

The Death of Klinghoffer (1990)

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Libretto

by Alice Goodman

Prologue, Scene 1

CHORUS OF EXILED PALESTINIANS

My father's house was razed
In nineteen forty-eight
When the Israelis passed
Over our street.
The house was built of stone
With a courtyard inside
Where, on a hot day, one
Could sit in shade
Under a tree, and have
A glass of something cool.
Coolness rose like a wave
From our pure well.
No one was turned away.
The doorstep had worn down:
I see in my mind's eye
A crescent moon.
Of that house, not a wall
In which a bird might nest
Was left to stand. Israel
Laid all to waste.
Though we have paid to drink
Our water, and our wood
Is sold to us, we thank
The only God.
Let the supplanter look
Upon his work. Our faith
Will take the stones he broke
And break his teeth.

Prologue, Scene 2

CHORUS OF EXILED JEWS

When I paid off the taxi, I had no money left,
and, of course, no luggage. My empty hands shall
signify this passion, which itself remembers.

O Daughter of Zion, when you lay upon my breast
I was like a soldier who lies beneath the earth
of his homeland, resolved.

You said. "I am an old woman. I thought you were dead.
I have forgotten how often we betrayed one another.
My hide is worn thin, covered with scars and wrinkles.
Now only doctors gather at my bedside, to tell what
the Almighty has prepared for me.

"A woman comes in to keep the place looking occupied."
Let us, when our lust is exhausted for the day,
recount to each other all we endured since we
parted. There is so much to get through, it will
take until night. Then we shall rise, miraculously,
virgin, boy and bride.

To me you are a land of Jerusalem stone;
your scars are holy places. There, under
my hands, the last wall of the Temple. There

the Dome of the Rock. And there the apartments,
the forest planted in memory, the
movie houses picketed by Hasidim, the military
barracks, the orchard where a goat climbs
among branches.

Your neighbor, the one who let me in,
she was brought up on stories of our love.

Act I

SCENE 1

CAPTAIN

It was just after 1:15;
I was awake, but lying down
As I had spent a sleepless night
Before we docked that morning. Thought,
The sailor's consolation, is
Surely the night's analysis
Of the impressions of the day.
If, as some think, a life at sea
Differs in real terms from one spent
On shore, it's in the element
Of comprehensive solitude
Which sharpens all one's senses. Good
And evil are not abstract there;
One tastes their advent; it is pure,
Metallic, unripe, and it twists
The gut. The men who climbed the masts
Knew this taste well. How can you doubt
That, in our age of polyglot
Crews and flags of convenience, when
The officer in the machine—
Room tunes and tunes his short-wave set
With no luck, the unheeded shout
Of the sea fills his empty ears.
In the interminable hours
Of navigation, thoughts take shape
And the same skill that steers the ship
Makes intellect an animal.
As I believe now, one detail
Awakened my anxiety.
The man gave me a komboloi.
He was the last in line to shake
My hand; a man in very thick
Glasses, which magnified his eyes.
He took my hand in both of his
And mumbled something. All I heard
Was 'Allah, Allah', and a word
That might have been a name: 'Floros'.
When I withdrew my hand, there was
The komboloi, a little chain
Of jeweller's metal, and the man
Had moved off quickly towards the stern
Before I noticed. It is borne
In upon me that I forgot
This episode until I put
The contents of my pockets on
My bedside table. There are nine
Hundred passengers to greet,
And, naturally, they are not
Identical. A captain sees
All kinds of eccentricities.
There's no need to elaborate.
Besides, the captivating sight

Of those, the old especially.
Who are so keen now to enjoy
Themselves, to unbend and confide
In foreigners, the special food,
Drink, candles, music, atmosphere,
All warm the heart. It moves me more
As I get older. And of course
One joins in. That's what makes the cruise
For many people. And yet dread
Gnawed at my heart when I retired
And saw that chain again. I took
Two Halcyons, which did not work.
I slept from three till five, then rose
And dressed and went on deck. A breeze
Agitated the swimming pool
Where early birds were out. Meanwhile
The pilot came on board to see
Us into Alexandria
Where an excursion went ashore
To view the Pyramids.

SWISS GRANDMOTHER

Passengers moved from Cafeteria to Tapestry Room

My grandson Didi, who was two,
—And what a brave and lovely boy
He was, and still is—had agreed
Not to see the Great Pyramid.
The others disembarked. 'I'll stay
With Grandmother', he said. So we
Strolled for a while around the deck
And watched the sailors at their work;
Then to our cabin for a brief
Rest, and the steward's autograph.
We washed our hands, made ourselves neat,
And with the kind of appetite
Associated with sea air,
Went looking for some lunch.
No more of that.

CAPTAIN

We were due to cast off at half past nine.
At noon I went below. At one Fifteen
Giordano Bruno came
Into the cabin. He looked grim.
'Captain, he whispered,'

FIRST OFFICER

Captain, you asleep?
We've terrorists on board the ship.

CAPTAIN

I ordered him on deck, then went
With others to the restaurant.

FIRST OFFICER

The engines cut out. Then, surprise
The bell began to ring. I was
Bringing our guns and shells up from
Their special closet by the gym

And longing for my thirty-eight
When the thing tripped. Hell's bells all right.
It just went on and on and on.
At last they let us send a man
In with a toolbox. Then we filed
Down to the restaurant. No bold
Manœuvres, not from us. My God,
Not with five hundred souls on board.
That tied the Captain's hands.

CAPTAIN

A strange sight. Terrifying. Shoes,
Handbags, some broken glass. Two boys
With guns.

FIRST OFFICER

If he was cautious everyone knew why.

CAPTAIN

The people on the floor.
The intercom. Machine-gun fire.
'The Captain needed urgently
On deck.' Then 'We are here to die',
Bruno, his hands upon his knees
And a gun pressed against his face.

FIRST OFFICER

And don't forget that at that time
We thought that there were more of them;
Twenty, perhaps. They'd shot one man
In the leg, severing a vein.
If it had been an artery
He'd have been dead,

FIRST OFFICER

...but there he lay.
They said, 'We fired into the floor.'
It must have ricocheted. The poor
Bastard got moved to the sick bay
Under my supervision.
I missed hearing what the Captain said
To the assembled multitude,
But, knowing him, can pretty well
Imagine it. Calmness at all
Costs. "Everything will be just fine
If everybody will remain
Calm. This is an imperative.
Parents, silence your children. Move—
Please take your passports—through that door.
You two! Help with that wheelchair.
Soon, very soon, all this will be
Over, a dream recalled by day
In the security of home.
I am still Captain here. Be calm."

MOLQI

Give these orders.
Nobody stirs
A limb: passengers,
Servants and sailors,
All remain calm.
Tell them there is a bomb
In the engine room.

If we are betrayed
The ship will explode
And you will be dead.
Make this understood
And nothing will happen.
This is a demonstration
Action for liberation:
Our fifty companions
Held in Israeli prisons.
You have the walkie-talkies?
Americans, Israelis,
And British: those
Until we reach Tartus
Must sit apart.

SWISS GRANDMOTHER

The next thing I recall
Is people screaming. Horrible, horrible.

MOLQI

No one will be hurt.
Check each passport;
A little discomfort
For a short time.
Here is some
American money.
It will cover any
Damage to your
Sporting rifles. We are
Soldiers fighting a war.
We are not criminals
And we are not vandals
But men of ideals.
These people must have food.
Where are the blankets stored?
Everyone on board
Should be here. We have killed
No one. Find women
To send to the kitchen.
Prepare a meal.
And we want petrol
Or kerosene.
Five cans. Send men.
The Captain comes with me
To speak to Syria.

SWISS GRANDMOTHER

To see one's fellow men become
Like beasts, diminished by each scream,
That, for me, is what shocks. How thin
The coat is: unlined velveteen,
And underneath, the monkey's back.
So I said to my grandson, 'Luck
Is on our side. Your parents will
Be jealous. We shall think them dull
Not to have shared this escapade.'
'Remember everything', I said.
Now I think, how could we forget?
How could we even contemplate
The effort of remembering?
Everything comes back, everything.
We are quite helpless, as we were
Shuffling along that corridor
Out of the dining room; half bored
Half terrified. I am afraid
I thought 'At least we are not Jews'.

MAMOUD

We are sorry
For you. We don't worry
As we want to die.
It is you, it is they
Who desire to live.
We believe
What you say is true.
We have studied you.

CAPTAIN

Bring sandwiches and coffee. I
Will drink the first cup. You shall say
Which cup, if you like. I will let
You choose the sandwiches I eat.

OCEAN CHORUS

Is not the ocean itself their past?
Landscape of night for Him
Who is called All-Seeing, untouched
by storms, deep-silted with the motes
of carrion which stand for light.
God rests in nothing. The perfect shapes,
delicately blazing monstrous creatures,
cross obliquely eating lice and moss.
Here is a semblance of the first man;
sinewy, translucent, thick with life,
superficially violent, inwardly calm.
His pulse beats in his ears. He is secretive;
entrenched in his side, the sacred parasites.
This is the night of his wedding.
His extremities reek of his wife,
flesh of his flesh, a rib of sand,
who is listening, not to his voice
but to the voice of spirits, and waiting
for the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil
to climb down from the trees.

SCENE 2

MAMOUD

The ship is on course for Syria

Now it is night
And we should get
Little stations,
Local ones;
Lebanon's,
Palestine's:
All the region's
Unlicensed programs
Broadcast from rooms
In people's homes,
The backs of stores.
And, when the sky clears,
Rooftops. It's late
When they transmit;

Sound carries better
When it's later.
Over the water
It's best of all.
I don't like news,
But I love these
Songs whose stories
Are all the same.
Lovers. A time
Of parting. For him
Death in a war,
The song is her
Lament. Or he
Must go away,
He'll send money
So they can marry.
Or the woman dies
Of a disease
That leaves her face
Untouched. She has
Brothers, maybe
A father. Cruelly
She is torn from
Her lover. The stem
Is broken, the head
Of the rose has dried
And scattered. It's good
That these songs are sad.
I used to play
With guns. My first toy
Was one like this.
A real one. I was
Five, and just able
To drag it and crawl
Over to a wall,
Prop it, fire, smell
The hot metal
And the exploded round,
Enjoy the sound,
Until my hand
Refused to bend.
It seemed a long
Time. I'm young.
It was not I
Driven away
But my mother
Who could not remember
What happened to her.
She only said
'There was a raid.
My uncle carried
Me in his coat.
He never thought
We would be
More than a day.'
She said God would
Restore threefold
All we had called
Ours. She was killed
With the old men
And children in
Camps at Sabra
And Chatila
Where Almighty God

In His mercy showed
My decapitated
Brother to me
And in His mercy
Allowed me to close
My brother's eyes
And wipe his face.

CAPTAIN

I think if you could talk like this
Sitting among your enemies
Peace would come. Now from day to day
Evil grows exponentially
Laying a weight upon the tongue.
Violence speaks a single long
Sentence inflicted and endured
In Hell, by those who have despaired.

MAMOUD

The day that I
And my enemy
Sit peacefully
Each putting his case
And working towards peace
That day our hope dies
And I shall die too.
My speech is slow
And rough. Esau
Cannot argue.

CAPTAIN

I have often reflected that
This is no ship, and I am not
A captain, as I formerly
Was, nor are my men sailors. They
Are plumbers, waiters, engineers,
Cooks, chambermaids, barmen, masseurs
Barbers, laundresses, and so forth.
Passengers get their money's worth;
On a good day they close their eyes
And through their eyelashes palm trees
Nod blackly over a white beach.
The sea is calm. The sea is rich
In paradoxes. This hotel,
Achille Lauro, should be full
Of a sense that all worldly care
Recedes as we lose sight of shore.
To my regret, it never is.
'Why?' I have asked myself. Tonight
I understand. Who could forget
Janus, the man in cotton gloves
God of hoteliers, who lives
Between the lobby and the street
Where joy is unconfined? Without
Him and his shrine, our luxury,
Our trained staff, our cuisine; all I
Attend to and take pleasure in,
Mock us.

AUSTRIAN WOMAN

I kept my distance. That seemed best.
There was a burst of shooting just
As I was stepping in the tub.
I froze. My heart began to throb
Violently. I had to lie
Down on the bathmat for a few
Minutes until I felt composed.
The bathwater I left, but dressed
Except for shoes. I knew the door
Was locked, but I dared not go near
Enough to check, in case I made
A noise that could be heard outside.
On the table next to my bed
Was a fruitbasket, and I had
Some chocolate I bought in Greece.
I had to ration my supplies;
There was no way to tell how long
They'd have to last. One lucky thing:
I had tapwater. I would eat
A little square of chocolate
Every few hours. I was more
Careful to save the fruit. A pear,
An apple, and some grapes; that's all
I ate. To take a sleeping-pill
Seemed dangerous. I couldn't sleep;
I thought they would blow up the ship,
And I'd begin to feel it list.
I prayed and sweated through the worst.
Even if one were going to die
One would avoid the company
Of idiots. During the war
I felt the same. I have no fear
Of death. I'd rather die alone,
If I must, though I'd hate to drown.

MAMOUD

Those birds flying
Above us, these landing
On the ship's railing,
Not migrating,
—Doesn't the earth belong
To them?—revisiting
Their lands, carrying
Traces of mist
From their latest
Approach to the crest
Of the firmament,
Their shadows burnt
On a cloudfront
In circles of brightness,
In witness
Leaving a trace
Of dust on the cloud,
Messengers of God,
Angels freed
To marry and die,
Children of day,
Night's predators,
Favorite creatures,
Chosen and endowed,

Whose gratitude
Shames the holiest
Of men; the least
Among their kind
Being unbound
And free from sin,
The eagle, the falcon,
The crow, and the raven,
The sparrow, the wren,
The dove, the pigeon,
The stork, and the heron,
Alike being clean
In the sight of Heaven,
These and many more
Travel through each layer
Of the atmosphere
With no desire
Or need of war.
Ritual song defends
Their nesting-grounds.
In each country
Through which they fly
They are at ease
And recognize
Particular trees,
The shapes of hills,
City walls,
And other details,
The oblong hole
Where a brick fell
Lined with grass and wool.
The sun will rise soon.
I would like to see the dawn
From my window.
As things stand now
This will not be
An easy day.

NIGHT CHORUS

Is not the night restless for them?
Smoke detectors and burglar alarms
go off without reason, the taped voice
unwinds in the widow's backyard.
No one bothers to look up from his work.
Elijah will return, the Jews believe,
the Antichrist condemn, the Messiah
judge; the dead, the wicked and the good
Will be distinguished, the world consume
and be renewed. Even the man
who lies awake in dread will be distinguished.
The lights of the world burn around the clock.
He guesses how much is lost.
Dwellers in Paradise look at each other
as one looks at the planets in the sky,
and a man may say something
in ignorance, please God, and be saved,
or, equally, be damned. Even he
rejoices; and is in his element.
I am afraid for myself, for myself, for myself.

ACT II
PROLOGUE TO ACT II

CHORUS: HAGAR AND THE ANGEL

When Hagar was led into the wilderness with some bread and a bottle of water and her son the Lord consoled Abraham, saying, 'Of this child too I will make a nation.'

It may be for this reason that our father turned and set his face toward his tents.

It was early in the day. Every few miles she stopped to rinse her mouth and give the child the breast. She was like one who walks across a room in a shuttered house naked and unwatched. She was newly manumitted. For a long time after, the bottle was empty. Hagar had milk for her son, and he nodded on her shoulder.

For a long time after, the bottle was empty, Hagar had milk for her son, and he nodded on her shoulder. For a long time after, after the boy looked at her and began crying, she carried him. When he was so weak that she had to bend her head to hear him, she said, 'My son will die as a free man on his own land, and put him down and turned her back. Then the angel struck open the abandoned well.

SCENE 1A

It is 11:30 a.m. The ship awaits permission to enter the Syrian port of Tartus. The air corridor is deserted, as is the sea-road. Americans, Britons and Jews have been moved on deck to the Winter Garden, which is the only place a helicopter might hope to land. Leon Klinghoffer's wheelchair cannot be lifted onto the platform, so he sits below the others. There is no shade.

MOLQI

Come here. Look.
Since we spoke
To shore, traffic
Along this road
Has moved outside
Our horizon.
And have you seen
A single plane?
For the last hour
The corridor
Has been empty.
Half an hour ago
The mist burnt away
And the whole sky
Is vacancy.
God have mercy
On those who guard
For the sake of God,
Who carry His secrets
In their hearts
Unopened, till they
Like Al-Asadi,
Have travelled two days
Towards the Jews.

Americans, Britons and Jews have been moved on deck to the Winter Garden. The ship awaits permission to enter port.

None of you knows
What the letter contained,
If the letter is opened,
When the determined
Action takes place,
Or what that action is.
Not even I
Know fully
What we are to do.
And so we have power.
I think more and more
Of those above us,

Not only in Tartus,
But in Cyprus,
And Tunis,
And those elsewhere
Who gave the order:
'When this is read
Let it be destroyed.'
How much, O God,
is each man told?
We have killed
No one, but soon
People will die.
Then Syria
Will show her hand.
Every sound
That you can hear
Is a passenger
Afraid for his life.
The sea is stiff
With men who died
Unafraid.

CAPTAIN

There's nothing. No reply. Tartus
Is not replying. I propose
We move out towards the open sea
Say a kilometer or so
Outside the territorial
Waters.

MAMOUD

Now we will kill you all.

LEON KLINGHOFFER

I've never been
A violent man;
Ask anyone.
I'm a person
Who'd just as soon
Avoid trouble, but
Somebody's got
To tell you the truth.
I came here with
My wife. We both
Have tried to live
Good lives. We give
Gladly, receive
Gratefully, love
And take pleasure
In small things, suffer,
And comfort each other.
We're human. We are
The kind of people
You like to kill.
Was it your pal
Who shot that little girl
At the airport in Rome?
You would have done the same.
There's so much anger in you.
And hate. I know how

Children in the Promised Land
Learn to sleep underground
Because of your shelling.
Old men at the Wailing
Will get a knife
In the back. You laugh.
You pour gasoline
Over women
Passengers on
The bus to Tel Aviv
And burn them alive.
You don't give a shit,
Excuse me, about
Your grandfather's hut,
His sheep and his goat,
And the land he wore out.
You just want to see
People die.

"RAMBO"

You are always complaining
Of your suffering
But wherever poor men
Are gathered they can
Find Jews getting fat.
You know how to cheat
The simple, exploit
the virgin, pollute
Where you have exploited,
Defame those you cheated,
And break your own law
With idolatry.
America
Is one big Jew.
What did you say?
You are old and ugly.
Not for one day
Will your children miss you.
I hear a belly growl;
The voice of your soul.
Go on then, kneel,
Beg me, beg me to permit
You something to eat
And a chance for a piss.
I see you cross
Your swollen legs.
Nobody begs?
That was your last chance.
Just this once
You can befoul yourselves.
You are all wolves,
Wolves without teeth.
You should think of death,
But you meditate
On dirty meat,
And your own unclean flesh.
Are you English?
Your Balfour Declaration
Led to the partition
And the dissolution
Of the Palestinian nation.

Where English is spoken
You will find perversion
And all kinds of filth
Not practised by stealth
Late at night,
But on the street
During the day.
You wink at sodomy.
You laugh at blasphemy.
You give no charity
To the oppressed.
What did your watch cost?
Is it solid gold?
How many mouths could be filled
If this were sold.
Your wrists are thick
But I can make
Bigger ones crack.
There. You may have it back.

LEON KLINGHOFFER

You're crazy.
This was to be
Our happy time
Together. Damn.
Oh dammit. M.,
Let's see you smile.
Look at that gull.
Think he'll land in the pool?
That's better. We'll
Bring home a tan
Anyway. When
I want to lie down
And get out of the sun,
I'll get a man
To wheel me below.
One thing less for you
To worry about.
I should have worn a hat.

SCENE 1B

BRITISH DANCING GIRL

I must have been hysterical,
But, you know, when they'd got us all
Sitting on red-hot folding chairs,
There was still one of the old dears
Below us on the deck. I could
See every freckle on his head.
It was like school; I bit my lip
And tried ever so hard to keep
From looking at him. Then, guess what?
I saw a lighted cigarette
Approaching at foot-level. Bliss.
Omar, who was extremely nice,
Kept us in ciggies the whole time.
We'd all had lunch before we came
On deck. Or breakfast. Sandwiches,
Anyway. First a great big piece
Of meat, and then a little bread,

Buttered, but not on the right side.
They all were more or less like that.
In some there wasn't any meat
Or cheese, or anything. It was
Just absolutely ludicrous.
And then later when Omar left
And Rambo came, nobody laughed.
He slapped a few people around
A bit, and shouted that he'd send
Us all to hell, and told us why
In rotten English. Actually,
Men like that aren't ever up
To much. You watch out for the type
Who looks as if he wouldn't fight
if he were paid. Now, I'd have bet
Omar would do for at least one
Passenger. An American.
How do I put it? They were sure
They had their rights, but this was war;
Something they failed to comprehend.
I did though, and I shut up, and
Looked at the rivets by my feet.
You know the story of the Great
Eastern, the ship built by Brunel?
A man was trapped inside the hull
Riveting. That's a joke. I thought
Of that, and knew I'd be all right.

OMAR

It is as if
Our earthly life
Were spent miserably
In great poverty
Outside a city
By whose lights we see
The Lord is God
When our power is dead.
You might read a newspaper
At midnight. A sleeper
Might well open his eyes
And notice
The wretchedness
Of his entire house:
The broken plaster
On the rotten floor;
Stripes of straw and lath,
Mice crawling beneath.
Hold your breath
And sleep again,
Sleep if you can.
Let the tent of your exile
Blow away in the gale,
Lie down, against the wall
Of the beautiful
City you besiege.
Your pilgrimage:
Let 'Courage!'
Be the word in your mouth.
O Holy Death,
A grass blade is not fine
Enough to pass between
One dovetailed stone

And its mate. Listen!
This perfection
Was made to be broken;
This work must be undone
And not by old men
Who have forgotten
Both annihilation
And the joys of heaven.
Let them wait
While we fight,
We who remember
And have come far,
None of us more
Than twenty years old,
And have sailed
On a pleasure cruise
In disguise,
Our purpose
Hidden in pleasure,
Each soldier
A martyr
Preparing his heart
In secret,
Resigning his post
And the world's interest.
May we be worth
the pains of death
And not grow old
In the world
Like these Jews.
My soul is
All violence.
My heart will break
If I do not walk
In Paradise
Within two days
And abandon my soul
And end the exile
Of my flesh from the earth
It struggled with.

DESERT CHORUS

Is not their desert the garden of the Lord?
Rain falls on the earth where no man is
to satisfy the desolate and waste ground;
to raise a grass blade for the green locust
and appease the scorpion that suffers thirst.
Rain falls, and not lightly, on the bituminous land,
obliterating landmarks; it vanishes
between the particles of rock, and runs
down ancient aquifers lined with the casts of ferns.
The hunters shall go hungry tonight;
one will rest inside his shelter while the other waits,
eyes open, though the stars and moon are gone
and the sky is nothing but cloud pouring out rain
and the earth is contracted by no human speech
as if it had turned itself away from the world
to leap like a fountain in the mind of God.
For a little while, perhaps a few years,
the rose of Persia, yellow with a red blotch at the
base,

which the people of Iran strip from their cornfields
and use as fuel, will bring its beauty here.

Omar and Molqi fight. Molqi wheels Klinghoffer away.

SCENE 2A

MARILYN KLINGHOFFER

Mrs. Klinghoffer is sitting on deck in wretched discomfort, having no idea that her husband is about to be shot.

My one consolation
Is that Leon
Has gotten someone
To take him down
To the hospital.
I hope it isn't full.
I wish I'd seen him leave.
Someone should have
Let me know.
But, as they say,
The wife hears last.
I've got the worst
Pain in my breast;
A stabbing pain.
And in my groin.
I don't know what it is.
It's like arthritis,
Right up by the pelvis,
You know, by the joint.
Those replacement
Joints they have today,
They're miracles. We
Have friends of eighty
Who have literally
Thrown walkers away.
So they can't play
Squash or tennis,
Who would notice?
Paralysis
like Leon has
Is intractable.
He's wonderful.
He's never stopped
Fighting. I've coped
As well as anyone,
But he just goes on
Amazing us all.
You say, 'What the hell,
The medical
Profession will
Discover something.'
I think you're wrong.
Nobody really cares
Except the sufferers.
Friends of friends of ours
Involved in research
Say there's not much
Work being done
On rehabilitation.
It's not in fashion.
Fashion! What a joke!
Cure the headache,
Ignore the stroke,

It makes me sick!

Even though
It may not be true.
You'll forgive me
If I close
My poor eyes
And pretend
This never happened.
Who could have imagined
Such a business,
Such meshugaas?
I should apologize;
Why didn't we meet
At the banquet?
The buffet, you know,
Two nights ago.
That would have been better.
Let me rest now, dear.

SCENE 2B

MOLQI

American kaput.
Take his passport.

MAMOUD

Every fifteen
Minutes, one
More will be shot.
You cannot doubt
We mean what we say.
You must tell Syria
This death is on her head.
This man's blood
Has been shed
To bear witness
To her treacheries
And to the betrayal
Of the Palestinian people
By those with powerful
Interests in Israel
Throughout the so-called
Arab world.
We have not failed
And the shame is not ours.

CAPTAIN

I said, 'Now you have made it clear
To the authorities on shore
That your demands are serious.
They know, but they have closed their eyes.
Very well, now you must go on:
Another death, another sign
That the world will refuse to see.
You speak of failure? I would say
You did not fail until you killed.
Yesterday the entire world
Acknowledged the significance

Attaching to—let me not mince
Words—your disruption of this cruise.
You awakened their consciences
Which sleep secure now they have seen
Nothing that they might not have known,
Like drunkards in a cemetery.
They know the score. It's time for you
To shoot another passenger—
A guest in my house, as it were.
I speak now as a man to men:
You should kill me. That act alone
Would echo to your lasting fame.
It would permit me to redeem
My honor. I am Captain. I
Stand for the ship, the Company,
The crew. Now let me represent
The passengers as well.

"RAMBO"

How many dollars
Have I got here?
I don't care.
There's plenty more.

CAPTAIN

I want Those wretched people to be safe.
Shoot me, and let that be enough.

"RAMBO"

Look! Up in the air!
Will any of you
Stand up and say
You'd like a few
What will they buy
That anyone wants?
They came from the pants
Of an old man.
They're not very clean.

CAPTAIN

And as I finished—this will seem
Incredible, but—on my arm
A bird was resting. I could feel
Its tiny claws right through the wool.

MOLQI

Say we have killed again,
This time a woman,
Not the wife of the man,
Another one.
And we will shoot more.
What is their answer?

SCENE 2C

The ship turns toward Egypt and the body is dropped over the side.

LEON KLINGHOFFER'S BODY

May the Lord God
And His creation
Be magnified
In dissolution

Nothing is lost
But the sea-level
Has risen fast
Against the sea wall

After the war
In this part of town
Good furniture
Exposed to the rain

Buckled and warped
Malachite and brass
Were quickly stripped
And inlays worked loose

Locked bureau drawers
Had their locks broken
The souvenirs
Which would be taken

Fetches not a cent
As for the papers
No instrument
Could find the sleepers

Whose things these were
None of the damage
Water nor fire
Nor any outrage

Reported there
Came to their notice
As if secure
In the Lord's justice

Empty-handed
But not hurriedly
They were minded
To go far away

To go away
Not to take action
And so decay
Followed defection

Study the laws
They celebrated
Knowing this house
The living and dead

MAMOUD

It's over. It's done.
The wife of the dead man—
Say nothing to her.

It's over.
It's finished.
As you wished,
It was done by talk.
Abu Kaleb spoke
And you answered.
He gave the word
When you confirmed
That things were as they seemed.

DAY CHORUS

Palestinians disembark.

Is not the day made to disperse their grief?
Light covers the mourners as dirt covers the dead
and brings them to themselves. They have been tried.
This was a country of inaccessible mountains,
of vineyards and pastures, where they cultivated
the land to the very edge of the river
and the river never flooded and was perennial.
What became of that woman who stared at us
with ash smeared on her temple? The sun
which filled her dark veil has divided her body
among those who loved her underground. The sun
which saw her waiting until dark to eat
has put her in the dark and made her verminous.
And as she dedicated her life to observance
the sun, which enjoyed her ecstasy,
made her black clothes green like the neck of a starling.
We thought those young men had forgotten one another
but they have lifted that beam. Broken cement and sand
slide into the hole from which a voice was heard
as if an ant-lion had caused them to give way.

SCENE 3

*The ship has docked in Cairo and the Palestinians have disembarked.
The Captain has called Mrs. Klinghoffer to his cabin.*

CAPTAIN

Mrs. Klinghoffer, please sit down.
You must be tired. You haven't been
Down to your cabin yet. You have?
That's good. You are a very brave
Woman. A rara avis. I
Have something terrible to say.
It seems your husband has been killed.
There was no witness. I am told
His body was thrown overboard
In the wheelchair. I am afraid
It is true. It sounds like the truth.
How weak and fruitless, from my mouth,
Words of condolence must be now
To you, who loved him, and who knew
Him better than you knew yourself.

You look past me for him. In half
A minute, you think, he will come
And comfort me. I pray that time
Will heal you, and the Lord assuage
Your sorrow, so that this mirage
Will soften into memory
And phantom pain into strange joy.

MARILYN KLINGHOFFER

You embraced them!
And now you come,
The Captain,
Every vein
Stiff with adrenaline,
The touch of Palestine
On your uniform,
And offer me your arm.
I would spit on you
But my mouth is dry.
I have no spit
And no tears yet.
The whole time I thought
He was all right,
Below decks somewhere
Being cared for.
We heard them fire.
It didn't register.
And Leon Klinghoffer,
My husband,
My best friend,
Is killed by a punk
While I think
Of this and that,
Hearing the shot,
Discounting it,
Looking at the sky,
Chatting idly.
Why didn't I know?
Oh God, with all the pain
Of hands, of feet, of skin,
Of the intestine,
Of liver and spleen,
And heart, and brain,
Of every organ,
And nerve and bone,
Of muscle and tendon,
Of the womb
And the spinal column
That I have borne,
Why nothing then
Of what Leon
Had endured,
What he suffered
Before they fired?
He would resist.

I can't recall the last
Sight I had of him.
We used to sit at home
Together at night
When the children were out.
I wouldn't glance up
From the book on my lap
For hours at a time,
And yet it was the same
As if I had gazed at him
I knew his face so well,
His beautiful smile.
I have only a short
Time. What can part
Us while I live?
He lives in me. I grieve
As a pregnant woman
Grieves for the unseen
Long imagined son.
Suffering is certain.
The remembered man
Rising from my heart
Into the world to come,
It is he whom
The Lord will redeem
When I am dead.
I should have died.
If a hundred
People were murdered
And their blood
Flowed in the wake
Of this ship like
Oil, only then
Would the world intervene.

They should have killed me.
I wanted to die.