

Layla the Body Washer and Incident at Jerusalem

By

NICHOLAS A. PATRICCA

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play that are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXXV by
NICHOLAS A. PATRICCA

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(LAYLA THE BODY WASHER AND INCIDENT AT JERUSALEM)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-348-0

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

Layla the Body Washer and Incident at Jerusalem

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Layla the Body Washer	9
Incident at Jerusalem.....	25

INTRODUCTION

How do we remember the dead? The dying? How do we work for peace in a world that never ceases warring? How do we make sense of being either activists or nothing-ists? I recall the bumper sticker of the 1960s, “If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.”

Never more so than now.

“Do wars ever truly end?” Aliya asks in *Layla the Body Washer*.

Do we end wars, or do wars end us because we leave it to the business of war-makers?

What do we say to ourselves, what do we ask, how do we live alongside wars?

I once lived in Sarajevo for a summer in 1982, before the Olympics, before the last war that changed the name of that country from Yugoslavia to Bosnia Herzegovina. That visit, which seemed at the time entirely by chance, changed me forever.

Perhaps we are only concerned about lives in remote countries when we know the names and the faces, the streets and the homes. My visit to the former Yugoslavia graced me with friends, whose lives I keep close and nurture even now.

Wars have been ever present throughout the history of humanity, but that war particularly changed my way of seeing. Sarajevo, the city held hostage then, is still held hostage now, though it is coerced to a false calm under a tenuous peace accord. When I go back to that city, I witness the war kept alive in the hearts of individuals, just as we keep war alive in our country—we have yet to recover from our civil war. Rage still simmers, the war goes on, the seeds of war freshly planted with every generation. I turn 70 years old this month. I have never known a not-war era.

What can we do? How do we make change? What is our responsibility as witnesses? How do we work for peace?

Nicholas Patricca asks these questions in a language that is neither contemporary nor ancient, but something that I can only call sacred. His words are prayers, chants, fables for our times. He gives us stories both historic and contemporary.

I keep asking myself what I can do with my voice in this time of constant war. Nicholas Patricca gives me hope that all is not lost. We are each, as Rumi wisely reminds us, capable of working for peace: “We may be only a drop, but we contain the ocean inside us.”

I want to bring to your attention here today especially this—we cannot choose sides in any war without adding fuel to the fire. How do we go forward, then, as peace makers?

Activist poet Thich Nhat Hanh made me understand the power of being peace by making peace with everyone we meet today and always, every thought and word and action. This is much harder than holding up a sign. The way to peace is to be peace.

“Let the dead teach us,” Nic Patricca instructs. He confessed in a letter: “It is so hard to keep up one’s courage to dare to write ... how presumptuous to think that what I have to say or what I see matters to another soul ... that it is worthy of another’s contemplation. I always shudder at the hubris of the writer.”

His homily for me, for you, for us:

“We have become story tellers.

We think it is important to name the dead.

And to remember.”

—Sandra Cisneros
Dec. 1, 2024
San Miguel de Allende

“Nicholas Patricca is a poet trapped inside a playwright or a playwright trapped in a poet. These two plays—as do all his works—remind one of ancient ritual dramas as much as ruminations written from a time deep in our shared history and a place deep, deep in the human heart. These plays challenge us to look squarely at the world and know its suffering. They ask us to do the hardest thing—to feel.”

—Ian Brennan
Co-creator *Monster* and *Glee*

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Layla the Body Washer and *Incident at Jerusalem* were written because of my friends and colleague theatre artists Cecilie Keenan and Rick Paul, who have always generously supported me throughout my theatre career. Cecilie inspired me to write *Layla*, which she so expertly brought to life in Rhino Fest 2024. I wrote *Incident* to honor the work and achievements of Rick, the founder of the Lionheart Gay Theatre Company, which pioneered plays and performance pieces, especially in the early days of AIDS, when gay theatre was not mainstream. Rick produced several of my works over many decades. *Incident* serves both as a companion piece to *Layla* and as a tribute to the name Lionheart, which announces the courage so necessary to create and present works of art in performance for the contemplation of a live audience. It is my hope that these two plays might open hearts to compassionate action in our world of ceaseless conflict.

I dedicate these plays to all theatre artists who work for peace. Thank you.

—Nicholas A. Patricca

Layla the Body Washer

Layla the Body Washer was presented at the Rhinoceros Theater Festival at Facility Theatre in Chicago in June 2024.

CAST:

LAYLA..... Momina Shahzad
ALIYA..... Joy Valdez-Pappas
MUSICIAN..... Whyne Braswell

PRODUCTION:

Director Cecilie Keenan
Advisor..... Rick Paul

Layla the Body Washer

CHARACTERS

ALIYA: Body washer.

LAYLA: Apprentice.

MUSICIAN: Performs music and sound effects.

PRODUCTION NOTES

TIME & PLACE: Now. Somewhere in the Middle East ... and everywhere.

SETTING: Catacomb areas dedicated to preparing the dead for burial, during a war.

Layla the Body Washer

Scene 1

(Traditional Arabic music plays. The music gradually becomes intense contemporary Arabic fusion rock as the play progresses. Lights up on LAYLA placing herbs in various packets. ALIYA is present in shadow and in LAYLA's memory.)

LAYLA *(to the audience)*. Aliya found me in a bombed-out building. I was hiding, trying to make myself so small no one could see me. Trying to become part of the rubble. Aliya heard the sobs I could not swallow. The sobs I choked on. She took my hand. She said nothing. Just took my hand and walked me out.

I was twelve. Now I'm her apprentice.

(LAYLA moves to the body of a deceased person. She mixes some herbs with water.)

LAYLA *(cont'd)*. From the Ancient Egyptians, we learned to use camphor oil with water to wash the body. And cedar oil when we have it. Sometimes we put rosemary leaves in the waters. When we have water.

(LAYLA starts wiping a hand with a white cotton cloth soaked in camphor-infused water from a small bottle.)

LAYLA *(cont'd)*. It's so strange. It is hard for me to get used to touching someone who won't ever laugh again, or cry or breathe. Have you ever looked closely at a body that no longer has life in it? It is so strange. All looks normal. You recognize the person who is no longer there. How can that be?

I watch Aliya's weathered hands, so carefully she touches them. As if they were not dead at all but in some kind of strange sleep. Aliya traces the lines around their eyes to make sure she has caught all their tears. She calls the tears of the dead the waters of life.

I am learning to trace the map of life in the wrinkles and scars and lines running through a woman's body. I make up stories of their lives from these imperfections of their bodies. Aliya scolds me:

"These are not imperfections, Child, they are the memories of life itself. Your body remembers everything that has ever happened to you."

As we tie the knots, we whisper their names into the linen, when we know their names. When we don't know their names, we whisper a name we think they will like.

First we tie the shroud around the head, then around the feet, then we make ties across the body. We pray as we work.

We make up things about the dead. From what we see in the lines on the face. When there is a face to see. From what we can tell from the softness or hardness of their hands, from what we see of the flesh and bones of the dead.

We have become story tellers.

We think it is important to name the dead.

And to remember.

(LAYLA bows her head and starts to pray over the body. ALIYA bursts into present consciousness.)

ALIYA *(suddenly)*. Layla! We don't need prayers, we need water. LAYLA *(moves from the body)*. There is no water. The taps are dry.

(ALIYA takes over tending the body.)

ALIYA. Even when the taps run. The water is polluted. Get some bottled water.

LAYLA. There is no money.

ALIYA. Steal some.

LAYLA. Stealing is *haram*!

(ALIYA removes a bracelet from her wrist and gives it to LAYLA.)

ALIYA. This was my mother's bracelet. Take it. Make sure you get a good price for it. Buy as many bottles as you can find.

(Distant aerial bombardments. Debris falls from the ceiling and walls.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Don't get killed.

(LAYLA exits. ALIYA speaks to the dead person.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. I apologize. I do not have the three waters to properly cleanse your body. Perhaps Allah will accept my tears.

(ALIYA gently holds the hand of the dead person.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Must death be a lonely thing.

(ALIYA kisses the hand. Holds it against her cheek.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Surely this hand has knowledge of love. Surely, it remembers the feel of a friend's face.

(More bombardment.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Men have time to sit in cafès, drink coffee, complain, order women about and kill each other. But no time to make peace. Or provide me with clean water.

(The lights flicker, go out.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). I don't even know your name.

(ALIYA sings a traditional Arab lullaby.)

Scene 2

(ALIYA is preparing a body for burial according to the ritual requirements of Islam. LAYLA is chanting an Arabic prayer [Sunan an-Nasa'i 333] softly in the background.)

LAYLA.

اللَّهُمَّ اغْسِلْ خَطَايَايَ بِمَاءِ التَّلَجِّ وَالْبَرَدِ وَنَقِّ قَلْبِي مِنَ الْخَطَايَا كَمَا نَقَّيْتَ الثُّوبَ
الْأَبْيَضَ مِنَ الدَّنَسِ

[Allahummaghsil khatayaya bi-ma'ith-thalj wal-barad was naqqi qalbi min al-khataya kama naqayta ath-thawb al-abyad min ad-danas]

ALIYA. O Allah, wash away her sins with the three waters of your mercy. Purify her soul so she can complete her journey to be at home with you.

(ALIYA washes an arm of the body.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). O Allah, grant her peace in her grave. Make her burial in holy ground the entrance to your gardens in Paradise.

(Loud intrusive noise at tunnel entrance to the cellars.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). More bodies stacked against our doors. What do they think we are a factory?!

(ALIYA washes the other arm.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). “May Allah take you into his hands and press you to his heart.”

LAYLA. Maryam is Christian.

ALIYA. Yes, yes I know. Thank God we know her name. Maryam, we share the same God. Surely we can share our prayers. Layla, go acquaint yourself with the dead outside our door. Find what you can to identify them.

(LAYLA exits.)

ALIYA (*cont'd, speaking to Maryam as she wraps her in linens*). I have to distract Layla when I take shortcuts in the rituals. She’s a real stickler for details. I know you will understand. I’m sure the Virgin Mary of your faith also understands. We Muslim women honor her. The Virgin Mary knows we women do what we can to protect life. To sustain life. So, we take a few shortcuts ... we get the job done.

(ALIYA sings a few lines of a popular Arabic song, completes wrapping the body in linens according to Islamic ritual with ties at head and feet. LAYLA enters.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). Maryam is ready for burial.

Scene 3

(ALIYA and LAYLA, cold and hungry, are huddled together in a corner of the basement. LAYLA is sobbing quietly. She is suffering a panic attack.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). Hush child. We don’t want the men to hear us. We must be strong for the living as well as the dead.

(ALIYA takes one of LAYLA’s hands. Rubs it.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). The cold in this tunnel makes the bones ache.

(ALIYA pulls LAYLA closer to her.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). Take what warmth you can from these old bones of mine. I wish these old breasts could shed milk to nourish you. It is our faith that Allah understands and cares for us. But when one is hungry and cold a hot tea and a biscuit would be most welcome.

Dear child. Sleep now. Rest.

(ALIYA gently places LAYLA's head comfortably on some blankets.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). I shall go find us some tea and perhaps even a biscuit the rats have not yet fouled.

Scene 4

(ALIYA and LAYLA are wrapping a dead person in linens. ALIYA ties the linen into a shroud at the head of the dead person. LAYLA ties the linen at the feet.)

ALIYA (*cont'd*). May she find peace.

(Heavy bombardment. Partial collapse of the roof in area where bodies are washed. ALIYA is knocked to the ground.)

LAYLA. Aliya! Aliya!

(LAYLA rushes to ALIYA, cradles her head in her arms. She worriedly rocks ALIYA while moaning her name.)

ALIYA. Stop groaning into my ear. A person can't even take a moment to rest. Get some water to clean my wound.

(LAYLA collects a cloth and camphor water. She then soaks the cloth and starts cleaning the wound on ALIYA's forehead.)

LAYLA. Don't die.

ALIYA. Only the good die young. Give me that cloth.

(ALIYA tends her own wounds.)

LAYLA. I'll go find some iodine and a plaster.

ALIYA. Good luck. *(She surveys the damage. Tries to put things in order. Gives up.)* When we meet we say to each other "salaam alaikum." But I have never known peace. I was born in war. I will die in war.

Oh. I know my history. Do not lecture me on history. Do not tell me of treaties and peace agreements. Treaties are signed. Yet, the embers of hatred burn fiercely beneath the surface, fueled by resentment, vengeance, and the wounds that never fully heal.

When did this war begin? Can anyone remember? Did this war begin when your son killed my child?

And then my daughter kills your son and then my uncle kills your mother and your father kills my brother or sister or grandfather or teacher or lover ... or, did this war begin with Cain and Abel and Ismael?

Ask yourself this question: Do wars ever truly end?

Look around. I stand amidst the skeletons of what was once a vibrant city. I hear laughter swallowed by the angry dust of violence. I see smiling faces turned into twisted clumps of burning flesh. I don't see peace.

What I don't see is:

Peace

Pax

Shalom

Salaam

I only see the dead.

The dignity of the dead.

The humility of the dead.

Perhaps our God is a god of war. And we are His worthy children.

(ALIYA resumes her efforts to puts things in order.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Let the dead teach us. Let the dead teach us the price of war. Let the dead make us remember the cost of war. Let the dead fuel our determination to build a future where peace can live and breathe. Let the dead remind us that we are only flesh and bone and blood and poorly lived dreams.

Let the dead break our hearts and take the scattered shards and reshape us into the worthy children of a God who makes peace.

Scene 5

(ALIYA and LAYLA are moving to a new space in the warren of cellars under the ruins of bombed buildings and collapsing tunnels.)

LAYLA. They're moving us to this old wine cellar. Wine is *HARAM!* It is forbidden!

ALIYA. Since there's no water, we shall bathe with it.

LAYLA. Wine is forbidden, Aliya.

ALIYA. Tell that to the devout Muslim men who drink it. And to all the Muslim writers who extol wine's virtues.

(ALIYA locates a clean spot on a table for placing the tea.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Here. This space will do. Prepare the tea. And some food.

LAYLA. There's just enough water for tea ... but—

ALIYA. Yes, I know. No food. Allah wants me to lose weight.

LAYLA. Allah loves you just as you are.

ALIYA. When the men bring the generators and the dead, they'll bring some food.

(LAYLA prepares the tea.)

LAYLA. What will we do Aliya. When ...

ALIYA. Make the tea and don't think

LAYLA. But you always tell me to think ...

ALIYA. Well, I'm not always right. You should have figured that out by now.

LAYLA. I shall die first. Then I won't have to worry. I shall ask Allah for this mercy I shall die first.

ALIYA. It would be better for you to ask Allah for food and water.

LAYLA. If you die before me ...

ALIYA. Layla, enough! I want my tea.

(ALIYA settles into a comfortable spot.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Not so bad. Living with wine bottles. Look. Each bottle has its own little home. Perhaps we can sneak in and live among them. No one would find us. It would be our secret. Our own special home. Look. Not one bottle is broken. Must be a special place.

(LAYLA serves the tea.)

LAYLA. I fear the owners, whoever they were, took better care of their wine than they did of their servants.

(ALIYA sips the tea. Savors it.)

ALIYA. Would be better with milk. And a little sugar. And a biscuit. Perhaps we should try a little wine with our tea.

LAYLA. That would be *haram*.

ALIYA. WAR IS *HARAM!*

(Loud banging sounds.)

ALIYA *(cont'd)*. Up Layla. No more thinking ...

The dead have arrived ...

Scene 6

(ALIYA is washing the body of a young girl.)

ALIYA. Her flesh. Even in death. So young. So beautiful. This is wrong. How can they murder such youth. Her breasts shall never know the touch of love. Her breasts shall never suckle a child. This is wrong. Layla.

LAYLA. You are tired. Let me finish the shrouding.

(A loud piercing whistle of a bomb descends rapidly upon them. An explosion. Flash of light then total darkness. Then partial light.)

LAYLA is stunned. Gropes. Lights a torch as she collects her wits and bearings. LAYLA rushes to the crumbled form of ALIYA.)

LAYLA *(cont'd)*. Aliya! Aliya! NO!

Scene 7

ALIYA. I am water

LAYLA. I am water

ALIYA & LAYLA. We are shapeless. Pliant.

LAYLA. I am gentle

ALIYA. My fury carves canyons out of solid rock. I cradle continents in my hands

LAYLA. I paint rainbows. I am a tear on a cheek. The gentle caress of summer rain

ALIYA. At the water hole

LAYLA. All the animals come to drink

ALIYA. For a time

LAYLA. All share the water that gives life

ALIYA. For a brief fragile moment

LAYLA. There is the intimation of

ALIYA & LAYLA. PEACE

ALIYA. I have woven myself into the fabric of your being

LAYLA. I quench your thirst

ALIYA. Nourish you

LAYLA. Cleanse you

ALIYA. I am the inspiration of your art

LAYLA. Civilization

ALIYA. Sacred rituals

LAYLA. Do not waste me

ALIYA. Pollute me

LAYLA. I am not yours to own

ALIYA. Not yours to sell

LAYLA. Destroy me

ALIYA. Destroy yourself

Scene 8

(LAYLA washes the body of ALIYA.)

LAYLA. We are lost in cold night

The sun the moon the stars cannot see us

The song of birds cannot find our ears
We are lost in cold night
No one to guide us
No one to teach us
Aliya. Aliya. Who will cleanse me when I die?
Who will pray for me?
Who will remember me.
Aliya. Aliya.
Who will comfort the dead?
Who will show us what the dead are teaching us?

(LAYLA places her head on ALIYA's breast.

*After a few moments of silence, LAYLA straightens herself
and faces the audience with resolve.)*

LAYLA (*cont'd*). Yes, Aliya. Yes. I shall do my duty.

(LAYLA looks into the audience.)

LAYLA (*cont'd*). I am Layla, the body washer.

THE END

Incident at Jerusalem

*A Tale of the Legendary Encounter of
Richard Lionheart and Saladin*

Incident at Jerusalem

CHARACTERS

SALADIN (EMISSARY): Commander of the armies of Islam, the first sultan of Egypt and Syria, founder of the Ayyubid dynasty.

RICHARD LIONHEART: Commander of the Crusaders. Son of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II of England. King of England, Duke and Lord of many domains in France and elsewhere.

Both Saladin and Richard are at the prime of their lives and the top of their games.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING: It is 1191, the time of the Third Crusade. Richard Lionheart, having won important victories at Acre and at Arsuf, has laid siege to Jerusalem, which Saladin had taken from the Catholic King Guy of Lusignan in October of 1187. Jerusalem, a city of no military significance but of the greatest political/religious importance, has become the fatal bone in the throat to both Richard and Saladin, who badly need to conclude their hostilities and attend to their political and dynastic futures.

Saladin and Richard have been exchanging letters and emissaries for quite some time.

HISTORICAL NOTE: As far as we know historically, Richard and Saladin never met though they planned such meetings repeatedly recognizing in each other kindred spirits loving learning and loathing religious fanaticism. Nonetheless, legends abound of their meeting because the drama of history requires it.

Incident at Jerusalem

(The tent of RICHARD LIONHEART before the walls of Jerusalem. At rise, the EMISSARY from SALADIN enters the tent.)

RICHARD. What is it you want now? I already gave you my message for your master.

EMISSARY. Yes, your excellency, *(Pulls out a small parchment from his sleeve.)* I have your most generous albeit slight statement of “thank you” for my master An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, sultan of Egypt and Syria, commander of all the armies of the faithful, protector of Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem ...

RICHARD. Enough!

(Silence.)

RICHARD *(cont'd)*. I do not write long flowery excessive verbose flattering insincere missives as is the custom of you Arabs.

EMISSARY. Your stinginess with words is legendary.

RICHARD. Be careful, sir, lest you trespass your role.

EMISSARY. Forgive my poor knowledge of the subtleties of your language. *(Pause.)* May I clarify, my lord, I and my master Lord Saladin are Kurds, not Arabs. You must learn to distinguish the many peoples under our glorious banners.

RICHARD. Yet, you call us all FRANKS.

EMISSARY. We call Greeks, Greeks. We call Venetians, Venetians. We call barbarians, FRANKS.

RICHARD. Whether Arab or Kurd or Turcoman or Persian, your blood stains the desert sands just the same.

EMISSARY. Perhaps I should have used the word “terse” or the phrase “efficient economy in the expression of gratitude.”

RICHARD. Get on with it. I have no time to waste on annoying banter. I need to plan my next triumph over your master’s overrated armies.

(The EMISSARY unwraps a small vessel, carefully protected and insulated, and hands it to RICHARD.)

EMISSARY. The physicians my gracious master sent to care for you during your recent illness informed him that you suffer greatly from the heat of our lands.

RICHARD *(opens the vessel)*. Snow and ice.

EMISSARY. Flavored with pomegranate juice and kernels.

(EMISSARY hands a small spoon to RICHARD, who tastes the snow.)

RICHARD. Delicious. *(Pause.)* How is this possible!?

EMISSARY. From the mountains, by relays of fast horses and competent messengers. *(He surveys the tent.)* It is a wonder how you Franks live in such squalor. You seldom bathe. You eat putrid meat. Which fouls the breath that comes from your unclean mouths ...

RICHARD *(interrupting)*. And yet as uncivilized as we are, we have outwitted you, outfought you, and beaten you at Acre and at Ascalon and Asruf and ...

EMISSARY. Mere battles. You win battles, my lord, but you cannot win the war.

RICHARD *(puts the pomegranate snow aside)*. I see. You’ve come here to sue for peace. What are the terms Lord Saladin, the conqueror, seeks? To hide the disgrace of his defeats?

EMISSARY. The Lord Saladin grants you leave of safe conduct to Acre from which you may depart for your Frankish lands unmolested by his invincible armies. My master, ever magnificent, promises you ample provisions of fresh foods and pure waters ...

RICHARD. And baskets and baskets of flavored snow I presume ...

(With a quick deft move, RICHARD seizes the EMISSARY. They wrestle. They are of equal strength. They roll. First RICHARD is on top. Then the EMISSARY. Then RICHARD.)

EMISSARY. My spies warned me that you enjoyed wrestling.

RICHARD. Just showing my gratitude for the two fine Arabian steeds you've given me.

EMISSARY. A king must have a horse worthy of him.

(The EMISSARY throws RICHARD over, straddles him.)

EMISSARY *(cont'd)*. Do your guards always let you win?

RICHARD. I didn't realize how old you are.

EMISSARY. Your preference for older men is well known.

(RICHARD throws the EMISSARY over, straddles him and removes his headdress, revealing him as SALADIN)

RICHARD. You risk everything to be here this night, Lord Saladin.

SALADIN. You, Richard, are worthy of the risk.

(RICHARD releases SALADIN.)

RICHARD. You are not as I have imagined from our correspondence.

SALADIN. What did you imagine? A pampered pasha, made soft by over-indulgence?

RICHARD. Something like that. Yes. Besotted by your many wives, and boy lovers, perfumes and exotic foods.

SALADIN. I have often suspected that is why you Franks keep coming to our lands, to escape the dreariness of your weather, cuisine and customs.

RICHARD. I have come here to take Jerusalem back from you.

SALADIN. I have come here to ask for your friendship.

RICHARD. Duty and destiny make us enemies.

SALADIN. Is it truly your duty to restore the vain, the stupid, the cruel and corrupt Guy of Lusignan as King of Jerusalem? A man unworthy to lick your feet?

RICHARD. I am his liege lord. Though I do loathe the man.

SALADIN. Then rid yourself of him.

RICHARD. With poisoned pomegranate ice?

(RICHARD picks up the flavored snow, moves close to SALADIN and hands the snow to him. SALADIN eats some.)

SALADIN. It is good. Thank you.

RICHARD. In a different life, Lord Saladin, we might be friends.

SALADIN. The Sufis tell me that our fates are intertwined like tangled umbilical cords of twins at birth. The poets tell us that twins feel each other's pains and joys. The flesh of twins is stitched together, woven as one flesh by invisible threads.

RICHARD. Brothers bound together or not, Saladin, I shall take Jerusalem back from you. Poetry will not stop me.

SALADIN. I don't give a Damascus fig for Jerusalem. It is of no military or commercial value. It is a cesspool of corruption and petty intrigues, a nest of fanatics, lunatics and idiots. I would gladly give it to you.

RICHARD. Your enemies, however, would slit your throat if they heard you speak thus.

SALADIN. I have read Moses ben Maimon, al-Farabi, even the Latin scholars whom you so wisely sponsor in your lands. These are true men of God. But what do these ignorant men know, these fanatics who study no science, no music, no poetry, who always preach war and death? These men who claim to know the will of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate. These small men only know their own small hearts and petty ambitions.

RICHARD. I made a vow.

SALADIN. I know all about your vow.

RICHARD. Do not mock me.

SALADIN. You are the man who murdered 2,700 innocent women, children and old men at Acre for no reason other than your pride. Where was your religion, your God, when you murdered the hostages to satisfy your anger against me. Was that part of your vow?

(RICHARD places a dagger at the throat of SALADIN.)

RICHARD. I can kill you now.

SALADIN *(with a dagger piercing RICHARD's blouse near his liver)*. And I you.

(RICHARD withdraws the dagger as does SALADIN.)

RICHARD. You are as guilty as I. You were testing me. And you lost. You sacrificed those innocent people to test my will. And my wits. For ten cartloads of gold and a few Christian nobles. You sacrificed your fellow Muslims.

SALADIN. Richard, you have always lacked patience. It will be the death of you. *(Pause.)* I propose that we, you and I,

Saladin and Richard, fulfill one of the prophecies of your Bible and bring peace to our world. I, Saladin, shall send all of my fanatics to the plains of Armageddon ...

RICHARD. And I, Richard, shall send all of my self-righteous fanatics to the same desolate plains.

SALADIN. Then, we shall pitch our tents on the highest grounds, sip our tea ...

RICHARD. And encourage these ignorant men to fight each other to the death ...

SALADIN. Till the very last fanatic is left standing all alone.

RICHARD. I, Richard, would then crown him the victor.

SALADIN. And I, Saladin, shall run him through with my most cherished blade.

RICHARD. That would be our gift to your God and mine.

SALADIN. That would be our gift to your people and mine.

RICHARD. PEACE.

(Silence.)

RICHARD *(cont'd)*. I have Jerusalem surrounded.

SALADIN. And, I, dear Richard, have you surrounded. *(Taking hold of RICHARD.)* My brother, we can end this bloodshed.

(RICHARD breaks away. SALADIN hands RICHARD a letter.)

RICHARD *(in shock)*. My brother, my own brother wears my crown.

SALADIN. While you are here in my lands, honoring your oaths to your God and your Pope, your brother John is in rebellion against you. He declares himself the true king of England. While you waste your life here in my lands, your

fellow crusader, Philip, the king of France, conspires to take your Frankish Dukedoms from you. The German emperor, Conrad, seeks to have you hanged for killing his brother.

RICHARD. You are remarkably well informed.

SALADIN. Battles may be won by bravery, but wars are won by accurate information and well fed and paid troops. Which brings us to the worst piece of accurate information of all. You, my dear Richard, have no money. You are bankrupt. Without money, you cannot continue to fight.

RICHARD. My ships dominate the coasts of the Holy Land. My armies occupy the trade routes between Damascus and Alexandria, you cannot consolidate your power over Egypt and Syria. Soon, my dear Saladin, you shall find your coffers empty.

SALADIN (*laughs*). Not for a very long time. And you know that fact full well.

RICHARD. Daily, I receive ambassadors from your enemies, even from your alleged friends, seeking alliances with me. They are jealous of your power. They want you to fail.

SALADIN. It is a sad affliction of human nature, is it not, that success breeds envy and pettiness, making men blind to the true good within their reach. Politics and power, like the sands of our deserts, shift with every passing wind. (*Pause.*) I can wait you out, Richard. I have the money. I have the food.

RICHARD. As winter takes hold, more and more of your soldiers are abandoning you.

SALADIN. They always return in spring.

RICHARD. Too late.

SALADIN. You are beginning to annoy me. Have you nothing to drink?

RICHARD. The wine is not as fine as those to be found in your tents.

(RICHARD pours the wine and hands a cup to SALADIN, who drinks it down in one gulp, grimaces and holds out his cup for more. RICHARD pours more wine for SALADIN and a cup for himself. He drinks the cup down in one gulp.)

RICHARD *(cont'd)*. Is it not against your religion to drink wine?

SALADIN. Is it not against your religion to take pleasure from the bodies of your guards?

RICHARD. Priests confess me.

SALADIN. The Imams, whom my treasury feeds, see no wrong in my habits.

(SALADIN and RICHARD eye each other. SALADIN takes the wine jug and refills RICHARD's cup, then his own. They salute each other. And both drink down the wine in the cups in one gulp.)

RICHARD. *In vino amicitia!* Let us follow the example of the heroes of old, and engage in combat to determine the victor in our quarrel.

SALADIN. A challenge! How delightful! Is it not your Frankish custom that the person challenged chooses the type of combat?

RICHARD. Choose.

SALADIN. Following the example of the ancient Greeks, I choose wrestling!

RICHARD. The whole world knows that I am a champion at wrestling! I am younger, stronger—I am a master of this sport.

SALADIN. Doing combat as leaders of our respective tribes, we shall strip naked, oil our bodies and wrestle!

RICHARD *(roars with laughter)*. You just want to seduce me. Admit it.

SALADIN. How vain you are to presume that I find you attractive, or worthy of my lust.

RICHARD. Why do we not do combat with weapons, as did the real heroes of antiquity?

SALADIN. I am trying to avoid bloodshed, not cause it. I would have chosen combat by poetry and wit, but that would be no contest. Since you would most certainly lose.

(RICHARD pours wine into SALADIN's cup then into his own cup.)

RICHARD. We would need a judge. Were we to wrestle. How would we know who the winner is? Of course, there is no doubt as to who would win.

SALADIN. No judge is needed. It is obvious. The winner penetrates the loser.

RICHARD. How corrupt is your imagination.

SALADIN. I read Persian poets. *(Pause.)* Your question is a good one, my discerning Richard.

RICHARD. What question is that?

SALADIN. How would we know who has won? What would “winning” mean to you, Richard? What would it really mean for you to fulfill your vow? What does it mean to take Jerusalem? Does it necessarily mean to restore the despicable Guy to his throne? Surely not. Surely that cannot be the meaning of winning or of fulfilling your promise.

RICHARD. You're laying a trap for me.

(SALADIN fiddles with the pieces of a chess set on RICHARD's table.)

SALADIN. I see you are using the chess set I sent to you.

RICHARD. I am learning. One of my guards is teaching me.

SALADIN. What is the object of this game?

RICHARD. Capture the enemy king.

SALADIN. You cannot capture me. I cannot capture you.

RICHARD. Stalemate.

SALADIN. Again I ask. What would WINNING look like in our game?

(SALADIN raises his hand to stop RICHARD from responding.)

SALADIN (*cont'd*). I shall answer for you. You shall answer for me.

(SALADIN gestures to RICHARD to answer.)

RICHARD. Saladin keeps Jerusalem.

SALADIN. Richard returns to his lands, secures his kingship of England, protects his dukedoms in France, successfully defends himself from the false charges of the emperor, pays off his debts ... need I go on and on and on ...

RICHARD. You conveniently forgot one thing, the most important thing ...

SALADIN. I did not forget. You insult me to think so.

RICHARD. Spit it out. Your solution for Jerusalem. The real purpose of your visit.

SALADIN. I keep Jerusalem. I guarantee you and your retinue safe passage to the coast to embark on your journey home. I, Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, sultan of Egypt and Syria, commander of all the armies of the faithful, protector of Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, I guarantee safe passage for all Christians on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, whether by sea or by land, all Christians may journey to Jerusalem to pray. I give my word, my treasure, my troops to enforce this promise.

RICHARD. And, the fanatics who shall oppose you?

SALADIN. The Imams shall declare the killing of Christian pilgrims to be *haram*. No one may harm them under pain of death. *(Pause.)* And your fanatics?

RICHARD. Guy and others will continue to fight you. They will continue to plunder your caravans for money. I cannot stop them.

SALADIN. Richard, without you, they are pests to be exterminated when it suits me.

RICHARD. Perhaps you overestimate my value. *(Pause.)*
What do your precious Sufi foretell?

SALADIN. I know your value. I do not need to consult my scholars.

RICHARD. What did the Sufi say?

SALADIN. I shall keep Jerusalem.

RICHARD. And I shall return to Europe and recover what is mine?

SALADIN *(pause)*. It is also foretold that we shall die soon.

(RICHARD refills their cups with wine. They drink.)

RICHARD. You have a way of sobering a man that I do not enjoy.

(Silence.)

RICHARD *(cont'd)*. I cannot control my fanatics nor the greed of their leaders. They will do their best to kill me.

SALADIN. It is the way men are.

RICHARD. I shall continue to fight until I have convinced or forced them to accept this treaty.

SALADIN. Agreed.

RICHARD. I shall fight to win.

SALADIN. As shall I. (*Pause.*) But now, the endgame is clear and certain, the two kings have understood each other. They have embraced. They part as friends.

(RICHARD embraces SALADIN. They kiss.

RICHARD removes a chain from his neck, places it on SALADIN. SALADIN removes a bracelet from his wrist, places it on RICHARD's left wrist.)

SALADIN (*cont'd*). The horses I have given you are my best. Treat them well.

RICHARD (*embraces SALADIN*). In another lifetime ...

SALADIN. In this lifetime ... when we sign our accord.

(SALADIN breaks away and leaves the tent.)

RICHARD. *Salaam.*

THE END