboration by the years only will import the best harvest of results for the good of all. (*aside*) Why doesn't Farnese cut the line? Maybe something has got stuck.

(*A terrible roar of noise in the background*)

*Suleiman* What was that? It sounded like some detonation.

*1st Turk (enters suddenly)* Lord general, a terrible accident! The whole fortress has exploded!

*Suleiman (alarmed, on his guard)* What is this, Barabas? An attack, just when our greatest force was gathered there for pleasure and festivities?

*Barabas* This is terrible! It must be saboteurs, terrorists, partisans and traitors! (*aside*) Something is wrong. I must check the mechanism. (*goes up to the gallery himself*)

*Farnese* Now! (*The line is cut, and Barabas falls down alone but gets a grip on a balk.*)

*Del Bosco (rushes forth with his knights)* Suleiman, you are all here taken prisoners!

*Suleiman* This is treason!

*Farnese (steps forth)* No, honoured colleague, it's only war. We don't give up Malta that easily. You were only fooled in here so that we could capture you and send you to death.

*Suleiman* And the agent Barabas?

*Farnese* Just a pawn in the game. It has filled its function. He fell himself into the trap he set up for you, believing that we as good Christians would give him extra gratifications.

*Suleiman* So you tricked him to death by provoking his greed in a typical Jewish-Christian double play?

*Del Bosco (observes Barabas)* He is still alive, lord governor, he hasn't fallen down all the way.

*Farnese* Will we then never have done with him?

*Barabas* No, for the game isn't over as long as I live.

*Suleiman* Barabas, what trap is this that you have fooled us into and fallen into yourself?

*Farnese* The fair lie of greed. He just wanted more money. To that pipe of lies all humanity keeps dancing to death.

*Suleiman* Barabas, explain yourself!

*Barabas* Suleiman, I apologise and ask you for forgiveness, for unfortunately Farnese is perfectly right: in my effort to fool you we both met with our destruction. We are lost, and it's my fault. Yes, my carrot was to eke my fortune, for much wants more, and it's not more than human that no one ever is quite content. You Christians

and you Turks and Muslims have taken everything away from us Hebrews, ruined our homeland, burnt out temple, expelled us and reduced us to homeless gypsies, despised and exiled by your prejudice beyond the law. We are fair game, and there is almost money for shooting us. Our only freedom that wasn't taken away from us by force was to make money. And by the greed of humanity we saw our opportunity to still have power and some kind of influence on the course of the world, so we turned into merchants and bankers, profiteers on the perpetual greed of humanity. But I became greedy myself and fell into the trap of that weakness by which all human greed self-destructively keeps digging its own grave. Then fall, Barabas, and find your wages! (*let's go of his grip and falls*)

*Suleiman* We have lost our only friend in the world.

*Farnese* I am sorry, gentlemen, but you have lost the war against Malta, which will remain free as a Christian freehold without Turkish tyranny. You must accept Christian captivity. If you are lucky your Sultan will ransom you fairly.

*Suleiman* Money, governor Farnese?

*Farnese* What else? As the fallen Jew said: man will never be satisfied.

Noble knights of St. John, bring out the prisoners!

*(The prisoners are taken out.)*

*Del Bosco (to the audience)* Thus ends our play, a study in capitalism, instructive for good and for worse perhaps, but actually only a documentary, a chart of the human squirrel's wheel, which constantly whirls around madly driven by our urge and desire, to what purpose and aim? Yes, to get further on into the enclosedness of the squirrel's wheel, but without ever understanding, that we are only our own prisoners.

*(bows and leaves)*

*The End.*

*(Athens-Palermo 7.4.2001,  
translated December 3rd 2018)*