

PROLOGUE

A ship. A gang of pirates rush about, grabbing and forcefully removing young women. Amidst the chaos, we see PAULINA picked up by GRIMALDI and carried away as she screams.

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

A street on the edge of a market in a dangerous, poorly governed Muslim country – like Somalia but not Somalia. Enter VITELLI and GAZETT, two Americans disguised as traders.

VITELLI:

You've hired a shop then?

GAZETT:

Sir, I have.

And since I didn't trust the greedy looks
The harbor master flitted at our wares,
I've personally seen to the unloading
Of all our goods from off our pisspot of a ship.
And you'll be pleased to know that nothing's broke:
Despite our so-called captain's best attempts
To crash us on the outskirts of the harbor,
There's not a crystal cracked or painting blemished.

VITELLI:

It's hard imagining, Gazett, that you
Would partake in such labor of your own accord.

GAZETT:

I'm nothing but a servant in your house, sir,
Where God exists within the margins.
So I'll be damned if I will let those Arab curs
Run off with any of the goods we brought with us
Without first parting with their cash. Besides,
I have been practicing some pretty speeches
To trick these troglodytes out of their gold.
I'll swear to them upon Muhammed's life
Or any other deity they choose, that these
The classroom paintings of some art school rejects
Are stolen classics from a financier's apartment,
Or that this naked whore is actually the heiress
Of some gigantic fortune.

VITELLI:

You begged me to allow you to accompany us
And this is what you plan to do in this place?
You will attempt to lie to these men?

GAZETT:

I'd lie most any place, my dear Vitelli,
And only tell the truth to save my hide.
Within your father's firm I've seen a futures trader lie
To steal a sum of money from his cousin.
And later he received a raise for it!
If trickery for ten percent returns
Is thought to be so meritorious
And Christian in our homeland, what then here?
To free these ragheads of a buck or two,
I'd sell a painting of your father to a terrorist,
So he can use it as a target practice.
If that means we are richer and they are not,
Is that not holy work?

VITELLI:

Gazett, don't tell me that you've found religion.

GAZETT:

Religion? No. I'll leave devotion to such as you
And your companion, Saint Francisco.
How you abide that teacher from the Dark Ages
I cannot tell –
No, I find all religions pointless,
And therefore I do practice all of them
Whenever the occasion serves me.
I will deny myself a bacon breakfast
If I know it will get me closer to a Jewish banker.
Tell me what country I am in, and I
Will be of that religion.

VITELLI:

So while we're hiding in this market,
Will you become a Muslim for a time?

GAZETT:

Oh no sir! Have you not heard?
The truest sign of any Muslim, my dear boy,
Is in the pants. These scuzzmonsters
Will mutilate their genitals, and their wives',
In Allah's name. And in no name will I
Ever do such harm upon my sacred altar.

VITELLI:

No, surely they don't such things.

GAZETT:

I swear they do, or everything I've learned
From Fox News is just a lie.
I'd surely love my seventy odd virgins,
But with no toy to tickle them all with,
What would be the point?

VITELLI:

You are and always will be an idiot.
One of supreme stupidity.
These people are no simpletons –
They steal souls off the sea, and they'll not hesitate
To steal your life as easily as you would look
To make a dollar off your swindling.
Our merchant clothes but cloak our greater task;
Your jests may prove our doom and so my sister's.
So I suggest you leash your avarice
For if you once endanger our true task,
I'll cut that wagging tongue out of your mouth.

GAZETT:

Speaking of cutting, sir, if I may wag once more,
Beware what colors you have on, sir.
That red you're wearing is despised
As emblematic of the ousted king.
I saw a chicken seller with a scarlet scarf
Cut cross his face for being a loyalist.
I'm glad the soldier that attacked him
Had not looked my direction; I had on
Red boxers, and if they'd shown above my pants
Then surely he'd have cut me down to size.

VITELLI:

This country is more hopeless than I'd heard.
I fear we may have come too late Gazett.
Take your own tale as warning how you act.
Get to our shop, and get to work.
I have to find Francisco. We will come after.

GAZETT:

I wish you best of luck sir.
Remember: no red.

VITELLI:

My dear Paulina, dearest sister,
I pray we're not too late to find you.
I've cast off everything – my livelihood,
My education, all my wealth, to come
To this forsaken country and to bring you home.
If my own death can save your life, then gladly I
Give up whatever days remain to me so you
Can have another free from these obsidian curs.
That they would kidnap such an innocent,
A soul as pure as yours, oh, it galls me!

FRANCISCO enters, also in disguise.

VITELLI:

My dear Francisco, you're my truest guide and surest hope.
It's good to see you. Tell me what you can
About my wayward sister: is she here?
Or will Fate mock us for our toils and labors
By letting us arrive too late to save Paulina?
I feel my mind's about to blow from lack of knowing!

FRANCISCO:

I pray you, be more quiet.
I come with news, but first I must admonish you:
You always speak with such disdain for fate,
But you refer to Fate like it's some blind
And heartless wheel the poets used to speak of.
But Fate is nothing next to God, my boy.
You cannot look at all you've done –

How far behind the enemy lines we've come
And all the perils we have overcome along the way –
And not see God's protection over us.
And if He's let us come this far, I know
God won't let anything befall Paulina
Until she's safely in our hands again.
So for the moment, show me manly patience.

VITELLI:

If she were your younger sister, you'd behave the same.

FRANCISCO:

She was my student, and her travels to
This god-forsaken region were by my council.
Trust me, Vitelli, I can sympathize.
But like I said, I have some news:
I have explored the greater districts of the city
And pressed as far as any Christian could,
And what I've learned is promising, if troubling:
Since the civil war came to an end here,
The wealth of all the city is controlled by Asambeg -
A mighty and most odious character from what I've gleaned -
Who uses several harbors here as ports of call
For various pirate bands that operate upon the Gulf.
He's currently receiving one Mustapha,
A minor financier of all these operations,
And with him is the daughter of the Emir, Donusa.

VITELLI:

I do not see how this concerns us.

FRANCISCO:

I pray you, learn to be more patient and you shall.
Among the pirate officers on hand for this event
Is Asambeg's best captain, or rather worst:
It is Grimaldi, the fearsome Renegade of Venice
Who brought with him a gift of twenty western women
Pulled off a missionary ship last week.
They say that Asambeg has chosen one,
A beautiful young Southern virgin,
To be his personal –

VITELLI:

Don't speak another word.
This poison in my ear will kill me long before
I find my just revenge. This girl you speak of
Must be Paulina. While I can't speak to her
Proclivities, I know she is the nonpareil
Of beauty, and this dog has her to wet his appetite.
Come!

FRANCISCO:

Where are you going?

VITELLI:

To my sister's aid!

While I have blood left in these outraged veins,
I'll do whatever's necessary to
Ensure that no more wrongs fall on her head.
And should God prove beneficent enough
To put that damned Grimaldi in my path,
I'll make him eat his own insidious heart
After he begs Paulina for forgiveness.

FRANCISCO:

So after all our clever work to come here,
All these disguises, all the money you have spent,
Bankrupting your inheritance,
And all my efforts gathering intelligence,
You'll rush off to your death so quickly
Without so much as positing a plan?
I thought I asked you to have patience.

VITELLI:

How can you bid me to stand still
When you have told me my dear sister's near
And that her purity – which I'd protect
For any woman, blood or otherwise -
Stands vulnerable to these atrocious animals?

FRANCISCO:

What help or comfort can you give her if you're dead?
You've been my student many years, Vitelli,
And you have always put your passions

Too far in front of logic or, more painfully, your faith.
We move too fast, we die. And she'll be lost.
If ever there's a moment where you need
To put your trust in God –

VITELLI:

Oh God, can you-

FRANCISCO smacks VITELLI.

FRANCISCO:

Don't take his name in vain. You understand?
If ever there's a moment where you need
To put your trust in God, then this is it.
So pray for her. She needs your prayers, I'm sure of that.
You do that, and I promise you, Vitelli,
I'll work a plan to free your sister
And show you for once and all that God
Is watching both our backs.

VITELLI:

I'm sorry for my rashness. I've been at sea too long,
And my imagination's run away from me
With thoughts of what could happen to Paulina.
I know I've struggled as your student, and
I indulge my doubts and passions far too much
But I will strive to give myself to God more fully, sir.
And may he offer us a path to save my sister.

FRANCISCO:

He will not disappoint you, son. Now come.
We've work to do.

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

The palace of ASAMBEG. Enter DONUSA, with her servants MANTO and CARAZIE, a eunuch.

DONUSA:

Have either of you seen the Christian girl
This Asambeg is so obsessed with?

MANTO:

I have, my lady. I was there when he
First saw her and became enthralled.

DONUSA:

And is she as magnificent as many claim?

MANTO:

Well, she was bathed in tears just then,
But still, her beauty shown despite her sorry fate.
She's well proportioned, with pale skin
That first I thought was made of alabaster.
Her eyes betrayed a deep intelligence as well.
If she were not a westerner,
I'd say that save your majesty, the girl's
The finest that I've ever seen.

DONUSA:

Save for myself? You flatter me as always.
Sometimes I wish I could cast off my wealth
And my high status, so once I could be dealt with plainly.

CARAZIE:

If ever your highness wishes to expel
Her wealth to try such a task,
I'll gladly, though it'd pain me, take
The burden of that gold upon myself.

DONUSA:

And lose the benefits that come along with it?
I hardly care about my family's wealth,
But as the Emir's daughter, I at least
Have means to bend a social standard here and there.
That prize is worth your flattery,
However old it gets.
And yet this foreign girl of Asambeg's
Has made me wonder what the western world
Provides its women.
Carazie, you're from America.
How different are your western women?
I've never met one, and I'm curious.

Speak freely with me. Although you can be churlish
I'm never harsh with you, nor have you met
With heavy bondage under me.

CARAZIE:

Heavy? No. I was made lighter by
My service to you by some several ounces.
That's earned me my occasional low blows.
But to your question: Every U.S. woman
Is freer than yourself. They all are Queens.
Her husband is her eunuch, and her lover is
Her personal shopkeep, who trades in gifts
For brief encounters in motel rooms.
A woman's most admired for acting dumber than she is,
For overpainting of her face, and saying yes
To her desires under influence of alcohol alone.
They laugh behind their teeth at men
Who call them vapid or brain dead.
For they are taught from birth to use their every charm
For their own gain, and men only use theirs
To gain the women. It's so very sad.

DONUSA:

You're mad for sure. Although our religion
Allows all sorts of pleasure to its true believers
(Whoever those may be) I doubt such looseness
Could be accepted in this land.
Although I wish it could. This life is irksome!
My father wants me married soon, and yet
He only offers up these warlords and their financiers.
I'd rather have a western whelp like you described
Than half the suitors father has arranged.
First Asambeg, that sickly vagabond,
And now Mustapha, and his snuff.
Who still snorts snuff in modern times??

CARAZIE:

A marriage in the east or west, my lady,
Is a transaction, plain and simple.
When you accept this truth, you'll take the meatiest deal.

DONUSA:

Oh quiet, you're not helping.
I listen to them talk of women like commodities
And I am meant to choose one as my mate?
I'll never understand a man.
I'm getting dull. Let's have some music and a dance.

MANTO:
My lady, you must know that's not allowed here.
If Asambeg or anyone should hear us -

DONUSA:
I'm capable of handling a little wrath
Should any of our hosts discover me.
What's life without bending rules from time to time?

(There is a song sung by CARAZIE. DONUSA starts to move to the music. It is sensual and free.)

(A knock at the door.)

DONUSA:
Ugh! Never any peace!
Who is it at the door Manto?

MANTO:
It is the financier, Mustapha.
He wishes now to dote on you, my lady.

DONUSA:
We must receive him, I'm afraid, and do so
With fullest ceremony. It's my father's wish.
Oh isn't there a better man in all the Muslim world?
But I must see him. Open the door.

(DONUSA veils herself. MUSTAPHA enters, with a gift in hand.)

MUSTAPHA:
Dear lady, it is an honor entering this sacred place.

DONUSA:
This place is sacred?

MUSTAPHA:

Yes, or any place
That you inhabit, being the darling star
Of all the Arab world.

DONUSA:

More flattery.

Allah protect me from this emptiness!

MUSTAPHA:

I hope you will permit me to present you
With these, the finest pearls this side of Mecca.

DONUSA:

If that is true, you offer me too much.

MUSTAPHA:

It's nothing; I can say I bought them for a steal.
And even so, there's little I'd not pay
For such a gem as you.

DONUSA:

Then thank you sir.

I won't deny you such a noble gesture.

MUSTAPHA:

My fair Donusa, I cannot express my pride
At your great father's offer of your hand.
I know how many men you have denied already,
And though your action speak impertinence,
For you, however regal you may be,
Are still a woman, yet you're light incarnate.
So I can promise you that though I seem
No more than just a financier of shady deals,
I have ambition that can match your peerless radiance.

DONUSA:

Forgive me, sir, but can you be so sure of that
If you have only seen me veiled?

MUSTAPHA:

There's wonder enough within your eyes
To tell me that the rest of you is all perfection.

DONUSA:

First glances, sir, can oftentimes be wrong.
My veil, no matter how my eyes may shine,
May shroud a hideous physique which you will not find pleasing.

MUSTAPHA:

A very clever turn of phrase.
I highly doubt my senses of perception
Are that far off the mark, my dear.
For if you'll gander in my eyes
I know you'll see a man of brains and power.
A man who hopes to bring us soon as possible to that
Most happy day when I can see you veilles,
And know for certain all your bounty.

CARAZIE:

It is a wonder that our lady hasn't vomited.

DONUSA:

You know I have denied my share of suitors, sir.
But as my father seems to favor you,
I'll offer you your chance to plead your case.
You say you harbor great ambitions?

MUSTAPHA:

My greatest being you.
But close behind that just and chaste desire
Is my great cause: the union of Arabia.
I have a twelve step plan laid out
To bring the Arab world into one Ummah
That will become the greatest economic state
This world has ever seen. And you shall be its queen.

CARAZIE:

He'd have more luck establishing
An Ummah that encompasses the world
Than win my lady had he twelve whole lives!

DONUSA:

That's truly fascinating.
Since clearly you're a business man

Of means to win entire nations,
I'll offer you this chance:
We'll talk throughout the next two days,
And if by Friday prayers I find you to my liking,
I'll show my favor by providing you
A peek behind my veil. Agreed?

MUSTAPHA:

Two days? I'll only need until the sun has set
To show you what I have to offer.

DONUSA:

(Aside) I doubt it'd even take that long!
Then we have got a deal, Mustapha.
And now I wonder if you'll grant a favor:
I've heard the market is quite an interesting sight,
Especially since the King has entered exile.
But even though I am his majesty's daughter,
I cannot go alone.

MUSTAPHA:

The market in this city, my dear lady,
Will be of little interest to one who's lived
The life of luxury within the Emirate.
But if you are intrigued, I could arrange
A tour for you myself. I do have business
Which I must see to there before the day's end.

DONUSA:

Please, take me to the market, and I'll see you do
Your business there, so I may judge
How worthy of my father's love you truly are.
But let's go just the two of us, and I
Shall play your loyal maiden. If any
Of the people in the market find out I'm royalty
They will not act the same around you.

MUSTAPHA:

If this shall help me win your hand,
And peak within your veil, then I shall strive
To show what I alone can do that's worth your viewing.
And as we go, I'll tell you of my schemes

To launch my twelve step plan –

DONUSA:

We will in time hear all we need of schemes.
For now, here is my hand.

MUSTAPHA:

My lady.

DONUSA:

(Aside) Allah feel free to have me spirited away
By one of this foul creature's pirate band
So I can hear no more of business models!!

(They exit.)

ACT ONE SCENE THREE

(The market. GAZETT mans the shop as VITELLI and FRANCISCO speak.)

GAZETT:

Come one, come all, for all your Western needs!
What do you lack? Whatever it is, we have it here!
There's pure Venetian crystal, European paintings
American electronics, all your wants
In one place, freshly ripped from off
A sailing vessel. Dress up your house with
The finest stolen goods this side of Mecca!

FRANCISCO:

I shall return as soon as I explore the city further.
Stay put, and let me offer some advise.
Gazett will be an easy target for the whores
Who wander through the market. They are trained
To use their dark, exotic skin to full advantage
On any Westerners who try to set up in this place.
Take heed he does not get distracted.

VITELLI:

I thought such acts were outlawed and reviled here?

FRANCISCO:

This country may proclaim itself as fearing God,
But as you see, they've little fear of any law.
Beware. Their looks will tempt you too, I fear.

VITELLI:

You truly think I'd fall for prostitutes?
Paulina is my only aim.

FRANCISCO:

And we shall land on her as soon as possible.
I will return.

(FRANCISCO exits.)

VITELLI:

As if a simple whore with olive skin
Could make me turn my course. Preposterous.
I'd rather pull out my own arteries.

GAZETT:

These ragheads are no easy customers, good sir.
I fear there will be little profits here today.

VITELLI:

Be patient. True gains are coming.

GAZETT:

Save your regurgitated pioussness
For that old clap trap. I'll never understand
Why your good father, model of perversity
And avarice, could set you up with such
A stuck up tutor as Francisco.
I mean, a Catholic priest? Come on!

VITELLI:

He worried Paulina's and my soul
Would slide the same way his did. His is too far gone,
But he wants us to stand for something better.

GAZETT:

And so you bark back scripture like a soldier,

Things that you don't believe for real,
And let Paulina join a mission to Sudan
Where she became an easy target.
Oh surely there's divinity in this:
God wants the world to have one less virgin -

(VITELLI grabs GAZETT.)

VITELLI:

You speak another word and I will strand you here!
How dare you even joke about such things.
It doesn't matter if it was to please my father,
Or if it was to serve I god you disavow,
Paulina chose to make a difference in the world,
Far more than can be said about the two of us.
As for Francisco, he's a good and honest man.
He's gotten us this far, and his "fool's teachings"
Have kept me calm enough to deal with you.
There is no act of heaven here, Gazett;
The one to blame for all of this rotten mess is
That bastard traitor, old Grimaldi.
If ever there was proof of God, it's him,
For his existence proves the Devil lives.

(Enter GRIMALDI, swilling grog, and accompanied by BOATSWAIN and CAPTAIN.)

GAZETT:

Dear lord, you speak the devil's name,
And he appears. Behold, what evil comes our way.

VITELLI:

The basilisk himself within my sight,
And I'm too dead to act?
I must hold off or else Francisco's plan
Shall be for nothing.
Be still my heart; have patience my two hands.

GAZETT:

What do you lack? Pure China dishes?
The latest iPad? Perhaps some soap to clean those pits?
Or maybe a cheap whore to cuddle with?

GRIMALDI:

I'll have your mother for my whore, you dickless pimp
Or if she's dead, I'll use this simple knife
To trim you to a pleasing shape.
Not for my pleasure, though, but for my dog!
Who lets this trash hold shops within the market?

GAZETT:

We came as guest of an Egyptian trader, who-

GRIMALDI:

Shut up, you fucking limp dick pussy.
You think this garbage interests me?
I threw away as much refuse off my
Last taking on the Gulf.
It had a thousand times the worth of all your shit
Stowed in the swabbee's quarters.
I killed him when he tried to keep me from
A picture of his sister, who I found but mildly attractive.
And do you think your phony knockoffs are impressive
When I have robbed an oil tanker, or ransomed
French billionaires upon their yachts?
You seem to be ashamed of all your wears.
Here, I'll piss on everything you have, so it gains value.

GAZETT:

Over my –

GRIMALDI:

Be careful how you finish this sentence, worm.
Or you shall be the food of them.

GAZETT:

What?

GRIMALDI:

Have you lost your hearing, sir?
Here let me restore it!

(He beats GRIMALDI.)

BOATSWAIN:

Master, enough. Please. If he has warrant
From this Egyptian he speaks of,
His death could cause some trouble for you.

GRIMALDI:

I kill upon the sea and you say not a word,
But now you show compassion?
Ha! I know what you're thinking.
His death will cause us to be fined by Asambeg,
And you will lose out on your share of booty.
Fuck off, good chap. What will this maggot cost us
That we can't take again upon the sea?
She's always rife and ready to be taken
And we three are her best intruders.
We've wasted in one afternoon more wealth
Than all Somalia put together.
That's what it is to be a pirate! Ah,
But now I've lost my appetite to kill.
So live, you imbecile, and if I find this shop again,
I'll have fun with you again.

(He exits.)

CAPTAIN:

We should go after him before he spends
All of our earnings once again.

BOATSWAIN:

I fought for mine, and I will not surrender it.

(They exit.)

VITELLI:

You fool! How could you take him on like that?
You're lucky you're still breathing.

GAZETT:

You seemed to lose your own breathe, sir.
Why didn't you kill him like you boasted?

VITELLI:

I swear, before we leave this place

That he or I or both of us will die.
I'm sure of that. But that can't happen till
We know how best to save Paulina.
Now straighten up, before we draw attention.

(VITELLI steps aside as GAZETT cleans up. Enter DONUSA and MUSTAPHA, dressed down.)

GAZETT:

Ah, look. New customers. Is this veiled lady
Truly a woman or some gorgon?
The mysteries that burka hides.
What do you lack? Here find the greatest products
From North America for cleaning of the face!

VITELLI:

Shut up, you fool! I take it these two
Are not to be harassed.

DONUSA:

Do Western women only spend their money
When they have been insulted? It's a strange approach.

MUSTAPHA:

These foreign pigs lack any grace towards women.
I am appalled that Asambeg allows them in the market.
I think it's better just to rob them on the seas.

DONUSA:

What can you say to that, good gentlemen?
You are the first men of the Western world
I have encountered. Can you speak
To your state's worth regarding how you treat a woman?

VITELLI:

Forgive this petty imbecile, good lady.
He lacks the proper schooling in manhood
To talk to little girls, let alone a lady such as you.
While I can't speak for other men, I know
I'm one would have all ladies treated like true queens.

DONUSA:

And so I hear do all your Western men,

And in so doing find themselves as pawns.

VITELLI:

They do so from a sinful frame of mind,
And only to the ones they find attractive.
I'd rather have all ladies be like you:
Veiled, so your true beauty remains your own,
And only just respect can earn the right to gaze beyond.

DONUSA:

He speaks poetically, and yet it shows much wisdom.
Then tell me, stranger, as you are a merchant
What can your shop provide me with
That I can't find in any other place?

VITELLI:

That all depends on where you've been and what you lack.

DONUSA:

Well, say I'm actually a queen. What then?

VITELLI:

For such a lady, there is little I can offer, save . . .

DONUSA:

Save what?

VITELLI:

Myself, I'd wager.

DONUSA:

My, you're forward sir.

VITELLI:

Far be it from me to offer any disrespect.
Now if you are a woman who has travelled,
You've seen and probably own all that you see here.
But my own story, I can say you've never heard;
For it is overflowing with unique calamities
And chance encounters that cannot be repeated
Were one to live a thousand lives.

DONUSA:

It seems you are a gifted storyteller.
Speak on, and let me understand.

VITELLI:

Well, look into this mirror here.
Imagine for a moment, you are a Western girl
Of eighteen years of age. Your hair is loose,
You're skirt is short, you have a tan that's turned your skin to bronze
Like many of the men here, but it burns to touch.
You stand upon a ship and gaze upon the Red Sea.
You feel the breeze upon your cheek, and smell
The wind that's rushing by – take in the freedom.
You look out to the right and see your future:
A foreign and exotic land where you will be so welcome.
Where you will do a million goods
To help the children of a million wrongs.
But then you hear a horn, and looking to your left,
You see another ship crest over the horizon.
Its bow rips open the blue waters and
Turns everything to blackness. And soon you're overtaken.
And men in ragged clothing rush aboard.
They see your skin and think you are a trophy.
Their hands grab hold of you and you are torn
From your best friend, and tossed into a galley.
You are abducted to a foreign and
Exotic land you never wished to enter.
Your foreignness, your namelessness,
Has made you into something less than human to them.
You come upon this land not as a veiled queen,
Or as a person meant to help the masses,
But as a slave, an animal for lust.
Now all you know is lost forever,
And only your own wits can save you.
Now, this is but a story, that I have plucked
From out the latest headlines. Mine is worse,
And those most close to me share in such plight.
Would this be a new experience to a queen?

DONUSA:

You speak so passionately upon this topic,
About the stolen lives of women.

And yet you hawk these stolen goods yourself.
What is the difference?

VITELLI:

I sell these goods so I might find a better means
To keep myself alive, as well as those I love.
These pirates here, they act the scourge for but themselves.
They act as though a woman's nothing more
Than just another stolen trinket.
But I could never touch a woman save with tenderness.

DONUSA:

(Aside.) I daresay I have never seen a man before this day.
(To VITELLI.) You have spoke harshly of my countrymen
Accusing them of building Hell on Earth.

VITELLI:

And should you know my story, you'd agree.

DONUSA:

But is there hope of salvation?

VITELLI:

The only hope I see is teaching everyone
That life is precious.

DONUSA:

That is droll, you will admit.
Is this a Christian proverb?

VITELLI:

I cannot speak for other Christians, and I
Have plenty flaws myself, and passions
That put me often in grave danger.
But I can say that love, when pure, can save us from
The hell I have described. At least, I hope.

DONUSA:

So could you love somebody from this land
In such a powerful way?

VITELLI:

I couldn't say. You are the first I've met
That didn't work in this base market.
But if your kind voice is any indication
Of your fair sex's breeding here,
Then I can't hate you, certainly.

DONUSA:

But could this covered face bring you to love?

VITELLI:

I couldn't say, dear lady.

DONUSA:

How about uncovered?

(DONUSA removes her veil.)

VITELLI:

Then I must find a way to wake, for I
Could never hope to see this anywhere
But in a dream. Excuse me.

(VITELLI leaves into the shop.)

DONUSA:

What, you can give no answer?
I'll force one from you.

(DONUSA begins breaking stuff.)

GAZETT:

Dear lord, she is a gorgon after all!
Please, please! Drop that, madam!

MUSTAPHA:

What has the mongrel said to you
To bring you to this rage? Just give a nod,
And I will have him keel hauled on the next voyage.

DONUSA:

He has done nothing. I just wanted to
Be wrathful in my mirth. They're only Christians after all.

But this is so below my birth. Dear fool,
I must apologize to your good master and
Give you some money for my rash actions.
This afternoon, have him come to the palace
Along the city's western coastline.
And have him tell the guard he's come to see Donusa.
My name shall give him passage to me
Where he shall take his just rewards.
Now come, Mustapha, to your business.

(She exits.)

MUSTAPHA:

I don't know what your master said to her,
But if I find out it was disrespectful,
I shall return and end your miserable existences.

(MUSTAPHA exits.)

GAZETT:

Two death threats in one day. I do suppose
We've done our Christian duty thus far.

(VITELLI re-emerges.)

GAZETT:

This woman must have banged her head
When she last bowed in prayer to Allah.
She -

VITELLI:

I heard it all. That was the Emir's daughter.
What cruelty has the world in store for us?!
It seems to mock our every move with new pain.
I've heard that Muslim women show their faces
In public only to signal their displeasure with a man.
I fear that she has marked me for a dead one.
So be it. I will test my fate.
I cannot sink much further than I have.
Perhaps Francisco can succeed, but I must go alone.

(They exit.)

ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

(DONUSA's chamber. DONUSA appears, in the process of dressing.)

DONUSA:

What magic has transformed me from myself?
Where is my self control?
Had I been seen without my veil within the market there,
Although I am the daughter of the Emir,
I would have been assaulted by a mob
And stoned within the public square.
And yet I would have stoned myself if I had not done so.
Could I, who've countered countless offers
Of marriage from the richest men in all Arabia
And scorned a thousand tempting bribes
From fools who sought my purity,
Could I now be so childish as to fall
So fully for this man from God knows where,
Who talks as though he's seen the world's worst evil?
Can I be so cliché now as to fall for that?
And yet he make clichés of every other suitor I have had! Oh!
Where is my pride? Where is my wisdom?
I never knew that passion could inoculate you
From common sense!
But I must follow where my heart will lead me.
It told me I must show my face to him,
And I have done it. Now I mean to show him more.
Carazie, Manto!

(CARAZIE and MANTO enter.)

MANTO:

My lady?

DONUSA:

You both have served me for some time now, and
Have come to understand my somewhat wayward passions.
You have partaken in my secret pastimes
And danced and sang with me a thousand times
And never once, thus far, betrayed my confidence.

CARAZIE:

You have my balls, my lady.
I have no power to speak against you.

MANTO:

You have been a supreme mistress to serve.
You know your secrets stay with us.

DONUSA:

I thank you. Because now I must ask something
More dangerous of both of you.
My heart wants something so delicious
And yet so blasphemous and deadly,
That if I speak it out right it could kill me.
And so . . .

(She whispers to them. CARAZIE laughs.)

MANTO:

Is this all?

CARAZIE:

I can assure you, speaking that out loud
Would never kill you. Many have done so
And never felt a single blow in retribution.

MANTO:

Who is he?

DONUSA:

You'll see in time. Now Carazie, go to the sergeant
Of Asambeg's security.
Tell him a Christian man is coming to the palace,
And if he asks for me by name, he is to enter
Without harassment. Understood?

CARAZIE:

I will perform as you command.

(CARAZIE exits.)

DONUSA:

And Manto, follow me and help me dress.

Whatever force commands me now, I do submit
To your sweet will as readily
As if Muhammed in the flesh bid me to follow.
I am all yours. Come Manto.

ACT ONE SCENE FIVE

(DONUSA's chamber. CARAZIE enters.)

CARAZIE:

Although he's gotten past the guards,
I can't believe this thing to be Donusa's man.
Oh Women! What is in your blood
That forces you to stoop so low for men
And pine for oafs below your worth?
My wondrous lady slumming it with him?
If she is so enamored with his foreign looks,
Then I would be more fit to play the part
If all my parts were still in place. Here comes
The Haberdasher. Welcome sir!

(Enter VITELLI.)

CARAZIE:

Think of what it is to be happy,
And you shall have it treble.
I think you're in for a surprise tonight, my lord.

(VITELLI stands amazed.)

CARAZIE:

I see my lady didn't lie. Your tongue's pure silver.
But I'll resist it. Pardon me, sir.
I must inform her imminence you have arrived.
Women. I shall never understand you.

(CARAZIE exits.)

VITELLI:

I cannot make out north from south.

To pass through all the guards unharmed, into
The very palace which Francisco now
Is seeking entry, past all dangers,
So close to sweet Paulina, I can smell her.
Oh God, my lord, you work in strangest ways.
I must find some way to continue on these grounds
Once this Donusa finishes with me.

(DONUSA enters, exquisitely dressed.)

DONUSA:
Finishes with you?
I hope I never see the day when you shall leave.

VITELLI:
My lady, pardon me. I-
You bid me come, and so I have.
You wished to settle our account.
But please believe me, majesty,
Whatever recompense you offer me
For your outburst today, is far too gracious.

CARAZIE:
If only you knew how correct you are.

DONUSA:
I must admit, I lied, dear stranger.
I called you here to repay me and not
The other way around. For you have sinned:
You are the greatest thief I've ever known.

VITELLI:
A thief? I never stole from you!

DONUSA:
Oh yes. You stole a glance beneath my veil.
To trick a lady into doing so's a serious offense.
And so, dear thief, I bid you welcome to
Your prison cell. I hope it's to your liking.

VITELLI:
I don't understand.

CARAZIE:

He's certainly slow, even by American standards.

VITELLI:

Your imminence, your majesty,
Whatever name that I should call you -

DONUSA:

I think Donusa shall suffice.

VITELLI:

It never was my aim to trick you. Please.
I have an overactive mind
That went a little wild earlier
When I told you those tales of kidnapping.
But I did not beguile you on purpose.
I'm unaccustomed to your practices, and-

DONUSA:

It seems I'm leading you astray again.
Your sin will not bring punishment, but joy.
At least I hope it will.
These chambers are your prison now, dear sir.
And I will be your jailor, though I pray
You'll call me by a better name tomorrow.
Don't stand amazed. It is an honor
To have royalty tend to your bed.
Come, play some music for our new inmate.

(CARAZIE and MANTO sing together. DONUSA removes her veil again.)

VITELLI:

When did I die? My base and useless life has ended,
For here before me stands an Angel,
A heavenly specter that ushers me to eternity.
Or am I dreaming, and now I see
A vision I can never touch by waking light?
Or is the devil real and play with me?

DONUSA:

It's none of these things.

I stand before you flesh and blood,
A prisoner of your sweet tongue.
Be mine as well, and I shall show you
What it means to wake and live and be in heaven.

VITELLI:

You must forgive me. I'm a simple man.
I don't know how to live and wake and do so.

DONUSA:

I said before that your imagination
Had captured me. Just use it once again.
You are American and know of conquest.
Just follow those instincts.
Or if you can't, I'll be your teacher.
Suppose I took your hand and placed it on my chest
And then looked deep into your eyes
And in my eyes you saw full rivers of warmth.
Then say I ran my hand so delicately
Across the hairs upon your neck like this.
Can you imagine what I want?

VITELLI:

I have a notion.

DONUSA:

And say I brought my lips within your reach
And breathed upon your chin like this.

VITELLI:

And now I have the notion too.

(They kiss.)

DONUSA:

I know your mind holds greater magic.
Suppose that I broke free of you
And beckoned you into another chamber
Where not another soul can enter but us two,
Where light and prying eyes can never find us
Where veils will disappear and we can see all?

(DONUSA exits.)

VITELLI:

If Death himself stood waiting through the door,
I'd enter still. Farewell to virtue.
It's but a word, and something greater waits ahead.

ACT ONE SCENE SIX

(The palace of ASAMBEG. GRIMALDI and his men are present, so is the AGA, the chief of security.)

AGA:

I've never seen the master rage like this.
I think the Devil's in him.

GRIMALDI:

Then damn him straight to hell.
I couldn't give two shits if Asambeg
Grew horns before my eyes; I'll stare him down.
I swear right now, if he won't prove more thankful
For all the services provided him,
He'll find himself without a fleet.
I'd turn an honest man to simply teach the twig a lesson.

AGA:

This twig provides us with our ports, Grimaldi,
And never shies from violence when offended.
I think you should be silent.

GRIMALDI:

Oh what, you fear him?
It certainly becomes ferocious men
To sit at home and suck on olive pits
As though he were a putrid infant,
While we run endless hazards just to keep him fat.
Our pillage is his wealth. Should he forget that,
He'll find himself with nothing but his pits indeed.
I will not fear his wrath.

(ASAMBEG enters.)

AGA:

He comes. Be still, Grimaldi.
If not for your own sake, then for your men.
We welcome you, great Asambeg, and beg of you
To know your pleasure.

(ASAMBEG pulls a gun. There is silence. ASAMBEG turns and fires, killing a soldier.)

ASAMBEG:

Oh now you seem to fear me.
Where was this terror for my retribution
When all of you mother shitting worms
Stood by while Swasi raiders shanghaied our vessel?
Are you not pirates? Worthless *manni*!
What kind of renegades are you if you
Can't hold on to your stolen property?
Do you delight in feeling shame?
I thought that hearty soldiers like yourselves
Would rush to save your pride, but not a single craft
Went in pursuit. What made you *jaban* trash
Decide you'd rather face *al mawte* from my gun?

AGA:

Sir, the numbers were against us.
The Swasi raiders came well equipped to fight
And had we entered battle, then your ship
Would certainly have sustained damage that
Would've made the vessel worthless to you anyway.

ASAMBEG:

And so you traded it instead: the vessel and
This port's unparalleled good name within the news,
For bullets in your brains.

CAPTAIN:

My lord, we –

(ASAMBEG injures the CAPTAIN.)

ASAMBEG:

Since you are of Grimaldi's crew,
Perhaps I should explain some things about

The pirate world and how we operate.
You see, you reprobates are given rein
To gallivant within this harbor only so
You can acquire certain goods for benefactors
That give us all we have. You all are pawns,
Meant only to perform whatever your king commands.
I am your king, and when you fuck me like
A whore, you lose us business in the underworld.

GRIMALDI:

What kind of dickless bureaucrat
Can look on everything my crew has done and want another?
You think the loss of this one ship will change all that?

ASAMBEG:

Ah, Grimaldi speaks at last.

GRIMALDI:

Your explanation of our function's asinine.
These Saudi sheiks and faggots from Iran
Can find another business if they choose,
But I'll be on the seas to steal their plunder.
And then I shall divide my spoils more evenly,
With just the men who helped procure them.

ASAMBEG:

Ah, yes, the wondrous Renegado
Can shanghai any vessel he desires.
But you forget that I provide the intel and equipment
That keeps you safe upon your raids.

GRIMALDI:

To walk the path of pussies.
I started on my own, sir, captured my first vessel
With only my two hands and balls forged of brass.
I have defiled the holy rites within St Marks in Venice
And did so on my own without your precious intel.
I am a better soldier for Allah than your whole intifada.
So when I told these men we shouldn't fight the Swasis,
You know I did it cuz it was the smart decision.
I will not risk my ass to save your gluttonous pride,
So drop the stupid reaper act.

We all know what you do while we're at sea,
So if you're so concerned with reputation,
Go use your fucking intel, make a plan,
And like a man, go raid the bastards back yourself.

ASAMBEG:

Don't harbor any hope that my need of you
Is great enough to take these insults.

GRIMALDI:

I'd like to see you live without me, sir.
What would you do if I withdrew allegiance to you?
I wonder, would you take the helm yourself,
Or would you hide forever behind your latest whore?

ASAMBEG:

Not another word!
If you're so eager to find out, then you
Can witness what becomes of this regime
Within the pits of hell!

(ASAMBEG puts the gun to GRIMALDI's head.)

GRIMALDI:

Ah, here's the thanks of Muslim men
When infidels supply them with their base desires.
No better thanks for he who brought Paulina to you?

(ASAMBEG backs down.)

ASAMBEG:

No. I have other plans for you.
Grimaldi, though you've been a pirate of
The highest order, here your patronage shall end.
Since you believe that you can operate alone,
I free you from my service. All of your plunder
Belongs to me now.
Start fresh, and make yourself a man again.
But first-

(ASAMBEG shoots the CAPTAIN and BOATSWAIN.)

ASAMBEG:

Let's not leave you any crutches, now
And furthermore –

(ASAMBEG shoots GRIMALDI through the hand)

ASAMBEG:

As you now stand an outlaw in a Muslim land
You will be subject to sharia law.
And as a thief, I take your hand as punishment.
If anyone of the guards shall catch you stealing,
They have permission to dismantle the remaining one.
Aga, toss him out. Naked.

(GRIMALDI is dragged out.)

GRIMALDI:

I shall be seeing you again, and I shall kill you!

ASAMBEG:

Now leave me, all of you!

(Exeunt. ASAMBEG is alone.)

ASAMBEG:

Now, fire, leave these veins and once again
Be filled with cool and sober blood.
How tedious I find this life these days.
The violent mask, the stupid reaper
As that *la-i-m* Grimaldi calls it . . .
The Renegade had gone too far to call my prize a whore.

(ASAMBEG removes a key from around his neck.)

ASAMBEG:

Why should I hug so close the thing that keeps me prisoner?
My, Allah deals in mysteries these days.
Had I but let the auction go ahead of me,
I'd never have laid eyes on her; but now I have,
I'll never let a living soul but I do so.
Now, Sun, come shine on me again.

(He reveals a door, unlocks it with the key. It reveals PAULINA. She has many adornments about her cell, gifts from ASAMBEG, which she has not touched. Instead she wears the same clothes we saw her in at the beginning, only tattered.)

ASAMBEG:

Fair sun risen from the Western sea,
You dim your beauteous magnificence
By staying in those tattered garbs.
You'd shine the brighter in the gifts I've left you.

PAULINA:

I spit on all your presents, Asambeg.
I wish that I were dirtier still,
So you would look on me not as a second sun
But as a monster come to eat the first.

ASAMBEG:

And yet no matter what you wear,
Your glory shall shine through as clear as when
I first laid eyes on you.

PAULINA:

Oh, you're an idiot.

If you believe that I am some sort of angel,
How could you lock away an angel like an animal?

ASAMBEG:

Your prison has more finery than half the city.

PAULINA:

Then lock up half the city in here,
So I were free from out your lock and key.

ASAMBEG:

Oh, *jamal*, you are the true keymaster here.
You have the means to free yourself.

PAULINA:

But give me something sharp, and I'll do so.

ASAMBEG:

Enough with the bravado, darling.

You are a creature of Allah's, not some murderous pirate.
The path to freedom is far easier
And far more pleasurable than you think.

PAULINA:

I will not be your whore, you prick.

ASAMBEG:

Nor would I ask you to be.
A blasphemy indeed – for me to lie with a Christian.

PAULINA:

I heard them talk about your whores.

ASAMBEG:

I take no whores, my lady.
Let fools think how they please. I do admit,
And you are surely smart enough to see,
That I'm enraptured by your wonder.
But do not think so low of me, despite this cage,
To think my ends are base and trivial.
Your glory rests in purity, your sainted virginhood.
Your faith more than your face has grabbed me.
And if you can be this divine while following
A path to God that's incorrect,
Then I shall marvel at your immaculance
When you are brought into the true faith.

PAULINA:

You over-zealous pig.

ASAMBEG:

Why must you offer insults to my kindness?
My violent mask shall never front you,
But please, do grant me decency.

PAULINA:

I will not offer decency to any man
Who holds such twisted values as yourself.
You think I will be killed with kindness
And turn your bride? You're loony!
I'll never turn my back on Jesus' love.

I'll stay within this lion's den like Daniel,
And slowly rot away to nothingness
Before I grant either my hand or heart.
So close the door. I've looked enough upon you, Devil.

ASAMBEG:

You will in time be calling me
By a much sweeter name, my dearest.
Till then, no other man may come to you.
Remain imprisoned; so will my heart.
She is enchanting; so much so
I question often if she's in fact a *jinn*.
But I will win her yet. For now,
Back to my mask of death and piracy.

ACT ONE SCENE SEVEN

(DONUSA's chamber. VITELLI and DONUSA lie about.)

DONUSA:

Do I seem different to you now?

VITELLI:

How so?

DONUSA:

They say a woman changes after she's made love.
Your eyes have deeper pools, your skin gives off
A thicker scent, your spine is straighter,
Your brow takes on a different shape.
In short, you're such a newfound person,
That everything you knew is nothing.

VITELLI:

I think your spine and brow are more relaxed,
And save the sweat from our embraces,
Your scent's the same as ever, but your eyes . . .
No they are shallower than when we were entwined.
While we were at it, they were fathoms deep.

DONUSA:

But I feel different now.

And everything I knew appears to be nothing.

VITELLI:

Do all your sex become so cryptic when they have sex?

DONUSA:

I think that you could answer that for me.

I've never talked to any woman about sex.

VITELLI:

Nor I. You are my first as well.

DONUSA:

Oh surely that's not true.

The way you handled yourself.

VITELLI:

Was it good?

DONUSA:

I thought that all Americans had sex

From thirteen on?

VITELLI:

That's some hyperbole, but yes, there's plenty
Of people who rush into sex when far too young.

DONUSA:

What kept you from indulging sooner?

VITELLI:

It was religion.

My father is a man of moral decadence.

He's had more women in a weekend's course

Than most men have in several lifetimes.

But guilt caught up with him, and he found me

A Catholic tutor, to instill in me

Good Christian values. God says sex

Is only for the married men, and I've obeyed.

DONUSA:

Why sir, I didn't think in offering my body
I'd offered you my hand already, but
If you insist, then I might think –

VITELLI:

No, I-
I mean, I'm not dissuading that notion -

DONUSA:

But if you aren't wed to me, aren't you breaking
The laws you promised God to follow?

VITELLI:

My tutor says my passions get the best of me.
But I am glad for that. I read the scriptures,
I always try to follow what he says,
But something deep within your eyes last night
Told me that God had gifted me my passion for a reason.
I've never fully trusted in God's words,
And being with you taught me why.
Those words were written by a man, not God,
And man is fallible, and passionate.
So why can't I be fallible and passionate as well?
Besides, I can't see harm in feeling joy like this.

DONUSA:

Back in America,
If you expressed that sentiment in public,
What do you think would happen to you?

VITELLI:

I've never had the courage to,
But I would think not much of anything.

DONUSA:

If I should speak so much beyond these walls,
I'd meet an end that you cannot imagine,
Not even with the story you told me before.

VITELLI:

Do you believe as much?

DONUSA:

I couldn't say.

But if last night is wrong, as the Koran says,
I can't find much magnificence in its meaning.

VITELLI:

Why did you bring me here? Is this a death wish?
Am I your parting meal in this life?

DONUSA:

If so, then I must write my will in haste.
Come: you, my gorgeous infidel,
Already in possession of my greatest jewel,
Shall be the sole inheritor of everything I own.
As such, please take this gold -

VITELLI:

No, Donusa!

DONUSA:

It's just to help you make it through the rougher market times.
They say the world's in recession.
And here, I want you to have all these clothes.

VITELLI:

Come on now, stop.

DONUSA:

And here's my finest purse.

VITELLI:

You take me for a cross dresser? Sit!
The only gem I want is here.

(They kiss. There is something deep in it – a kiss of meaning and commitment that is only half understood. CARAZIE and MANTO bust in.)

MANTO:

I'm sorry to disturb you lady, but Mustapha
Is at the outer door, to bring you breakfast.

DONUSA:

Then you must fly, my love, have Manto show you out.
But you must come again tonight.

VITELLI:

I can't deny the daughter of an Emir any audience.

DONUSA:

I shall not live till you return.

(VITELLI and MANTO exits out the back. DONUSA dresses.)

CARAZIE:

How was it? Is he bigger than me?

DONUSA:

Be quiet. You have sworn to secrecy.

CARAZIE:

Believe me I don't have a death wish.
Mustapha's knocking, I will get him.

(CARAZIE exits, returns with MUSTAPHA.)

MUSTAPHA:

The fairest morning to you, lady.

DONUSA:

If you had wished me such, you shouldn't knock
So vexingly upon my door this early,
Nor come and knock my sleepy brain with cliché flatteries.
I never take my breakfast before ten.
So if there's nothing else, excuse me till then.

CARAZIE:

Now that's a fine hello.

DONUSA:

Do you stand dumb, sir? Where is that tongue
You claimed could work a thousand business deals?
Please tell me what you want or else depart.

MUSTAPHA:

Have I awakened in a different life?
What makes you look so viciously on me
When yesterday your eye was more flirtatious?

DONUSA:

I think this shows how little you do comprehend
A woman's eyes, you businessman.
You've spent too long amongst your sex.
I looked upon you yesterday with mild distrust,
Not interest, and gave you the fair chance
I owed you for my father's sake.
But sleeping on the noxious notion
That I could be your bride, I think I'd rather
My burka could be stapled to my face
Than grant you but a flash of cheekbone.

MUSTAPHA:

This is most disrespectful and unearned.
How have I injured you that you could speak to me
As though I were a river rat?

DONUSA:

If you need more than royal blood as explanation,
I'll tell you this: beyond your vapidness,
You lack the looks, or proper smelling breath
That I desire in my eternal mate.
Your plans for building your own kingdom
Are silly and impossible,
And your sheer lack of intuition makes you tedious.
When you next seek to woo a princess,
As I am sure you'll worm your way into another palace,
Remember that we love true character,
Not caricatures. Now please leave me.

(DONUSA leaves the room with CARAZIE.)

MUSTAPHA:

It seems that yesterday I slept, and now I wake.

(MANTO returns from the back door.)

MANTO:

Good morning sir. What, did my lady leave?

MUSTAPHA:

She seemed at odds with her true nature.

Come sit with me a moment, will you?

I think that my approach in wooing her

Has been off course; please help correct it.

MANTO:

I'm not sure I can-

MUSTAPHA:

But I'm sure you can.

You hold the key to my dear lady's heart

As surely as you do the keys to this back door.

(He pulls a gun and pushes into her side.)

MUSTAPHA:

And I believe I have the key to your tight tongue.

Her majesty is drastically impertinent,

And I don't wonder why she has grown cold to me,

But rather whom it's for. And if you value life,

And I do think you do, my petty girl,

You'll answer all my questions. Understood?

MANTO:

Yes, sir. Just don't hurt me.

MUSTAPHA:

That's in your hands. Just know, I loathe a liar.

ACT ONE SCENE EIGHT