

The Death of Klinghoffer
Discussion Guide Libretto Excerpts

VIGNETTE I (*Act I, Scene II*)

MAMOUD

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.

VIGNETTE II (*Act II, Scene I*)

BRITISH DANCING GIRL

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.

VIGNETTE III (*Act II, Scene III*)

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 wheel chair. 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,
*[The double-take
And the shrewd look,
If he had a headache
I'd go to the kitchen
For some aspirin.
He'd never complain,
You understand, but
We were so intimate
When something wasn't right
I couldn't concentrate
On my reading.
I remember our wedding
And the night he came
Into my room
At the hospital
And said, "That baby's a doll!"
And, at the school,
How he searched every wall
For the children's art.]*
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.
End of Opera