

THE OTHELLO/Y York

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Adapted from Shakespeare's Othello

by Y York

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Note: Soliloquies were developed into raps by Y York with Bulldog, who also played Iago in the premiere in Hawai'i. Rapped versions of bracketed text are included at the end of the script.

CHARACTERS: Othello, Iago, Desdemona, Cassio.

PLACE: Various locations on the island of Cyprus.

PROLOGUE

(IAGO, DESDEMONA, and CASSIO dance. OTHELLO enters and dances with DESDEMONA, gives her a handkerchief. Then CASSIO and DESDEMONA dance; IAGO whispers...)

IAGO. Beware my lord of Jealousy, it is the green eyed monster that mocks the meet it feeds on.
Beware my lord of Jealousy, it is the green eyed monster that mocks the meat it feeds on.

(Exit DESDEMONA with CASSIO, then OTHELLO.)

IAGO. Mock the meat, Mock the meat, mock mock, mock the meat.

Scene 1

(Cyprus, evening. IAGO.)

IAGO. Othello, the savage moor, has stolen the fair Desdemona and taken her to wife. The din and cry from outraged Venetian fathers—including her own! was stifled by our Senate—The Senators did not hang the infidel from the highest tree but promoted him to the highest rank of general. In Othello lies all their hope that Venice may defeat the hated Turkish fleet. So the hot-blooded thick-lips prevails as deity, soldier, and as husband. Even now, our “general” fights the Turks in a broiling sea as his virgin bride awaits him here—on the Venetian outpost of Cyprus.

As for me, as for me...

[I do forever hold Othello in my hate.

Three great ones of the city tried in vain to make me his lieutenant, but he evaded them with meandering bombast horribly padded with expressions of war; and, in conclusion, Nondelivers my commission, saying, ‘I have already chose my officer.’ One Michael Cassio, a Florentine, that never set a squadron in the field, nor the division of a battle knows more than a spinster; this librarian Cassio must his lieutenant be, and I, I! who have proved myself a peerless leader on battle grounds both Christian and heathen—and I, God bless the mark! This savage Moor’s corporal. I follow him but to serve my turn upon him: Not I for love and duty, but only to seem so. I am not what I am.]

(Or Rap 1.)

(Enter CASSIO.)

Good Cassio—

CASSIO. O Iago, bless your safe landing here with Desdemona.

IAGO. What of Othello?

CASSIO. I have lost him on a dangerous sea.

IAGO. Is he well shipp’d, think you?

(Enter DESDEMONA.)

CASSIO. I know not—(Seeing her.) More of this later—O, behold, hail to thee, my lady! and the grace of heaven be with you.

DESDEMONA. Thank you, valiant friend. What tidings can you tell me of my lord?

CASSIO. Know I aught...but that he’s well and will be soon come.

DESDEMONA. O, but I fear...How lost you company?

CASSIO. The great contention of the sea and skies parted our fellowship. Think not on it.

DESDEMONA. I can think of nothing but Othello.

CASSIO. Then of good times to come and happy courtship past.

DESDEMONA. A courtship lighted by the sun.

CASSIO. Speak of it, that your words might lighten the shadows.

[DESDEMONA. ...My father loved him; oft invited him; still question'd him the story of his life—the battles, sieges, fortunes, that he had passed.

IAGO. Your father's love set sail upon your marriage day.

DESDEMONA. (Snapping.) Ay, but I dwell now on happier times. Othello told all, even from boyish days, up to the very moment of our meeting; he spoke of most disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood and field, of hair-breadth escapes—of being sold into slavery and subsequent redemption. He spoke of endless caves and empty deserts, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven. His story being done, it was my chance to speak. I gave him a world of sighs: I swore, in faith, it was strange, it was passing strange, it was pitiful, wondrous strange, saying, I wish I had not heard it, yet I wish that heaven had made me such a man, adding if Othello had a friend who loved me, he should but teach that friend how to tell his story and that would woo me. I loved him for the dangers he had pass'd, and he loved me that I did pity them.]

(Or Rap 2.)

IAGO. Let me live so long as to have such flattery heaped upon my head.

DESDEMONA. It is true!

IAGO. Ah, true! Sadly there be but two eyes can verify.

CASSIO. He means only to lighten your heart, my lady.

DESDEMONA. Myself would welcome the unburdening.

CASSIO. Then tell us how Othello praises you.

DESDEMONA. I am not privy to his private talk.

CASSIO. Let Iago praise thee by the use of Othello's sweet tongue.

DESDEMONA. Yes. What wouldst Othello say of me, if he should praise?

IAGO. Let me not presume to borrow Othello's tongue, but if with mine own—O gentle friend—do not put me to it; for I am nothing, if not critical.

DESDEMONA. Come, Iago. I am not merry; let me trick my sadness by seeming otherwise. Come now, how wouldst thou praise me?

IAGO. I am about it. If you be fair and wise, fairness and wit, the one's for use, the other useth it.

DESDEMONA. How if I be plain and witty?

IAGO. Witty but plain has only one duty, let wit go forth and proclaim plain is beauty.

CASSIO. Worse and worse.

DESDEMONA. How if fair and foolish?

IAGO. The fool who takes her beauty to market, returns that eve baking bread in her basket.

DESDEMONA. O heavy ignorance! Praise me, Iago. I am a deserving woman, one in full authority of my merit.

IAGO. Very well....You are fair and never proud, have tongue at will and yet are never loud. When you are angered—revenge being nigh—you bid anger stay put and displeasure fly. You think, but never disclose your mind, see suitors following and never look behind. You have a future that looms so bright...

DESDEMONA. To do what?

IAGO. To suckle fools and wallow in the trite.

DESDEMONA. O most lame and impotent conclusion!

CASSIO. He is common, madam. You may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar.

IAGO. (Aside.) He takes her by the palm. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio.

(Fanfare.)

IAGO. The Moor!

DESDEMONA. Thank the Heavens.

(Enter OTHELLO.)

OTHELLO. O my fair warrior.

DESDEMONA. O my Othello.

OTHELLO. It gives me wonder great as my contentment to see you here before me. O my soul's joy! If after every tempest come such calms, may the winds blow till they have waken'd death! Sweet love, if it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy.

DESDEMONA. Do not speak of dying! The heavens forbid all but that our loves and comforts should increase as our days do grow!

OTHELLO. Amen, Powers! I cannot speak enough of contentment; it stops me here; it is too much of joy: from this moment, no more of discord. Only this (Kissing her.) and this and this!

IAGO. (Aside.) O, you are well tuned now! But I'll set down the pegs to turn your harmony into dissonance.

OTHELLO. News, Cassio, our wars are done, the Turks are drown'd in that same tumultuous sea that did separate our ships. See to it that every man put himself into triumph—to whatever sport and revels his addiction leads him, for, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of my wedding. Let there be full liberty of feasting from this moment— But Lieutenant, look to the revelers that their festivities not outsport their discretion.

CASSIO. Iago hath direction what to do... (Othello frowns at him.) but, notwithstanding, with my personal eye will I look to it.

OTHELLO. Iago is most honest. Michael, good night. Tomorrow at your earliest send word to the Venetian Senators that Othello prevails. Come, my dear love, once more well met at Cyprus.

(Exit OTHELLO, DESDEMONA.)

CASSIO. We must to the watch.

IAGO. Not yet, Lieutenant. Our general bids us make merry in celebration of his wedding night—he hath not yet made wanton the night with his bride, and she is sport for Jove. Let our revels drown out the love sounds from their chamber—

CASSIO. (Shocked.) She's a most exquisite lady.

IAGO. And I'll warrant her full of game.

CASSIO. She is a most fresh and delicate creature.

IAGO. What an eye she has! methinks it sounds a parley of provocation.

CASSIO. An inviting eye; and yet methinks right modest.

IAGO. And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love?

CASSIO. Whatever she is, it is not ours to speak on!

IAGO. Well, happiness to their sheets. Come, Lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine here.

CASSIO. No, Iago.

IAGO. Come, come. Here without lurk several citizens from the isle that would drink a cup to the health of savage Othello.

CASSIO. I tell you, no. I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking; I could well wish custom would invent some other fashion of entertainment.

IAGO. O, but one cup.

CASSIO. I am unfortunate in the infirmity, my yesterday becomes a blank page. I dare not task my weakness.

IAGO. What, man? You insult our hosts. It is a night of great celebration. Would you deny the islanders their hospitality?!

CASSIO. ...Where are they?

IAGO. There at the gate; I pray you, make but one toast with them.

CASSIO. I'll do it; but it dislikes me. (Exit.)

IAGO. [If I can fasten but one cup upon him, he'll be as full of quarrel and offence as my young mistress's dog. In this way I shall put Cassio in some action that may offend Othello. Then I will put the Moor into an anger so strong that judgment cannot cure him. 'Tis here, but yet confused: Knavery's plain face is never seen 'til used.]

(Or Rap 3.)

(Re-enter CASSIO; with a cup of wine.)

CASSIO. 'Fore God, they have given me a rouse.

IAGO. Good faith, it is a little one; not past a pint, as I am a soldier. (Pours more into CASSIO's cup.) Some wine, ho!

(Sings.)

And let me the cannikin clink, "Clink"
 And let me the cannikin clink, "Clink"
 A soldier is a man, a life is but a span
 Why then. Let a soldier drink!

CASSIO. And let me the cannikin clink, "Clink"
 And let me the cannikin clink, "Clink"
 Uh... uh.....(He cannot think of a rhyme.)
 To the health of our general!!

IAGO. (Sings.)

O Sweet England!
 King Stephen was a worthy peer
 His breeches cost him but a crown—
 He held those pennies all too dear
 And gave the tailor but a frown.
 The tailor was of high renown
 The king he was of low degree
 King Miser pulls the country down
 He wants to wear his clothes for free.
 More wine, ho! (Pours.)

CASSIO. 'Fore God, an excellent song.

IAGO. Will you hear it again?

CASSIO. No; I do not like this miser King. Well, God shall decide his fate. There be souls must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved.

IAGO. It's true, good lieutenant.

CASSIO. For mine own part, no offence to the general, nor any man of quality, I hope to be saved.

IAGO. My salvation I would find on earth.

CASSIO. How find an earthly salvation?

IAGO. With a savior like our friend, Desdemona.

CASSIO. (Offended.) She is not for you.

IAGO. Nay, it is a wild stallion mounts my young mare.

CASSIO. Treason, speaks thou, Man!

IAGO. Our general and his dam make the beast with two backs.

CASSIO. Were I you, corporal, I should keep my eyes and tongue out their bed.

IAGO. I would but taste their joy, good Cassio.

CASSIO. (Drawing sword.) You rogue! you rascal!

IAGO. But one taste!

CASSIO. I'll rip your tongue from your head.

IAGO. What? Rip my tongue from my head?

CASSIO. I'll make of your one head two.

(They fight.)

IAGO. Nay, good lieutenant. Here's a goodly watch indeed! Help, ho. (Shouts.) Othello, master. Lieutenant, sir, good sir. (Re-enter OTHELLO, seen by IAGO but not CASSIO.) Good Cassio, stop you! The town will rise: God's will, lieutenant, hold! You will be shamed forever.

(OTHELLO comes between them and subdues CASSIO.)

OTHELLO. Hold, for your lives!

IAGO. He has forgot all sense of place and duty. Hold! the general speaks to you; hold, hold, for shame!

OTHELLO. Why, how now—are we turned Turks? For Christian shame—he that stirs next dies upon his motion. (Brief pause.) How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?

CASSIO. I pray you, pardon me; I cannot speak.

OTHELLO. Now, by heaven, my blood begins my safer guides to rule; and passion attempts to lead the way: (To Cassio.) Give me to know how this foul brawl began. (Cassio shakes his head.) Iago! Who began it?

IAGO. I had rather have this tongue “ripped from my head” than it should do offence to Michael Cassio; yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general. I, making merry from your evening order did myself and Michael Cassio avail of one cup, no more, of wine—when from nowhere and upon no occasion did your Lieutenant draw his sword upon me. More of this matter I cannot report: But men are men, General; the best of us sometimes forget.

OTHELLO. I know, Iago, thy honesty and love doth mince this matter, making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee. But never more be officer of mine. (Silence, then enter DESDEMONA.) Look, if my gentle love be not raised up!

DESDEMONA. What's the matter?

OTHELLO. All's well now, sweeting; come away to bed. Iago, good night; look with care about the town, and reassure any whom this vile brawl distracted. Come, Desdemona: 'tis the soldier's life to have his balmy slumbers waked with strife.

(Exit OTHELLO and DESDEMONA. CASSIO moans.)

IAGO. What? Are you hurt, lieutenant?

CASSIO. Ay, past all surgery.

IAGO. Marry, heaven forbid!

CASSIO. Reputation, reputation, reputation! I have lost my reputation! The immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial.

IAGO. As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound. Reputation is an idle and 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 but now cast in his mood. You have but to ask, and he's again yours.

CASSIO. I will rather ask to be despised than to deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet an officer. O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!

IAGO. What caused in you such uproar? I did nothing to it.

CASSIO. I know not.

IAGO. ...Is it possible?

CASSIO. I remember nothing.

IAGO. A blank page—

CASSIO. O God, that men should put foul liquor in their mouths to steal away their brains and transform themselves into beasts!

IAGO. Come, you are too severe a moraler. You or any man living may be drunk at some time. I'll tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is now the general—confess yourself freely to her. Importune her help to put you in your place again.

CASSIO. ...You advise me well.

IAGO. You are in the right, man. Now, put this incident out of your mind that you might have a troubleless sleep. Good night, lieutenant.

CASSIO. Good night, my friend. I will trust to you and the virtuous Desdemona.

(Exit CASSIO.)

IAGO. The virtuous Desdemona... [In equal measure do I hate the Moor and love the lady. And if enjoyment of the lady is to me denied, than surely shall she bring happiness to no man. Yet shall she play some part...She with Cassio? Othello's soul is so entangled with her love that his desire for her shall play the god with his weak function. Somehow must I turn her virtue into pitch, and out of her own goodness make the net that shall enmesh them all.]

(Or Rap 4.)