

Othello

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

Copyright 2005 by Paul W. Collins

Othello

By William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, audio or video recording, or other, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Contact: paul@wsrightnow.com

Note: Spoken lines from Shakespeare's drama are in the public domain, as is the Globe edition (1864) of his plays, which provided the basic text of the speeches in this new version of *Othello*. But *Othello, by William Shakespeare: Presented by Paul W. Collins*, is a copyrighted work, and is made available *for your personal use only*, in reading and study.

Student, beware: This is a *presentation*, not a scholarly work, so you should be sure your teacher, instructor or professor considers it acceptable as a reference before quoting characters' comments or thoughts from it in your report or term paper.

Chapter One Alarm and Arrest

On a dark street in Venice—a prosperous, powerful government now in the late 16th century, controlling land from the Alps to the Baltic and territories far beyond—two men argue in muted tones as they approach the mansion of one of the Signiory’s most prominent legislators. It is almost midnight.

The younger, a landed gentleman quite fashionably attired, is irate. “Never told *me!*” complains Roderigo. “I take it much unkindly that thou, Iago, who hast had my purse as if the strings were *thine*, shouldst *know of this!*”

“*Sblood*, but you will not *hear* me! If ever I did *dream* of such a matter, abhor me!”

“Thou told’st me thou didst hold him in thy *hate!*”

“Despise me if I do *not!*” insists Iago, military in dress and bearing. His face reveals anger and frustration. “Three great ones of the city, in personal suit to make *me* his lieutenant, off-capped to him! And, by the faith of man, I know my price!—I am *worth* no worse a place!

“But *he*, as loving his own pride and purposes, evades them with a bombast of circumstance, horribly stuffed with epithets of war—and, in conclusion, nonsuits my mediators!

“For, certes,” says he, ‘I have already chosen my officer.’ And what was *he*? Forsooth, a great *arithmetician*: one Michael Cassio, a *Florentine*, a fellow *almost* damned in a fair wife,”—the young lieutenant has successfully retained his bachelorhood, “that never set a squadron in the *field*, nor of the division of a *battle* knows more than a spinster, unless by the *bookish* theoretic wherein the *toga’d consuls*”—ancients—“can propose as masterly as he! Mere *prattle* without practise is all *his* soldiership!

“But *he*, sir, had the election! And I—whose eyes had seen the *proof*”—been in combat—“at Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds, Christian and heathen—must be beleev’d, and claimed as debtor by creditor! This *counter-caster*,”—game player, “*he* in good time must his lieutenant be, and *I* his Moorship’s *ancient!*”—ensign, standard-bearer, “God bless the mark!”

Roderigo has his own reason to despise the general. “By heaven, I rather you would have been his *hangman!*”

“Well, but there’s no remedy. ’Tis the curse of service: preferment goes by letter and affection, and not by old gradation, where each second stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself, whether I in any just terms am affined to *love* the Moor.”

“I would not *follow* him, then!”

Iago brushes aside the challenge. “Oh, sir, content you: I follow him to *serve my turn* upon him!

“We cannot all be *masters*—nor can all masters be *truly* followed. You shall mark many a duteous and knee-crooking knave that, doting in his own obsequious *bondage*, wears out his time much like his master’s *mule*, for nought but provender—and when he’s *old, cashiered!*”—dismissed without pension. “*Whip* me such *honest* knaves!

“Others there are who, trimmed in *forms* and *visages* of duty, yet keep their hearts attending on themselves, and, throwing but *shows* of service on their lords, do well thrive by them!—and when they have lined their coats, do *themselves* homage. *Those* fellows have some *soul!*

“And such an one do I profess *myself!* For, sir, it is as sure as you are Roderigo, were I not *Iago*, I would be no *Moor!*” he says wryly. “In following him, I follow but *myself*. Heaven is my judge: not for love and duty, I, but *seeming* so for my peculiar end. For when *my* outward action doth demonstrate the native act and figure of my heart in complement *extern*, ’tis not long after but I will wear my heart upon my sleeve for *daws* to *peck at!*

“I am *not* what I am.”

Roderigo sees Iago's duplicity as an asset for his own jealous scheming; he returns angrily to the reason they're here this warm night. "What a *full fortune* does the thicklips own if he can *carry*'t thus!"

Iago instigates by inciting. "Call up her *father*; rouse him! *Make after* him!—*poison* his delight! *Proclaim* him in the streets; incense her *kinsmen*! As though he dwelt in a *fertile climate*,"—a manured field—"plague him with *flies*!"

"Though that this toy be *joy*, yet throw such charge of *vexation* on't as it may lose some colour!"

Roderigo stops. "Here is her father's house. I'll call aloud."

"*Do!*—with like accent of *fright* and *dire yell* as when, by night and negligence, *fire* is spied in populous cities!"

"What, ho, Brabantio," calls Roderigo. "Signior Brabantio, ho!"

Iago shakes his head at his companion's feeble effort. "*Awake! What ho!*—*Brabantio!*" roars the soldier. "*Thieves! Thieves! Thieves!* Look to your *house*, your *daughter*, and your *moneybags!* *Thieves! Thieves!*"

The senator himself, in a shirt, throws open the casement of a window in the building's second story. "What is the reason of this terrible summons? What is the *matter* there?"

"Signior, is all your family within?" asks Roderigo.

"*Are your doors locked?*" cries Iago.

Brabantio frowns. "Why, wherefore ask you this?"

"*Zounds*, sir, you're *robbed!*" shouts Iago. "*For shame!* Put on your gown!—your *heart* is *burst*, you have lost half your *soul!*—even now, *now*, very *now*, an old black *ram* is topping your white *ewe!* *Arise, arise!*—*awake* the snoring citizens with the *bell*, or else the *Devil* will make a grandsire of you! *Arise*, I say!"

Brabantio stares down at two dark figures in the shadowy street. "*What*, have you *lost your wits?*"

"Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?" asks Roderigo reasonably.

"Not I; *who are you?*"

"My name is Roderigo."

Brabantio is further annoyed. "Then *worser* welcome! I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors! In *honest plainness* thou hast heard me say *my daughter is not for thee!* And now—in *madness*, being full of supper and distempering *draughts*—upon malicious *knavery* dost thou come to *startle my quiet!*"

Roderigo pleads: "Sir, sir, sir—"

"But thou must needs be sure my spirit and my place have in them power to *make this bitter to thee!*" warns Brabantio.

"—patience, good sir...."

"What tell'st thou me of *robbing?*" demands the nobleman in disgust. "This is *Venice*; my house is not a *grange!*"

Roderigo tries again. "Most grave Brabantio, in simple and pure soul I come to you—"

"*Zounds*, sir," cries Iago impatiently, "you are one of those that will not serve *God* even if the *Devil* bid you to! We come to *do you service*, but because you think *we* are ruffians, you'll have your *daughter* covered with a *Barbary horse!*—you'll have your nephews *neigh* to you!—you'll have *coursers* for *cousins* and ponies *germane!*"

Brabantio is revolted. "What profane wretch art *thou?*"

"I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your *daughter* and the *Moor* are now *making the beast with two backs!*"

"Thou art a *villain!*" cries the old man, livid.

"You are a *senator!*" retorts Iago.

"This thou shalt *answer!*" vows Brabantio. "I know thee, Roderigo!"

The young man pleads: "Sir, I will answer anything, but I *beseech* you!"

“If’t be your pleasure and most wise *consent*, as partly I find it is, that your fair daughter at this odd-to-even in the dull watch o’ the night”—between eleven and twelve—“be *transported*—with no worse nor *better* guard than a *knave of common hire*, a *gondolier*—to the *gross clasps* of a *lascivious Moor*... if this be *known* to you and your *allowance*, then we *have* done you bold and saucy wrongs.

“But if you knew this *not*, my manners tell me we have your *wrong rebuke*!

“Do not believe that in despite of the sense of all *civility* I thus would play and *trifle* with Your Reverence! I say *again*: your daughter, if you have not given her leave, hath made a *gross revolt*!—tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes to an extravagant and wheeling *stranger* of here and everywhere!”—an itinerant foreigner. “Straight satisfy yourself: if she be in her chamber or your house, let loose on me the *justice of the state* for thus deluding you!”

Brabantio turns away. “Strike on the tinderbox, *ho!* Give me a taper! Call up all my people!” Thinks the old nobleman to himself, *This occurrence is not unlike my dream! Belief of it oppresses me already!* “*Light*, I say! *Light!*” He moves back from the window.

Iago tells Roderigo, quietly, “Farewell. I must leave you. It seems not meet nor wholesome to my place to be producèd—as, if I stay, I shall—against the Moor.

“I do know that, however this may gall him with some check, the state cannot with safety cast him out; for he’s embarkèd with much loud praise *to the Cyprus wars*—which even now stand in *act*—and, for their *souls*, another of *his* fathom they have none to lead their business.

“In which regard, though I do *hate* him as I do *hell-pains*, yet, for necessity of present life, I must show out the flag and sign of *love*—which is indeed but *sign*.

“So that you shall surely find him, lead the raisèd search to the Sagittary, and there will I be with him. So, farewell!” The ensign strides away, headed for the general’s hostelry.

The house’s heavy front doors swing open and Brabantio hurries out., followed by several servants, two of them bearing torches. He is highly distraught. “It is *too true* an evil!—*gone* she is! And what’s to come of my despisèd time is nought but bitterness!

“Now, Roderigo, where didst thou see her? —*Oh, unhappy girl!* With the *Moor*, say’st thou?” He groans. “Who would be a *father*?

“How didst thou know ’twas she? —Oh, she *deceives* me past *thought!* What said she to you?”

“Get more tapers! Raise all my kindred!” the senator orders his men, as more come to join him. Brabantio chews his lip. “Are they *married*, think you?”

“Truly, I think they *are*.”

“*O heaven!* How got she out? Oh, *treason* of the *blood!* Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters’ minds but by what you *see* them *act!*

“Be there not *charms*, by which the property of youth and maidenhood may be abusèd? Have you not read, Roderigo, of some such thing?”

“Yes, sir, I have indeed,” replies Roderigo—truthfully; his long searching has been fervent and assiduous, if fruitless.

“Call up my brother!” Brabantio tells an attendant. He turns to Roderigo. “Oh, would that *you* had had her!

“Some one way, some another!” the senator tells the shuffling men; but then he stops them with a gesture. He asks the rejected suitor, “Do you know where we may apprehend her and the Moor?”

“I think I can discover him, if you please to get good guard and go along with me.”

“Pray you, *lead on!* At *every house* I’ll call; I may command at most,” says the politician.

“Get weapons, *ho!* And raise some special officers of night!

“*On*, good Roderigo; I’ll deserve your pains!”—by rewarding them.

Under the stately old inn’s weathered wooden sign—painted to depict a centaur, his bow drawn taut with an arrow ready to release—Iago emerges onto the street following Othello, a tall, powerfully built man. Several of the general’s attendants follow with torches.

Without telling of his own part in it, Iago has reported Lord Brabantio's rousing by young Roderigo—whom he has described with disgust. "Though in the trade of war I have slain men, yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience to do no contrived *murder*—I lack iniquity sometimes to do me *service!* Nine or *ten times* I had thought to have yerked him *here*, under the ribs!"—stabbed the swain.

Othello is not worried. "'Tis better as it is."

"Nay, but he prated, and spoke such *scurvy* and *provoking* terms against Your Honour that, with the little godliness I have, I *full hard* did forbear him!

"But, I pray you, sir, are you securely married? Be *assured* of it!—the magnifico is much beloved, and hath in his effect a voice potentially as *double* the *duke's!* He will *divorce* you, or put upon you whatever restraint and grievance the *law*, with all his might to *enforce it on*, will give him cable!"

Othello stops to pull on gloves. "Let him do his spite. My services which I have done the Signiory shall out-tongue his complaints.

"'Tis yet to be known—which, when I know that *boasting* is an honour, I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being from men of *royal* holdings; yet my deemed *merits* may speak to as proud a fortune as this that I have reached.

"Know, Iago, but that I *love* the gentle Desdemona, I would not my unhoused, free condition put into circumscription and confine for the *sea's* worth!" The commander, a wealthy Mauritanian prince of forty-five, had long eschewed marriage.

He sees torches approaching. "But, look! What lights come, yond?"

Iago is visibly alarmed. "Those are the raised *father* and his friends!—you were best *go in!*"

"Not I," says Othello, utterly confident. "I must be *found*: my parts, my title and my complete soul shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?"

As the party rushes forward behind them, Iago is surprised. "By Janus, I think no!"

Othello nods, recognizing them. "The servants of the duke, and my lieutenant." With Cassio are two other officers of his command, and servants. "The goodness of the night upon you, friends! What is the news?"

Cassio speaks as he bows. "The duke does greet you, general, and he requires your haste, *post* haste, appearance, even on the instant!"

"What is the matter, think you?"

"Something from Cyprus, as I may divine," Cassio tells him. "It is a business of some *heat!*—the sequent galleys have sent *a dozen messengers* this very night at one another's heels, and many of the consuls are raised and met at the duke's already!

"*You* have been hotly called for!—not being found at your lodging, the Senate hath sent about three several quests to search you out!"

Othello nods. "'Tis well I am found by you! I will but spend a word here in the house, and go with you." He enters the inn to tell his bride he must answer an urgent summons from the Duke of Venice.

Cassio asks Iago, "Ancient, what makes he *here?*"

"Faith, he tonight hath boarded a *land* vessel," says the cynical soldier. "If it prove lawful prize, he's made fast forever."

"I do not understand."

"He's married."

"To *whom?*"

"Marry, to—" He bows as Othello returns. "Come, captain, will you go?"

Othello nods to them. "Have with you."

But Cassio points down the narrow street. "Here comes another troop to seek for you."

"It is *Brabantio!*" says Iago. "General, be advised: he comes to bad intent!"

The prominent lord hurries forward, accompanied by constables with torches. Roderigo follows.

Othello raises a hand to halt them. “*Holla!* Stand there!”

“Signior, it is the Moor,” Roderigo tells Brabantio—quite unnecessarily.

“*Down* with him,” cries the old man. “*Thief!*”

At that affront, the men with the general draw their rapiers—and Brabantio’s quickly draw theirs.

“You, *Roderigo!*” cries Iago menacingly. “Come, sir, I am for you!”

But Othello calmly steps forward, raising a hand. “Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.” He faces the white-haired senator squarely. “Good signior, you shall more command with your *years* than with weapons.”

“O thou *foul thief!* Where hast thou stowed my *daughter?*”

“*Damned* as thou art, thou hast *enchanted* her! For I’ll refer me to all things of *sense*: if she were not bound in *chains of magic*—a maid so tender, fair and happy, so opposite to marriage that she shunned the wealthy, curled darlings of our nation—would she ever incur a *general* mock, running from her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a *thing* as *thou?*—unto *fear*, not to delight!

“Judge the *world* if ’tis not *gross* in sense”—obvious—“that thou hast *practised* on her with foul *charms*—abused her delicate youth with drugs, or minerals that weaken motion! I’ll have ’t disputed on; ’tis *probable*, and palpable to *thinking!*”

“I therefore apprehend and do attach thee for an *abuser of the world!*—a practiser of *arts prohibited* and out of warrant!”

Brabantio motions to the city officers, “Lay hold upon him! If he do resist, subdue him at his peril!” The parties move closer, blades held forward.

Othello again halts them: “Hold your *hands*, both you of my inclining and the rest! Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it without a prompter.” He asks the senator, “Where will you that I go to answer this your charge?”

“To *prison* till fit time, as law courts call thee to answer direct in session!”

Othello glances toward the Signiory men with him. “What if I do *obey?* How may the *duke* be therewith satisfied, whose messengers are here about my side, upon some *present business of the state* to bring me to him?”

“’Tis *true*, most worthy signior,” one of that group tells Brabantio. “The duke’s in *council*—and *your noble self*, I am sure, is sent for!”

Brabantio is surprised. “What? The duke in *council!*—at *this* time of the night!” He ponders for a moment.

“Bring him away,” says Brabantio; they will go to the palace.

At Othello’s nod, his men sheathe their weapons; he bows, waiting courteously for the legislator to lead the way.

The senator is confident. “Mine’s not an idle cause! The duke himself, or any of my brothers of the state, cannot but feel this *wrong* as ’twere *their own!* For if such actions may have passage free, *bond-slaves* and *pagans* shall our statesmen be!”

Chapter Two **Arraignment, Assignment**

Torchlight illuminates the extensive Venetian state’s ornate council chamber, where—in the middle of a summer night—the duke and his panel of powerful advisers sit at a long oak table, attended by military officers.

At issue in this emergency session: threatening moves by Turks of the vast Ottoman Empire against Venetian territories around the eastern Mediterranean.

“There is no *composition* in these news that gives them credit,” says the frowning duke, tapping the missives before him.

“Indeed, they are disproportioned,” says a senator. “*My* letters say a hundred and seven galleys.”

“And mine, a hundred and *forty*,” the duke notes.

“And mine, two hundred,” adds another legislator. “But though they jump not on a just account—and in these cases, where the reports aim ’tis oft with difference—yet do they *all* confirm a *Turkish fleet*—and bearing up to Cyprus!”

The duke nods. “Aye, it is possible enough in judgment. I do not so secure me to the errors but that the *main* article I do approve in *fearful sense!*”

They hear the voice of a man coming quickly down the corridor, calling ahead: “What, ho! *What, ho! What ho!*”

“A messenger from the galleys,” an officer advises.

“Now, what’s the business?” asks the duke, as a sailor hurries to the council, stopping in front of the table to remove his cap and bow.

“The Turkish preparation makes for *Rhodes!*” says the seaman. “So was I bid report here to the state by Signior Angelo!”

The duke looks to the council. “How say you by this change?”

“This *cannot be*—by no assay of reason,” says a portly old senator. “’Tis a *pageant*, to keep us in *false watch!*”

“When we consider the importancy of *Cyprus* to the Turk—and let ourselves again but understand that, as it more *concerns* the Turk than Rhodes, so may he with more facile question beard it,”—*readily challenge it*. “And it stands not in such warlike brace, but altogether lacks the abilities that Rhodes is dressed in.

“If we make thought of this, we must not think the Turk is so unskilful as to leave that for *later* which concerns him *first!*—neglecting an attempt of *ease* and *gain*, to wait and wage a danger profitless.”

The duke concurs: “Aye, in all confidence, he’s not for Rhodes.”

“Here is more news,” says the officer, as another man arrives.

“Reverend and Gracious,” says the naval messenger with a bow, “the Ottomites, steering with due course towards the isle of Rhodes, have there injoined them with an *after* fleet!”

“*Ah*, so I thought!” cries the senator. “How many, as you guess?”

“*Of thirty sail!*—and now they do re-stem their course, bearing *backward*—with frank appearance their purposes *toward Cyprus!*—where Signior *Montano*, your trusty and most valiant servitor, of his free duty recommends *you* do thus, and prays you *relieve* him!”

Governor Montano has no military experience, and the island is protected by far fewer Venetian troops than are stationed on Rhodes.

“’Tis certain, then, for Cyprus,” the duke concludes. “Marcus Luccicos—is not he in town?”

“He’s now in Florence,” a councilor notes.

“Write from us to him!—post *post-haste*—*dispatch!*” A messenger hurries away.

The rotund senator nods toward the doors. “Here comes Brabantio—and the valiant Moor!”

The Venetian nobleman and a constable enter the chamber, followed by Othello and Iago. Roderigo comes in behind them.

Says the duke gravely, “Valiant *Othello*, we must straight employ you against the general enemy Ottoman!” He looks at Brabantio—annoyed at the legislator’s tardy arrival. “I did not see you; welcome, gentle signior. We lacked your counsel and your help tonight,” he adds pointedly.

“So did I *yours*,” replies Brabantio. “Good Your Grace, pardon me; neither my *place* nor aught I heard of *business* hath raised me from my bed—nor doth the *general* care take hold on me! For my *particular grief* is of so *flood-gate* and *o’erbearing* nature that it engulfs and swallows other sorrows!—and it is *still itself!*”

“Why, what’s the matter?” asks the duke.

“My *daughter! Oh, my daughter!*”

An elderly senator, seeing the man’s misery, asks, “Dead?”

“Aye—to *me!*” moans Brabantio. “She is *abused!*—*stolen* from me and *corrupted* by *spells*, and medicines bought of *mountebanks!* For a nature so *preposterously* to *err*—being not lame, blind or deficient of sense, sans *witchcraft* could *not!*”

The duke is disturbed. “Whoe’er he be that in this foul proceeding hath thus beguiled your daughter of herself, and you of her, the bloody *book of law* you shall *yourself* read, in the bitter letter after your own sense!—yea, though our proper *son* stood in your action!”

“Humbly I thank Your Grace,” says Brabantio. He points: “*Here* is the man!—this *Moor*, whom now, it seems, your special mandate for the state’s affairs hath hither brought!”

The senators exchange uncomfortable glances; commenting quietly among themselves, they regard Brabantio with sympathy.

The duke asks Othello, “What in your own part can you say to this?”

Brabantio interjects: “*Nothing* but this is *so!*”

Othello strides to stand before the council table’s row of candles. “Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors, my very noble and approvèd good masters,” he begins, “that I have ta’èd away this old man’s daughter, it is most *true*—true I have *married* her! The very head and front of my offending hath this extent, no more.

“Rude am I in my speech, and little blessed with the soft phrases of *peace*. Because these arms of mine have seven years’ pith,”—full maturity, “and till now some nine moons wasted they have used their dearest action in the *tented field*, of this great world little more can I speak than pertains to feats of *broil* and *battle*. And therefore little shall I grace my cause by speaking for myself.

“Yet, by your gracious patience, I will a round, unvarnished tale deliver of my whole course of *love*—what drugs, what charms, what conjuration and what mighty *magic*—for by such proceeding, I am chargèd—I won his daughter.”

“A *maiden* never *bold*,” says Brabantio, “of spirit so still and quiet that her emotion *blushed* at *itself!*—and for *her*, in spite of nature, of years, of country, credit, *everything*, to fall in love with what she feared to *look* upon?—it is a judgment *maimed* and most *imperfect* that will profess perfection could so err against all rules of Nature! One *must* be driven to find out *practises* of *cunning Hell* why this should be!

“I therefore vouch again that with some *mixtures* powerful o’er the blood, or with some *dram* conjured to this effect, he *wrought* upon her!”

The duke is not to be persuaded by repetition. “To *avouch* this is no *proof*, without more wider and more overt test than these thin habits and poor likelihoods of modern *seeming* do prefer against him!”

“But, Othello, speak!” urges a senator. “*Did* you by indirect and forcèd courses subdue and poison this young maid’s affections?—or came it by *request*, and such fair question as soul to soul affordeth.”

“I do beseech you, send to the Sagittary for the lady,” says Othello, “and let *her* speak of me, before her father. If you do find me foul in her report, the trust, the *office* I do hold from you not only take away, but let your sentence even fall upon my *life!*”

“Fetch Desdemona hither,” orders the duke.

Othello turns to Iago. “Ancient, conduct them; you best know the place.” Iago bows and goes. “And, till she come, as truly as to Heaven I do confess the vices of my blood, so justly to *your* grave ears I’ll present how I did thrive in this fair lady’s love, and she in mine.”

The duke nods to him. “Say it, Othello.”

The general pauses for a moment, remembering. “Her father welcomed me—oft *invited* me, and questioned me for the story of my life: from year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes, that I have passed.

“I ran through it, even from my boyish days to the very moment that he bade me tell it, wherein I spake of most disastrous chances, of stirring incidents by flood and field, of hair-breadth *’scapes* in the imminent, deadly *breach!*”

“Of being taken by the insolent foe and sold to *slavery!*—of my redemption thence!

“Of the *cannibals* that each other eat; the *anthropophagi*—and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders!

“And of portents in my travels’ history, wherein it was my dint to speak of caverns vast and deserts idle, rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven!

“Such was the ‘practise.’

“This to hear would Desdemona seriously incline. But oft the house’s affairs would draw her thence—after which, as she could ever with haste dispatch, she’d come again, and with a greedy ear devour up my discourse.

“Observing which, I took once a pliant hour and found good means to draw from her a prayer of earnest heart that I would all my pilgrimage dilate, whereof by *parcels* she had *something* heard, but not intensively.” He smiles wryly. “I did consent.” The advisers chuckle.

“And often did ‘beguile’ her—*of her tears*, when I did speak of some distressful stroke that my youth suffered. My story being done, she gave me for my pains a world of sighs! She swore, in faith, ’twas *strange*, ’twas *surpassing* strange, ’twas piteous, ’twas *wondrous* piteous!

“She wished she had not heard it—yet she wished that heaven had made for *her* such a man! She thanked me, and bade me, if I had a *friend* that loved her, and that would *woo her*, I should but teach him how to tell *my* story!

“Upon this hint, I spake.” He regards the council. “She loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them. This only is the ‘witchcraft’ I have used.” He nods toward the doors. “Here comes the lady; let her witness it.”

Desdemona, a beautiful young noblewoman, arrives, accompanied by Iago.

The duke has been impressed by Othello’s account of their courtship. “I think this tale would win *my* daughter, too!

“Good Brabantio, take up this mangled matter for the best,” he advises. “Men do their broken weapons rather use than their bare hands.”

“I pray you, hear her speak!” insists Brabantio. “If she confess that she was half the wooer, destruction on my head if *my* bad blame light on the man!

“Come hither, gentle mistress,” he says sternly. “Do you perceive in all this noble company where most you owe obedience?”

Desdemona goes to him and curtsies. “My noble father, I do perceive here a *divided* duty. To you I am bound for life and education; both do teach me how to respect you. You are the lord of *duty*; I am *hitherto* your daughter.

“But here’s *my husband*; and so much duty as my mother showed to you, preferring you before *her* father, so much I challenge that I may profess as due to *my* lord, the Moor.”

Brabantio’s face flushes; he is stunned. “*God* be wi’ you. *I* have done.

“Please it Your Grace, on to the state-affairs,” he says grimly to the duke. “I had rather to *adopt* a child than beget it!” He glares. “Come hither, Moor.” Othello faces him. “I here do *give* thee that with all my heart which, but thou hast it already, with all my heart I would *keep from thee!*”

Brabantio turns to Desdemona. “As for your *sale*, jewel, I am glad at soul I have no *other* children, for thy escape would teach me *tyranny*, to *hang clogs on them!*

“I have done, my lord.”

Says the kindly duke, “Let me speak like *yourself*, and lay a sentence which as a step or stair may help these lovers into your favour.

“When *remedies* are past, then griefs are ended by *seeing* the worst which lately on hopes depended; to mourn a mischief that is past and *gone* is the nearest way to draw *new* mischief on!

“What cannot be *preserved* when Fortune takes, Patience her injury a *mockery* makes. The robbed that *smiles* steals something from the thief; he robs *himself* who spends a bootless grief.”

The rhyming aphorisms only aggravate Brabantio’s distress; he replies—in kind: “So *let* the Turk of Cyprus us beguile; we lose it not, so long as we can *smile!*

“He hears a sentence *well* who nothing bears but the *comfort*, which, *free* from thence, he *wears*,” the old man counters sourly. “But he bears both the *sentence* and the *sorrow* who to *pay* grief must from poor *Patience* borrow!

“These sentences, to sugar or to *gall*, being strong on both sides, are *equivocal*. Words are but words; I never *yet* did hear that the bruised heart was pierced through the *ear*!

“I humbly beseech you, proceed to the affairs of *state*.”

The Duke of Venice nods. “The Turk, with a most mighty preparation, makes for *Cyprus*.

“Othello, the fortification of the place is best known to *you*; and though we have there a substitute of most allowed sufficiency, yet opinion of *effects*, a sovereign mistress, throws a more safer voice on you. You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition.”

Othello bows. “The tyrant *custom*, most grave senators, hath made my bed of down the flint and steel couch of thrice-driven *war*.” He looks at Desdemona. “I do agonize; yet a natural and prompt alacrity I find in *hardness*—and I do *undertake* these present wars against the Ottomites!

“Therefore, most humbly bending to your state, I crave fit disposition for my *wife*—due reference of place, with such accommodation and expedition as besorts and levels with her breeding.”

The duke still hopes for reconciliation. “If you please, be’t at her father’s.”

“*I’ll not have it so!*” says Brabantio.

“Nor I,” says Othello.

“Nor I!” cries Desdemona. “I would not there reside, to put my father in impatient thoughts by being in his eye. Most gracious duke, to my unfolding lend your prosperous ear, and let me find a charter in your voice to assist my simpleness.”

“What would you, Desdemona?”

“That I do *love* the Moor, may *living* with him, despite downright violence and storm of fortunes, *trumpet to the world!* My heart’s subdued even to the very quality of my *lord*; I saw Othello’s visage in *his* mind—and to his honour and his valiant parts did I my soul and fortunes consecrate!

“So that, dear lords, if I be left behind, a *moth* of *peace*, and he go to the war, the rites for which I love him are *bereft* me, and I a heavy interim shall support in his dear absence!

“Let me go *with* him!”

“Let her have your voices”—approval, Othello urges the councilors. “Vouch with me, Heaven: I therefore beg, not to please the palate of my *appetite* nor to comply with *heat*—the young affections in me being defunct for satisfaction *per se*—but to be free and bounteous with her *mind!*”

“And heaven defend your good souls, should you think I will your serious and great business scant for that she is with me! *No!* When light-winged toys of feathered *Cupid* seal with wanton dullness my speculative and officed instruments such that my *disports* corrupt and taint my *business*, let housewives make a *skillet* of my *helm*, and all indign and base adversities make head against my *estimation!*”

The duke is impatient. “Be it as you shall privately determine, either for her staying or going. The affair cries *haste*, and *speed* must answer it!”

“You must away tonight!” says a senator.

The bride is taken aback. “*Tonight*, my lord?”

Othello takes her hand. “With all my heart!”

The duke rises and addresses the council. “At nine i’ the morning here we’ll meet again.

“Othello, leave some officer behind, and he shall our commission bring to you, with such things else of quality and respect as doth import you.”

Othello nods. “So please Your Grace, my ancient—a man he is of honesty and trust—to his conveyance I assign my wife, with what else needful your good grace shall think to be sent after me.”

“Let it be so,” says the duke. “Good night to everyone!” He addresses Brabantio: “And, noble signior, if Virtue no *delighted* beauty lack, your son-in-law is more *fair* than black!”

“Adieu, brave Moor,” says a senator at the table. “Use Desdemona well.”

Brabantio, leaving, turns back. “*Look* to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see! She has deceived her father—and she may *thee!*”

“My *life* upon her faith!” replies Othello, as his father-in-law stalks away. “Honest Iago, my Desdemona must I leave to thee. I prithee, let thy wife attend on her, and bring them after in the best advantage.

“Come, Desdemona! I have but an hour of *love*, from worldly matters and direction, to spend with thee! We must obey the time!”

As the council chamber clears, Roderigo approaches the ensign. “Iago....”

“What say’st thou, noble heart?”

“What will *I* do, thinkest thou?”

Iago yawns. “Why, go to bed and sleep.”

“I will incontinently *drown* myself!” Roderigo is heartsick and distressed; Desdemona has married—and she is leaving.

“If thou dost, I shall never love thee after! *Why*, thou silly gentleman?”

“Is it *silliness* to *live*, when to live is *torment*?” moans Roderigo. “Then have we a *prescription to die*, and Death is our *physician*.”

“Oh, villainous!” Iago has no tolerance for such sorrow. “I have looked upon the world for four-times-seven years, and ever since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury I never found a man that knew how to love *himself!* Ere *I* would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen I would *exchange* my humanity with a *baboon!*”

“What should I *do*?” pleads Roderigo. “I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to *amend* it.”

Iago scoffs, disgusted by Roderigo’s thralldom: “*Virtue?—a fig!*”

’Tis in *ourselves* that we are thus or thus! Our *bodies* are our gardens, unto the which our *wills* are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed-up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, have it either sterile with idleness or manured with industry—why, the power and corrigible authority of that lies in our *wills!*

“If the balance-scale of our lives had not one tray of *reason* to poise another of *sensuality*, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions! But we *have* reason to cool our raging emotions, our carnal stings, our unbidden *lust*—of which I take this that *you* call *love* to be a sect or scion!”

Either way, Roderigo suffers; he looks down, morose. “It cannot be.”

“It is merely a lust of the *blood* in a permission of the *will!* Come, *be a man!* Drown *thyself?*—drown *cats* and *blind puppies!*”

Iago sees that his source of cash needs encouragement—and a course of action. “I have professed me thy *friend*—and I confess me knit to *thy deserving* with cables of perdurable toughness!

“I could never better stead thee than *now!*” he argues brightly. “Put money in thy purse; follow thou the wars! Defeat *thy* face with an usurpèd beard!”—go in disguise.

Roderigo listens; a scheme to keep pursuing his adored lady appeals to the youth.

“I say, put money in thy purse!” says Iago, smiling in eager anticipation of the enterprise. “It cannot be that Desdemona should long *continue* her love to a *Moor!*—

“Put *money* in thy purse,” he urges warmly, “—nor *he* his to *her!* It was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration!

“Put but money in thy purse—these *Moors* are changeable in their wills—

“*Fill* thy purse with money! The food that to him now is luscious as *sweets* shall shortly be to him acerbic as *coloquintida!*”—as bitter as the purgative. “She *must* exchange for *youth!* When

she is unsated with his body, she will find the error of her choice!—she must have change, she *must!*

“Therefore *put money in thy purse!*”

Iago sees that the fop is coming around. “If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than *drowning!*” he says with a leer. He claps the young man on the back and laughs. “Make all the money thou *canst!*”

“If *sanctimony* and a frail vow betwixt an errant *barbarian* and a supersubtle *Venetian* are not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of Hell, *thou shalt enjoy her!*” he vows vehemently. “Therefore *make money!*”—transform property into it.

“A *pox* on drowning thyself!—it is clear out of the way!” He puts an arm around Roderigo’s narrow shoulders. “Seek thou rather to be hanged for *encompassing* thy joy than to be drowned *without* her!”

Roderigo is almost persuaded. “Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue?” he asks.

“Thou art sure of *me!*—go, make money. I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again: I *hate* the Moor! My cause is *hearted*; thine hath no less *reason*—let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him! If thou canst *cuckold* him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport!

“There are many events in the womb of time which will be *deliverèd! Traverse!* Go, provide thee with *money!*”

But now the ensign has work to do for the state. “We will have more of this tomorrow. Adieu!”

“Where shall we meet i’ the morning?”

“At my lodging.”

Roderigo nods. “I’ll be with thee betimes.”

“Go to; fare *well!*” As the younger man starts to leave, Iago grasps his arm firmly. “Do you *hear*, Roderigo!”

“What say you?”

Iago’s smile seems kindly. “No more of *drowning*, do you hear?”

“I am changèd,” Roderigo assures him. “I’ll go sell all my land!” He leaves, enjoying his restored hope of buying happiness.

Iago watches him go. *Thus do I ever make my fool my purse; for I mine own gainèd knowledge should profane if I would time expend with such a snipe but for my sport and profit!*

I do hate the Moor—and it is thought abroad that ’twixt my sheets he has done my office. I know not if’t be true; but I, for mere suspicion in that kind, will do as if for surety.

He regards me well; the better shall my purpose work on him.

Cassio’s a proper man. Let me see, now.... To get his place and to plume up my will doubles the knavery! How?...how?

Let’s see.... After some time, to abuse Othello’s ear that he is too familiar with his wife! Iago pictures the handsome lieutenant. He hath the person and the smooth dispose to be suspected—framèd to make women false!

The Moor is of a free and open nature; he thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will be led by the nose as tenderly as asses are.

I have’t!—it is engendered!

Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light!

Chapter Three

Storm and Celebration

On Cyprus this stormy morning, Governor Montano and two other Venetian gentlemen have climbed to the headland overlooking their stronghold's long stone wharf and stood peering out through the rain. Their anxiety is growing; dark clouds loom over the rolling waves. "What from the *cape* can you discern at sea?" asks the governor.

The officer who had been watching there reports. "Nothing at all! It is a highwrought flood—I cannot, 'twixt the heaven and the main, descry a sail!"

"Methinks the *wind* hath spoken *loud* to land!—a fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements!" declares Montano. He wonders about the ships coming from Venice. "If it hath ruffian'd so upon the *sea*, what ribs of oak, when *mountains* melt on them, can hold their mortise? What shall we hear of *this*?"

"A segregation of the *Turkish* fleet!" offers his hopeful deputy. "For do but stand upon the foaming shore—the chidden billow seems to pelt the *clouds*: the wind-shakèd *surge* with high and monstrous mane seems to cast water on the *burning bear*, and quench the guards of the ever-fixèd *pole*!"—the constellation and star. "I never did such molestation view on the enchafèd flood!"

The wind whips Montano's wet cloak about him. "If that the Turkish fleet be not ensheltered and embayèd, they are drowned! It is impossible they bear it out!"

Another gentleman rushes up the slope behind them. "*News*, lads! Our wars are *done*! The desperate tempest hath so banged the Turks that their designment halts!—a noble ship of Venice hath seen a grievous wreck and sufferance on most part of their fleet!"

"*What*? Is this *true*?"

"The ship is here put in, the *Veronessa*; Michael Cassio, lieutenant to the warlike Moor, *Othello*, is come on shore! The Moor himself is at sea—and in full commission here for Cyprus!"

"I am glad on't; 'tis a worthy governor!" says Montano.

"But this same Cassio, though he speak of comfort touching the Turkish loss, yet he looks grave," the gentleman notes, "and prays the Moor be *safe*—for they were parted by foul and violent tempest."

"Pray heavens he *be*!—for I have served him, and the man commands full like a *soldier*!"

"Let's to the seaside go, as well to see the vessel that's come in as to throw out our eyes for brave *Othello*, even till we make the main and the aerial blue an indistinct regard!"—a blended blur. He starts down toward the shore.

"Come, let's *do* so," nods the deputy, "for every *minute* is expectancy of more arrivance!"

The driving rain is subsiding, but with hands still securing hats against the bluster, the men hurry down the hill and past the long citadel wall.

By the bay, and sheltered from the storm, they can see Cassio's ship at the wharf; its passengers have disembarked, and the lieutenant comes to meet them. After his party's warm military reception he bows. "Thanks, you the valiant of this warlike isle—and may the *Moor* so arrive!" he says. "Oh, let the *heavens* give him defence against the elements, for I have lost him to *us* on a dangerous sea!"

"Is he well shipped?" asks Montano.

"His vessel is stoutly timbered, his pilot of very expert and approvèd allowance; therefore my hope is that, if not *surfeited* to death, it stand bold in care."

"*A sail*," cries a distant voice. "*A sail, a sail*!" shout others.

"What noise?" asks Cassio.

Says a gentleman, "The town is *empty*: on the brow o' the sea stand ranks of the *people*, and they cry, '*A sail*!'"

The sweeping curtains of rain have diminished, and Cassio spots a vessel as it struggles in the still-churning swells. “My *hopes* do shape it as the governor’s!”

Over the water comes a *Boom!* of cannon-fire. “They do discharge their shot of courtesy!—our *friends* at least!” says the deputy.

“I pray you, sir, go forth,” Cassio tells him, “and give us truth who ’tis that is arrived.”

The official bows. “I shall!” He hurries out toward the pier at which the ship is to dock.

Montano thinks about Othello’s return—as governor. “But, good lieutenant, is your general wived?”

“Most *fortunately!*—he hath achieved a maid that *paragons* description by wild *Fame!*—one that *excels* the quirks of blazoning *pens*, and in the essential vesture of *Creation* does tire the *ingeners!*”—tax the angels.

He asks the returning deputy, “How now? Who has put in?”

“’Tis one *Iago*, ancient to the general.”

Cassio is surprised. “He’s had most favourable and happy speed!

“*Tempests themselves*, high seas and howling winds, guttered rocks and the congregated sands—*traitors* ensteepèd to clog the guiltless keel—as if having sense of *beauty* do omit their lethal natures to let go safely by the divine *Desdemona!*”

“Who is she?” asks Montano.

“She that I spake of: our great *captain’s* captain, left in the conduct of the bold Iago, whose footing here anticipates our thoughts by a se’nnight’s speed!” The ensign’s sleek vessel has made such good time as to arrive a week earlier than expected.

“Great *Jove*,” calls Cassio to the stormy sky, “*guard* Othello, and swell his sail with thine own powerful breath, that he may bless this bay with his tall ship, make love’s quick pants in Desdemona’s arms, give renewed fire to our extincted spirits, and bring all Cyprus comfort!”

They are soon joined on the wharf by Desdemona and Iago, with his wife, Emilia, and various servants. Roderigo, disguised with a mustache and beard, follows, attending Iago in his new, military capacity.

“Oh, *behold*,” cries Cassio, “the *richness* of the ship is come on shore! Ye men of Cyprus, *let her have your knees!*” The men kneel and courteously sweep off their hats. “*Hail* to thee, lady! And the grace of *heaven*, before, behind thee, and on every hand, enwheel thee round!”

After the perilous passage, Desdemona is glad to be on land. “I thank you, valiant Cassio. What tidings can you tell me of *my lord?*”

“He is not yet arrivèd; nor know I aught but that he’s *well*, and will shortly be here.”

“Oh, but I *fear!* How lost you company?”

“The great contention of the sea and skies parted our fellowship—but *hark!*—‘*A sail!*’”

From the citizens comes the cry, “*A sail, a sail!*” A shipboard cannon is heard.

“They give their *greeting* to the citadel,” notes a gentleman. “This likewise is a friend!”

“See for the news!” urges Cassio, and the Cypriot goes into the fort to ask the watch, who is observing from above.

Cassio greets Iago and his wife. “Good ancient, you are *well come!* *Welcome*, mistress!

“Let it not gall your patience, good Iago, that I *extend* my manners; ’tis my breeding that gives me this bold show of courtesy.” He kisses Emilia’s cheek.

“Sir, would she give you so much of her *lips* as of her *tongue* she oft bestows on *me*, you’d have enough!”

Even his wife is surprised at Iago’s offhand—and rudely ambiguous—comment.

Desdemona is amused, seeing Emilia blush. “Alas, she has no speech!”

“In faith, too *much!*” counters Iago. “I find it when I have list to *sleep!* Marry, before Your Ladyship I grant, she puts her *heart* in her tongue but little—and *chides* with *thinking!*”

Emilia is indignant. “You have little cause to say so!”

Iago teases the women: “Come on, come on, you are *pictures* out of doors, *belles* in your parlors, *wild-cats* in your kitchens, *saints* in your injuries, *devils* being *offended*, *players* at your housewifery—and *hussies* in your *beds!*”

Desdemona laughs. “Oh, *fie* upon thee, slanderer!”

“Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk! You rise to *play*—and go to *bed* to *work!*”

Emilia jeers. “*You* shall not write *my* praise!”

“No, let me not!”

Desdemona challenges him: “What wouldst thou write of me if thou shouldst *praise* me?”

Iago demurs. “Oh, gentle lady, do not put me to’t; for I am nothing if not critical.”

“Come on, assay!” says Desdemona. She again looks toward the long wharf. “There’s someone gone to the harbour?”

Iago nods. “Aye, madam.”

Desdemona’s white-gloved hands are clasped tightly. *I am not merry; I do but beguile the thing I am by seeming otherwise.* “Come, how wouldst thou praise me?”

“I am going about it,” Iago tells her, “but indeed invention comes from *my* pate as birdlime does from wool cloth: it *plucks out*, brains and all! But, my Muse *labours*; and thus is *deliverèd*: ‘If she be *fair* and *wise*—Beauty and Wit—the one’s for *use*; the other *useth* it!’”

Desdemona laughs. “Well praised! How if she be *dark*”—not *fair*, not blonde—“and witty?”

“If she be *black*, and thereto have a wit, she’ll find a *white* that shall her blackness *fit!*” His leer reflects a salty meaning.

Desdemona chuckles. “Worse and worse!”

Emilia asks, “How if fair and *foolish*?”

“She never yet *was* fool-ish that was fair; for even her folly helped her to an *heir!*”

Desdemona shakes her head. “These are old—fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i’ the alehouse! What miserable ‘praise’ hast thou for her that’s *foul* and foolish?”

“There’s none so foul and foolish thereunto but does the foul pranks which *fair* and *wise* ones do!”

“Oh, heavy ignorance!—thou praisest the *worst best!*” laughs Desdemona. “But what praise couldst thou bestow on a woman indeed *deserving*?—one who, in the authority of her merit, did justly put off the vouch of very Malice itself!”

Iago recites:

“She that was ever fair and never *proud*,
Had tongue at will, but was never *loud*,
Never lacked gold, and never went *astray*;
Fled from her wish, said but ‘Now, I *may*’—
She that being angered, her *revenge* being nigh,
Bade her wrong *wait* and her displeasure *fly*—
She that in wisdom was ne’er so frail
To exchange cod’s *head* for salmon’s *tail*—
She that could *think*, but ne’er *disclose* her mind,
See *suitors* following, and not look *behind*—
She was a wight, if ever such wight *were*—”

The lady asks, “To do what?”

“To *suckle* fools, and *chronicle* small *beer!*”

Desdemona, laughing, chides: “Oh, most *lame* and *impotent conclusion!* Do not learn from *him*, Emilia, though he be thy *husband!* How say you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane and lewd counsellor?”

“He speaks home, madam!” laughs the officer. “You may relish him more in the *soldier* than in the scholar!” He turns and motions politely toward the citadel; Desdemona walks with him.

Iago watches them intently. *He takes her by the palm,—aye, well done! Whispers! With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio! Aye, smile upon her, do!—I will shackle thee in thine own courtship!*

As Cassio nods and smiles, the ensign, silently and sourly, mimics: *You say true!—’tis so, indeed!*

*If such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft—which now again you are most apt to play the sir in! Very good!—well kissed! An excellent courtesy!—’tis so, indeed. Yet again your fingers to your lips? I would for your sake they were clyster-pipes!—*which are used to flush bowels.

With the others, he follows the new governor’s lady into the stone bastion

From outside, a herald’s horn sounds. “The Moor!” cries Iago. “I know his trumpet!”

Cassio nods. “’Tis truly so!”

“Let’s meet him and receive him!” says Desdemona, rising.

Cassio smiles, pointing to the door. “*Lo* where he comes!”

From his fighting-galleon’s anchorage, Othello has been rowed ashore by sailors, and has rushed along the edge of the harbor, followed by attendants. The general greets his wife: “Oh, my fair warrior!”

“My dear *Othello!*” They embrace and kiss.

“It gives me *wonder* great as my *content* to see you here before me!” he cries. “O my soul’s joy! If after *every* tempest come such calms, may the winds blow till they have wakened *Death*, and let the labouring bark climb *hills* of seas *Olympus*-high, and duck again as low as *Hell* is from *Heaven*! If it were now to *die*, ’twere to be most *happy*!—for now, I fear, my soul hath its contentment, so absolute that not another like to this follows in unknown fate!”

She protests, “The heavens forbid but that our loves and comforts should *increase*, even as our *days* do grow!”

“*Amen* to that, sweet powers!” he says, tearfully. “I cannot speak enough of this bliss!” He touches his throat. “It stops me here—it is *too much* of joy!”

He beams. “And may this in *this* be the *greatest* discord that e’er our hearts shall make!”

Iago, despite his smiling, is privately disgusted by their harmony. *Oh, you are well tuned now! But I’ll twist down the pegs that make this music, as honest as I am!*

The general addresses the Venetian officials: “Come, let’s go to the castle!

“*News*, friends: *our wars are done!*—the Turks are *drownèd!*”

“How does my old acquaintance of this isle?” He shakes the former governor’s hand warmly.

Montano smiles, courteously silent about news already told by Cassio.

Othello takes Desdemona’s hands in his. “My honey, *you* shall be well desired in Cyprus; I have found great *love* amongst them!

“O my sweet, I prattle out of fashion, and I dote in mine *own* comforts!

“I prithee, good Iago, go to the bay and disembark my coffers. Take thou the ship’s master to the citadel; he is a good one, and his worthiness does challenge much respect!

“Come, Desdemona! Once more: *Well met* at Cyprus!”

As the others leave for the governor’s castle, walking up the slope from the citadel’s walled grounds, Iago tells the general’s servants, “Do thou meet me presently at the harbour.”

The ensign turns to Roderigo. “Come hither.” He speaks privately, in a corner. “If thou be’st valiant—and they say base men, being in *love*, have then a nobility in their natures more than is native to them—listen to me! The lieutenant tonight watches on the Court of Guard—”

Iago pauses; he grips Roderigo’s arm. “First, I must tell thee this—Desdemona is directly in *love* with *him!*”

“*With him!* Why, ’tis not possible!”

Iago presses against the man's lips to silence him. "Lay *thy* finger *thus*, and let thy soul be *instructed!* Mark with what violence she first loved the *Moor*, for *bragging* and telling her *fantastical lies*—but will she love him *still* for prating? Let not thy discreet heart think it!

"Her eye must be fed—and what delight shall she have to look on *a devil?*" Demons are widely thought of as black. "When the blood is made dull with the *act* of sport, there *should* be—to *inflame* it again, and to give satiety a fresh appetite—loveliness of *face*, sympathy in *years*, *manners*, and *beauties*—all of which the *Moor* is defective in!

"Now, for want of these requisite amenities her delicate tenderness will find itself *abused*, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and *abhor* the *Moor!*—very Nature will instruct her in it, and compel her to some second choice!

"Now, sir, this granted—as it is a most pregnant and unforcèd position—who stands so eminent in the degree of this fortune as does *Cassio?*—a very *voluble* knave, no further conscionable than in *putting on* the mere *form* of civil and humane *seeming*, for the better compassing of his salty and most hidden, loose affection! Why, none! Why, *none!* A *slippery* and *subtle* knave, a finder of occasions, who has an eye that can stamp advantages in *counterfeit*, though *true* advantage never present itself!—a *devilish* knave!

"Besides, the knave is handsome and young—hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after—a pestilent, *complete* knave!

"And the woman hath *found him already!*"

Roderigo frowns. "I cannot believe that of her! She's full of most blessèd condition—"

"Blessèd *fig-stem!*"—*penis*. "The wine *she* drinks is made of *grapes!*—if she had been *blessed*, she would never have loved the *Moor!* Blessèd *pudenda!* Didst thou not see her fiddle with the palm of his hand?—didst not *mark* that?"

"Yes, I did. But that was but courtesy...."

"*Lechery*, by this hand!—an *index*, an obscuring *prologue* to a history of *lust* and *foul thoughts!* They met so near with their lips that their breaths *embraced* together! *Villainous* thoughts, Roderigo! When these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes the *master* and *main* exercise, the *incorporate conclusion!*" Iago spits with disgust. "But, sir, be you ruled by me!

"I have brought you from Venice! Watch *you* tonight; as for the command, *I'll* lay't upon you. Cassio knows you not. I'll not be far from you." The conscript looks apprehensive about sentinel duty, but the ensign continues. "Find some occasion to *anger* Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or tainting his discipline, or from what other course you please, which the time shall more favourably minister."

Roderigo slowly nods. "Well."

"Sir, he is rash and very sudden in choler, and haply may strike at you; *provoke* him so that he *may!*—for even out of that will I cause these of Cyprus to *mutiny!*—whose discontent shall come again into no true satisfaction but by the *displanting of Cassio!*

"So shall *you* have a shorter journey to your desires—by the means *I* shall then have to *prefer* them, the impediment most profitably removed!" He adds, "*Without* which there were no expectation of our prosperity."

Says Roderigo without enthusiasm, "I will do this, if I can bring it to any opportunity."

Iago pats his back encouragingly. "I warrant thee! Meet me by and by at the citadel. I must fetch his necessaries ashore. Farewell!"

Roderigo, still weak from the tossing at sea, says "Adieu," and goes to find the troops' quarters in the citadel.

Iago paces, thinking.

That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it; that she loves him... 'tis apt, and of great credit. He hopes it will be plausible.

The Moor, howbeit that I endear him not, is of a constant, loving, noble nature, and I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona a most dear husband.

Now I do love her, too! Not out of absolute lust—though peradventure I stand accountable for as great a sin—but led partly to nourish my revenge! For I do suspect the lusty Moor hath leaped into my seat!—the thought whereof doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards! And nothing can or shall content my soul till I am even'd with him, wife for wife—or failing so, yet that I put the Moor at least into a jealousy so strong that judgment cannot cure it!

Which thing to do, if this poor trash of Venice whom I leash for his quick hunting”—use like an eager dog—“stands the putting-on, I'll have our Michael Cassio helpless!—abuse him in rank garb to the Moor!—for I fear Cassio wears my night-cap, too.

I'll make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me—for making him egregiously an ass, and practising upon his peace and quiet, even to madness!

He considers the scheme. 'Tis here, but yet confused; knavery's plain face is never seen till used!

A sergeant rings the hand-bell vigorously, drawing troops to hear a proclamation. When a sufficient crowd has gathered, he clears his throat, then announces:

“It is Othello's pleasure—our noble and valiant *general's*—that, upon *certain* tidings now arrived importing the *sheer perdition of the Turkish fleet*, every man put himself into *triumph*!—some to dance, some to make bonfires!—each man to what sport and revels his addition leads him!

“For, besides these beneficial news, it is the *celebration of his nuptials*!

“So *much* is his pleasure, it *should* be proclaimed,” says the soldier knowingly, drawing a laugh.

“All kitchens are *open*,” he calls, “and there is full liberty of *feasting* from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven!

“Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus!—and our noble general *Othello*!”

Into a wide corridor of the castle, Othello and Desdemona emerge with their attendants after the sumptuous supper held to celebrate the would-be invaders' destruction—and with further ceremonies in honor of the general and his new bride.

“Good Michael, look you to the guard tonight,” Othello tells Cassio, who has dined with him and Lord Montano. “Let's teach ourselves the honourable stop, not to out-sport *discretion*.”

Cassio bows. “Iago hath direction what to do; but, notwithstanding, with my personal eye will I look to't!”

Othello nods. “Iago is most honest. Michael, good night. Tomorrow, with your earliest let me have speech with you.” He takes Desdemona's hand. “Come, my dear love, the purchase made, the fruits are to ensue!—*that* profit's yet to come 'tween me and you!

“Good night!” he says happily to Montano, as his party proceeds to the castle's guest quarters.

Chapter Four Night Watch

Sentinels who will secure the castle after dark, some by pacing its high parapets, have come up from the citadel. Iago is in charge of them tonight, and Cassio is waiting for him in the guardhouse; just outside it a flight of stone steps rises along the walls.

“Welcome, Iago; we must to the watch,” says Cassio.

“Not *this* hour, lieutenant! 'Tis not yet ten o' the clock; our general *rests* us this early for the love of his *Desdemona*—who let us not therefore blame: he hath not yet made wanton the night with her!—and *she* is sport for Jove!”

“She's a most exquisite lady.”

“*And, I’ll warrant her, full game!*”

“Indeed, she’s a most fresh and delicate creature.”

Iago presses. “What an *eye* she has! Methinks it sounds a parley of provocation!”

“An inviting eye; and yet, methinks, right modest.”

The ensign persists. “And when she speaks, is it not an *alarum* to love?”

But Cassio simply says, “She is indeed perfection.”

“Well, happiness to their sheets!” cries Iago. “Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of *wine*, and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello!”

“Not tonight, good Iago. I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking; I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment.”

“*Oh, they are our friends!*” scolds Iago. “But one *cup*—I’ll drink it *for* you!”

Cassio shakes his head. “I *have* drunk but one cup tonight—and that was craftily qualified, too”—well diluted. “And behold what innovation it *makes* here.” His complexion is indeed rosier than usual. “I am unfortunate in the infirmity, and dare not task my weakness with any more.”

“*What, man?*” cries the hearty soldier. “’Tis a night of *revels!* The gallants desire it!”

“Where are they?”

“Here at the door; I pray you, call them in!”

“I’ll do’t,” says Cassio, “but it dislikes me.” He goes out to invite the two celebrating Cypriots to drink.

If I can fasten but one cup upon him, thinks Iago, with that which he hath drunk tonight already he’ll be as full of quarrel and offence as my young mistress’ dog! He has a woman in town.

Now, my sick fool Roderigo, whom love hath turned almost the wrong side out, to Desdemona hath tonight caroused potations bottle-deep!—and he’s to watch! Three lads of Cyprus—noble, swelling spirits that hold their honour at a wary distance, the very elements of this warlike isle—have I tonight flustered with flowing cups—and they watch too!

Now ’mongst this flock of drunkards am I to put our Cassio in some action that may offend the while.

—But here they come! If consequence do but approve my dream, my boat sails freely, with both wind and stream!

Cassio returns, bringing the two gentlemen—and Montano. A servant with them carries two flagons; another’s fists clasp the handles of several mugs. The men bow and leave the wine and pewter on a scarred pine table.

“Fore God, they have given me a rouse *already!*” Cassio tells Iago.

Montano, too, is in high spirits: “Good faith, a *little* one—not past a pint, as I am a soldier!”

Iago—who *is* a soldier—grabs a cup. “Some wine, *ho!*” He sings boisterously as he pours:

“And let me the canakin *clink, clink!*

And let me the canakin *clink!*

A soldier’s a man;

A life’s but a span—

Why, *then* let a soldier drink!

“Some *wine*, boys!” he cries, pouring for the others.

Cassio is glowing. “Fore God, an excellent song!”

“I learned it in England,” Iago tells them, “where, indeed, they are *most* potent in *potting!* Your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied Hollander—*Drink, ho!*—are *nothing* to your *English!*”

Cassio is fascinated; he leans toward the ensign. “Is your Englishman so expert in his drinking?”

“Why, *he* drinks with facility your *Dane* dead drunk; he sweats not to overthrow your *Almain*; he gives your Hollander a *vomit* ere the next pottle can be filled!”

Cassio raises his cup. "To the health of our general!"
Montano's is lifted as well: "I am for it, lieutenant!—and I'll do you justice!" They drink deeply.

Iago rhapsodizes: "O sweet England!" He sings:

"King *Stephen* was a *worthy* peer:
His breeches cost him but a crown;
He held them sixpence *all too dear!*
With that, he called the tailor *clown!*
He was a wight of high renown,
And *thou* art of but *low* degree;
'Tis *pride* that pulls the country down—
So take thine *auld* cloak about *thee!*

"Some *wine, ho!*"

Cassio is exuberant: "Why, *that* is a more exquisite song than the other!"

"Will you hear't again?" offers Iago.

"No; for I hold him to be unworthy of his *place* that does these things," says proud Cassio—slowly, with deliberate dignity, thinking he still sounds sober. He shrugs. "Well, *God's* above all; and there be souls must be saved, and there be souls must *not* be saved."

Iago nods, and again pretends to drink. "It's *true*, good lieutenant!"

"As for mine *own* part—no offence to the general, nor any man of *quality*—*I* hope to be saved!"

"And so do I, too, lieutenant!"

Cassio raises a forefinger. "Aye, but, by your leave, not before *me!*—the *lieutenant* is to be saved before the ancient!" He shakes his head, trying to clear it. "Let's have no more of this; let's to our *affairs*."

"Forgive us our sins! Gentlemen, let's look to our *business!*" He bangs his mug down onto the table, spilling some wine. "Do not think, gentlemen, I am *drunk*," he warns. "This is my *ancient*; this is my *right hand*." He laughs, raising a fist, "and this is my *left!* I am *not* drunk, now; I can stand well enough," he mumbles, "and speak well *enough*."

They all concur happily—"Excellent well!"—and drink to confirm it.

Cassio heads outside, stepping very carefully, to inspect the soldiers now mustering for night duty on watch. "Why, very *well*, then. You must not think then that I am *drunk!*" he says, his speech slurred.

To the *platform*, masters," Montano tells the gentlemen, with a gallant wave. "Come, let's set the watch!" The deputies and guests follow the lieutenant; they will oversee assignment of the troops to their stations.

But Iago intercepts Montano. "You see this fellow that is gone before?—he is a soldier fit to stand by *Caesar* and give direction!" The ensign wags his head sadly. "Yet do but see his vice; 'tis to his virtue a just equinox, the one as long as the other.

"'Tis pity of him. I fear that the trust Othello puts in him will, at some odd time of his infirmity, shake this island."

Montano is surprised. "But is he often thus?"

Iago shrugs. "'Tis evermore the prologue to his sleep; he'll watch the horologe a double set"—be wakeful twenty-four hours—"if *drink* rock not his cradle."

Montano frowns. "It were well the general were put in mind of it! Perhaps he sees it not—or his good nature prizes the *virtue* that appears in Cassio, and looks not on his evils. Is not that true?"

As Montano ponders, blinking drowsily, a soldier comes to the door—where Iago stops him. His private whisper is urgent: "How now, Roderigo! I pray you, *after the lieutenant!*—*go!*" The young Venetian hurries away to confront Cassio.

Montano continues: "And 'tis a great pity that the noble Moor should hazard such a place as his own *second* with one of an ingraft infirmity! It were an honest action to *say* so to the Moor."

"Not *I*, for this fair island!" says Iago. "I do love Cassio well, and would do much to *cure* him of this evil. But, *hark!*—what noise?"

From outside they hear cries of "*Help! Help!*" Roderigo bolts into the room, pursued by an enraged Cassio, whose sword is drawn.

"You rogue! You *rascal!*" shouts the officer, shaking his left fist at the soldier.

"What's the *matter*, lieutenant?" cries Montano.

"A *knave* teach me my *duty?*—I'll beat the knave into a *friggin' bottle!*"

Roderigo backs away, trying to fend off blows. "*Beat me?*"

"Dost thou *prate*, rogue?" cries Cassio, striking him again.

Montano seizes his arm to restrain him: "*Nay*, good lieutenant!—I pray you, sir, hold your *hand!*"

"Let me *go*, sir," growls Cassio, "or I'll knock *you* o'er the mazzard!"

Montano is indignant: "*Come, come*—you're *drunk!*"

"*Drunk?*" Cassio staggers back and raises his blade. Montano, appalled, draws his sword to counter Cassio's unsteady thrust at him.

Iago pushes Roderigo out past the door, urging him in a hushed voice: "*Away*, I say! Go out and cry a *mutiny!*" The ensign returns to the clumsy combatants. "*Nay*, good lieutenant!—*Alas*, gentlemen!—*Help, ho!*—Lieutenant!—*sir!*—Montano!—*sir!* *Help, masters!*—*Here's* a goodly watch indeed!"

An alarm clangs incessantly in the tower. "Who's that which rings the bell?" cries Iago angrily at the door. "*Diablo, ho!*—the *town* will rise!

"*God's will*, lieutenant, *hold!*—you will be *shamed forever!*"

Othello soon reaches the guardhouse, followed by attendants. "What is the matter here?"

"*Zounds*, I *bleed* still!" moans Montano, staring down at his side. "I am hurt to the death!" He steps back, sword drooping, as Iago struggles to restrain Cassio.

Othello is furious about the disturbance. "*Hold*, for your *lives!*"

"*Hold, ho! Lieutenant!*—*sir!*" cries Iago. "*Montano!*—*gentlemen!*—Have you *forgot* all sense of place and *duty? Hold!* The *general* speaks to you!—hold, *hold*, for *shame!*"

"Why how now, *ho!* From whence *ariseth* this?" demands Othello, stepping between the armed men. "Are we turned *Turks*, and to *ourselves* do that which Heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? For Christian *shame*, put by this *barbarous brawl!*" He draws his own sword. "He that stirs next to carve for his own rage holds his *soul* light!—he *dies* upon his motion!

"*Silence* that dreadful *bell!*" the general orders an attendant, who runs out. "It frights the isle from her propriety!

"What is the *matter*, masters? Honest Iago, that look'st dead with grieving, *speak!* Who *began* this?—on thy love I charge thee!"

"I do not know!" The ensign seems baffled. "*Friends*, all but *now!*—*even* in quarters, and in *terms* like bride and groom devesting them for bed!" He sees the general's annoyance increase. "And then, but *now*—as if some *planet* had *unwitted* men!—*swords out*, and tilting one at other's breast in opposition bloody!

"I cannot speak any beginning to this peevish odds—and would that in *action* glorious I had *lost* these legs that brought me to be a part of it!"

Othello turns to Cassio. "How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?"

The officer is dizzy and gasping. "I pray you, pardon me—I cannot speak!"

"Worthy Montano," says Othello, "you were wont be civil; the gravity and stillness of your youth the world hath noted, and your name is great in mouths of wisest judgment. What's the matter, that you unlace your reputation thus, and spend your rich opinion for the name of a *night-brawler?* Give me *answer* to it!"

But Montano, in great pain, is close to collapse. “Worthy Othello, I am *hurt to danger!* Your officer, Iago, can inform you, while I spare speech, which somewhat now offends me, of all that I do know!

“Nor know I aught that’s said or done *amiss* this night by *me!*—unless *self-charity* be seen as a vice, and *defending ourselves* be a sin, when violence *assails* us!”

Othello seethes with frustration—public and personal. “Now, by heaven, my *blood* begins to rule my *safer* guides!—and passion, having my best judgment collared, assays to lead the way!

“*Zounds!* If I once stir, or do but lift this arm, the best of you shall *sink* in my rebuke!”

He has already asked several times. “*Give me to know* how this foul rout *began*, who *set it on!* And he that is proven to offence in this, though he had *twinned* with me, both at a birth, shall *lose* me!

“*What!* In a town yet *at war*, still wild, the people’s hearts brimful of *fear*, to manage private and domestic *quarrel!*—at *night*, and for the court in *guard of safety!* ’Tis *monstrous!*”

“Iago, who began’t?”

Montano, a civilian, warns the ensign: “If affined partially, or leaguèd in office thou dost deliver more or less than *truth*, thou art no *soldier!*”

Iago seems hurt by the imputation: “Touch *me* not so near! I had rather have this *tongue* cut from my *mouth* than it should do offence to Michael Cassio! Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the *truth* shall nothing wrong him.

“Thus it is, general: Montano and myself being in speech, there comes a fellow crying out for *help!*—and Cassio following him with *sword*, determined to execute upon him!

“Sir, this gentleman steps unto Cassio and entreats his *pause*.

“Myself the crying fellow did pursue, lest by his clamour—as it so fell out!—the town might fall into fright. He, swift of foot, outran my purpose, and I returned—the faster for that I heard the clinking *fall of swords*, and Cassio high in *oath!*—which till tonight I ne’er might say before!

“When I came back—for this was *brief!*—I found them close together at blow and thrust, even as *again* they were when you yourself did part them!

“More of this matter cannot *I* report. But men are men; the best sometimes forget. Though Cassio did some little wrong to him, as men in rage strike those that wish them best, yet surely Cassio, I believe, received from him who *fled* some strange indignity which patience could not let pass.”

Othello has heard enough. “I know, Iago, that thy honesty and love doth mince this matter, making it *light* to Cassio.

“Cassio, *I* love thee—but *never more be officer of mine!*”

The general sees that Desdemona has now come to learn what caused the alarm. “Look, if my gentle love be not raised up!” He glares at Cassio, “I’ll make thee an example!”

Desdemona stares, stunned by the sight of the bleeding nobleman and the dejected officer. “What’s the *matter?*”

Othello reassures her. “All’s well *now*, sweeting; come away to bed.” He sheathes his blade.

The general tells the Montano kindly, “Sir, for your hurts, *myself* will be your surgeon.” He nods to his attendants, and they grasp the pale nobleman’s arms. “Lead him off.

“Iago, look with care about the *town*, and silence those whom this vile brawl distracted.

“Come, Desdemona. ’Tis the soldiers’ life to have their balmy slumbers wakèd with strife!”

Iago and Cassio are left in the guardhouse. The officer weeps as he wipes his sword clean, staining a kerchief.

“What—are you *hurt*, lieutenant?”

“Aye—past all *surgery!*” Cassio sheathes the blade, and stares at the bloody cloth.

Iago moves toward him, pretending to look for an injury. “Marry, heaven forbid!”

“*Reputation, reputation, reputation!*—oh, I have *lost my reputation!*” wails Cassio. “I have lost the *immortal* part of myself, and what remains is *bestial!* My reputation, Iago, my *reputation!*”

The ensign frowns. “As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily *wound!* There is more sense in *that* than in *reputation!*” Cassio fails to enjoy the jest on *sense*. “Reputation is an idle and most false *imposition:* oft got without *merit,* and lost without *deserving!* You have lost no reputation at all unless you repute *yourself* such a loser.

“*What, man?*—there are ways to recover the general again! You are now but cast down in his *mood,* a punishment more in *policy* than in malice, even as one would beat his offenceless dog, to affright the imperious liar”—stop its needless barking. “Sue to him again and he’s yours!”

But Cassio is ashamed. “I will rather sue to be *despised* than to deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet an officer!” He is amazed at himself: “*Drunk!* And speaking *parrot!* To squabble, swagger, *swear,* in fustian discourse with one’s own *shadow!*

“O thou invisible spirit of *wine,* if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee *devil!*”

“Who was he that you followed with your sword?” asks Iago. “What had he done to you?”

“I know not.”

“Is’t *possible?*”

Cassio is exasperated. “I remember a *mass* of things, but nothing *distinctly!*—a quarrel, but nothing of *wherefore!* *Oh, God!*—that men should put an *enemy* in their mouths to steal away their *brains!*—that we should with *joy,* in pleasant revelry and *applause,* transform ourselves into *beasts!*”

“But you are *now* well enough; how came you thus recoverèd?”

“Why, it hath pleased the devil *drunkenness* to give place to the devil *wrath!*—one unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly *despise* myself!”

“Come, you are too severe a moraler,” Iago tells him. “As the time, the place, and the condition of this country stands, I could heartily wish this had not befallen; but since it is *as* it is, *mend* it for your own good!”

“I will ask him for my place again; he shall tell me I am a *drunkard!*” says Cassio, despairing. “Had I as many mouths as *Hydra,* such an answer would stop them *all!* To be now a *sensible* man, by and by a *fool,* and presently a *beast!*—oh, *strange!* Every inordinate cup is *unblessèd,* and the ingredient is a *devil!*”

“Come, come, good *wine* is a good familiar creature,”—a fine companion, “if it be well *used;* exclaim no more against it,” says Iago. “And, good lieutenant, I think you think *I* love you,” he says, reassuringly—with a scheme in mind.

Cassio nods. “I have well approved it, sir.” But he hangs his head. “*I—drunk!*”

Iago is forgiving: “You or any man living may be drunk at *some* time, man!”

“I’ll tell you what you shall do. Our general’s *wife* is now the general—I may say so in this respect: for that he hath devoted and given up himself to the contemplation, marking and denotement of her parts and graces. Confess yourself freely to *her*—importune her help to put you in your place again! She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so *blessèd* a disposition, she in her goodness holds it a *vice* not to do *more* than she is requested!

“This broken joint between you and her husband entreat her to splint this crack, and—my fortunes against any wager worth naming—your love shall grow stronger than it was before!”

Wiping his eyes with the back of a hand, Cassio nods. “You advise me well.”

“I speak in the sincerity of love and honest kindness.”

“I think it freely; and betimes in the morning I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me.” He groans. “I am desperate of my fortunes, if they halt me here!”

“You are in the right,” says Iago. “Good night, lieutenant; I must to the watch.”

Cassio goes to the door. “Good night, honest Iago!” He soon heads into town, resolved to attempt a recovery.

The ensign is smug. *And who's he, then, that says I play the villain, when this advice I give is free and honest, probable to thinking, and indeed the course to win the Moor again! For 'tis most easy to subdue Desdemona in any honest suit; and, inclining, she's framed as fruitful as the free elements!*

Then it's for her to win the Moor. Were it to renounce his baptism, all seals and symbols of redeemed sin, his soul is so enfeathered to her love that she may make, unmake, do what she list, even as her appetite shall play the god with his weak function!

How am I then a villain to counsel Cassio to this course, directly parallel to his good?

He laughs. *Divinity of Hell! When devils will the blackest sins put on, they do suggest at first with heavenly shows—as I do now!*

For whiles this honest fool plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes, and she for him pleads strongly to the Moor, I'll pour this pestilence into his ear: that she repeals him for her body's lust! Then by how much she strives to do him good, she shall by so much undo her credit with the Moor!

So will I turn her virtue into vice, and out of her own goodness make the net that shall enmesh them all!

He looks to the door. “How now, Roderigo!” His accomplice has returned—an unhappy young man.

“I do *follow* here in the chase—not like a hound that *hunts*, but one that fills up the cry!” complains the crestfallen gentleman. “My money is almost spent, I have been tonight exceedingly well cudgelled, and I think the issue will be I shall have so much ‘*experience*’ for my pains!

“And so, with no money at all and but a little more wit, I return again to Venice.”

Iago protests, “How *poor* are they that have not *patience*! What wound did ever heal but by *degrees*? Thou know'st we work by *wit*, not by *witchcraft*!—and wit depends on dilatory *time*.

“Does't not go *well*? Cassio hath beaten thee—but *thou*, by that small hurt, hast *cashiered* Cassio!

“Though other things grow fair against the sun, yet fruits that *blossom* first will first be *ripe*!

“*Content* thyself awhile,” he tells the sullen suitor, pulling him toward the door, where they can hear church bells. “By the Mass, 'tis *morning*! Pleasure and action make the hours seem short!

“Retire thee; go where thou art billeted. *Away*, I say; thou shalt know more hereafter.”

Roderigo starts to speak, but Iago smiles reassuringly. “Nay, get thee gone!”

Alone again, Iago returns to scheming.

Two things are to be done: my wife must move for Cassio to her mistress; I'll set her on, myself the while drawing the Moor apart, and bringing him jump to where he may find Cassio soliciting his wife!

Aye, that's the way! Dull not device by coldness and delay!

Chapter Five **Assurances, Doubts**

Cassio has brought musicians, one with a flute, the other a hautboy, to the corridor outside Othello's quarters at the castle early this morning. “Masters, play here—I will content your pains—something that's brief and bids, ‘Good *morrow*, general!’”

They perform a song, lilting and mellifluous; but soon Othello's jester emerges from the rooms. “Why masters, have your instruments been in Naples, that they speak to the *nose* thus?” he demands.

“*What*, sir, *what*?” asks the man with the reed, frowning.

“Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?”

“Aye; marry, they are, sir.”

“Ah, *thereby* hangs a *tail*...”

“Whereby hangs a tale, sir?”

“Marry, sir, by many a wind *instrument*—that I know! But, masters, here’s money for you.” The two take umbrage at his allusion to animals’ flatulence; but they also take his silver. “And the general so likes *music* that he desires you, for its love’s sake, to make no more *noise* with it.”

The indignant piper pockets the coins. “Well, sir, we will *not*.”

“As they say, ‘To hear music, the general’”—*populace*; a jest—“‘does not greatly care.’ But if you have any music that may not be *heard*, to’t again!” says the wry clown.

“We have none such, sir.”

“Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I’ll away. Go—vanish into air; *away!*”

As the musicians leave, Cassio approaches the general’s fool. “Dost thou hear, my honest friend...”

“No, I hear not your honest friend; I hear *you*.”

Cassio has no time for quips. “Prithee, keep thy quillets; there’s a poor piece of gold for thee. If the gentlewoman that attends the general’s wife be stirring, tell her there’s one Cassio entertains her a little favour of speech. Wilt thou do this?”

The man nods. “She is stirring, sir; I shall notify unto her if she will deem to stir *hither*.”

“Do, good my friend.”

As Cassio waits, the ensign comes up the stairs. “In happy time, Iago!”

The ensign regards the former officer. “You have not been a-bed, then?”

“Why, no; the day had broken before we parted. I have made bold, Iago, to send in to your wife; my suit to her is that she will to virtuous Desdemona procure me some access.”

“I’ll send her to you immediately,” Iago tells him, “and I’ll devise a mean to draw the Moor out of the way, that your converse and business may be more free.”

Cassio clasps his hand. “I humbly *thank* you for’t!” As Iago goes in, he thinks, *I never knew a Florentine more kind and honest!*

Soon, Emilia comes out to greet him. “Good morrow, good lieutenant. I am sorry for your displeasure; but all will surely be well! The general and his wife are talking of it, and she speaks for you stoutly!

“The Moor replies that he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus, and great affinity, and that in wholesome wisdom he might not but refuse you. But he protests he loves you, and needs no other suitor but his likings to take the safest occasion by the front to bring you in again!”

“Yet I beseech you, if you think fit, or that it may be done, give me advantage of some brief discourse with Desdemona alone...”

“Pray you, come in,” Emilia tells him. “I will bestow you where you shall have time to speak your bosom freely.”

“I am much bound to you!” says Cassio, as they enter the interim household.

Othello has risen early to handle official tasks. “These letters give, Iago, to the ship’s pilot—and by him, too, my duties to the Senate. That done, I will be walking on the works. Repair there to me.”

Iago bows. “Well; my good lord; I’ll do’t.”

Othello asks the citadel officers waiting to accompany him on an inspection tour, “This fortification, gentlemen, shall we see’t?”

They bow. “We’ll wait upon Your Lordship,” says the senior officer, and they follow him down the stairs, heading for the armory.

In the castle’s sunny garden, flowers still glistening with dew sparkle brightly in the gentle breeze. Cassio walks with Desdemona and Emilia among trees laden with olives and sweet, fragrant fruits.

“Be thou assurèd, good Cassio, I will do all my abilities in thy behalf,” says Desdemona.

“Good madam, do!” urges Emilia. “I warrant it grieves my husband as if the case were his!”

“Oh, that’s an honest fellow! Do not doubt, Cassio, but I will have my lord and you again as friendly as you were.”

“Bounteous madam,” says the gentleman, “whatever shall become of Michael Cassio, he’s never anything but your true servant!”

“I know’t; I thank you. You do love my lord; you have known him long—and be you well assured he shall in strangeness stand no further off than is a *politic* distance.”

The outcast officer has found lodging just outside the citadel walls, in a tawdry area where soldiers may spend their off-duty hours, and their silver, dining and drinking with seedy civilian companions—most of them women. He hopes to return—soon—to the citadel. “Aye, but, lady, that policy may either last so long, or feed upon such limited and waterish diet, or breed itself so out of circumstance, that—I being absent, and my place supplied—my general will *forget* my love and service!”

“Do not fear that,” says Desdemona. “Before Emilia, here I give thee warrant of thy place! Assure thee, if I do vow a friendship, I’ll perform it to the last article! My lord shall never rest: I’ll walk him *tame*, and talk him out of *patience*; his bed shall seem a *school*, his *board* a *shrift*!”—each meal a confessional. “I’ll intermingle every thing he does with Cassio’s suit! Therefore be merry, Cassio, for thy solicitor shall rather die than give thy cause away!”

Emilia nods toward the garden doors. “Madam, here comes my lord!”

Cassio bows. “Madam, I’ll take my leave.”

“Why, stay and hear me speak.”

“Madam, not now; I am very ill at ease—unfit for mine own purposes!”

“Well, do at your discretion.”

As they come into the garden, Othello is commenting to Iago on the governance of Cyprus. Glancing ahead, the ensign mumbles, “*Hmh*... I like not *that*,” as Cassio strides away through a shadowed arbor.

“What dost thou say?”

“Nothing, my lord; or if— I know not what.”

“Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?”

“Cassio, my lord? *No*, surely; I cannot think it—that he would steal away so guilty-like, seeing you coming. . . .”

“I do believe ’twas he.”

Desdemona welcomes the soldiers. “How now, my lord! I have been talking with a suitor here, a man that languishes in your displeasure.”

“Who is’t you mean?”

“Why, your lieutenant, Cassio. Good my lord, if I have any grace or power to move you, his present *reconciliation* take—for if he be not one that truly loves you, that errs in ignorance and not in cunning, I have no judgment in an honest face! I prithee, call him back!”

“Went he hence now?”

“Aye, ’sooth—so humbled that he hath left part of his grief with *me*, to suffer *with* him. Good love, call him back!”

“Not now, sweet Desdemona; some other time.”

“But shall’t be shortly?”

“The sooner, sweet, for you.”

“Shall’t be tonight at supper?”

“No, not tonight.”

“Tomorrow dinner, then?”

“I shall not dine at home; I meet the captains at the citadel.”

Desdemona takes his hand. “Why, then, tomorrow night; or Tuesday morn; on Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn—I prithee, *name* the time, but let it not exceed three days! In faith,

he's *penitent*; and his trespass, in our common reason, is almost not a *fault* to incur a *private* check, save that they say warriors must make examples out of their *best*.

"When shall he come? Tell me, Othello!" She chides him, gently: "I wonder in my soul what you would ask *me*, that *I* should deny, or stand so *mannerly* on.

"What?—Michael *Cassio*, who came a-wooing with you, and so many a time, when I have spoke of you dispraisingly, hath ta'en your part!—to have so much to-do to bring him in! Trust me, I could do much—"

"Prithee, no more!" laughs Othello. "Let him come when he will! I will deny thee nothing!"

"Why, this is not a *boon*," Desdemona argues. "'Tis as if I should entreat you wear your gloves, or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm, or sue to you to do a peculiar profit to your own person!

"Nay," she says with mock gravity, "when I *have* a suit wherein I mean to touch your love indeed, it shall be full-posed, of difficult *weight*, and *fearful* to be granted!"

Othello smiles. "I will deny thee nothing!—whereon, I do beseech thee, grant *me* this: to leave me but a little to myself."

Desdemona considers, playfully. "Shall I deny you...? No! Farewell, my lord!"

"Farewell, my Desdemona! I'll come to thee straight."

"Emilia, come." The lady and her new waiting-gentlewoman, somewhat older, have already conferred about men in general, husbands in particular. She teases Iago's wife: "Be as your fancies teach you; whate'er *you* be, *I* am obedient!"

General Othello watches happily as his beautiful young bride returns to the castle.
*Excellent wench! Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee! And when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again!*

His ensign walks beside him. "My noble lord..."

"What dost thou say, Iago?"

"Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, know of your love?"

"He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?"

"But for a satisfaction of my thought; no further harm."

"Why in thy thought, Iago?"

"I did not think he had been acquainted with her."

Othello strolls among the aromatic evergreens and brilliant blooms. "Oh, yes; and went between us very oft."

Iago frowns. "Indeed..."

"Indeed! Aye, *indeed*—discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?"

"Honest, my lord?"

"Honest—aye, *honest!*"

Iago nods. "My lord, for aught I know."

"What dost thou *think*?"

"Think, my lord?"

"*Think*, my lord?" says Othello, mimicking. "By heaven, he *echoes* me, as if there were some monster in his thought too hideous to be shown! Thou dost mean *something*; I heard thee say even now thou likedst not *that*, when Cassio left my wife. *What* didst not like?"

"And when I told thee he was of my counsel in my whole course of wooing, thou criedst 'Indeed!' and didst contract and purse thy brow together, as if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain some horrible conceit!

"If thou dost love me, show me thy thought."

Iago begins: "My lord, you know I love you..."

"I *think* thou dost," says the general dryly. "I know thou'rt full of love and honesty, and weigh'st thy words before thou givest them breath; therefore these *stops* of thine fright me the

more! For such things in a false, disloyal knave are tricks of custom, but in a man who's just, they are dear dilations, working from a heart that passion cannot rule."

Iago speaks carefully. "As for Michael Cassio, I dare be sworn I think that he is honest."

"I think so, too."

"Men should *be* what they seem; as for those that be nought, I would they might seem *none!*"

"Certainly men should be what they *seem*...."

"Why then I think Cassio's an honest man."

Othello is impatient. "Nay, yet there's *more* in this! I prithee, speak to me as to thy thinkings, as thou dost ruminat—and give thy worst of *thoughts* the worst of *words!*"

"Good my lord, pardon me! Though I am bound to every *act* of duty, I am not bound to what all *slaves* are *free* of! Utter my *thoughts*? Why, say they are vile and false—and where's that palace whereinto foul things sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so pure but *some* uncleanly apprehensions keeps, sitting in session"—acting as a judge—"leets and law-days, with meditations *lawful?*"

"Thou dost *conspire against thy friend*, Iago," argues Othello, "if thou think'st him *wronged*, but makest his ear a stranger to thy thoughts."

The ensign still demurs—and tantalizes. "Yet I do beseech you—though I perchance am negative in my *guess*, and I confess it is my nature's plague to spy into abuses, as oft my suspicion shapes faults that are not—that your wisdom from one who so imperfectly conceives would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble out of his scattering and unsure observance.

"It were not for your quiet nor your good, nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom, to let you know my thoughts."

Othello stops. "What dost thou mean?"

"*Good name* in man and woman, dear my lord, is the immediate *jewel* of their *souls*," says Iago sanctimoniously. "Who steals my *purse* steals trash: 'tis something, *nothing*—'twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to *thousands!* But he that filches from me my good *name* robs me of that which not enriches him, but makes me poor indeed!"

"By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!" says Othello.

Iago is adamant. "You cannot, if my *heart* were in your *hand*—nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody."

Othello stares at the ground. "*Hmh!*" He has drawn the obvious conclusion.

Iago seems alarmed. "Oh, *beware*, my lord, of *jealousy!*" he warns. "It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it *feeds* on! That cuckold lives in bliss who, certain of his fate, *loves not* his wronger; but, oh, what *damned minutes* counts he o'er who *dotes*, yet *doubts*, *suspects*, yet strongly *loves!*"

The general finds that his personal peace has been tainted. *Oh, misery!*

"Poor and *content* is rich, and rich enough; but riches *boundless* are as poor as winter to him that ever *fears* he shall be poor," says Iago. "Good Heaven, the souls of all *my* tribe *defend from jealousy!*"

"Why, what is *this?*" says Othello. "Think'st thou *I'd* make a life of jealousy, to follow ever the changes of the moon with fresh suspicions? *No!* To be once in *doubt* is at once to be *resolved!* Exchange me for a *goat* when *I* shall turn the business of my soul to such exsufflicate and blown surmises, matching thy implication!"

"'Tis not to make *me* jealous to say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company, is free of speech, sings, plays and dances well!—where *virtue* is, these are *more* virtuous!"

"Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw the smallest fear or doubt of her revolt, for she had *eyes*, and *chose me!*"

"No, Iago; I'll *see* before I doubt; when I doubt, *prove*; and on the proof, there is no more but this: *out at once—jealousy or love!*"

"I am glad of this," Iago tells him, "for now I shall have reason to show the love and duty that I bear you with *franker* spirit. Therefore, as I am *bound*, receive it from me."

“I speak not yet of proof. *Look* to your wife: observe her well with Cassio.” He tips his head up slightly. “Wear *your* eye thus: not jealous nor secure.

“I would not have your free and noble nature through its own *bounty* be *abused*; look to’t.

“I know our country’s disposition well. In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks they dare not show their *wives*,” says the cynic sourly. “Their best conscience is not to leave’t *undone*, but to keep’t *unknown*!”

Othello frowns. “Dost thou say so?”

“She did deceive her *father*, marrying *you*—and when she *seemed* to shake and fear your looks, she loved them *most*!”

“And so she did....”

“Why, *go to*, then! She, though so young, could give out such a *seeming* as to *seal up* her father’s *eyes*!—closed as if *open*! He thought ’twas *witchcraft*!”

“But I sound unseemly; I humbly do beseech of you your pardon for too much loving you.”

Othello feels deep pain—new insight, he thinks. “I am bound to thee forever.”

“I see this hath a little dashed your spirits....”

“Not a jot, not a jot.”

“I’ faith, I fear it has! I hope you will consider what is spoke comes from my love. But I do see you’re disturbed; I am praying you not to strain my speech to *grosser* issues, nor to larger reach than to *suspicion*!”

“I will not.” Othello’s eyes are glistening.

“Should you do so, my lord, my speech should fall into such *vile* success as my thoughts aim not at. Cassio’s my worthy *friend*.... My lord, I see you’re moved”—angered.

“No, not much movèd; I do not think but that *Desdemona*’s honest....”

“Long live she so! And long live you to think so!”

Think so. The phrase echoes in Othello’s mind. He stares down, trying to square concern with experience. “And yet, how a nature, erring from itself—”

“Aye, *there’s* the point!” says Iago quickly. “As, to be bold with you, not accepting many proposèd matches of her *own* clime, complexion, and degree—whereto we see *nature* in all things tends! *Fie!*—one may smell in such thoughts unnatural a *will* most rank in foul *disproportion*!” He sees anger rising. “But pardon me. I do not distinctly speak of *her* disposition... though I may fear that her will, returning to her *better* judgment, may fail to match *you* with her country’s forms—and perhaps *repent*.”

Now Othello needs to think. “Farewell, farewell. If more thou dost perceive, let me know more.” He considers. “Set on thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago.”

The ensign bows. “My lord, I take my leave.” He walks away.

Othello groans. *Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds!*

Iago comes back. “My lord, I would I might entreat Your Honour to scan this thing no further; leave it to time.

“Though it be fit that Cassio *have* his place—for surely he fills it up with great ability—yet, if you please to hold him off awhile, you shall by that perceive him and his means. Note if your lady strain his consideration with any strong or vehement importunity; much will be seen in that.

“In the meantime, let me be thought too *busy* in my fears—as I have worthy cause to fear I am!—and hold *her* free, I do beseech Your Honour.”

Othello is close to tears. “Fear not my government.”

“I once more take my leave.” The obsequious ensign goes into the castle, leaving the warrior alone—and embattled.

Chapter Six A Loss, and an Alliance

Othello paces, wrung in a torment of doubt instilled by Iago. *This fellow's of exceeding honesty, and knows all qualities with a learned spirit of human dealings....*
If I do prove her a flown falcon, though her cords were my dear heart-strings I'd whistle her off, and let her fly down the wind as prey to Fortune!
Perhaps for I am black, and have not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have, or for I am declined into the vale of years—yet that's not much—she's gone....
I am abusèd!

He stops, stricken with the shock. *And my relief must be to loathe her!*
Oh, curse of marriage, that we can call these delicate creatures ours, but not their appetites! I had rather be a toad, and live upon the vapour of a dungeon than keep even a corner in the thing I love for others' uses!

Yet 'tis the plague of great ones: prerogativèd are they less than the base! 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death! When we first quicken, then is this forkèd plague fated to us!

He is still ruminating darkly when Desdemona and Emilia return, hoping to find him still in the bower.

Othello watches the lovely and innocent lady—smiling to see him, hurrying to reach him.

Desdemona comes. If she be false, oh, then heaven mocks itself! I'll not believe't!

She kisses him. “How now, my dear Othello! Your dinner and the generous islanders by you invited do attend your presence.”

He murmurs, chiding himself, “I am to blame....”

“Why do you speak so faintly? Are you not well?”

“I have a pain upon my forehead, here”—he touches the site of a cuckold's horns.

Desdemona knows he has had little sleep. “Faith, that's with watching; 'twill away again! Let me but bind it hard, within this hour it will be well!” She touches his cheek tenderly with her embroidered handkerchief.

Othello is pleased and amused. “Your napkin is too little,” he says, gently taking the hand at his face, and leaning down to kiss her. “Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.” The kerchief falls, unnoticed.

“I am very sorry that you are not well,” says Desdemona, as they go to meet their guests.

Emilia, following, spots the square of bright linen.

I am glad I have found this napkin! she thinks. This was her first remembrance from the Moor. My wayward husband hath a hundred times woo'd me to steal it; but she so loves the token, for he conjured her she should ever keep it, that she reserves it evermore about her, to kiss and talk to.

She tucks it into a pocket, intending to obtain a duplicate. *I'll have the work ta'en out, and give't Iago; what he will do with it heaven knows, not I!* Actually, she has an idea: *Aye—nothing but to please his fantasy!*

Iago comes to find his wife; they are expected at the noon meal with Cypriot notables. “How now,” he says. “What do you here *alone*?”

“Do not you chide; I have a thing for you!”

“A *thing* for me?”—the term can mean *pudenda*. “It is a *common* thing to have in a foolish wife!”

She ignores the gibe. “What will you give me now for that same handkerchief?”

“What handkerchief?”

“*What* handkerchief?—why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona—that which so often you did bid me *steal*!”

“Hast stol'n it from her?”

“No, ’faith; she let it drop by negligence, and, to the advantage, I, being here, took’t up. Look, here it is!”

“A good wench!—give it me.”

Emilia examines it, curious. “What will you do with ’t, that you have been so earnest to have me filch it?”

Iago snatches it away. “Why, what’s that to you?”

“If it be not for some purpose of import, give’t me again. Poor lady—she’ll run mad when she shall lack it!”

“Be not acknownd of ’t,” Iago orders. “I have use for it. Go, leave me.”

Emilia is annoyed, but she refrains from complaining just now, and goes instead to take part in the official luncheon.

Iago is delighted. *I will in Cassio’s lodging lose this napkin, and let him find it.*

Trifles light as air are, to the jealous, confirmations strong as proofs of Holy Writ!

This may do something!

Late that night, Iago stands outside the garden doors, waiting to speak to Othello. Thin clouds drift past moon and stars, and the dim glow from a tall window nearby seems to deepen the surrounding darkness.

The Moor already changes with my poison! Dangerous conceits are in their natures poison, which, at the first, are scarce found to distaste—but in a little, act upon the blood, burn like the mines of sulphur!

He sees Othello, obviously distraught. *I did say so!—look where he comes! Not poppy nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world shall ever medicine thee unto that sweet sleep which thou ownedst yesterday!*

“False to me?” cries Othello angrily.

“Why, how now, General? No more of that.”

“Avaunt! Be gone! Thou hast set me on the rack! I swear ’tis better to *be* much abused than to know’t but a little!”

“How now, my lord?”

“What *sense* had I of her stol’n hours of lust? I saw’t not, thought it not—it *harmed* not me! I slept the next night *well*, was free and *merry*. I found not *Cassio’s* kisses on her lips! He that is robbèd, not *lacking* what is stol’n, let him not *know* it—and he’s *not robbed at all!*”

“I am sorry to hear this—”

“I had been happy if the *general camp, pioners and all*, had tasted her sweet body, so I had nothing *known!*”

“Oh, now, *forever farewell* the tranquil mind! Farewell *contentment!*

“Farewell the plumèd *troops*, and the big *wars* that make ambition *virtue!* Oh, *farewell!* Farewell the neighing *steed* and shrill *trumpet*, the spirit-stirring *drum*, the ear-piercing fife, the royal banner—and all quality, pride, pomp and circumstance of *glorious War!*”

“And, O you mortal engines whose rude throats the immortal *Jove’s* clamours deadly counterfeit,”—cannons’ thunderous fire, “*farewell!* Othello’s *occupation* is gone!”

Iago seems dismayed. “*Is’t possible*, my lord?”

With both fists Othello seizes the smaller man’s coat. “Villain, be sure thou *prove* my love a whore!—be *sure* of it!—give me the ocular *proof!* Or, by the worth of man’s eternal soul, thou hadst been better to have been born a *dog* than to answer my wakèd wrath!”

Iago looks wounded. “Is’t come to *this?*”

Othello pulls his face closer. “Make me to *see*’t!—or, at the least, so prove it that the probation bear no hinge nor loop to hang a *doubt* on—or *woe upon thy life!*”

“My noble lord—”

“If thou dost *slander her* and *torture me, never pray more!* Abandon all *remorse*; on horror’s head *accumulate* horrors!—do deeds to make heaven *weep*, all earth *amaze!*—for nothing canst thou to damnation add greater than *that!*” Brusquely, he releases the ensign.

Cries Iago, “O *Grace!* O Heaven, *defend* me!

“Are you a *man?* Have you a *soul* or *sense?*” He straightens his rumpled coat. “God be wi’ you,” he says, quietly. “Take mine office.”

Having resigned, he starts for the door, muttering to himself: “O wretched *fool*, that livest to make thine *honesty* a *vice!* O *monstrous* world! Take note, take *note*, O world: to be direct and honest is *not safe!* I *thank* you for this profit!—and from hence I’ll love no friend, sith love breeds such offence!”

Beleaguered and weary, Othello softens. “Nay, stay. Thou *shouldst* be honest,” he says sadly.

Iago shakes his head. “I should be *wise*—for honesty’s a *fool*, and loses that it works for!”

Othello is desperate. “By the world, I think my wife be *honest!*—and think she is *not!* I think that thou art *just*, and think thou art *not!*”

“*I’ll have some proof!* Her name, that was as fresh as *Diana’s visage*, is now begrimed and black as *mine own face!* If there be ropes or knives, poison or fire, or suffocating streams,”—ways to die, “I’ll not *endure* it!

“Would I were *satisfied!*”

Iago appears to be touched. “I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion; I do repent me that I put it to you!” He thinks for a moment. “You would be satisfied?”

“Would?—nay, I *will!*”

“And may: but *how?*—*how* satisfied, my lord? Would you as spectator grossly *gape on?*—*behold* her *topped?*”

Othello recoils as if he had been struck. “*Death* and *damnation!*” He moans, “*Oh!*”

Iago paces. “It were a tedious difficulty, I think, to bring them to *that* prospect; *damn* them *then*, if ever mortal eyes *do* see them bolster, more than *their own!*”

“*What* then? *How* then? What shall I say? Where’s *satisfaction?* It is impossible you should *see* this, were they as prime as *goats*, as hot as *monkeys*, as salt as *wolves* in pride—and gross in ignorance as *fools* made *drunk!*”

“But yet... I say if *imputation* and strong *circumstance*, which lead directly to the door of truth, will give you satisfaction, you may have’t.”

Othello fears *satisfaction* has been lost. “Give me a living *reason* she’s disloyal!”

“I do not like the office,” claims Iago. “But, sith I am entered in this cause so far, pricked to’t by foolish honesty and love, I will go on.”

He paces again, then looks up, as if remembering an incident of his billeting in the citadel. “I lay near Cassio lately; and, being troubled with a raging tooth, I could not sleep.

“There are a kind of men so *loose* of soul that in their sleeps they will mutter their affairs; one of this kind is Cassio. I heard him say, in sleep, ‘Sweet Desdemona, let us be wary, let us hide our loves!’ And then, sir, would he grip and wring my hand, cry, ‘O sweet creature!’—and then kiss me *hard*, as if he *plucked up by the roots* kisses that grew upon my lips! Then laid he his leg over my thigh, and *sighed*, and *kissed*—and then cried, ‘Cursèd fate that gave thee to the Moor!’”

“Oh, monstrous! *Monstrous!*”

“Nay, this was but his *dream*...”

“But this denoted a *foregone* conclusion! ’Tis a cutting concern, though it be but a dream!”

Iago nods. “And this may help to thicken other proofs that do demonstrate thinly.”

Now Othello paces. “*I’ll tear her all to pieces!*”

“Nay, but be *wise*,” urges Iago. “Yet we see nothing *done*—she may be *honest* yet!”

“Tell me but this: have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief, spotted with strawberries, in your wife’s hand?”

“I *gave* her such a one; ’twas my first gift.”

“I know not that; but such a handkerchief—I am sure it was your wife’s—did I today see Cassio wipe his beard with.”

“If it be *that!*—”

“If it be it or *any* that was *hers*, it speaks against her with the other proofs.”

Othello is furious. “Oh, that the slave had *forty thousand* lives! *One* is too poor, too weak for *my* revenge! Now do I see ’tis *true!*”

“Look here, Iago,” he says, lifting his cupped hands, “all my foolish *love* thus do I blow to heaven! ’Tis *gone!*”

“Arise, black *vengeance*, from thy hollow cell! Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne to tyrannous *hate!* Swell, bosom, with thy fraught, for ’tis of *serpents’ tongues!*”—venomous ideas.

Iago tries to calm him for now: “Yet be content!”

“Oh, *blood, blood, blood!*”

“*Patience*, I say!—your mind perhaps may change!”

“*Never*, Iago! Like to the Pontic *sea*, whose icy current and compulsive course ne’er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on to the Propontic and the *Hellespont*, even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace shall ne’er look back, ne’er ebb into humble cove, till a capable and wide *revenge* swallow them up!”

He kneels, looking upward. “Now, by yond marble heaven, in the due reverence of a *sacred* vow I here engage my words!”

“Do not rise yet,” says Iago, kneeling beside him. “Witness, you ever-burning lights above, you elements that clip us round about, witness that here Iago doth give up the execution of his wit, hands, heart, to wrongèd *Othello’s* service! Let him command, and to obey shall be in me reason for what bloody business ever!”

Othello is grimly grateful. “I greet thy love, not with vain thanks, but with acceptance *bounteous*—and will upon the instant put thee to’t! Within these three days let me hear thee say that *Cassio’s* not alive!”

“My friend is dead. ’Tis done, at your request. Only, let *her* live....”

“*Damn* her, lewd *minx!* Oh, *damn* her! Come, go with me apart; I will withdraw to furnish me with some swift means of death for the *fair* devil!”

“Now art thou my lieutenant!”

The swearers, religious and secular, rise in the shadows.

Iago murmurs, “I am your own forever!”

Chapter Seven **Test, Proof, Resolve**

As Desdemona and Emilia stand and talk on the wide portico at the front of the governor’s palace the following afternoon, they are passed by the general’s jester, who is heading toward the front gate.

“Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?” asks Desdemona.

“I dare not say he lies anywhere.”

“Why, man?”

“He’s a *soldier*—and for one to say a soldier *lies* is *stabbing!*”

“Go to!” she laughs. “Where *lodges* he?”

“To tell you where he lodges is to tell you wherein *I* lie.”

Desdemona looks at Emilia. “Can anything be made of this?”

“I know not where he lodges,” the man explains, “and for me to *devise* a lodging, and say he lies here or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat!” Emilia, too, now smiles.

“Can you inquire him out,” the lady asks—adding dryly, “and be edified by report?”

“I will *catechise* the world for him!” cries the clown. “That is, make questions, and by them answers.”

“Seek him; bid him come hither,” says Desdemona. “Tell him I have moved my lord on his behalf, and hope all will be well!”

The fool, looking up thoughtfully at the sky, seems to consider. “To do this *is* within the compass of *Man’s* wit....” She gives him gold. “...therefore *I* will *attempt* the doing it!” He bows, and goes into town.

Desdemona returns to their conversation. “Where should I lose that *handkerchief*, Emilia?”

“I know not, madam.”

“Believe me, I had rather have lost my *purse* full of *crusadoes*! And, but my noble Moor is true of mind, and made of no such baseness as *jealous* creatures are, it were enough to put him to ill-thinking!”

“Is he not jealous?”

“Who, *he*? I think the sun where he was born drew all such humours from him!”

Emilia points toward the street. “Look where he comes.”

Desdemona is determined to keep her word. “I will not leave him now till Cassio be called to him!” Othello reaches them at the steps. “How is’t with you, my lord?”

“Well, my good lady.” He regards her, thinking, *O hardness, to dissemble!* “How do you, Desdemona?”

“Well, my good lord!”

“Give me your hand.” He turns it over, to examine the open palm. “This hand is moist, my lady.”

Desdemona smiles. “It yet hath felt no age, nor known no sorrow.”

“This argues fruitfulness, and *liberal heart*,” says Othello, still looking down. “*Hot, hot and moist!*—this hand of yours requires a sequester from *liberty*—fasting and prayer, exercise *devout*, much *castigation!* For there’s a young and sweating *devil* here, that commonly *rebels!*”

“’Tis a good *hand*: a *frank* one,” he says sourly, staring at her.

Nonplussed, she still smiles. “You may, indeed, say so, for ’twas that hand that gave away my heart!”

Othello releases her. “A *liberal* hand; the hands of *old* gave hearts; but our *new* heraldry is *hands*, not hearts.”

She is puzzled. “I cannot speak to this. Come now, your promise!”

“What promise, chuck?”

“I have sent to bid Cassio come speak with you.”

“I have a salt and sorry rheum offends me. Lend me thy handkerchief.”

“Here, my lord.”

“That which I gave you,” he says curtly.

“I have it not about me.”

“Not?”

“No, indeed, my lord.”

Othello frowns. “That is a *fault!* That handkerchief did an *Egyptian* to my mother give; she was a charmer, and could almost read the thoughts of people. She told her that while she kept it ’twould make her amiable, and subdue my father entirely to her love—but if she lost it or made gift of it, my father’s eye should hold her loathèd, and his spirits should hunt after new fancies.

“She, dying, gave it *me*, and bade me, when my fate would have me wive, to give it *her*.”

He glares at Desdemona. “I did so. And take *heed* on’t! Make it a darling like your precious eye!—to lose’t or give’t away were such perdition as nothing else could match!”

She is taken aback by his angry tone. “Is’t possible?”

“’Tis true! There’s *magic* in the web of it: the *sibyl* who sewed the work had numbered the sun to course *two hundred compasses* of the world in her prophetic fury; the worms were

hallowed that did breed the silk; and it was dyed in distillments which the skilful conserved from *virgins' hearts!*"

"Indeed? Is't true?"

"Most veritable! Therefore look to't well!"

Then would to God that I had never seen 't! Desdemona moans softly.

"*Huh?* Wherefore?"

She is startled. "Why do you speak so *startingly* and rash?"

"Is't lost? Is't *gone*? Speak—is it out o' the way?"

"Heaven bless us!"

"*Say* you!"

"It is not lost," claims Desdemona, weakly, "but what an if it were?"

"*What?*"

"I say, it is not *lost*," she insists, hoping to find the thing.

"Fetch't!—let me see't!"

"Why, so I can, sir, but I will not *now*. This is a trick to put me from my *suit*," she argues.

"Pray you, let Cassio be received again!"

Othello stares. "Fetch me the handkerchief; my mind misgives."

"Come, come—you'll never meet a more sufficient man."

"The handkerchief!"

"I pray, talk to me of *Cassio*,—"

"The *handkerchief!*"

"—a man that all his time hath founded his good fortunes on your love, shared dangers with you—"

Othello shouts: "*The handkerchief!*"

Desdemona persists: "In sooth, you are to blame..."

"*Away!*" cries Othello, seething. He storms into the castle.

Emilia, amazed, watches him go. "Is not this man *jealous?*"

"I ne'er saw this before! Surely there's some *wonder* in that handkerchief! I am most unhappy in the loss of it!"

Emilia is shaking her head. "'Tis not a year or two shows us a *man!* They are all but *stomachs*, and we all but *food*; they eat us hungrily—and when they are full, they belch us!" She spots two men coming up the walk from the gate. "Look you, Cassio and my husband."

Iago is telling him, quietly but urgently, "There is no other way! 'Tis *she* must do't—then, *lo*, the *happiness!* Go and importune her!"

Desdemona welcomes him. "How now, good Cassio! What's the news with you?"

"Madam, my former suit," he says, bowing. "I do beseech you that by your virtuous means I may again *exist*, and be a member of his love whom I with all the office of my heart entirely honour!"

"I would not be delayed! If my offence be of such mortal kind that neither my service past, nor present sorrows, nor purposed merit in futurity can ransom me into his love again, merely to *know* so must be my benefit; so shall I clothe me in a forced contentment, and shut myself up in some other course, to Fortune's alms."

She confesses frustration. "*Alas*, thrice-gentle Cassio, my advocacy is not now in tune! My lord is not my lord—nor should I *know* him, were he in face as in *mood* altered! So help me every spirit sanctified, I have spoken for you all my best—and stood upon the brink of his displeasure for my free speech!"

"You must a while be patient. What I *can* do I will—and more I will than I dare for *myself*. Let that suffice you."

"Is my lord angry?" asks Iago.

Emilia tells him, "He went hence but now, and certainly in strange unquietness!"

Iago seems surprised. “Can he be angry? I have seen when a *cannon* hath blown his ranks *into the air*, then like a very *devil*, from his own arm he *bruised its brother!*”—returned fire. “And can he be *angry*? Something of *moment*, then! I will go meet him. There’s matter in’t *indeed*, if he be angry!”

“I prithee, do so,” says Desdemona, as Iago goes in to find the general.

“Something, surely, of *state*, either from Venice, or some unhatchèd practise made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him, hath muddied his clear spirit,” she tells Emilia. “And in such cases men’s natures wrangle with inferior things, though *great* ones are their *object*. Tis ever so; for let our *finger* ache, and it endues even our other, healthful members with that sense of pain.

“Nay, we must not think men are *gods*—nor to them look for such observances as fit the *bridle!*”

“Beshrew me much, Emilia, I, unhandsome *lawyer* as I am, was arraigning his unkindness with my *soul!* But now I find I have *suborned* that witness, and it’s *indicted falsely!*”

“Pray heaven it *be* state matters, as you think,” says Emilia, “and no conception nor no jealous notion concerning *you!*”

“Alas the day!—I never gave him *cause!*”

Emilia shrugs. “But jealous souls will not be answered so; they are not ever jealous for a cause, but jealous *for they are jealous!*—’tis a monster begot upon *itself*, *born* of itself!”

“Heaven keep that monster from Othello’s mind!”

“Lady, *amen!*”

“I will go seek him. Cassio, walk hereabout; if I do find him fit, I’ll move your suit and seek to effect it to my uttermost.”

Cassio bows. “I humbly *thank* Your Ladyship.”

Desdemona and Emilia go inside the castle.

For a while, Cassio paces; then he walks down to the iron gates, and stands beside the high stone wall that faces the street. He is deep in thought when a young woman about his age approaches.

She hails her *inamorato* sourly. “Save you, *friend* Cassio!”

He looks up, surprised to see her. “What make you from home? How is it with you, my most fair Bianca? I’ faith, sweet love, I was coming to your house,” he lies.

“And I was going to *your* lodging, Cassio,” she replies in kind. “What, keep away a *week*? Seven *days and nights*?—eight score, eight *hours*—in a *lover’s* absence, hours *eight-score times* more tedious than the *dial’s!* Oh, weary reckoning!”

“Pardon me, Bianca! I have this while with leaden thoughts been pressèd, but I shall, in a more comfortable time, strike off this tally of absence.” He hands her Desdemona’s kerchief. “Sweet Bianca, take out this work for me.”

She examines it. “Oh, Cassio, whence came *this*? This is some token from a *newer* friend! For the felt absence now I feel a *cause!* Is’t come to this? Well, well!”

Cassio laughs. “Go to, woman! Throw your vile guesses in the Devil’s teeth, from whence you have them! You are jealous now that this is from some *mistress* some remembrance; *no*, in good troth, Bianca!”

“Well, whose is it?”

“I know not, sweet. I found it in my chamber. I like the work well; ere it be demanded—as likely enough it will—I’d have it copied. Take it, and do’t; and leave me for this time.”

“Leave you! Wherefore?”

“I do attend here on the *general!*—and think it no addition, nor my wish, to have him see me *womaned.*”

“*Why*, I pray you?” she demands, indignant.

“Not that I love you *not!*—”

“But not that you do *love* me!” she replies hotly. Still, she touches his arm softly. “I pray you, bring me on the way a *little*,” she pleads, “and say if I shall see you *soon* at *night.*”

“’Tis but a little way that I *can* bring you, for *I* attend, here. But I’ll see you anon.”

“’Tis very good. I must be as circumstances”—tentative. She heads toward her home—with the handkerchief.

Beside the castle’s lower gate, the new lieutenant meets privately with the general. Iago has played the skeptic while Othello, wracked with jealous anger, expressed the latest of his fevered imaginings.

“Will you think so?”

“*Think* so, Iago?”

“What, to kiss in private,—”

“An *unauthorized* kiss!”

“—or being naked with her friend in bed an hour or more, not meaning any harm....”

“*Naked in bed*, Iago, and not mean *harm!*—it is *hypocrisy* against the *Devil!*—they who mean virtuously and yet do *so*, the Devil their virtue *tempts!*—and *they tempt Heaven!*”

Iago shrugs. “Say they *do nothing*—’tis but a venial *slip*. If I give my wife a handkerchief—”

“*What then?*”

“Why then ’tis *hers*, my lord—and, being hers, she may, I think, bestow’t on any man.”

“She is protectress of her *honour*, too!—may she give *that?*”

“Her honour is an essence that’s not seen; very oft they *hove* it that *have* it not. But as for the handkerchief—”

Othello moans, a hand pressed to his churning stomach. “By heaven, I would most gladly have *forgot* it! It comes o’er my memory as doth the *raven* o’er the infected house, boding ill to *all!* Thou said’st *he had my handkerchief!*”

“Aye, what of that?”

Othello seeks restraint. “That’s... not so good, now,” he grumbles; he closes his eyes and swallows several times.

“What if I had said I had *seen* him do you wrong?”

“Or heard him *say so?*—such knaves be abroad who, having by their own importunate suit of voluntary dotage *convinced* some mistress, *supplied* by them cannot choose but they must *blab!*”

“Hath *he* said anything?”

“He *hath*, my lord—but, be you well assured, no more than he’ll *unswear!*”

“What hath he said?”

“Faith, that he did—” Iago seems to waver. “I know not what he did.”

“What? *What?*”

“Lie—”

“With her?”

“*With* her, *on* her—what you will.”

“‘Lie *with* her!’ ‘Lie *on* her!’—we say ‘*lie* on her,’ when they *belie* her!”

Choking with rage, his face revealing pain and fury, Othello struggles to utter his anguish: “*Lie with her!*—that’s fulsome!” He gasps for breath. “Handkerchief— *Confessions!*—*Handkerchief!*—”

“*To confess*, and be *hanged* for his labour! *First* to be *hanged*, and *then* to confess!”—like a man being executed. “*I tremble at it!*”

Feeling faint, he leans back against the wall for support. “Nature would not invest herself in such shuddering passion without some *instigation!*” Sweat glistens on his brow. “It is not *words* that shake me thus....”

His eyelids flutter, then squeeze shut, but the images persist. He spits. “*Noses, ears and lips!*—Is’t *possible?*—*Confess!*—*Handkerchief!*—*O, devil!*”

Staring but unseeing, he collapses, sliding down to gape in a kind of dreadful trance.

Iago watches, pleased. *Work on, my medicine, work!* He had added a potent potion to Othello’s wine.

Thus credulous fools are caught!—and many worthy and chaste dames even thus! All, guiltless, meet reproach!

Hearing footsteps on the street, he kneels beside Othello. “*What, ho, my lord? My lord, I say! Othello!*” He looks up as a gentleman comes toward them. “How now, Cassio?”

“What’s the matter?”

“My lord is fall’n into an *epilepsy!* This is his second fit; he had one yesterday!”

Cassio, surprised, quickly kneels to help. “Rub him about the temples!”

“No, forbear!—the lethargy must have its quiet course! If not, he foams at mouth, and by and by breaks out to *savage madness!*”

“Look, he stirs! Do you withdraw yourself a little while. He will recover straight. When he is gone, I would of a great occasion speak with you.”

Cassio, loath to discomfit the man he is petitioning, nods and goes.

Iago leans forward. “How is it, general? Have you not hurt your head?”

Othello reaches to wipe his damp brow. “Dost thou mock me?” he asks, weakly.

“*I—mock you? No, by heaven! I would you would bear your fortune like a man!*”

“A *hornèd* man’s a monster and a *beast!*” moans Othello, rising unsteadily.

“There’s many a beast, then, in a populous city, and many a civil monster.”

Othello resumes questioning. “Did he *confess* it?”

“Good sir, be a *man!*” chides worldly Iago. “Every bearded fellow that’s but *yoked*”—married—“may draw *with* you”—pull the same plow, as an ox. “There’s millions now alive that nightly lie in those unproper beds which they dare swear theirs alone!

“*Your* case is better. Oh, ’tis the spite of Hell, the fiend’s *arch mock*: to lip a *wanton* in a secure couch, and to suppose her *chaste!* *No!*—let me *know!*—and knowing what *I* am, I know what *she* shall be!”

Othello, still trying to clear his vision, nods. “Oh, thou art wise; ’tis *certain!*”

Iago now advises urgently: “Stand you a while apart; confine yourself but in a patient *hearing.*”

“Whilst you were here o’erwhelmèd with your grief, a passion most unsuited such a man, *Cassio* came hither!” Iago sees that Othello is mortified. “I shifted him away, and laid good ’scuse upon your rapture; bade him anon return and here speak with me—the which he promised.

“Do but encave yourself—and mark the *fleers*, the *gibes* and notable *scorns* that dwell in every region of his face! For I will make him tell the tale anew: where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when he hath, and is again to *cope your wife!* I say but mark his gesture!”

Othello lifts trembling hands to his throbbing temples and groans, but nods agreement.

The lieutenant knows that his scheme will require some distance. “Marry, *patience,*” he insists, grasping the general’s shoulder, “or I shall say you are *all in all* in spleen, and nothing of a *man!*”—just angry talk.

Othello straightens, grim and resolute. “Dost thou *hear*, Iago: I will be found most *cunning* in my patience; but then—dost thou hear!—most *bloody!*”

“That’s not amiss; but yet keep to *time* in all! Will you withdraw?”

Othello moves into a stone alcove of the wall, at the end of the paved space where carriages’ passengers can disembark.

Iago’s thinks. *Now will I question Cassio about Bianca, a hussy that by selling her desires buys herself bread and clothes. She is a creature that dotes on Cassio—as ’tis the strumpet’s plague to beguile many, and be beguiled by one! He, when he hears of her, cannot restrain from the excess of laughter!*

Here he comes. As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad!—and his unsophisticated jealousy must construe poor Cassio’s smiles, gestures and light behavior quite in the wrong!

He walks toward Cassio. “How *do* you now, lieutenant?”

“The worser that you give me the addition”—military title—“whose want even kills me.”

Iago is loudly encouraging: “Ply *Desdemona* well, and you are *sure of’t!*” He moves closer, his back to Othello, and speaks quietly: “Now, if this suit lay in *Bianca*’s power, how *quickly* should you speed!”

“Alas, poor caitiff!”

- *Look how he laughs already!* thinks Othello.

“I never knew woman to love man so,” murmurs Iago.

Cassio shakes his head at her folly. “Alas, poor rogue!—I think, i’ faith, she *does* love me!”

- *Now he denies it faintly—then laughs it out!*

Iago begins, louder. “Do you hear, Cassio, . . .”

- *Now he importunes him to tell it o’er! Go to!—well done, well done!*

“ . . . she gives it out that you shall *marry* her. Do you intend it?”

Cassio laughs even louder at that idea.

- Othello quivers with rage. *Do you triumph, Roman? Do you triumph?*

“I marry *her*? What?—a *customer*? Prithee, bear some charity to my *wit*, do not think it so *unwholesome!*”

- *So, so, so, so.* Thinks Othello, savagely, *They laugh who win!*

Iago teases: “Faith, the cry goes that you *shall* marry her!”

Cassio finds that hard to believe. “Prithee, say *true!*”

“I am a very villain else!”

“That is the monkey’s *own* giving out!” says Cassio. “She is persuaded out of her own love and flattery I will marry her, not out of *my* promise.” He frowns.

- *Have you scorned me so well?* A hand, held behind the deceiver’s back, moves. *Iago beckons me! Now he begins the story!*

Cassio complains, “She was *here* even *now*; she haunts me in every place! I was the other day talking on the sea-bank with certain Venetians when thither comes the bauble—and, by this hand, she *falls upon me*, thus”—he throws up his arms—“about my neck!”

- *Crying ‘O dear Cassio!’ as it were—his gesture imports it!*

“So *hangs*, and *lolls*, and *weeps* upon me; so hauls and pulls me!” Cassio laughs again.

- *Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber! Oh, I see that nose of yours—but not the dog I shall throw it to!*

Cassio is concerned. “Well, I must leave her company.”

Iago spots Bianca. “And before *me*,” he laughs. “Look where she comes!”

Cassio is disgusted. “’Tis such—or *another* fitchew!”—polecat, a term for whore. “Marry, a *perfumèd* one!”

As Bianca approaches, Cassio asks her. “What do you *mean* by this haunting of me?”

“Let *the Devil and his dam* haunt you!” she retorts hotly. “What did *you* mean by that same handkerchief you gave me even now? I was a fine *fool* to take it! I must *take out* the work?—a *likely* piece of work, that you should find it in your chamber and not know who *left* it there!

“This is some *minx*’s token!—and I must take out the work?” She thrusts the kerchief at him. “*There!*—give it to your *hobby-horse!* Wheresoever you had it, *I’ll* take out no work on’t!”

Cassio speaks soothingly, palms held up. “Now, now, my sweet Bianca, now, now . . .”

- *By heaven, that would be my handkerchief!*

Bianca pouts. “If you wish to come to supper tonight, you *may*; if you do *not*—come when you are *next* prepared for!” Defiantly, she stalks off into the town.

“After her, *after* her!” urges Iago.

Cassio nods, pocketing the handkerchief. “Faith, I must!—she’ll *rail in the street* else!”

“Will you sup there?”

“Faith, I intend so.”

“Well, I may chance to see you; for I would very fain speak with you!”

“Prithee, come. Will you?”

Iago nods. “Go to; say no more.” Cassio hurries away after the vociferous vixen.

Slowly, Othello emerges. “How shall I murder him, Iago?”

“Did you perceive how he laughed at his vice?”

“Oh, Iago!”

“And did you see the handkerchief?”

“Was that mine?”

“*Yours*, by this hand! And you see how he *prizes* the foolish woman, your wife: she gave it him—and he hath given it to his whore!”

“I would have him *nine years a-killing!*” Othello’s thought turns from the thief to the stolen. “A *fine* woman,” he says, remembering Desdemona as he first knew her. “A *fair* woman. A *sweet* woman...”

The lieutenant is stern. “Nay, you must forget that.”

“Aye, *let her rot!*—and perish, and be damnèd *tonight!*—for *she shall not live!* Now my heart is turned to *stone!*” He claps a fist to his chest. “I *strike* it, and it hurts my *hand!*”

But he laments his loss. “Oh, the world hath not a sweeter creature,” he says sadly. “She might lie by an *emperor’s* side and command him tasks!”

Iago frowns. “Nay, that’s not *your* course.”

“*Hang* her, I do but say what she *is,*” says Othello. His voice softens even as he thinks of her: “So delicate with her needle; an admirable musician—oh, she will *sing* the savageness out of a *bear!* Of so high and plenteous wit and invention—”

“She’s the *worse* for all that!”

“Oh, a thousand *thousand* times!” Othello ponders. “And *then,* of so gentle a condition...”

“Aye, *too* gentle!”—too high-born.

“Aye, that’s certain... but yet the pity of it, Iago!” he moans, tears welling. “Oh, Iago, the *pity* of it, Iago!”

“If you are so fond of her iniquity, give her *patent* to offend!” says Iago callously. “For, if it touch not *you,* it comes near nobody.”

Othello’s pride is pierced. “I will *chop her into messes!*”—stew for troops. “Cuckold *me?*”

“Oh, ’tis foul in her!”

“With mine *officer!*”

“That’s fouler!”

“Get me some *poison,* Iago—this night! I’ll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again. *This night,* Iago!”

“Do it not with poison. *Strangle* her in her *bed!*—even the bed she hath *contaminated!*”

“Good, *good!* The justice of it pleases! Very good!”

“And as for Cassio, let *me* be *his* undertaker,” says Iago. “You shall hear more by midnight!”
“*Excellent* good!”

Chapter Eight **Confrontation, Despair**

Passing through the main hall of the governor’s castle, Othello and Iago hear a herald’s horn being sounded at the entrance. “What trumpet is that same?” asks the general.

“Something from Venice, surely.” Iago looks to the doors. “’Tis *Lodovico,* come from the duke—and, see, your wife is with him.”

Signior Lodovico, smiling to see Othello, comes in with Desdemona and attendants. “Save you, worthy general!” he says warmly.

“With all my heart, sir,” Othello replies, with a bow.

“The duke and senators of Venice greet you!” Lodovico gives him a letter.

“I kiss the instrument of their pleasures,” says Othello, and he unseals it.

“And what’s the news, good cousin Lodovico?” asks Desdemona as Othello reads.

But Iago intervenes. "I am very glad to see you, signior! Welcome to Cyprus!"

"I thank you," says Lodovico. "How does Lieutenant Cassio?"

"Lives, sir." The emissary's eyebrows rise at the terse reply.

Desdemona explains. "Cousin, there's fall'n between him and my lord an unkind breach, but you shall make all well!"

Othello mutters darkly: "Are you sure of that?"

"My lord?" says she, not quite hearing.

But Othello is again reading: '...*This fail you not to do, as you will...*'

Lodovico tells his niece, "He did not call; he's busy with the papers. Is there division 'twixt my lord and Cassio?"

"A most unhappy one," she tells him. "I would do much to atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio."

Othello hears. "*Fire and brimstone!*" he cries.

"My lord?"

He glares at her seeming boldness. "Are you *wise*?"

Desdemona, puzzled, asks, as he again reads, "What, is he angry?"

"May be the letter moves him," says Lodovico, "for, as I think, they do command him *home*, deputing Cassio in his government."

"Trust me, I am glad on't!" says Desdemona.

Othello is incensed: "*Indeed!*"

"My lord?"

"I am glad to see you *mad!*" he cries.

"Why, sweet Othello—"

Othello strikes her face. "*Devil!*"

She steps back, tears welling up, amazed. "I have not deserved this!" she cries, touching her burning cheek.

Lodovico is dismayed. "My lord, this would not be *believed* in Venice, though I should swear I saw't! 'Tis very *much!* Make her *amends!*—she *weeps!*"

"*O devil, devil!*" Othello shouts at the cringing lady. "If that the Earth could *teem* with *women's* tears, each drop *she* falls would prove a *crocodile!* *Out of my sight!*"

"I will not stay to offend you," says Desdemona softly, curtsying and gathering her skirts to go.

"Truly, an obedient lady," notes Lodovico. "I do *beseech* Your Lordship!—call her *back!*"

Othello calls. "Mistress!"

Desdemona looks back. "My lord?"

Othello looks expectantly at Lodovico, "What would you with her, sir?"

"Who, *I*, my lord?"

"Aye—you did wish that I would make her turn." He glares at Lodovico. "Sir, she *can* turn, and *turn*, and yet go on, then turn *again!* And she *can* weep, sir!—*weep!* And she's obedient, as you say, obedient—*very obedient!*" He growls at Desdemona, "*Proceed* you in your tears!"

Othello turns to Lodovico, holding up the letter. "Concerning this, sir—" He stops to scoff at his wife: "Oh, well-*painted* passion! —I am commanded home."

He snarls at Desdemona: "*Get you away!* I'll send for you later." He faces Lodovico. "Sir, I obey the mandate, and will return to Venice." He glares at her. "*Hence, avaunt!*" She rushes, sobbing, from the room.

"*Cassio* shall have my *place*," says Othello with grim irony. "And, sir, *tonight* I do entreat that we may sup together. You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus." He turns and strides away, muttering to himself. "*Goats and monkeys!*"

Lodovico stands aghast. "Is *this* the noble Moor whom our full Senate call *all-in-all sufficient?* Is *this* the nature whom passion could not shake?—whose solid virtue neither shot of accident nor the dart of chance could graze nor pierce?"

Iago shrugs. "He is much changèd."

"Are his *wits* safe? Is he not *light of brain*?"

"He's what he is. I may not breathe my censure what he *might* be; if what he might he is *not*, I would to heaven he *were!*"—his right self.

Lodovico is still an astonished witness. "What, *strike his wife!*"

"Faith, that was not so well—yet I would I knew *that* stroke would prove the *worst!*" frets Iago.

"Is it his *use*? Or did the *letter* work upon his blood, and new-create this fault?"

"Alas, *alas!*" says the discreet lieutenant. "It is not honesty for me to speak what I have *seen* and *known*. You shall observe him, and his own courses will denote him, so that I may save my speech. Do but go after, and mark how he continues."

Lodovico leaves to join the others of his party, including Desdemona's cousin, Gratiano. He shakes his head. "I am sorry that I am *deceivèd* in him!"

In his private chambers at the castle, Othello interrogates his wife's waiting-gentlewoman.
"You have seen *nothing* then?"

"Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect!" Emilia assures him.

"Yes, you *have* seen Cassio and her *together!*"

"But then I saw no *harm*—and then I heard each syllable that breath made up between them!"

"What, did they never whisper?"

"*Never*, my lord!"

"Nor send you out o' the way?"

"*Never*."

"To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask, nor nothing?"

"*Never*, my lord."

"That's strange...."

"I durst, my lord, to wager she is *honest*, lay down my *soul* as stake!" says Emilia. "If you think otherwise, *remove* your thought; it doth abuse your bosom!"

"If any wretch have put this in your head, let heaven requite it with *the serpent's curse!* For if *she* be not honest, chaste, and true, there's *no* man happy—the purest of their wives is foul as slander!"

But the glum general now hears only what confirms his fear. "Bid her come hither. Go." Emilia curtseys and hurries away.

She says enough. Yet it's a simple bawd that would not say as much! he thinks sourly, considering Emilia a go-between.

She returns with the lady.

Othello regards Desdemona: *This is a subtle whore, a bedroom 'lock-and-key' of villainous secrets—and yet she'll kneel and pray!—I have seen her do't!*

"My lord, what is your will?" asks Desdemona quietly.

"Pray, chuck, come hither."

She goes to him. "What is your pleasure?"

"Let me see your eyes; look in my face."

Desdemona sees his angry stare. *What horrible fancy is this?*

Othello addresses Emilia as if she ran a brothel: "Some of your *function*, mistress! Leave procreants *alone*, and shut the door; cough or cry *hem!* if anybody come. Your *trade*, to your *trade!*—nay, *dispatch!*" Emilia, offended—and not a little frightened—leaves them.

"Upon my *knees*," pleads Desdemona, "what doth your speech *import?*—I understand a fury in your words, but not the *words!*"

"Why, what *art* thou?"

"Your wife, my lord!—your true and loyal *wife!*"

“Come, *swear* it!—*damn* thyself, lest the *devils themselves* should fear to seize thee, looking like one of heaven! Therefore be *double* damnèd: swear thou art *honest!*”

Desdemona looks up at him. “Heaven doth truly know it.”

“Heaven truly knows that *thou art false* as *Hell!*”

“To *whom*, my lord? *With* whom? *How* am I false?”

Othello, crushed by his loss, cannot bear the images of *how*. “Oh, *Desdemona!* Away! *Away!* Away!”

“*Alas the heavy day!*” she cries, as she rises. “Why do you *weep*? Am *I* the motive of these tears, my lord? If haply you do suspect *my father* is an instrument of this, your *calling back*, lay not your blame on *me!* If you have lost him, why, *I* have lost him, too!”

Othello paces, complaining aloud. “Had it pleasèd heavens to try me with *affliction*—had they rained all kinds of *sores* and *shames* on my bare head, steeped me in *poverty* to the very *lips*, given to *captivity* me and my utmost *hopes*—I should have found in *some* place of my soul a drop of *patience!*”

“But, alas, they do make me a fixèd figure for *Time* to point his slow-moving finger at in *scorn!*”

“Yet could I bear that, too—*well, very well*, but for *there,*”—he points at his wife, “where I have *garnered up my heart!*—where I must either live or bear *no* life—the fountain from which my current runs, or else dries up, being decanted thence!

“Or keep it as a *cistern,*” he growls, his anger growing, “for *foul toads* to *knot and gender in!* Turn thy complexion *there, Patience*, thou young and rose-lipped cherub,”—the placid garden statue—“and, *there* look *grim as hell!*”

Desdemona is perplexed. “I hope my noble lord esteems me *honest!*”

“Oh, *aye!*—as summer *flies* are in a *carcass!*—teeming at even a *breeze!*” cries Othello. “O thou *weed*, who art so lovely, so fair, and smell’st so sweet that the sense *aches* at thee, would thou hadst *ne’er been born!*”

“*Alas*, what *sin* have I unknowingly committed?” she pleads, again in tears.

He stares, coldly, at her face. “Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, made to write ‘*whore*’ upon? What committed? *Committed!* O thou *public commoner!* I should make very *forges* of my cheeks that would *to cinders* burn up modesty, did I but *speak* thy deeds!

“What *committed?* Heaven *stops the nose* at it, and the moon shuts its eyes!—the bawdy *wind* that *kisses all it meets* is hushed within the hollow mine of earth, and will not hear it!

“What *committed?* Impudent *strumpet!*”

“By heaven, you *do me wrong!*” she sobs.

“Are you not a *strumpet?*”

“*No*, as I am a Christian! If to preserve this vessel for my lord from any foul, unlawful touch is *not* to be a *strumpet, I am none!*”

“What, not a *whore?*”

“*No*, as I shall be saved!”

“Is’t possible?” he cries, disgusted by the denial.

“O heaven, forgive us!”

“I cry you *mercy*, then,” says Othello with heavy sarcasm. “I took *you* for the *cunning whore* of *Venice* that married with Othello!”

He shouts toward the closed door: “*You*, mistress!—that have the office opposite to Saint Peter, and keep the gate of *Hell!*” Emilia comes in, fearfully. “Yes, *you, aye, you!* We have *done our course.*” He flings coins at her. “There’s *money* for your pains. I pray you, turn the key, and keep your counsel”—tell no one. He stalks out of the chamber, tears of pain and anger still wet on his face.

Emilia is stunned. “*Alas*, what does this gentleman *conceive?* How *do* you, madam? How *do* you, my good lady?”

Desdemona stands devastated, forlorn and dazed. “Faith, half *asleep.*”

“Good madam, what’s the matter with my lord?”

“With who?”

“Why, with my lord, madam.”

“Who is thy lord?”

“He that is *yours*, sweet lady.”

Desdemona shakes her head. “I *have* none.” She raises a pale palm. “Do not talk to me, Emilia. I cannot weep; nor answer have I none but what should go by water”—through tears.

She looks slowly around the room. “Prithee, tonight lay on my bed my wedding sheets. Remember. And call thy husband hither.”

Here’s a change indeed! thinks Emilia, very worried. She goes to find Iago.

’Tis meet I should be used so, very meet, thinks the dutiful lady, even as she struggles to comprehend. *How have I been behaved, that he might stick the small’st opinion on my least misuse?*

Emilia returns with Iago. “What is your pleasure, madam?” he asks. “How is’t with you?”

“I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes do it with *gentle* means and easy tasks; he might have chid *me* so, for, in good faith, I am a child to chiding.”

“What’s the matter, lady?”

Emilia responds. “*Alas*, Iago, my lord hath so be-*whored* her, thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her, as true hearts cannot *bear!*”

“*Am* I that name, Iago?” asks Desdemona.

“What name, fair lady?” He wants her to suffer it again.

“Such as she says my lord did say I was.”

“He called her *whore!*” says Emilia. “A beggar in his *drink* could not have laid such terms upon his *callat!*”

“Why did he so?”

“I do not *know*,” says Desdemona, piteously, beginning to cry again. “I am sure I am none such!”

“Do not weep, do not weep,” says Iago. “*Alas* the day!”

Emilia, however, is indignant. “Hath she forsook so many noble matches, and her father, her country and her friends, to be called *whore*? Would it not *make* one weep?”

“It is my wretched fortune,” says Desdemona.

“*Beshrew him* for’t!” cries Emilia. “How *comes* this trick upon him?”

Iago shrugs. “*Nay*, heaven doth know....”

Cries Emilia angrily, “I will be hanged if some *infernal villain*—some busy and insinuating *rogue*, some cogging, cozening *slave!*—have not devised this slander to get some office! I’ll be *hanged* else!”

“*Fie*, there is no such man,” says Iago. “It is impossible.”

The devout lady prays: “If any such there be, Heaven, *pardon* him.”

“A *halter* pardon him!” cries Emilia, “and *Hell* gnaw his bones!”

“Why should he call her *whore*? *Who* keeps her company? What place?—what time?—what form? What *likelihood*?”

“The Moor’s *abusèd* by some most *villainous knave*, some base, notorious *slave*, some *scurvy fellow*! O Heaven, would that such companions Thou’ldst *reveal!*—and put in every honest hand a *whip* to lash the rascals naked through the world, even from the east to the west!”

Iago tries to quiet her. “*Speak* within door!”

“Oh, *fie* upon them!” replies Emilia. “Some such *squire* was he that turned *your* wit the seamy side without, and made you to suspect *me* with the Moor!”

“You are a *fool!*—*go to!*” says Iago hastily.

But Desdemona is abstracted. “*Alas*, Iago, what shall I do to win my lord again?”

“Good friend, go to him,” she pleads, “for, by the light of heaven, I know not how I lost him!”

“Here I kneel! If e’er my will did trespass ’gainst his love, either in discourse of thought or actual deed—or mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense, delighted them in any other form—or if I do not yet, and ever did, and ever *will* love him *dearly!*—though he do shake me off to beggarly divorcement—may *comfort forswear me!*”

“Unkindness may do much, and *his* unkindness may defeat my life, but never taint my *love!*”

She shudders again at his malice. “I cannot say the *word*: it does abhor me now to *speak!* To *do* the act that might the addition earn, not the *world’s* mass of vanity could make me!”

Iago is soothing. “I pray you, be content! ’Tis but his mood: the business of the *state* does him offence, and he does chide with *you.*”

Desdemona wants to believe that. “If ’twere no other—”

“’Tis but *so*, I warrant,” Iago tells her. They hear the herald’s trumpets. “Hark, how these instruments summon to supper! The messengers of Venice stay the meat!”—wait to be served.

“Go in, and weep not—all things shall be well!”

Chapter Nine **Darkness and Alarm**

Standing on the portico as the sun sets, Iago feels comfortable and content after the long meal. The strained courtesy and artificial cordiality that made the event an ordeal for the others—Othello and Desdemona, the visiting Venetian courtiers—added piquancy to his repast.

His sees cohort walking up from the citadel—as a beardless civilian, no longer disguised.

“How *now*, Roderigo?”

“I do not find that thou dealest *justly* with me!” says the young man hotly.

“What in the contrary?”

“Every day thou *daffest* me with some *device*, Iago!—and, as it seems to me now, *keepest from* me all conveniency, rather than suppliest me with the least advantage of *hope!* I will indeed no longer *endure* it!—nor am I yet persuaded to put up *in peace* with what *already* I have foolishly suffered!”

“Will you *hear* me, Roderigo—”

“Faith, I have heard *too much!*—for your words and performances are no kin together!”

“You charge me most unjustly!”

“With nought but *truth!* I have *wasted* myself out of my *means!* The *jewels* you have had from me to deliver to Desdemona—*half* would have corrupted a *votarist!* You have told me she hath received them, and returned me *expectations* and comforts of sudden respect and acquaintance—but I *find none!*”

Iago says, calmly: “Well; go to; very well.”

“Very *well?* Go *to?*” I cannot *go to*, man!—nor ’tis *not* very well! Nay, I think it is *scurvy*, and begin to find myself *robbed* in it!”

“Very well.”

“I tell you ’tis *not* very well!” cries Roderigo angrily. “I will make *myself* known to Desdemona! If she will *return* me my jewels, I will give up my suit and repent my unlawful solicitation; if not, assure yourself I will seek satisfaction of *you!*”

“You have said”—spoken your piece.

“*Aye!*—and said nothing but what I protest intendment of *doing!*”

Iago smiles warmly. “Why, *now* I see there’s *mettle in thee!*—and even from this instant do build on thee a *better* opinion than ever *before!* Give me thy *hand*, Roderigo!” he says, seizing and shaking it. “Thou hast taken against me a most just exception; but yet, I protest, I have dealt most *directly* in thy affair!”

“It hath not *appeared!*” complains Roderigo.

Iago nods. "I grant in *deed* it hath not appeared, and your suspicion is not without wit and judgment. But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed which I have greater reason to believe now than ever—I mean *purpose, courage* and *valour!*—this night, *show it!*

"If thou the next night following enjoy not Desdemona, *devise engines for my life*, and take me from this world with *treachery!*"

Roderigo frowns at yet another stratagem. "Well, what is it? Is it within reason and compass?"

Iago grasps his elbow, and looks around carefully to see if they can be overheard; he lowers his voice. "Sir, there is especial commission come from Venice to depute *Cassio* in *Othello's place!*"

"Is that *true?* Why, then Othello and *Desdemona* return again to Venice!"

"Oh, *no!*" says Iago. "*He goes to Mauritania*—and takes the fair Desdemona away *with him!*—unless his abode be lingered here by some *accident*—wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio!"

Roderigo stares. "How do you mean, 'removing' of him?"

"Why, by making him incapable of Othello's place—knocking out his brains."

"And *that* you would have *me* to do?"

"*Aye*, if you dare do yourself a *right* and a *profit!*

"He sups tonight with a harlot, and thither will I go to him; he knows not yet of his honorable fortune. If you will watch his going thence, which I will fashion to fall out between twelve and one, you may take him at your pleasure!

"I will be near to *second* your attempt—and he *shall* fall between us!

"Come!—stand not amazed at it, but go along with me! I will show you such a *necessity* in his death that you shall think yourself *bound* to put it on him! It is now nigh his suppertime, and the night goes to waste! *About it!*"

Despite doubts, Roderigo is again drawn toward easy success. "I will hear further *reason* for this..."

"And you shall be satisfied!"

In the castle's guest quarters after the evening meal, Othello invites Lord Lodovico and Gratiano to stroll with him into town.

"I do beseech you, sir," says Lodovico, "trouble yourself no further."

"Oh, pardon me," says Othello insistently, "'twill do me good to walk."

Lodovico bows to Desdemona. "Madam, good night; I humbly thank Your Ladyship."

"Your Honour is most welcome," she replies.

"Will you walk, sir?" says Othello, starting to leave. He turns. "Oh, Desdemona—"

"My lord?"

"Get you to bed on the instant; I will be returned forthwith." He motions toward Emilia.

"Dismiss your attendant there; look it be done."

"I will, my lord."

The gentlemen go down to the street, discussing intently about the future defense of Cyprus against the Ottoman Turk.

Emilia approaches Desdemona in the general's chambers. "How goes it now? He looks gentler than he *did.*"

"He says he will return; importingly he hath commanded me to go to *bed*, and bade me to dismiss you."

"Dismiss me?" She usually stays until the lord and lady have retired.

"It was his bidding; therefore, good Emilia, give me my nightly wearing, and adieu. We must not now displease him."

"I would you had never *seen* him!"

“So would not *I*; my love doth so approve him that even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—prithee, unpin me—have grace and favour in them.”

“I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.”

Desdemona sighs. “All’s one.” She looks at the bed for a moment. “Good faith, how foolish are our minds! If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me in one of those same sheets.”

“Come, come!—how you *talk!*”

Desdemona is calm, but wistful. “My mother had a maid called Barbary. She was in love, but he that she loved proved mad, and did forsake her. She had a song of *willow*—an old thing, ’twas, but it expressed her fortune, and she died singing it.

“That song tonight will not go from my mind; I have much to-do but to go hang my head all at one side, and sing it like poor Barbary!

“Prithee, *dispatch.*”

“Shall I go fetch your nightgown?” asks Emilia.

“No, unpin me here.”

Emilia busies herself with letting down the lady’s long hair. “This Lodovico is a proper man!—a very handsome man!” she says, trying for girlish cheerfulness.

“He speaks well.”

“I know a lady in Venice would have walked *barefoot* to *Palestine* for a touch of *his* nether lip!”

Desdemona sings softly:

“The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree.

Sing all, ‘A green willow.’

Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee.

Sing, ‘Willow, willow, willow.’

The fresh stream ran by her and murmured her moan.

Sing, ‘Willow, willow, willow.’

Her salt tears fell from her, and softened the stones.”

She hands Emilia her earrings. “Lay these by.

Sing, ‘Willow, willow, willow.’

“Prithee, *hie* thee,” she says, “he’ll come anon!

“Sing all, ‘A green willow must be thy garland!’

‘Let nobody blame him; his scorn I approve—’”

Desdemona pauses, frowning. “Nay, that’s not next... *Hark*—who is’t that knocks?”

“It’s the wind,” says Emilia, gently brushing her hair.

The lady sings:

“‘I called my love ‘False love!’—but what said he then?’

Sing, ‘Willow, willow, willow.’

‘If I court more women, you’ll couch with more men!’”

Emilia chuckles at the ribald sophistry.

Desdemona looks at her. “So, get thee gone. Good night. Mine eyes do itch—doth that bode weeping?”

“’Tis neither here nor there.”

“I have heard it *said* so. Oh, these men, these *men!* Dost thou in conscience think—tell me, Emilia—that there be *women* who abuse their *husbands* in such gross kind?”

“There be some such, no question.”

Desdemona *tsks* disapproval. “Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the *world?*”

“Why, would not *you?*”

“*No*, by this heavenly light!”

Emilia grins. “Nor I neither, by heavenly *light*; I might do’t as well i’ the *dark!*”

But Desdemona is serious. "Wouldst thou *do* such a deed for all the *world*?"

Emilia shrugs. "The world's a huge thing: it is a great price for a small vice."

"In troth I think thou wouldst not!"

"In troth, I think I *would!*—then *undo*'t when I had done!

"Marry, I would *not* do such a thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition. But for the *whole world!*—why, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a *monarch*? I should venture purgatory for't."

"Beshrew me if *I* would do such a wrong for the whole world!"

"Why, the wrong is but a wrong *in* the world," argues Emilia blithely, "and having won the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in *your own* world—and you might quickly make it *right!*"

Desdemona smiles; but she believes in fidelity. "I do not think there is *any* such woman!"

"Yes—a *dozen!* And as many took *their* advantage"—a lesser prize—"as would *stock* the world they played for!

"But I do think it is their *husbands'* faults if wives do fall! Say that they slack their duties, and pour *our* treasures into *foreign* laps!—or else break out in peevish jealousies, throwing *restraint* upon us! Or say they *strike* us, or scant our *former* having in despite—why, we have *galls!* And though we have some *grace*, yet we'll have some *revenge!*

"Let husbands know their *wives* have *senses*, like them: they see and smell, and have their palates for both sweet and sour, as husbands have!

"What is it that they *do* when they exchange us for others? Is it *sport*? I think it *is!* And doth *affection* breed it? I think it *doth!* Is't *frailty* that thus errs? It *is* so too!

"And have not *we* affections, desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?

"Then let them use us *well*," she warns in comical dudgeon, "else let them know: the ills we do, their ills *instruct* us to!"

Desdemona laughs as Emilia goes to her own room. "Good night, good *night!*"

She waits, now, for her lover.

Heaven, to me such uses send, not to pick bad from bad, but from bad to mend!

Darkness along this unsavory street in the town's military quarter is familiar to Iago; he has often visited nearby at night. But Roderigo is apprehensive.

The lieutenant leads him to an alley and into a stall beside a sagging, boarded-up old building. He points to a stack of broken crates. "Here, stand behind this bulk. Straight will he come!—wear thy good rapier bare, and put it *home!*

"Quick, *quick!*—fear nothing!—I'll be at thy elbow! It makes us, or it mars us—think on that, and fix most firm thy *resolution!*"

"Be near at hand," says Roderigo looking around warily. "I may miscarry in't."

"Here at thy hand," Iago assures him. "Be *bold*, and take thy stand!" He moves back, deeper into the shadows.

Roderigo tries to steel himself. *I have no great devotion to the deed; and yet he hath given me satisfying reasons. 'Tis but a man gone. Forth, my sword—he dies!*

Iago draws his own blade. *I have rubbed this young quat almost to the sense, and he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio, or Cassio him, or each do kill the other, every way makes my gain!*

He considers further. *Live Roderigo, he calls me to a restitution large of gold and jewels that I fobbed from him as gifts to Desdemona; it must not be.*

If Cassio do remain, he hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly; and, besides, the Moor may unfold me to him—there stand I in much peril! No, he must die.

But so. —I hear him coming!

Cassio has just left Bianca's room, having made pleasant amends with her.

I know his gait—'tis he! thinks Roderigo. "Villain, thou diest!" He leaps forward, driving his rapier's point directly at Cassio's chest.

The gentleman is pushed away—unhurt. “That thrust had been mine enemy *indeed* but that my coat is better than thou know’st!” cries Cassio, drawing his rapier. “I will make proof of *thine!*” He attacks his opponent with vigor; they start to circle, but the soldier quickly pierces his assailant.

“*Oh,*” cries Roderigo, “I am *slain!*” He gasps as the blade is withdrawn.

As Cassio pulls it back, Iago steps behind him and slashes viciously with his sword. Hearing him, Cassio turns, trying to avoid the stroke, but the blade cuts deeply into his leg. Iago dashes away, unrecognized.

Cassio falls, bleeding and unable to stand. “I am maimed forever! *Help, ho! Murder! Murder!*”

Above, at a dim, open window of the alehouse across the way, Othello looks down. He has sent away the Venetian visitors, and waited alone—listening. *The voice of Cassio! Iago keeps his word!*

Roderigo lies in the stall, regretful now. “*Oh, villain, that I am!*” he cries out in his pain.

Othello thinks he heard Cassio. He nods at the confession. *It is even so.*

Cassio calls: “*Oh, help, ho! Light! A surgeon!*”

’Tis he. Oh, brave Iago, honest and just, that hast such noble sense of thy friend’s wrong! Thou teachest me! Going to the chamber door, he blows out a candle, then hastens down creaking wooden stairs and past off-duty soldiers among the other drinkers at the bar.

Othello leaves the tavern and heads toward the castle. He thinks of his wife. *Minion, your dear lies dead, and your unblest fate hies! Strumpet, I come!*

Forth from my heart go those spells!—thine eyes are blockèd!

Thy bed, lust-stainèd, shall with blood-lust be spotted!

On the street, Lord Lodovico and Gratiano—sent by Othello to seek out Lieutenant Michael Cassio, just appointed by the Signiory to succeed him as commander of the garrison at Cyprus—near a bloody scene.

Cassio is muttering. “*What, ho! No watch? No passersby?*” He calls out: “*Murder! Murder!*”

“*’Tis some mischance!*” says Gratiano, stopping several yards away. “The cry is very direful!”

“*Oh, help!*” cries Cassio.

“*Hark!*” says old Lodovico, peering forward in the dark.

“*Oh, a wretched villain!*” moans Roderigo.

“*Two or three groan!—it is a heavy night!*” says Lodovico. “These may be *counterfeits,*” he warns. “Let’s think’t unsafe to go in to the cry without more help!”

“*Nobody come?*” wails Roderigo. “Then shall I bleed to death!”

Lodovico turns as help arrives. “*Hark!*”

At the house of a discreet acquaintance—she never questions her visitors—Iago has wiped his blade, pulled off his coat and doublet, and taken up a lantern.

Gratiano grasps Lodovico’s arm. “Here’s one comes in his shirt, with light and weapons!”

“Who’s there?” demands Iago. “Whose noise is this that cries out *murder?*”

Lodovico replies. “We do not know!”

“Did not you hear a cry?”

“Here, *here!*” calls Cassio. “For heaven’s sake, *help me!*”

“*What’s the matter?*” asks Iago, raising the lantern.

Gratiano tells the older nobleman, “This is Othello’s ancient, as I take it.”

“The same indeed—a very valiant fellow!” says Lodovico.

Iago, clean sword gleaming, holds up the lantern and steps toward Cassio. “Who are *you* here, that cry so grievously?”

“*Iago? Oh, I am spoiled!—undone by villains! Give me some help!*”

Iago kneels and sets the lantern beside him, revealing the bloody wound. “*Oh, me, lieutenant! What villains have done this?*”

Cassio motions toward the alley. "I think that *one* of them is hereabout, and cannot make away!"

"*Oh, treacherous villains!*" growls Iago, rising. He turns to Gratiano. "What, are you *there*? Come in, and give some *help!*"

Roderigo cries, weakly, "Oh, help me *here!*"

"*That's one of them!*" cries Cassio.

Iago strides to the stall. "Oh, *murderous slave!* Oh, *villain!*" The men outside hear his sword clanking—defensively they think—against Roderigo's fallen blade just before he stabs the man who lies on the ground.

"Oh, *damnèd,* Iago!" cries Roderigo, staring up in horror. "O *inhuman dog!*" Blood spills from his mouth, his eyes close, and his head lolls to the side.

Iago turns away. "Kill men i' the *dark!*" he says, angrily contemptuous. "Where *be* these bloody thieves?—How *silent* is this town!—*Ho! Murder! Murder!*" He comes back to Lodovico. "What may *you* be?—are you of good or evil?"

Lodovico raises both empty hands. "As you shall prove us, *praise* us!"

"Signior *Lodovico?*"

"*He, sir!*"

Iago bows, and hands Gratiano the lantern. "I cry you mercy. Here's Cassio hurt by villains!"

Gratiano is surprised. "*Cassio!*"

Iago has gone to him. "How is't, brother?"

"My leg is cut in two!"

"Marry, heaven forbid!" Iago waves for the lantern. "*Light, gentlemen!*" He looks at the injury. "I'll bind it with my shirt."

Bianca, having heard the disturbance from up the street, has run to see. "What is the *matter, ho?* Who is't that cried?"

Iago, bare-chested, looks up from bandaging and sneers at the woman. "'Who is't that cried for *thee?*'"

"Oh, my dear *Cassio!*" cries Bianca, seeing the bloody cloth. "My sweet *Cassio!* Oh, Cassio, Cassio, *Cassio!*"

Iago glares up at her. "Oh, notable *strumpet!*" He finishes binding the wound, then regards the woman sourly. "Cassio, do you suspect who they should be that may to this have *led* you?"

"No."

Gratiano leans down to speak with Cassio. "I am sorry to find you *thus!*" he says, dismayed. "I have been to seek you!"

"Lend me a belt!" says Iago; Gratiano provides his. "So. Oh, for a *chair*, to bear him easily hence...."

"Alas, he *faints!*" says Bianca, wringing her hands. "Oh, Cassio, Cassio, *Cassio!*"

Iago rises. "Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash to be a *party* in this injury! *Patience* awhile, good Cassio!"

He looks to Gratiano. "Come, come; lend me the light!" They go together into the stall to look. "Know ye this face, or no?"

"*Alas!*—my friend and my dear countryman, Roderigo! No... *yes, sure!* Oh, *heaven!* *Roderigo!*"

"What—of *Venice?*" asks Lodovico.

"Even *he, sir,*" says Gratiano. "Did you know him?"

The nobleman nods, shaken. "Know him? *Aye!*"

Iago looks at his face, seeming just now to recognize him. "Signior *Gratiano?* I cry your gentle pardon; these bloody incidents must excuse my manners, that so neglected you!"

"I am glad to see you," says Gratiano weakly, still staring at Roderigo.

"How do you, Cassio?" asks Iago urgently, going to him. "*Oh, a chair, a chair!*"

Gratiano returns to them with the lantern, shaken. "*Roderigo.*"

“He, he, ’tis *he!*” says Iago. “Oh, that’s well done—a *chair!*” One of the onlookers from the tavern has brought it. The lieutenant helps Cassio to rise onto one leg, then ease down to sit on the makeshift litter. Iago uses the belt to secure him.

“Some good men bear him carefully from hence,” he says, and gives silver to two burly fellows who come forward. “I’ll fetch the general’s surgeon!”

He seizes Bianca’s arm as she tries to go with Cassio. “As for *you*, mistress, save you your labour!”

Gratiano is looking back at Roderigo. “He that lies slain here, Cassio, was my dear friend—what *malice* was between you?”

“None in the world,” says Cassio, weakening further, “nor do I *know* the man!” He is borne away for treatment at the citadel.

Iago demands of Bianca, “What, look you *pale?*”

Four arriving soldiers run to him. Waving toward the stall, he tells them, “Go bear him out o’ the air.” They carry Roderigo away, heading for the garrison.

Iago regards Lodovico and Gratiano. “Stay you, good gentlemen.” He pulls Bianca forward. “Look you *pale*, mistress?”

“Do you perceive the *gastness* of her eye?” he asks the Venetians; Bianca scowls. “Nay, do you *stare?* We shall *hear* more—anon!”

“Behold her well, I pray you!—*look* upon her! Do you *see*, gentlemen? *Aye!*—*guiltiness* will speak, though *tongues* were out of use!”

With others from the castle, Emilia has run down into the city, as word of a killing spreads. She spots Iago, shirtless, with blood on his hands. “*Alas, what’s the matter?* What’s the *matter*, husband?”

“Cassio hath here been *set on* in the dark by Roderigo and fellows that are ’scaped!” he tells her. “He’s almost *slain*—and Roderigo *dead!*”

Emilia is appalled. “*Alas, good gentleman!* *Alas, good Cassio!*”

Iago glances at Bianca. “This is the fruit of *whoring!* Prithee, Emilia, go know of Cassio where he *supped* tonight.” He looks again at Bianca. “*What!*—do you *shake* at that?”

Bianca faces him defiantly. “He supped at my house; but I therefore *shake not!*”

“Oh, *did* he so? I charge you, go with me!”

“*Fie, fie* upon thee, *strumpet!*” cries Emilia.

“I am no strumpet,” says Bianca, “but of a life as honest as you that thus *abuse* me!”

“As *I!* *Oh, fie* upon thee!”

“Kind gentlemen, let’s go see poor Cassio’s wound dressed,” Iago says to Signior Lodovico and Gratiano. He pulls Bianca along: “Come, mistress, you must tell us *another* tale!”

“Emilia, run you to the citadel, and tell my lord and lady what hath happ’d!” She nods and hurries away.

He gestures courteously. “Will you go on?” Lodovico and Gratiano begin returning to the castle.

Iago, follows, wondering if Othello’s part of their pact has been accomplished.

This is the night that either makes me, or fordoes me quite!

Chapter Ten Retribution

Othello stands, silent, looking at the bed where Desdemona lies sleeping. Again he wavers. *It is because... it is because, my soul....*

He looks up. *Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars! It is for cause.*

Yet I’ll not shed her blood, nor scar that skin of hers—whiter than snow, and smooth as monumental alabaster....

Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men!

As he moves closer, a bedside candle flickers. *Put out the light... and then put out the light. If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, I can again thy former light restore, should I repent me. He looks at the sleeping lady. But once put out thy light, thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature, I know not where is that Promethean heat that can thy light relume.*

He pinches the flame, and is aware of the wick's pungent fume.

When I have plucked the rose, I cannot give it vital growth again; it must needs wither. I'll smell it on the green stem. He leans forward, and kisses her gently. *Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade Justice to break her sword! One more, one more!* He kisses her again.

Annoyed by deep feelings, he gibes: *Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee and love thee after!*

But he whispers, eyes teeming. "One more; and *this* the last."

So sweet was ne'er so fatal! I must weep, but they are cruel tears; this sorrow's heavy—it strikes where it doth love!

She wakes. "Who's there? Othello?"

That stirs a frown. "I, Desdemona."

She sits up. "Will you come to bed, my lord?"

"Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?"

"Aye, my lord."

"If you bethink yourself of any crime unreconcilèd as yet to Heaven's grace, solicit for it straight."

"*Alas*, my lord, what do you mean by *that*?"

"Well, *do* it, and be brief! I will walk by; I would not kill thy *unprepared* spirit!—no, heaven forfend! I would not kill thy *soul*!"

She is startled. "Talk you of *killing*?"

"Aye, I do."

"Then *Heaven have mercy* on me!"

"*Amen*, with all my heart!"

She is staring. "If you say *so*, I hope you will *not* kill me!"

Othello, heartbroken, moans and looks, tearfully, upward.

"And yet I fear you!—for you are *fearful* when your eyes roll so! Why *I* should fear I know not, since guiltiness I know not—but yet I feel my *fear*!"

"Think on thy sins."

"They are *loves* I bear to *you*!" she says earnestly.

And to whom else? Othello's anger rises. "Aye. And for that thou diest."

"That Death's *unnatural* who kills for *loving*!" Desdemona's eyes scan his face. "Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip? Some bloody passion shakes your very frame! These are portents, but yet I hope they do not point on me!" She starts to rise.

He pushes her down brusquely. "Peace, and be still!"

"I will so," says Desdemona, now thoroughly afraid. "What's the *matter*?"

"That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee, thou gavest to *Cassio*!"

"*No*, by my life and soul! *Send* for the man, and *ask* him!"

"Sweet soul, take heed, take heed of *perjury*; thou art on thy deathbed."

She did make a lifetime commitment to their bed. "Aye—but not *yet* to die!"

Othello is adamant. "Yes; immediately. Therefore *confess* thee freely of thy *sin*—for denying each article with *oath* cannot remove nor check the strong conception that I do groan withal! Thou art to die."

"The Lord have mercy on me!" cries Desdemona.

"I say, *Amen*."

"And have *you* mercy, *too*! I *never* did offend you in my *life*!—never loved Cassio but with such general warranty of *heaven* as I *might* love! I never gave him *token*!"

Othello glares. “By heaven, I *saw* my handkerchief *in’s hand!* O *perjured* woman! Thou dost *stone* my heart, and makest me call a *sacrifice* what I intended to do as *murder*—which I thought of *when I saw the handkerchief!*”

She is desperate. “He *found* it then! I never *gave* it him! Send for him hither; let him confess the truth!”

“He *hath* confessed.”

“What, my lord?”

“That he hath usèd thee.”

Desdemona is aghast: “How? *Unlawfully?*”

“Aye.”

She shakes her head; she replies, firmly, “He will not say so.”

“No—his mouth is *stopped!* Honest Iago hath ta’en order for’t.”

“*Oh!* My fear *interprets—what, is he dead?*”

“Had all his *hairs* been *lives,*” growls Othello, “my great *revenge* had metal for them all!”

“*Alas!* He is *betrayed,* and I *undone!*”

He is furious. “*Out, strumpet! Weep ’st* thou for him *to my face?*”

“Oh, *banish* me, my lord, but *kill* me not!” cries Desdemona, trying to rise.

“*Down,* strumpet!”

“Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight!” she begs, as he shoves her down.

“Nay, if you *strive—*”

“But half an hour!”

With his right hand he presses her neck against the bed. He grasps a pillow. “Being due, there is no pause!”

Desdemona tries to hold back his left hand. “Only while I say one *prayer!*” she pleads.

“It is too late.” Othello pushes the pillow over her face and forces it down. Soon her struggling weakens—until, finally, she is still.

“My lord, my lord!” calls Emilia, knocking on the locked bedchamber door. “*What, ho!* My lord, my lord!”

What noise is this? thinks Othello—just as Desdemona stirs. *Not dead? Not yet quite dead? I that am cruel am yet merciful; I would not have thee linger in thy pain.* He presses the pillow down again, using both hands. *So... so....*

Emilia calls, “*What, ho!* My lord, *my lord!*”

Othello stands, holding the pillow. “Who’s there?”

“Oh, good my lord, I would speak a word with you!”

Yes, ’tis Emilia. “By and by,” he calls. He looks at Desdemona. *She’s dead.*

He faces the door, in a daze. *’Tis likely she comes to speak of Cassio’s death.* He starts— *A noise was here!* He looks quickly at the bed. *Hmh—no more moving. Still as the grave.*

Shall she come in? Were’t good? —I think she stirs again! No. What’s best to do? If she come in, she’ll surely speak to my wife....

My wife! My wife!—what wife? I have no wife! The pillow falls.

Oh, insupportable, oh heavy hour! Methinks it should be, now, a huge eclipse of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe should gape at alteration!

Emilia knocks again. “I do *beseech* you that I may *speak* with you, O good my lord!”

I had forgot thee. “Oh, come in, Emilia... soft; by and by....” *Let me the curtains draw.* As he pulls the valances under the canopy closed, he pauses to look at the lady he considers damned. *Where art thou?*

He unlocks and opens the door. “What’s the matter with *thee* now?”

“Oh, my good lord, yonder *foul murder’s* done!”

“What—*now?*”

“But now, my lord!”

“It is the very error of the *moon*; she comes more nearer earth than she was wont, and makes men mad.”

“Cassio, my lord, hath killed a young Venetian called Roderigo!”

“Roderigo, *killed!* And *Cassio* killed!”

“No, Cassio is not killed.”

“Cassio *not* killèd!” Othello staggers. “Then *murder*’s out of tune!—and *sweet* revenge grows *harsh!*”

From the bed comes a weak moan: “Oh, falsely, *falsely* murderèd!”

Emilia moves forward. “*Alas*, what *cry* is that?”

Othello blocks her way. “That? *What?*”

“*Out*, and *alas!*” cries Emilia, pushing past him. “That was *my lady*’s voice!” She sweeps aside the curtains and sees Desdemona. “*Help! Help, ho! Help!* Oh, lady, speak *again!* Sweet *Desdemona!* Oh, sweet mistress, *speak!*”

The lady opens her eyes. “A *guiltless* death I die....”

“Oh, who hath *done* this deed?” asks Emilia, aghast.

“*Nobody*—I *myself*. Farewell... Commend me to my kind lord....” Emilia grasps her hand. “Oh, *farewell*,” whispers Desdemona, smiling faintly at Othello. And then she dies.

He seems surprised. “Why, how could she be *murdered?*”

Emilia closes the lady’s eyes, tears running from her own. “*Alas*, who *knows?*” Gently she covers Desdemona’s face with the edge of one of her wedding sheets.

Othello presses. “You heard her say herself it was not *I!*”

Emilia looks at him coldly. “She said so. *I* must needs report the *truth!*”

“She has—like a *liar!*—*gone to burning hell!*” cries Othello. “’*Twas* I that killed her!”

“Oh, the more *angel* she!—and you the blacker *devil!*”

Othello declaims in righteousness: “She turned to *folly*, and she was a *whore!*”

Emilia defies him. “Thou dost *belie* her!—and thou art a *devil!*”

“She was false as *water!*”

“Thou art *rash* as *fire* to say that she was false! Oh, she was heavenly *true!*”

Othello shakes his head. “Cassio did *top her!*—ask thy husband else! Oh, I were damnèd beneath all depth in Hell but that I did proceed upon *just* grounds to this extremity! Thy husband knew it all!”

“My husband?”

“Thy husband.”

“That she was false to wedlock?”

“Aye, with Cassio! Nay, had she been *true*, if heaven would make me such another *world*, of one entire and perfect *chrysolite*,”—a golden-yellow gem, “I’d not have sold her for it!”

“My *husband*.”

“Aye, ’twas he that told me first! An *honest* man he is, and hates the slime that sticks on filthy deeds!”

Emilia cries, furious: “My *husband!*”

“What needs this iteration, woman?—I say thy husband!”

Emilia looks at the bed. “O mistress, *villainy* hath *made* *mocks* with love!

“My husband say that she was false!”

“*He*, woman! I say *thy husband!*—dost understand the *word?* My *friend*, thy *husband*, honest, honest *Iago!*”

“If he say *so*, may his pernicious soul *rot half a grain a day!*” shrieks Emilia. “He *lies* to the *heart!*” She points at Othello. “She was *too fond* of her most *filthy bargain!*”

Othello starts angrily toward her.

“Do thy worst!” she cries, facing him. “This deed of thine is no more worthy *heaven* than *thou* wast worthy *her!*”

“*Peace*, you were best!” warns Othello.

Emilia spits at him. "Thou hast not *half* that power to do me harm as I have to *be hurt!*
"O gull! O dolt! As ignorant as dirt! Thou hast done a deed..." Othello draws his rapier.
"I care not for thy sword!" she cries, backing to the door. "I'll make thee *known*, though I lose *twenty* lives!

"*Help! Help, ho! Help!*" she calls. "*The Moor hath killed my mistress! Murder! Murder!*"

In the corridor, walking down from the guest quarters, Montano has been listening to Gratiano's account of the violent occurrence in town; they rush into the room, followed by Iago.

"What is the matter?" asks Montano. "How now, general?"

"Oh, are you come, Iago?" cries Emilia. "You have done *well*, that men must lay their *murders* on your neck!"

"What is the matter?" he demands.

Emilia points at Othello. "*Dispute* this villain, if thou be'st a *man*: he says thou told'st him that his wife was *false!* I know thou didst not—thou'rt not *such a villain!* *Speak*, for my heart is full!"

Iago shrugs. "I told him what I thought, and told no more than what he found, himself, was apt and true."

"But did you ever tell him she was false?"

"I did."

"*You told a lie!*" cries Emilia, "*an odious, damnèd lie!*—upon my soul, a *lie*, a *wicked lie!* *She*, false with *Cassio*—did you say *with Cassio?*"

"With Cassio, mistress," Iago replies. "Go to; charm your tongue," he orders, waving her away.

"I will *not* charm my tongue!" insists Emilia. "I am *bound to speak!*—my *mistress* here lies *murderèd in her bed!*"

The others now look. "*Oh, heavens forfend!*" cries Gratiano.

Emilia faces Iago. "And *your reports* have *set the murderer on!*"

"Nay, stare not, masters," Othello tells the gentlemen. "It is true, indeed."

Gratiano regards his cousin's killer. "'Tis a *strange truth!*"

"Oh, *monstrous* act!" gasps Montano.

"*Villainy, villainy, villainy!*" wails Emilia. "I think upon't—I think I *smell't!* —Oh, *villainy!* —I *thought* so! Then I'll kill *myself* for *grief!* *Oh, villainy, villainy!*"

Iago tries to push her to the door. "*What*, are you *mad?* I charge you, get you home!"

Emilia breaks away. "Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak! 'Twas proper I obey him—but not *now!* Perchance, Iago, I will *ne'er* go home!"

Othello has been staring at Desdemona. He groans sorrowfully, and sits down, sobbing, beside her on the bed.

Emilia berates him: "Nay, lay thee down and *roar*, for thou hast killed the *sweetest innocent* that *e'er* did lift up eye!"

Othello rises, grief-stricken, but angry. "Oh, she was *foul!*" Wiping away tears, he looks at Lodovico. "I scarce did know you, Uncle. There lies your niece, whose breath, indeed, these hands have newly stopped! I know this act shows horrible and grim—"

"Poor *Desdemona!*" breathes Gratiano. "I am *glad* thy father's dead! Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief sheared his old thread in twain. Did he live now, *this* sight would make him do a *desperate* turn!—yea, curse his *better* angel away from his side, and fall to *reprobation!*"

Othello pleads his case. "'Tis pitiful—but yet Iago knows that she with Cassio hath the act of *shame a thousand times* committed! Cassio *confessed* it! And she did gratify his amorous works with that recognizance and pledge of love which I first gave her—I *saw* it in his *hand!* It was a handkerchief, an antique token my father gave my mother."

Emilia is stunned. "O *Heaven!* O heavenly powers!"

Iago glares at her. "*Home! Hold your peace!*"

“Twill out, *'twill out!*” she cries. “I, *peace? No!*—I will speak as liberal as the *north!*”—winter’s fierce wind. “Let heaven and men and devils, let them all, *all, all cry shame* against me, yet I’ll *speak!*”

Iago grasps the hilt of his rapier. “Be wise, and get you *home!*”

“I will not!” Iago draws and tries to stab her—but she has backed away too fast.

Gratiano draws his own weapon and blocks Iago. “*Fie!* Your *sword* upon a *woman?*”

Emilia scowls. “Oh, *thou dull Moor!* That handkerchief thou speak’st of *I found* by fortune, and did give my *husband!*—for *often*, with a solemn earnestness, more than indeed belonged to such a trifle, he begged of me to *steal* it!”

Iago shouts, “*Villainous whore!*”

Emilia transfixes Othello with her glare. “She give it Cassio? *No! Alas, I found it*, and I did give’t *my husband!*”

“*Filth*, thou *liest!*” cries Iago.

“By heaven I do *not!* I do *not*, gentlemen!” She still watches Othello. “Oh, murderous *coxcomb!* What should such a *fool* do with so good a woman?”

Realization has overtaken Othello. “Are there no *stones* in heaven but what serve for the rumbling of thunder?” He draws his sword. “*Precious villain!*” He runs the blade at Iago.

But the lieutenant leaps away, avoiding the thrust—and he stabs Emilia in the back, then bolts from the room. Othello stands, confounded, as Montano takes away his sword.

Gratiano has caught Emilia. “The woman *falls!* Surely he hath killed his *wife!*”

“*Aye, aye,*” she groans. “Oh, lay me by my mistress’ side.”

“*He’s gone,*” says Gratiano, helping her to the bed, “but his wife’s *killed!*”

“’Tis a notorious *villain!*” cries Montano. “Take you this weapon which I have here recovered from the Moor,” he tells Gratiano. “Come, guard the door without!—let him not pass, but *kill him* rather! I’ll after that same villain, for ’tis a *damnèd slave!*”

They both go out, closing the door behind them.

Devastated, Othello stands, his powerful hands dangling, and silently weeps. *I am not valiant, neither; every puny whipster gets my sword! But why should honour outlive honesty?—let it go, all!*

Emilia eases herself slowly, painfully, down to kneel beside the bed, blood now staining her dress. “What did thy song bode, lady? Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan, and die with music.”

As she clasps Desdemona’s hand, she sings, softly, with ineffable sadness: “*Willow, willow, willow.*”

She regards the general solemnly. “Moor, she was *chaste*. She *loved* thee, cruel Moor.”

Emilia’s voice fades as she weakens. “So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true! So speaking as I think, I die... I die...”

Othello, stricken, turns away, eyes closed, head throbbing in agony.

After a moment he looks up, and moves slowly to a chest of drawers. *I have another weapon in this chamber; it is a sword of Spain, of the icy brook’s tempering. Here it is.* He calls out, toward the door, “I must *come forth!*”

“If thou *attempt it*, it will cost thee *dear!*” replies Gratiano from beyond the door. “Thou hast no weapon, and perforce must suffer!”

“Look in upon me, then, and speak with me,” says Othello, “or, naked as I am, I will assault thee!”

Gratiano opens the door and comes in warily. “What is the matter?”

Othello slides the gleaming steel from its costly sheath. “Behold, I *have* a weapon!—a better never did itself sustain upon a soldier’s thigh!” He looks sadly at the blade, raising it before him. “I have seen the day that, with this little arm and this good sword, I have made my way through more impediments than *twenty times* your stop!”

“But, oh, vain boast! Who can control his fate? ’Tis not so *now*,” he admits. “Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed; here is *my* journey’s end, here is my terminus, and very sea-mark of my utmost sail.”

Gratiano moves toward the door, fearful despite the general’s grave calm.

“Do you go back, dismayed? ’Tis a lost fear!—make but a rush against *Othello*’s breast and he *retires*.”

“Where should *Othello go*?”

He turns to the bed. “Now—how dost thou look *now*, O ill-starrèd wench!—pale as thy smock. When we shall meet at *compt*,”—Judgment, “this look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven, and *fiends* will *snatch* at it!”

He touches her cheek. “Cold, *cold*, my girl! Even,” he says, his voice breaking, “like thy *chastity*!”

He weeps, utterly wretched. “O cursèd, *cursèd slave*! *Whip me*, ye devils, from the possession of this heavenly sight! Blow me about in *winds*! *Roast me in sulphur*!—wash me in deep-down *gulfs of liquid fire*!”

“O Desdemona! *Desdemona*! Dead!” He falls to his knees, sobbing in convulsion.

Gratiano glances behind him, then moves aside. Montano, just returning, has encountered Signior Lodovico, the injured officer, and several troops. Two soldiers carry in Cassio, strapped onto the chair.

“Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?” demands Lodovico.

“That’s he who was *Othello*; here I am.”

Lodovico turns to the door. “Where is *that viper*? Bring the villain forth!” Two men of the guard haul in Iago—a prisoner, hatless, arms bound behind him. Seizing him roughly by the shoulders, they shove him forward to stand facing the general.

“I look down towards his *feet*,” says *Othello*, as if expecting cloven hooves. “That’s but a *fable*; if thou be a devil, I cannot kill thee.” Suddenly he swings the sword up, thrusting it at Iago and piercing his side, despite dodging. A soldier quickly grabs the arm wielding the weapon.

“Wrench his sword from him!” orders Lodovico.

Iago winces as the twisting blade is pulled free. He smirks “I bleed, sir—but not *killed*!”

“I am not sorry, neither,” *Othello* tells him. “I’d *have* thee live—for in *my* sense ’tis *happiness* to die!”

Lodovico shakes his head, amazed. “Oh, thou, *Othello*, thou wert once so *good*!—fall’n to the scheming of a cursèd *slave*! What shall be *said* of thee?”

“Why, anything!—an *honourable* murderer, if you will; for nought did I in hate, but all in *honour*,” says *Othello*—scathing himself with irony.

Lodovico stands near Iago. “This wretch hath partly confessed his villainy. Did you and he consent in Cassio’s death?” he asks *Othello*.

“Aye.”

Cassio is astonished. “Dear general, I never gave you *cause*!”

Othello nods. “I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.” He looks at Lodovico. “Will you, I pray, demand of that demi-devil *why* he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?”

Iago sneers. “Demand me nothing; what you *know* you know.” His hypocritical jealousy would sound even more absurd now that he’s killed his wife. “From this time forth I never will speak *word*.”

“What, not to *pray*?” asks Lodovico.

Gratiano takes another tack: “*Torments* will ope your lips,” he assures the lieutenant.

Othello hopes so. “Well, *thou* dost *best*!”

Lodovico tells him. “Sir, you shall understand what hath befallen which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo, and here another. The one of them imports the death of Cassio, to be undertook by *Roderigo*.”

Othello seethes. “Oh, *villain*!”

“Most *heathenish* and most *gross!*” cries Cassio.

“Now here’s another paper, found in his pocket too,” says Lodovico, “and this, it seems, discontented Roderigo meant to have sent to this damnèd villain, but that, belike in the interim Iago came and satisfied him.”

“Oh, the pernicious caitiff!” Othello pauses; he needs to know. “How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief that was my wife’s?”

“I found it in my chamber,” says Cassio. He motions toward Iago. “And he himself confessed but even now that there he dropped it, for a special purpose which wrought to his desire.”

In a spasm of pain, Othello pounds his fists against his own head. “O *fool! fool! fool!*”

Cassio continues: “There is, besides, in Roderigo’s letter, how he upbraids Iago for making him defy me upon the watch—whereon it came that I was cast out.” He has more news from the citadel about Roderigo: “And even but now he *spake*, after long seeming dead: Iago *hurt* him—Iago *set him on!*”

Lodovico tells the fallen general, “You must forsake this room and go with us. Your power in your command is taken off, and *Cassio* rules in Cyprus.”

He grasps the sagging Iago by the hair to raise his pain-contorted face. “As for *this* slave, if there be any *cunning cruelty* that can *torment him much!*—and *hold him long!*—it shall be *his!*”

He turns to Othello. “*You* shall a close prisoner rest, till that the nature of your crime be known to the Venetian state.” He nods to the soldiers. “Come, bring him away.”

Othello holds up a hand. “Soft, you—a *word* or two before you go!

“I have done the state some *service*, and they know’t!” He looks down, sadly. “No more of that.

“I pray you, in your letters, when you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me *as I am*: nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.

“Then must you speak of one that loved not wisely, but *too well!*—of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme! Of one whose hand, like the base heathen’s, threw away a pearl richer than all his tribe!—of one whose subduèd eyes, albeit unused to the melting mood, dropped *tears* as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinable gum!

“Set you down that—and say besides, that once in Aleppo, where a malignant and a turbaned Turk beat a *Venetian* and traduced the state, I took the circumcisèd *dog* by the *throat* and *smote him—thus!*” He pulls a dagger from under his shirt and plunges the slender blade in deep, just below his heart.

“Oh, *bloody* conclusion!” cries Lodovico, as Othello staggers to the bed.

“All that’s spoken is *marred!*” says Gratiano, shaking his head.

Othello tells Desdemona, “I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this: killing *myself*, to *die* upon a kiss!” He leans, touches her lips with his, then falls. The knife is driven upward. He shivers, and dies.

Cassio stares, stunned. “This did I fear, for he was great of heart, but I thought he had no weapon!” he says of his general.

Lodovico grasps Iago’s shirt. “O Spartan *dog*, more fell than *anguish*, *hunger*, or the *sea!* Look on the tragic loading of this *bed!*—this is *thy* work!”

He tells a soldier, “The object poisons sight; let it be hid!” The man pulls the curtains closed.

“Gratiano, keep the house, and seize upon the fortunes of the Moor, for they succeed on you.

“To *you*, lord governor,” he tells Casio, “remains the censure of this hellish villain—the time, the place, the *torture!* Oh, *enforce it!*”

“Myself will straight aboard, and to the state this heavy act with heavy heart relate.”