

# Othello

Act III, Scene 3

## CHARACTERS

**Desdemona** — daughter of Senator Brabantio of Venice and the wife of General Othello. Desdemona is considered by some to be innocent and naive; others say she is blinded by her deep love for her husband Othello, who is a Moor — a man of another race or color.

**Emilia** — wife of the villainous Iago. She is outspoken, somewhat annoying, and oftentimes cynical, probably due to the years of living with her husband. She is also Desdemona's friend and confidante.

**Cassio** — a young and handsome lieutenant in Othello's army.

**Othello** — a general in the Venetian army. He is a seasoned warrior, an honest man, and is newly married to Desdemona.

**Iago** — He is considered by many to be Shakespeare's consummate villain. He is conniving, two-faced, and cannot be trusted. Also, he is married to Emilia.

This scene, oftentimes referred to as the "temptation scene," is one of the most famous in all of drama. It shows how a man, despite his power in the military and the respect he receives from society, can be deceived into believing that his wife had been unfaithful. Othello is indeed considered wise because of his rise in the military ranks; however, Iago, the conniving villain, sees that his wisdom is clouded by his deep love for his new bride, Desdemona.

Iago is upset: he has been overlooked for promotion in Othello's army; to make matters worse, Cassio, who Iago believes is a lesser soldier, has been appointed to lieutenant by Othello. Because of this, he vows revenge and designs a plot to hurt both Cassio and Othello.

This scene opens in the castle garden, and Desdemona is promising Cassio that she can persuade Othello to reinstate him to rank of lieutenant. (He lost the rank after accidentally wounding Montano, the governor of Cyprus, in a drunken brawl while trying to seem a good soldier and friend to Iago.) As Othello and Iago enter, Cassio leaves hurriedly. After Cassio exits, Desdemona begins her plea to Othello for Cassio's reinstatement.

However, after Desdemona and Emilia leave, Iago begins his sinister plot. He begins dropping hints and innuendos that Desdemona is

possibly having an affair with Cassio, and, in many ways, he begins to undermine Othello's faith in Desdemona's innocence.

Iago exits and Desdemona returns. Othello complains of having a headache, and she tries to soothe it by placing her cherished strawberry-embroidered handkerchief (one given to her by Othello) to his head. Othello angrily pushes it away from his head and it falls, unnoticed, to the floor. As they depart, it is left behind. (This is very important!)

Emilia enters, notices the handkerchief, and innocently gives it to her husband Iago. After she exits, Othello reenters and demands Iago to give proof of Desdemona's infidelity. Iago responds to this by claiming that he overheard Cassio talking in his sleep about making love to Desdemona. He also says that he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with a strawberry-embroidered handkerchief. Enraged, Othello falls to his knees. He is joined by Iago, and together they vow revenge: furthermore, Othello promises that Iago will be his new lieutenant.

When performing this scene, it is important to note how clever and conniving Iago really is: he seizes the opportunity of Desdemona innocently speaking of Cassio and plants the seed of distrust in Othello. He knows that man, being human, is flawed and subject to fears and irrational suspicions.

1 But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,  
 2 Chaos is come again.  
 3 IAGO: My noble lord —  
 4 OTHELLO: What dost thou say, Iago?  
 5 IAGO: Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,  
 6 Know of your love?  
 7 OTHELLO: He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?  
 8 IAGO: But for a satisfaction of my thought;  
 9 No further harm.  
 10 OTHELLO: Why of thy thought, Iago?  
 11 IAGO: I did not think he had been acquainted with her.  
 12 OTHELLO: O, yes, and went between us very oft.  
 13 IAGO: Indeed?  
 14 OTHELLO: Indeed? Ay, indeed! Discern'st thou aught in that?  
 15 Is he not honest?  
 16 IAGO: Honest, my lord?  
 17 OTHELLO: Honest? Ay, honest.  
 18 IAGO: My lord, for aught I know.  
 19 OTHELLO: What dost thou think?  
 20 IAGO: Think, my lord?  
 21 OTHELLO: Think, my lord?  
 22 By heaven, he echoes me,  
 23 As if there were some monster in his thought  
 24 Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something.  
 25 I heard thee say even now, thou lik'st not that,  
 26 When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?  
 27 And when I told thee he was of my counsel  
 28 In my whole course of wooing, thou cried'st "Indeed?"  
 29 And didst contract and purse thy brow together,  
 30 As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain  
 31 Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,  
 32 Show me thy thought.  
 33 IAGO: My lord, you know I love you.  
 34 OTHELLO: I think thou dost;  
 35 And, for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty

1 And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath,  
 2 Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more;  
 3 For such things in a false disloyal knave  
 4 Are tricks of custom; but in a man that's just  
 5 They are close dilations, working from the heart  
 6 That passion cannot rule.  
 7 IAGO: For Michael Cassio,  
 8 I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.  
 9 OTHELLO: I think so too.  
 10 IAGO: Men should be what they seem;  
 11 Or those that be not, would they might seem none!  
 12 OTHELLO: Certain, men should be what they seem.  
 13 IAGO: Why then, I think Cassio's an honest man.  
 14 OTHELLO: Nay, yet there's more in this.  
 15 I prithee speak to me, as to thy thinkings,  
 16 As thou dost ruminare, and give thy worst of thoughts  
 17 The worst of words.  
 18 IAGO: Good my lord, pardon me.  
 19 Though I am bound to every act of duty,  
 20 I am not bound to that all slaves are free to.  
 21 Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false,  
 22 As where's that palace whereinto foul things  
 23 Sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so pure  
 24 But some uncleanly apprehensions  
 25 Keep leets and law days, and in session sit  
 26 With meditations lawful?  
 27 OTHELLO: Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,  
 28 If thou but think'st him wronged, and mak'st his ear  
 29 A stranger to thy thoughts.  
 30 IAGO: I do beseech you —  
 31 Though I perchance am vicious in my guess  
 32 (As I confess it is my nature's plague  
 33 To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy  
 34 Shapes faults that are not) — that your wisdom  
 35 From one that so imperfectly conceits

1 Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble  
 2 Out of his scattering and unsure observance.  
 3 It were not for your quiet nor your good,  
 4 Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,  
 5 To let you know my thoughts.  
 6 OTHELLO: What dost thou mean?  
 7 IAGO: Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,  
 8 Is the immediate jewel of their souls.  
 9 Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;  
 10 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;  
 11 But he that filches from me my good name  
 12 Robs me of that which not enriches him  
 13 And makes me poor indeed.  
 14 OTHELLO: By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!  
 15 IAGO: You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;  
 16 Nor shall not whilst 'tis in my custody.  
 17 OTHELLO: Ha!  
 18 IAGO: O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!  
 19 It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock  
 20 The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss  
 21 Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;  
 22 But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er  
 23 Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves!  
 24 OTHELLO: O misery!  
 25 IAGO: Poor and content is rich, and rich enough;  
 26 But riches fineless is as poor as winter  
 27 To him that ever fears he shall be poor.  
 28 Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend  
 29 From jealousy!  
 30 OTHELLO: Why, why is this?  
 31 Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,  
 32 To follow still the changes of the moon  
 33 With fresh suspicions? No! To be once in doubt  
 34 Is once to be resolved. Exchange me for a goat  
 35 When I shall turn the business of my soul

1 To such exsufficate and blown surmises,  
 2 Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous  
 3 To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,  
 4 Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well.  
 5 Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.  
 6 Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw  
 7 The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,  
 8 For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago;  
 9 I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;  
 10 And on the proof there is no more but this —  
 11 Away at once with love or jealousy!  
 12 IAGO: I am glad of it; for now I shall have reason  
 13 To show the love and duty that I bear you  
 14 With franker spirit. Therefore, as I am bound,  
 15 Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.  
 16 Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;  
 17 Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure.  
 18 I would not have your free and noble nature,  
 19 Out of self-bounty, be abused. Look to't.  
 20 I know our country disposition well:  
 21 In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks  
 22 They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience  
 23 Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.  
 24 OTHELLO: Dost thou say so?  
 25 IAGO: She did deceive her father, marrying you;  
 26 And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,  
 27 She loved them most.  
 28 OTHELLO: And so she did.  
 29 IAGO: Why, go to then!  
 30 She that, so young, could give out such a seeming  
 31 To seal her father's eyes up close as oak —  
 32 He thought 'twas witchcraft — but I am much to blame.  
 33 I humbly do beseech you of your pardon  
 34 For too much loving you.  
 35 OTHELLO: I am bound to thee for ever.