

**BARABBAS: A
DREAM OF THE
WORLD'S TRAGEDY**

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Barabbas: a dream of the world's tragedy by Marie Corelli

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'And they consulted how they might take Him, *by subtilty.*'
—*Matthew xxvi. v. 4.*

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BY

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'THELMA' 'A ROMANCE OF TWO WORLDS' 'ARDATH'
'VENDUTTA!' 'WORMWOOD: A DRAMA OF PARIS'
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‘And they had then a notable prisoner called Barabbas.’—*Matthew xxv. v. 16.*

‘One named Barabbas which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him.’—*Mark xv. v. 7.*

‘Barabbas, who for a certain sedition made in the city and for murder was cast into prison.’—*Luke xxiii. v. 19.*

‘Now Barabbas was a robber.’—*John xviii. v. 40.*

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BARABBAS

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I

A LONG sultry Syrian day was drawing near its close.

The heavy heat was almost insupportable, and a poisonous stench oozed up from the damp earth-floors of the Jewish prison, charging what little air there was with a deadly sense of suffocation. Down in the lowest dungeons complete darkness reigned, save in one of the cells allotted to the worst criminals ; there, all through the slow hours a thin white line of light had persistently pierced the thick obscurity. It was the merest taper-flame reflection of the outside glowing Eastern sky, yet narrow as it was, it had vexed the eyes of the solitary prisoner on whom it fell, and

he had turned from its hot flash with a savage curse and groan. Writhing back as far as his chains would allow, he covered his face with his manacled hands, pressing his eyelids down, and gnawing his lips in restless fury till his mouth was bitter with the taste of his own blood. He was seized with such impotent rages often. He mentally fought against that poignant light-beam cutting like a sword through deep darkness,—he regarded it as a positive foe and daily source of nervous irritation. It marked for him the dismal time,—when it shone he knew it was day, —when it vanished, it was night. Otherwise, whether minutes or hours passed, he could not tell. His existence had merged into one protracted phase of dull suffering, varied with occasional fits of maniac ferocity which only relieved him for the moment and left him more stupefied and brutish than before. He had no particular consciousness of anything except of that needle-pointed ray, which falling obliquely upon him, dazzled and hurt his eyes. He could have endured the glare of the Syrian sun in the free and open country,—no one better than he could have turned a bold gaze to its amber flame radiating

through the vast blue dome of ether,—but here and now, that thin shaft of brightness pouring slantwise through the narrow slit in the wall which alone served as an air-passage to the foul den in which he was caged, seemed an aggression and a mockery. He made querulous complaint of it, and, huddling on his bed of dirty straw in the furthest darkness, refreshed himself anew with curses. Against God and Fate and man, he railed in thick-throated blasphemies, twisting and turning from side to side, and clutching now and again in sheer ferocity at the straw on which he lay. He was alone, yet not altogether lonely, for close beside him where he crouched like a sullen beast in the corner there was a crossed grating of thick iron bars, the only air-aperture to the neighbouring cell, and through this there presently came a squat grimy hand. After feeling about for a while, this hand at last found and cautiously pulled the edge of his garment, and a faint hoarse voice called him by name :

‘Barabbas!’

He turned with a swift savage movement that set his chains clanking dismally.

‘What now?’

‘They have forgotten us,’ whined the voice. ‘Since early morning they have brought no food. I am perishing with hunger and thirst! Ah, I would I had never seen thy face, Barabbas, or had aught to do with thine evil plotting!’

Barabbas made no answer.

‘Knowest thou not,’ went on his invisible fellow-felon, ‘what season this is in the land?’

‘How should I know!’ retorted Barabbas disdainfully. ‘What are seasons to me? Is it a year or years since we were brought hither? If thou canst tell, I cannot.’

‘’Tis eighteen months since thou didst slay the Pharisee,’ replied his neighbour with marked malignity of accent,—‘And had it not been for that wicked deed of thine, we might have missed this present wretchedness. Verily it is a marvel we have lived so long, for look you, now it is Passover.’

Barabbas uttered no word, either of surprise or interest.

‘Rememberest thou the custom of the Feast?’ pursued the speaker, ‘How that one captive chosen