

David Henry Wilson

IAGO

The Villain of Venice

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IAGO, The Villain of Venice

List of characters:

Emilia, late twenties
Othello, black, middle-aged
Montano, late twenties
Gratiano, middle-aged
Iago, late twenties
Lorenzo, middle-aged
Launcelot Gobbo, middle-aged
Solanio, middle-aged
Salerio, middle-aged
The Duke of Venice, old
Lodovico, late twenties
Shylock, old
Jessica, Shylock's daughter, middle-aged
P.J.Appleby, a middle-aged Texan
Miriam, black, middle-aged, Othello's sister
Othello Junior, mixed race, late twenties, Miriam's son
Sibylla, mixed race, 20 years old, Miriam's daughter
Cassio, about 30
Lucius, any age
Catullus, a guard, any age
Guards, attendants, citizens of Venice

Scenes: various locations on Cyprus, and in Venice and Belmont

PROLOGUE

(From *Othello*, Act V Sc. 2)

Cyprus. A chamber in the castle. Emilia screams off-stage, then enters, followed by Othello.

EMILIA: Help! Help! O help!

The Moor has killed my mistress! Murder! Murder!

Enter Montano, Gratiano, Iago.

MONTANO: What is the matter? How now, general?

EMILIA: O, are you come, Iago? You have done well,
That men must lay their murders on your neck.

ALL: What is the matter?

EMILIA: Disprove 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 art not such a villain.
Speak, for my heart is full.

IAGO: I told him what I thought, and told no more
Than what he found himself was apt and true.

EMILIA: But did you ever tell him she was false?

IAGO: I did.

EMILIA: You told a lie, an odious damned lie!

Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!

She false with Cassio? Did you say with Cassio?

IAGO: With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm your tongue.

EMILIA: I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak:
My mistress there lies murder'd in her bed.

ALL: O heavens forbend!

EMILIA: And your reports have set the murder on.

OTHELLO: Nay, stare not, masters, it is true indeed.

GRATIANO: 'Tis a strange truth. (*He goes off.*)

MONTANO; O monstrous act!

EMILIA: Villainy, villainy, villainy!

I think upon't – I think I smell't – O villainy!

I thought so then. – I'll kill myself for grief. –

O villainy, villainy!

IAGO; What, are you mad? I charge you, get you home.

EMILIA; Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak.

'Tis proper I obey him, but not now.

Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home.

OTHELLO: O! O! O!

He falls. Gratiano returns.

EMILIA: Nay, lay thee down and roar,

For thou hast kill'd the sweetest innocent

That e'er did lift up eye.

OTHELLO (*rising*): O, she was foul.

I scarce did know you, uncle. There lies your niece,

Whose breath indeed these hands have newly stopp'd.

I know this act shows terrible and grim.

GRATIANO: Poor Desdemon, I am glad thy father's dead.
 Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief
 Shore his old thread in twain. Did he live now,
 This sight would make him do a desperate turn,
 Yea, curse his better angel from his side,
 And fall to reprobation.

OTHELLO: 'Tis pitiful, but yet Iago knows
 That she with Cassio hath the act of shame
 A thousand times committed; Cassio confess'd 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: O God! O heavenly God!

IAGO: Zounds, hold your peace!

EMILIA: 'Twill out, it will! I hold my peace, sir, no,
 I'll be in speaking liberal as the air.
 Let heaven and men and devils, let 'em all,
 All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.

IAGO: Be wise and get you home.

EMILIA: I will not.

Iago draws his sword.

GRATIANO: Fie,
 Your sword upon a woman?

EMILIA: O 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 belong'd to such a trifle,
 He begg'd of me to steal it.

IAGO: Villainous whore!

EMILIA: She gave it Cassio? No, alas, I found it,
 And I did give't my husband.

IAGO: Filth, thou liest!

EMILIA: By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.
 O murderous coxcomb! What would such a fool
 Do with so good a wife?

OTHELLO: Are there no stones in heaven
 But what serves for the thunder? Precious villain!

He runs at Iago with his sword, but Iago parries the blow. Montano and Gratiano intervene, and in the scuffle Montano disarms Othello, while Iago stabs Emilia. She lets out a cry, and Gratiano turns to see her fall.

GRATIANO: The woman falls. Sure he has kill'd his wife.
Iago runs off. Lights out.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Cyprus. A dungeon in the castle. Lorenzo, Solanio, Salerio and Launcelot. They are all in their fifties, bearded, ragged and dirty. Lorenzo sits staring into space. Solanio and Salerio are asleep very close to each other, and Launcelot is scratching and examining himself.

LAUNCELOT: Little bastards!

He slaps himself.

SOLANIO: Can't you keep quiet, Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT: Well, they irrigate.

Another silence. Sounds of scuffling and groaning off stage.

GUARD (off): In you go then, devil-mouth!

Iago is flung into the dungeon, and lies groaning on the floor. Solanio and Salerio sit up and, like Launcelot, stare at the newcomer. Lorenzo takes no notice at all.

Eventually Launcelot goes to have a closer look.

LAUNCELOT: You all right? (To the others:) He's bleeding.

He goes to one corner and brings back a bowl of water and a cup.

SALERIO: Here, don't you waste our water on him, Launcelot!

LAUNCELOT: Only a drop. He's very sanguine.

Iago groans.

I come in peace with the waters of affliction, sir.

He bathes Iago's wounds.

Fff, messy.

Iago raises his head, drinks from the cup that Launcelot offers him.

SALERIO: Go easy on our water, will you?

LAUNCELOT: Nasty gash you've got in your side. That could turn sceptical.

IAGO: Who are you?

LAUNCELOT: Launcelot's the name. Launcelot Gobbo.

Iago drinks again, and does not spit.

IAGO: And you?

SALERIO: Salerio.

Iago looks at Solanio. Salerio nudges him.

SOLANIO: Oh! Solanio.

LAUNCELOT: And that's Lorenzo over there, but he's a bit...

He points to his head.

IAGO: (interested): Lorenzo.

LAUNCELOT: And yourself, good master?

IAGO: Iago. Lieutenant Iago.

LAUNCELOT: Lieutenant. (He salutes.) Did you get on the wrong side of the general, sir?

IAGO: The general got on the wrong side of me.

LAUNCELOT: Begging your pardon, sir, but you don't look very victorious.

IAGO: I'm alive. The general is dead.

SALERIO: Who's dead?

IAGO: Othello.

SALERIO: The Moor?

IAGO: You knew him?

SALERIO: You hear that, Solanio? The Moor's dead!

SOLANIO: Maybe they'll let us out now.
He and Salerio come closer to Iago.

SALERIO: How did he die?

IAGO: Killed himself.

SALERIO: Then let him roast in hell where he belongs.

LAUNCELOT: He that taketh his life shall lose it.

IAGO: You hated Othello, then?

SALERIO: No man more.

SOLANIO: Why did he kill himself?

IAGO: He was told that his wife had been unfaithful, so he killed her and then himself.

SALERIO: So why did they throw you in here?

IAGO: It was I that told him his wife was unfaithful.

SOLANIO: And was she?

IAGO: No.

They all laugh.

SOLANIO: All that for a woman!

SALERIO: I knew he was mad.

SOLANIO: Well, you've done a service to mankind, if not to yourself.

IAGO: What was the cause of your hatred?

LAUNCELOT: It was him that had us incinerated here.

SOLANIO: Who's governor now?

IAGO: Cassio.

SALERIO: Never heard of him.

SOLANIO: Does he know about us?

SALERIO: Nobody knows about us. We're forgotten men. Is this Cassio your enemy too?

IAGO: He is at the moment.

SOLANIO: Then he won't help.

IAGO: Give me some more water.

Launcelot gives him a cupful.

SALERIO: That's all we've got!

SOLANIO: Sh! He's a lieutenant.

SALERIO: That's not a lieutenant's uniform.

SOLANIO: True.

SALERIO: Excuse me, lieutenant, but why aren't you wearing a lieutenant's uniform?

IAGO: Are you querying my rank?

SALERIO (*cowed*): No, sir, but...

IAGO: I was his Moorship's ancient, but shortly before he died, he made me his lieutenant. And you? I take it you were soldiers?

SALERIO: Yes, sir.

IAGO: Deserters?

LAUNCELOT: In a manner of speaking, sir. We, as they say, or might say if forced to say it, which I hope I'm not but nevertheless will, deserted.

IAGO: How long have you been here?

LAUNCELOT: As long as it takes to turn young into old, sir.

SALERIO: We've lost track of time.

SOLANIO: All we know is that it was the Moor's first year of command.

IAGO: Then you've been in here for twenty-eight years.

Silence. Iago studies Lorenzo.

IAGO (*contd.*): You say his name's Lorenzo?

LAUNCELOT: Yes, sir.

IAGO: Twenty-eight years. My father left Venice just after I was born, sent to Cyprus under the command of a black general named Othello, whose first command it was. And my father's name was Lorenzo.

He stares at Lorenzo, who gradually focuses on him.

My mother's name is Jessica, and her father's name is Shylock.

LAUNCELOT: Then Lorenzo is your father, sir.

IAGO: What happened to him?

LAUNCELOT: He stopped talking one day, sir, and started staring, and he's stared ever since. He's non compost mensa, as they say.

IAGO (*to Lorenzo*): Do you hear me? (*No reponse.*) He's weeping.

LAUNCELOT: He weeps a lot, sir, but he doesn't speak.

Iago breaks the contact with Lorenzo.

IAGO: So you are Solanio and Salerio, who tried to murder Shylock.

SOLANIO: Oh!

SALERIO: We were inno..

IAGO: Your crime was to fail. (*To Lorenzo*): And you plotted to kill Shylock. Laudable. Then left me in his clutches. Unforgivable.

SALERIO: Is he dead now?

IAGO: No. Old, but alive and still counting.

LAUNCELOT: The wicked live for ever, sir.

IAGO: Let us hope so. Two would-be murderers, then...

LAUNCELOT: Not would-be, sir. In actuary, de facto, de mortis, they did murder one Tubal, friend of Shylock, by mistake.

SALERIO: Hold your tongue, Launcelot!

IAGO: You were sent to fight the Turks here on Cyprus, deserted, and were left to rot in this place.

SOLANIO: Twenty-eight years!

IAGO: We all thought you were dead. The story goes that to hasten his inheritance, my father plotted to kill Shylock, and financed the murder by borrowing money from the merchant Antonio, who unknowingly borrowed it from Shylock himself.

LAUNCELOT: It's true, sir. Shylock disguised himself as the Venetian Finance Company. What you might call Satan disguising himself as Lucifer.

SOLANIO: How is the good Antonio?

IAGO: Dead.

SALERIO: Oh! How did he die?

IAGO: A heart attack, soon after Bassanio had died of the pox, I believe. But that's ancient history. And you, Launcelot, did you not make pregnant Portia's negro maid Miriam, that was Othello's sister?

LAUNCELOT: You're very well deformed, sir.

IAGO: For which the Lady Portia sent you too to Cyprus.

LAUNCELOT: What happened to the Lady Portia, sir?

IAGO: When she and her maid Nerissa had annulled their marriages, they entered a convent.

SALERIO: So who's looking after Belmont?

IAGO: Othello's sister and her American husband.

LAUNCELOT: P.J., the toxicated Texan?

IAGO: A man called Appleby.
 LAUNCELOT: That's him! All hat and hiccups. Came fortune-hunting to marry Portia, and we tricked him into marrying Miriam.
 IAGO: Well he has his fortune now.
 LAUNCELOT: And if pregnancy turns to infancy....
 IAGO: Their son is your son.
 LAUNCELOT: I knew the little bastard would be a boy. Did they call him Launcelot Junior?
 IAGO: No. Othello Junior.
 LAUNCELOT: Oh! Well, the world does turn in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.
 IAGO: And it shall turn again and perform more wonders when I leave this hell-hole.
 SALERIO: How do you propose to do that, lieutenant?
 IAGO: They tortured me, but I refused to speak. Now Cassio and the rest would have me hanged but, being honest fools, want my confession. I spoke only to demand a hearing, and Cassio will not pass upon my life without the form of justice. He will hear me. And when I have been heard, I shall be freed, if honest minds and hearts be not too hard for my sharp wits and all the tribe of hell.
 SOLANIO: Will you free us too, lieutenant?
 IAGO: If I can use you, then I'll free you.
 SALERIO (*bringing him water*): Here, sir. Drink your fill.
Lights out.

Scene Two

Venice. A room in the Duke's palace. The Duke and Lodovico.

DUKE: Poor Desdemona! What a tragedy! And yet I had misgivings, Lodovico, from the start. It was a strange marriage.
 LODOVICO: I think it would have been a happy marriage, your Grace, but for Iago's villainy.
 DUKE: A villain using words needs ears to hear them. Who knows what weaknesses sleep in us all? The beast was there. Iago wakened it. But this Iago, was he not thought honest? As I recall, men spoke most highly of him.
 LODOVICO: He was thought honest.
 DUKE: So those Belmont caskets haunt us still: choose not by the view. And yet if conduct seems to match appearance, what can we choose by? No-one suspected him?
 LODOVICO: Not even his wife, your Grace.
 DUKE: You say he killed her?
 LODOVICO: He did.
 DUKE: What gain could he have made from this?
 LODOVICO: He wouldn't tell us, but I gave instructions that he be tortured till the truth was known. Then Cassio will send a messenger.
 DUKE: And Cassio himself you say is injured?
 LODOVICO: Stabbed in the leg and lucky to be alive.
 DUKE: We must send news to Shylock and his daughter about Iago's villainy

and his fate.

LODOVICO: They have already been informed, your Grace.

DUKE: Good. One must in part feel sorry for them, although in part one praises heaven's justice. Shylock is hard, and hardness will rebound. Come, Lodovico, we must call the senate and sadden them with these unlucky deeds.

They go out.

Scene Three

Venice. Shylock's house. Shylock, very old now, with Jessica, in her fifties.

SHYLOCK: He was always two-faced, Jessica. I remember him one Yom Kippur, bible in one hand, beigel in the other. I never trusted him.

JESSICA: He never did anything like this.

SHYLOCK: He always did anything like this. From the moment of his birth he gave us trouble. But somehow he was never punished for it. Be sure your sin will find you out, said Moses, and now he's been found out.

JESSICA: What will they do?

SHYLOCK: They'll hang him.

JESSICA: We must go to the Duke and beg for mercy.

SHYLOCK: On what grounds? He's the son of a dead schlemiel and a nice Jewish girl?

JESSICA: Emilia was never a good wife.

SHYLOCK: So the Duke should rewrite the laws of Venice? You can murder your wife if your mother doesn't like her. Besides, Emilia was a good woman. She was as honest as your son is crooked.

JESSICA: Iago wouldn't have killed her without good cause.

SHYLOCK: The messenger said she betrayed his villainy. That's cause for a villain, not for a court of law. Forget him, Jessica. You married a shyster and mothered a monster. *(She weeps.)* I'm sorry. God forgive my hard heart and my runaway tongue. I'm sorry, Jessica. Don't weep. Don't weep.

JESSICA: My life wasted on failures.

SHYLOCK: You're still young, Jessica. It's not too late. Don't weep.

JESSICA: I'm old, father. It's all over.

SHYLOCK: No, don't weep. We'll go to the Duke. We'll pray. Ha, Jessica? God's in Cyprus and in Venice.

JESSICA: God won't hear my prayers.

SHYLOCK: Don't say such words.

JESSICA: God tortures Jews because we killed his son.

SHYLOCK: No! We're the chosen people. God is kind. We have our home, our wealth, we have each other. God took our enemies away: Antonio, Bassanio and Lorenzo and the rest, all long since dead, while you and I survive. Jessica, God is on our side, and with him above to ratify our work, we are blest not cursed'st among men.

JESSICA: I can't pray to him any more, father.

SHYLOCK: Then I shall pray twice over for us both. Come, to prayer, and then we'll to the Duke.

They go out.

Scene Four

Belmont. A room in Portia's house. P.J.Appleby, holding a letter, Miriam, Othello Jr. and Sibylla. The parents are in their fifties, Othello Jr. is 28, and Sibylla is about 20, a strikingly beautiful girl.

APPLEBY: I'm sorry, Miriam. Your brother was a fine, fine man.
MIRIAM (*weeping*): They'd only just been married. I was so happy that he'd found a wife after all these years, and now they're both gone.
OTHELLO: Who is this Iago that eats the souls of men?
MIRIAM: Othello always spoke highly of him, and affectionately. Iago was his ensign.
SIBYLLA: I can't believe we shall never see our uncle again.
MIRIAM: Not in this world, Sibylla.
APPLEBY: There's a lot of him in you, Othello Junior. Maybe you'll be a great man like he was.
MIRIAM: I don't want my son to be a soldier.
OTHELLO: If this Iago goes unpunished, mother, I'll crush the Venetian army to have his head.
MIRIAM: They say he's to be hanged.
APPLEBY: Hanging's too good for him.
OTHELLO: I would have him nine years a-killing.
APPLEBY: Miriam, I guess Othello's estate will come to you now.
MIRIAM: I suppose it will.
SIBYLLA: I'd rather have my uncle than his fortune.
APPLEBY: And surely so would I. But gone is gone, Sibylla, and them that stay collect from them that's gone.
OTHELLO: Send to Venice, father, find out if this Iago pays the penalty, and ask what's to be done with the estate.
APPLEBY: I'll do just that. Maybe you'll help me, Othello Junior. When I write letters, I rarely get past A.
MIRIAM: While you attend to this world, we'll attend to the next. Come, Sibylla, let's pray for my poor brother.
SIBYLLA: Let's also pray for Desdemona, mother.
They all go out.

ACT TWO

Cyprus. A room in the castle. Cassio, as governor, flanked by Gratiano and Montano, all seated. When Cassio eventually walks, it is with a heavy limp and a stick. Iago stands before them.

CASSIO: Iago, as governor of Cyprus, I have the power to sentence you to death. This I shall do unless you give me reason not to do so. Therefore, speak or die.
IAGO: I ask the court, with what crime am I charged?
GRATIANO: Oh monstrous!
CASSIO: You're charged with murder and attempted murder, incitement to murder, lying, treachery...
IAGO: I am not guilty.
MONTANO: What?
GRATIANO: Not guilty, man?

IAGO: I am on trial here for my life!
CASSIO: You are.
IAGO: Yet I'm condemned before my judges hear me.
CASSIO: We're men of honour, Iago. We'll judge fairly.
IAGO: You leave me little choice. Arraign me, then.
CASSIO: You told Othello I'd slept with Desdemona.
IAGO: Is that a crime?
CASSIO: You told a damned lie!
IAGO: But is it a crime? What law does it infringe? If gossip's a crime, hang half the human race! I told him what I thought, and told no more than what he found himself was apt and true. To err is not to be a criminal.
CASSIO: You confessed you dropped the handkerchief in my lodgings for a special purpose. You planted evidence.
IAGO: But evidence of what? A crime? What crime? Adultery a crime? Does the governor see adultery as a crime?

Cassio is slightly taken aback.

MONTANO: What exactly was your special purpose?
IAGO: To help Cassio and please Desdemona.
MONTANO: To help Cassio, whom you planned to murder?
GRATIANO: How could this have pleased Desdemona?
IAGO: She told me how she pitied the lieutenant. She'd promised to obtain his reinstatement by pleading with Othello – (*to Cassio*) as we'd hoped. She said she'd failed you and betrayed your love. Those were her words. And so the handkerchief she sent as pledge of love and good intent. That was the message I was to deliver. I knew the value that my friend Othello placed on that handkerchief, and so I took the words, the gift, as proof of your adultery.
CASSIO: You brought no message.
IAGO: You were not at home, but I assumed you'd know the handkerchief and also the adulterous intent. I left the handkerchief where you would find it.
MONTANO: Why did your wife say, then, that she had found it, and you had solemnly begged of her to steal it?
IAGO: To protect the reputation of her mistress.
GRATIANO: Protect?
IAGO: Because my wife believed, as I did, that Desdemona and Cassio were lovers.
GRATIANO: That's absurd!
IAGO: Emilia loved her mistress. And hated me for telling what I told.
CASSIO: There were no grounds!
GRATIANO: Cassio did no wrong.
IAGO: That I believe, and, yet it can be proved that Cassio is a known adulterer. Or will you deny your other mistress too, the whore Bianca?

Cassio is embarrassed.

GRATIANO: You supped with her that night.
IAGO: Supped, or tugged, whichever you prefer.
GRATIANO: That doesn't make him an adulterer.

IAGO: Perhaps you do not know of Cassio's wife. A Florentine. A beauty. In the army we call such men "damn'd in a fair wife", since commonly fair wives attract fine lovers.

GRATIANO: Is this true, Cassio?

CASSIO: It's true that I am married. We were both young, and youth may make mistakes.

GRATIANO: How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience.

IAGO: Cassio, you are a lecherous man, reputed for your drunkenness, your whoring. Perhaps I've been too busy in my fears, but gentlemen, I know his reputation. You charge me now with lying to Othello, but I believed that Cassio was guilty. The handkerchief that Desdemona gave me was not the clue, it was the confirmation! It killed all doubts in me, as in Othello.

MONTANO (*to Cassio*): We have to grant that, given your reputation, there may have been some grounds for these suspicions.

CASSIO: But they were false!

IAGO: Perhaps. You are the judge.

GRATIANO: We are the judges. And Cassio's not on trial. But when I look from old age back to youth, I know lust heats the blood, and wine the liver, and jealousy may shape faults that are not. Iago, we shall lay aside the charge that you with malice did deceive Othello. You have more deadly crimes to answer to. For instance, that you planned to murder Cassio.

IAGO: I don't deny the plan to murder Cassio.

GRATIANO: Ah!

IAGO: But I was not responsible.

GRATIANO: What?

MONTANO: He's impossible!

IAGO: All of you were there when Othello himself confessed. Lodovico asked if he had consented in Cassio's death, and when he said he had, Cassio cried: "Dear general, I never gave you cause."

CASSIO: It's true, I did.

IAGO: When did a general "consent" to an ensign's order? It was his plan. I was the instrument. You knew Othello. What was the penalty for disobeying such a master's order? You'd have me killed because I did my duty, and he'd have killed me if I hadn't done it. Justice of hell, you'll burn me either way.

GRATIANO: You wrote to Roderigo, inciting him to murder!

IAGO: Because I didn't want to kill Cassio! Cassio's my friend, and I'm no murderer.

CASSIO: You murdered Roderigo.

IAGO: No, sir, no, it was your own blows that killed Roderigo.

CASSIO: I wounded him, but after long seeming dead, he told us you had hurt him, set him on.

IAGO: Roderigo was in love with Desdemona. He pestered me to help him. I refused. Perhaps he lied to punish my refusal.

GRATIANO: If it were so, why at your request would he consent to murder Cassio?

IAGO: He envied Cassio. (*To Cassio*;) He too thought you were lovers. He was consumed with murderous jealousy.

CASSIO: In a letter that we found on Roderigo, he said you made him brave me on the watch, so that we quarrelled, and you made me drunk.

IAGO: Another lie! Fool that I was to trust him! Cassio, Cassio, how could I make you drunk? Were you a baby? Did I ope your lips? Will you kill me to cover your own weakness?

CASSIO: No, it was my fault.

GRATIANO: But why should Roderigo write such lies?

IAGO: I don't know why! I can't read dead men's minds! There are a kind of men, corrupt of soul, who seeing others better than themselves, cannot rest until they bring them down. He was corrupt enough to kill Cassio. A man who'll murder won't stop short of lying. Why should I seek to destroy Othello, and Cassio, and Desdemona too? What reason could I have to bring them down? You know I'm honest, yet you accuse me! Why not accuse a man known for a villain? You choose to take the word of an assassin against the word of a man you called your friend.

Pause.

MONTANO: These potent arguments give you no defence for your gravest crime: the murder of your wife. Emilia told the truth. You killed her for it.

IAGO: I killed her, but she did not tell the truth. She lied in order to protect her mistress.

MONTANO: Why did you kill her?

IAGO: It was an accident! Othello thrust at me. In my defence, I swung my sword...*(a moment of deep emotion)*...I don't know how it happened.

GRATIANO: You had to silence her, and so you killed her!

IAGO: To silence her? When she'd already spoken? What more could she have said to damn me more?

GRATIANO: You tried to silence her before she spoke.

MONTANO: "Go to, charm your tongue" – those were your words.

IAGO: I meant that she should moderate her tone. She shrieked of odious, damned, wicked lies, screaming abuse. You're married, Cassio. Would you have your wife shout such abuse?

MONTANO: You said she was mad.

IAGO: She threatened to kill herself!

CASSIO: Emilia?

MONTANO: Yes. "I'll kill myself for grief."

IAGO: She'd lost control. Every word was madness.

GRATIANO: Othello said Cassio had the handkerchief, your wife cried out, and then you drew your sword and threatened her.

IAGO: But I didn't kill her!

GRATIANO: You stopped because I stopped you. I rebuked you.

IAGO: You did rebuke me, but you didn't stop me. Would words have stopped me if I'd meant to kill her?

MONTANO: Why did you threaten her?

IAGO: She was in despair. I knew that she would lie for Desdemona. She lied as easily as water flows. The handkerchief was proof – she must disprove it! *(To Montano:)* Your memory, sir, is good for spoken words. Did she not say that heaven, men and devils should all cry shame against her but she'd speak?

MONTANO: She did.

IAGO: But why should they cry shame against her if what she said was true? I told her to be wise and to go home. Instead of trying to protect the dead. Yet even as she lied, I still did nothing. I let her hatch this wild, fantastic plot that flies against all knowledge and all reason. And then Othello hurled himself at me. I struck in my defence, Emilia fell, and her blood was on my sword and on my soul.

He is deeply moved.

GRATIANO: You say she lied, but I heard the ring of truth.

IAGO: Oh sir, you've lived through far more years than I, but have you seen the devil's horns and hoof? For liars, sir, only the truth rings false. I was always known for honesty, and yet you claim that all my truth was lies. Now you must choose between my wife and me. Cassio, we've been friends through peace and war. In all that time, have I ever told a lie?

CASSIO: You lied that I was Desdemona's lover!

IAGO: Cassio, to be wrong is not to lie. If I believed a lie, I beg forgiveness, but to believe is not to be a liar. When have I lied?

Pause.

CASSIO: Iago was always honest.

IAGO: I thank you, sir. Yet now you'd have me die because my wife could lie with the "ring of truth". (*Once more he shows considerable emotion.*) I meant no harm to come to anyone. Desdemona's love for Cassio seemed evident when she passed to him the token. And I for love and duty told my master. How could I have known that telling him would bring to life some savage, murderous beast? Was he not always all-in-all sufficient, the noble Moor whom passion could not shake? Had I but known, then I should have said nothing, and wife and friends would still be of this world. That is the fault for which I do plead guilty: loving Othello, trusting him too much. Loving and trusting all my friends too much.

He is overcome. The others look at one another as he weeps. Gratiano points to the door, and Cassio nods.

CASSIO: Iago, you will have to wait outside while we attempt to reach a fair decision. (*Iago nods without looking up.*) Guard.

A guard comes in. Cassio motions to him to take Iago away. Iago stops near the door.

IAGO: Gentlemen, I have lost my wife, my friends, and everything that once I held most dear. Your judgment matters very little now. My one concern is for my reputation, since that's the only jewel left to me. Execute me for my wagging tongue, or hang me for uncleanly apprehensions, but not for crimes which I have not committed. I hated no-one, and I lied to no-one. Friendship was my crime. So take my life, but leave my reputation. Leave the immortal part, sirs, of myself.

He is taken out.

MONTANO: Is he a man more sinned against than sinning?

GRATIANO: Let us review the charges one by one. He did deceive Othello.

CASSIO: He only said what he thought was true.

GRATIANO: He planted the handkerchief.

CASSIO: Emilia may have lied to protect her mistress.

GRATIANO: Which of them lied?

CASSIO: Iago was ever honest.

MONTANO: He plotted your death.

CASSIO: It was on Othello's orders. Othello begged forgiveness. Shall I now condemn Iago for Othello's crime?
GRATIANO: If you forgive him, Cassio, so must we.
MONTANO: That leaves Roderigo. A liar, like Emilia?
GRATIANO: My brother Brabantio called the man a pest. Iago's right, he haunted Desdemona, plied her with gifts, and drove us to despair.
MONTANO: You'd take Iago's word against Roderigo's?
GRATIANO: We know Roderigo tried to murder Cassio.
CASSIO: We have no choice but to believe Iago. What of Emilia's death?
MONTANO: I didn't see it. I was trying to hold Othello back.
GRATIANO: And so was I. His story could be true.
CASSIO: We saw his grief. Iago's a broken man.
GRATIANO: To show an unfelt sorrow is an office which the false man does easy.
CASSIO: Not Iago. Those were dilations working from the heart.
GRATIANO: You trust him then?
CASSIO: I do.
GRATIANO: And you, Montano?
MONTANO: Unwillingly.
GRATIANO: And I'm unwilling too. You are Lord Governor, Cassio. You decide.
CASSIO: I have one question more to ask of him. If he can satisfy me, I shall free him. Guards, bring him in!

Iago is brought in again by the guard.

Iago, I've one more question. Upon Emilia's death, you ran away, but you were caught and brought before Othello. He asked you then why you'd ensnared his soul and body. You refused to answer, and swore that you would never speak again. If you were innocent, why did you run away? Why did you refuse? And why vow silence?
IAGO: Because on all sides men who'd been my friends had turned on me as on some foul disease, assuming guilt where I was innocent. My only crime had been to speak my mind, yet you believed my wife's fantastic lies, and called me devil, smashed my reputation, and tried to kill me. What could I have said? Words had shattered lives. Should I use words to tell a truth my friends would not believe? Should any man ever use words again?

Once more he is overcome by his emotions. He falls to his knees. Cassio goes to him and gently helps him to his feet. Gratiano dismisses the guard.

CASSIO: Iago, we have lived through savage times. Perhaps we're justly punished for our sins. Pray you, forget and forgive, and so will I.

They embrace.

IAGO: To mourn a mischief that is past and gone is the next way to draw new mischief on. Forgive me, Cassio, for my unworthy thoughts, and for obeying the crazed Othello's orders.

CASSIO: With all my heart. Let's both mend where we can. My mending shall begin with two decisions. Iago spoke home: I should not be governor. To you, Montano, now I give the office, while I myself will hasten back to Venice and tell the Duke the truth of what has happened. Iago, you have never shown me envy, but I held a post which might well have been yours. Let me promote you now to be lieutenant.

IAGO: No, Cassio!

CASSIO: Please!

IAGO: I know I am not worthy.
CASSIO: Oh, you are ten times worthier than I. Accept the post, Iago.
IAGO: I accept.
CASSIO: Then I'll to Venice. Cyprus is yours, Montano.
MONTANO: I'll try to be a worthy governor.
CASSIO: The Moor's estate is yours now, Gratiano.
GRATIANO: I'll settle his affairs.
CASSIO (to Iago): Forgive me, friend.
IAGO: There's nothing to forgive, dear Cassio. You did, as I did, what you thought was right.

They embrace again.

CASSIO: Come, gentlemen, we have much work to do.
Cassio goes out. Gratiano nods to Iago and follows Cassio. Montano stops before Iago.

MONTANO: I hope that Cassio's trust is not misplaced.

IAGO: Oh no, you'll be a worthy governor.
Iago outstares Montano, who goes out. Iago watches them all disappear. There is a moment of stillness, and then he laughs.

But now the villain's neck was in the noose, yet now he is lieutenant of the army. The world is full of honest, tender fools, born to be led by the nose as asses are. What can a man not achieve with words? So Cassio goes, Montano takes his place, and Iago now runs second in the race. But if Montano were to disappear, why then I should be running in the clear.

He goes out.

ACT THREE

Scene One

Venice. A room in the Duke's palace. The Duke and Shylock.

DUKE: There's no news, Shylock. Every day you come, and every day I tell you to go home and wait. I'll send a message when there's news.
SHYLOCK: Your grace, my daughter's pain cannot be borne. To save an hour, I'll sacrifice a day.
DUKE: You may, but do not sacrifice my day.
SHYLOCK: I ask no more than a seat upon your floor. You need not see me. Only know I'm there.
DUKE: Shylock, you and I are both old men. After life's fitful fever we'll sleep well. Surely from all your agues of the past you have preserved some medicine for your daughter. Iago will die. Accept it as it is.
SHYLOCK: I pray for him. For my daughter's sake I pray.
DUKE: Then put your faith in God.
SHYLOCK: I do, of course. But answers come more swiftly from the Duke.

Enter an attendant.

ATTENDANT: Your Grace, Lieutenant Cassio's come from Cyprus.

SHYLOCK: Ha!

DUKE: Let him enter. Shylock, you may stay.

SHYLOCK: I thank your Grace.

Enter Cassio, still with a stick.

DUKE: Welcome, Cassio.
 CASSIO: Your Grace.
 DUKE: Now tell us, what's the news from Cyprus? This is Shylock. You may speak before him.
 CASSIO: Shylock! Then give thanks to heaven. Your grandson's innocent of every charge.
 SHYLOCK: I thank God for his mercy to my daughter.
 DUKE: This is most strange. According to Lodovico, the tragedy was all Iago's work.
 CASSIO: So we believed. We've since learned otherwise. His only fault was that he spoke his mind.
 SHYLOCK: I heard he killed his wife.
 CASSIO: An accident. The tale that Lodovico told your Grace was an account conceived in the moment's heat, but since proved false and slanderous to Iago.
 DUKE: Shylock, it seems your prayers have been well answered.
 SHYLOCK: For Jessica I rejoice. But for myself, I could accept the villain's execution.
 CASSIO: He is no villain.
 DUKE: Hard as ever, Shylock. You have a low opinion of your grandson.
 SHYLOCK: You and I, your Grace, are both old men. From all the agues of the past we've learned how to distinguish medicine from poison.
 CASSIO: Iago's the most honest man in Venice.
 SHYLOCK: Long live he so. And long live you to think so.
 DUKE: Cassio, we'd appointed you as governor. Now, in your absence, who has command of Cyprus?
 CASSIO: Montano.
 DUKE: And who is now lieutenant?
 CASSIO: The man most worthy of the post: Iago.
 SHYLOCK: Thus do you put knives in the hands of robbers. May I have leave, your Grace, to make joyful the hearing of my daughter with this news?
 DUKE: Shylock, you may.
 SHYLOCK: My thanks to you, and God.
He bows and hobbles out.
 DUKE: The body crumbles, but the soul stays firm. You must be tired from travel and your wound. We'll have you bathed and fed, and when refreshed, you can unfold this strange and tragic tale.

They go out.

Scene Two

Cyprus. A room in the castle. Iago, in lieutenant's uniform. Enter a guard.

GUARD: The prisoners are here, sir.
 IAGO: Bring in Launcelot.
The guard brings in Launcelot, who leads the blank Lorenzo. Iago dismisses the guard.
 Do you not know me, Launcelot?
 LAUNCELOT: Knowing is one thing, sir. Believing is another.
 IAGO: Then know and believe that I'm Lieutenant Iago.
 LAUNCELOT: And so you are, sir. Then they quitted you.

IAGO: They did. And now I may 'quit' you.

LAUNCELOT: You'll set me free, sir?

IAGO: Not exactly.

LAUNCELOT: Oh!

IAGO: I want you to work for me.

LAUNCELOT: I'll take the job, sir.

IAGO: But can I trust you?

LAUNCELOT: Explicitly, sir.

IAGO: If you were to betray my trust, Launcelot, I should cut out your tongue, hammer nails into your eyes, and separate each arm and each leg from your body, one by one.

LAUNCELOT: You can trust me, sir, limb from limb.

IAGO: Then you shall be my servant, and tend my father. Clean him, and clean yourself – you both stink. But I don't want him shaven or shorn. Leave him wild and shaggy.

LAUNCELOT: He'll be the sweetest smelling shag in Cyprus, sir.

IAGO: Good. One more task. In the dungeons you'll find the whore Bianca. Have her cleaned and scrubbed and brought to my apartment.

LAUNCELOT: I'll do it, sir, swifter than the arrow from the tart's bow.

IAGO: Wait. (*He scribbles a note.*) This is your authorization.

LAUNCELOT: Thank you, sir.

He goes out with Lorenzo.

IAGO: Fools are made to serve, wise men to rule. The wise man trusts no-one except the fool. Guard! (*The guard enters.*) Bring in the others.

The guard goes out, returns with Solanio and Salerio, and goes out again.

Solanio, Salerio. I've had you brought from the dungeons myself.

SALERIO: We thank you, sir.

IAGO: To buy your favour I extend this friendship.

SOLANIO: Our favour, sir?

IAGO: In helping you, I hope to help myself. I have a task for you. A delicate, perhaps a dangerous task.

SOLANIO: I am reckless what I do to spite the world.

SALERIO: I would set my life on any chance to mend it or be rid on't.

IAGO: Both of you know Othello was your enemy.

SOLANIO: True sir.

IAGO: Othello had a friend who, if he could, would send us all back into our hell-hole. I want this friend removed.

SALERIO: Removed, sir? How?

IAGO: By knocking out his brains.

SOLANIO: You want him killed?

IAGO: If you dare do it. If not, we'll meet again behind iron bars.

SALERIO: We'll do it, sir. Who is this deadly friend?

IAGO: His name's Montano, governor of Cyprus.

SALERIO: I thought that Cassio was the governor now.

IAGO: Cassio was the governor. He's returned to Venice. Montano has his place. And hence it is we stand within his danger.

SOLANIO: When should we remove him, sir?

IAGO: Tonight. He dines with me. Wait for us near my quarters.

SALERIO: What'll become of us when we've killed him, sir?

IAGO: You'll go on assisting me – in secret. Shave your beards, cut your hair, and wear the clothes I'll give you, then remain hidden until it's dark. You understand?

SOLANIO & SALERIO: We do.

IAGO: Then I'll show you the route that he'll be taking.
They go out.

Scene Three

Belmont. A room in Portia's house, P.J.Appleby (holding a letter), Miriam, Othello Jr. and Sibylla.

APPLEBY: Graitiano ain't got no right to Othello's estate. Money-grabbing fortune-hunter. That estate belongs to us.

MIRIAM: To me.

APPLEBY: To you.

OTHELLO: Iago freed without a punishment! This is no justice. Give me the letter, father.

APPLEBY (*handing it over*): I know there's more important things than money, but I find it mighty hard to think of 'em.

MIRIAM: What shall we do?

APPLEBY: We'd best go to Venice and see the Duke.

SIBYLLA: To Venice!

APPLEBY: Not you, Sibylla. Venice ain't no place for a young girl.

SIBYLLA: Oh father, let me come!

OTHELLO: This letter smacks of treachery. I'll go with you to see the Duke. He'll give me leave to sail to Cyprus and avenge my uncle's death.

SIBYLLA: If Othello's going, then you must let me go too. Please, father! I long to see Venice.

APPLEBY: Well, I don't know. You'd better ask your mother. My word may be law, but hers is the only one anybody takes any notice of.

MIRIAM: We'll all go, since it affects us all.

SIBYLLA: Oh, thank you, mother! (*She kisses Miriam.*) And thank you, father. (*She kisses him too.*)

MIRIAM: I'll have to inform Portia of what's happened, but we shan't be away for long. Stephano will look after the house. Come on then, let's get ready for the journey.

They all go out.

Scene Four

Cyprus, a street at night. Enter Solanio and Salerio.

SOLANIO: The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day.

SALERIO: And near approaches the subject of our watch.

SOLANIO: I hope this Montano's no fighter.

SALERIO: If he is, I shall run away.

SOLANIO: You'll be following me then.

Iago and Montano enter.

MONTANO: Cassio was struck in the leg from behind. It wasn't Roderigo, so who was it?

IAGO: Roderigo must have had accomplices.

SOLANIO: Like these!

He and Salerio spring at Montano, who draws his sword and fights, but is run through from behind by Iago.

MONTANO: Aaah! Iago! O inhuman dog!

He dies.

SALERIO: I'm wounded! Solanio, I'm wounded!

IAGO: Keep watch, Solanio. I'll attend to him.

SALERIO: Oh! Oh! It hurts! Solanio!

IAGO: Go down the street and keep watch!

Solanio obeys. Salerio is whimpering.

Now, let me see.

SALERIO: It hurts.

Iago runs him through.

Aaaah!

He dies.

IAGO: And one to go. Solanio, come quickly!

Solanio returns.

SOLANIO: What is it?

IAGO: He's fainted. I fear he's badly hurt. Loosen his clothes.

SOLANIO: Salerio!

He kneels beside the body.

IAGO: Solanio!

Solanio turns.

If I'm to be the hero of this hunt, thy wounds must be inflicted from the front.

Iago runs him through.

SOLANIO: Aaaah!

He dies.

IAGO: Let's have you over here. Separate fights, separate bodies. Thus the noble governor takes his leave, together with his murderers, while I grieve. Help! Murder! Murder! Help! Some blood drawn upon me would beget opinion of my more fierce endeavour. (*He wounds himself in the arm and leg.*) Oh, I am maimed for ever! Light ho! Murder! Murder!

Enter Gratiano and some guards with torches.

GRATIANO: What is the matter here?

IAGO: Help! Who are you?

GRATIANO: Gratiano.

IAGO: Oh, Signor Gratiano. Bring the light here.

GRATIANO: Iago, what's happened?

IAGO: Montano and I...we've been attacked. Oh!

GRATIANO: You're wounded.

IAGO: It's nothing. Where is my friend?

GRATIANO: Who are these?

IAGO: We fought the villains together. I think I killed one.

GRATIANO: It's him. He's dead!

IAGO: Who? No, not Montano!

GRATIANO: I fear so. And one of the villains is dead beside him.

IAGO: Montano dead!

GUARD: Here's another body.

IAGO: I killed one, and Montano the other. Who are they, Gratiano?
GRATIANO: They're not soldiers. Robbers most likely.
IAGO: One struck me in the leg from behind. These must be the villains that helped Roderigo.
GRATIANO: Guards, remove these bodies. Iago, you must have your wounds attended to.
IAGO: My wounds are nothing, Gratiano, to the loss of Montano. No man could ever have a better friend. Oh, will these grievous losses never end?

Gratiano helps Iago off, while the guards take the bodies.

Scene Five

Venice. Shylock's house. Shylock and Jessica.

SHYLOCK: You see the power of prayer now, Jessica. Out of the noose into lieutenantancy.
JESSICA: He'd done no wrong. This proves there's justice here on earth.
SHYLOCK: It comes from heaven, Jessica.
JESSICA: Then why did God crucify his son?
SHYLOCK: Because he was not his son. This Jesus claimed descent from the House of David, yet the gospels trace different lines from Joseph back to David through Joseph's different possible fathers: Jacob, Heli. They cannot agree, but even if they could, the claim means nothing in a virgin birth. The line should go through Mary – or the so-called Holy Ghost that impregnated her. Why are we arguing? We should be rejoicing.
JESSICA: I am rejoicing.
SHYLOCK: Don't rejoice too much. The boy is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.
JESSICA: Perhaps he'll marry again. In Cyprus – though better here in Venice.
SHYLOCK: He's just got widowed, now you want him married.
JESSICA: I want a grandchild.
SHYLOCK: Well, I have a grandchild. And he's as welcome as a note of credit from a bankrupt. Come, we owe the Lord a prayer of thanks. (*She shakes her head.*) A gift unthanked is like a gift refused.
JESSICA: God is cruel.
SHYLOCK: Only to those that hate him.
JESSICA: He crucified a man that loved him.
SHYLOCK: God loves the Jews. Jesus was a Christian. And God has saved your son for his Jewish half, so I shall thank him. As for the Christian half, we'll see what tricks the devil has in store. If you won't pray, then you can cook the supper.

They go out.

Scene Six

Cyprus. A room in the castle. Iago and Gratiano.

GRATIANO: No-one knew them.

IAGO: They were thieves, Gratiano. The island's full of them.

GRATIANO: We must tell the Duke. Cassio must return to govern Cyprus. But who can I send?

IAGO: Go yourself, Gratiano. The Duke and senate will require your counsel and reassurance after all these murders. Meanwhile, I'll take command till Cassio comes.

GRATIANO: You won't oppose the return of Cassio?

IAGO: No, on the contrary, I plead for it. What better man could Cyprus have to rule it?

GRATIANO: Something warns me not to leave this island.

IAGO: Then I must go.

GRATIANO: No, you must stay, Iago. The soldiers need a soldier in command. You're right. I'll leave at once.

IAGO: Good speed, Gratiano.

Gratiano goes out.

You'll find it safer on the sea than here. A few bold lies, a few thrusts of the sword, and the damned inhuman dog now governs Cyprus. But why stop here at Cyprus? Venice is weak – her strongest force is under my command. The Duke is old, the state is fat and limp, counting gold while steel is left to rust. A swift assault, she falls, and I am Duke. The men will follow me, but the true Venetians must go with Gratiano, or to prison. Greatness is boldness. Venice now. Where next? Launcelot! The wealth of Venice reaches far and wide, and who controls the wealth...

Launcelot enters.

LAUNCELOT: You called, sir?

IAGO: How is my father?

LAUNCELOT: As evacuated as ever, sir.

IAGO: Good. Let him remain so. Signor Gratiano is leaving Cyprus. I want others to leave with him, and will presently inform you of their names. They must leave at once. After their departure, every soldier, Venetian and Cypriot, will assemble on parade.

LAUNCELOT: It shall be done, sir. Meanwhile, sir, I should like to deposit a question.

IAGO: Well?

LAUNCELOT: The two dead men, sir, that attacked your noble self and the dead governor who at the time was the live governor not being dead until he lost his life, were their names, sir, by any manner of chance and the wheel of fortune, Solanio and Salerio?

Pause.

IAGO: Launcelot, put out your tongue.

LAUNCELOT: Tongue, sir?

IAGO: Put it out.

Launcelot obeys. Iago draws his sword and places it on Launcelot's tongue. Terrified reaction.

For such questions tongues have been sliced off and left for daws to peck at. Wise men learn how to be dumb and blind. Fools that see and speak leave heads behind. (*He lowers the sword.*) Which are you, Launcelot, fool or wise man?

LAUNCELOT: Um...fool, sir? Wise man! Wise man, sir!

IAGO: Come then, I'll give you the names of those who are to sail.

They go out. Enter Gratiano with Lucius.

GRATIANO: I'm to set sail at once to Venice, Lucius, but I'll confess I am right loath to go. There is some ill a-brewing on this island.

LUCIUS: I take it you'll return with Cassio, sir.

GRATIANO: I must. The Moor's estate has to be settled. We live, we breathe, we move, and then we're gone, and all we leave behind is merest objects – even the lifeless body that is buried. Poor Desdemona's dainty silks and cottons, her rings, her combs, her linen and her brushes – delicate things that listen for her voice, which never speaks or sings or laughs again. And all destroyed by foolish tongues and ears.

He produces a handkerchief.

This handkerchief I'll take with me to Venice. So small and fine, yet stained with so much blood.

Launcelot re-enters.

LAUNCELOT: Signor Gratiano and Signor Lucius, well met, sirs. I was hoping you'd not departed as I am to inform you that you are to depart.

GRATIANO: I'm already preparing to depart, Launcelot.

LAUNCELOT: And so you should, sir, and so should you, sir.

LUCIUS: I?

LAUNCELOT: Ay.

GRATIANO: Lucius to depart?

LAUNCELOT: To accompany you, sir, as will many, various and Sunday persons entered upon this list.

LUCIUS: I'm to go to Venice?

LAUNCELOT: Is your name Lucius, Lucius?

LUCIUS: It is.

LAUNCELOT: Then Lucius, you are to sail for Venice, reporting for immediate embrocation.

Iago has entered unseen.

IAGO: Signors, forgive this sudden change of plan. Montano's death has cut me to the quick, and I fear it may not be the last such murder. Those that are most true to the state of Venice may be most safe in Venice.

LUCIUS: Are we in danger?

IAGO: There are enemies of Venice on the island. This murderous shaft that's shot hath not yet lighted. Your safest way is to avoid the aim.

GRATIANO: Come, Lucius. Iago's premonitions may well spring from the same source as my own. Our safety therefore lies in swift departure.

Gratiano and Lucius go out.

IAGO: Go and inform the others, Launcelot.

Launcelot goes out.

And so we'll sail behind them on the deep, unseen, and fall on
Venice in her sleep.

He goes out.

ACT FOUR

Scene One

Venice. The Duke's palace. The Duke, Gratiano and Lodovico.

DUKE: Montano dead? Is no-one safe on Cyprus? You'd think the Turks had landed on the island. One senseless murder follows on another, and always present, always innocent, right in the centre of the web, Iago. Is he to be trusted, Gratiano?

GRATIANO: Your Grace, when one is with him, one must trust him, but when one leaves him, doubts emerge again. I think he's honest, and I think he's not.

DUKE: Lodovico?

LODOVICO: He is not what he seems. The villain should have rotted in the dungeons.

GRATIANO: He gave good reasons for the things he did.

LODOVICO: Hell burns brightly.

DUKE: It was a mistake for Cassio to resign as governor. You say Iago's acting in his place?

GRATIANO: Yes, but he asked that Cassio should return.

LODOVICO: He asked for Cassio?

GRATIANO: To be governor.

DUKE: That smacks at least of honesty. Gratiano, you must go too, to guide these younger heads.

He rings a bell and an attendant enters.

Bring Cassio here with utmost urgency.

ATTENDANT: I will, your grace. There is a family, sir, from Belmont that awaits your Grace's pleasure.

DUKE: From Belmont?

ATTENDANT: A foreign family, sir. The Applebys.

GRATIANO: P.J.!

DUKE: You know them, then?

GRATIANO: I do, your Grace.

DUKE (*to attendant*): Admit them, and bring Cassio.

The attendant bows and goes out.

GRATIANO: No doubt your Grace remembers Lady Portia?

DUKE: Disguised herself as Balthazar the judge. I do remember. And you wed her maid.

GRATIANO: My salad days, when I was green in judgment. Portia and Nerissa gained annulments, and went into a convent, leaving Belmont to be managed by a Texan fortune-hunter, who wed a Moorish maid in Portia's service.

The attendant re-enters with the Applebys.

ATTENDANT: The Applebys, your Grace.

DUKE: You are welcome hither.
The attendant goes out.

APPLEBY: Why thank you, sir. This is my wife, Miriam. Miriam, this here's the Duke. This is my daughter Sibylla. And this is my son, Othello Junior.

DUKE: Othello!

GRATIANO: Of course! You're Othello's sister!

MIRIAM: That's right.

GRATIANO: My name is Gratiano.

APPLEBY: Graitiano! I'd never have known you! Why, you've got even older than I have! How long is it?

GRATIANO: Twenty-eight years, P.J. How is Nerissa?

APPLEBY: She and Portia are just fine. Praying, doing good deeds, helping the poor, and growing old.

LODOVICO (*to Sibylla*): My name is Lodovico.

SIBYLLA: Sir.

DUKE: Signor Appleby, we were in council and time is short. You have a suit to me?

APPLEBY: I surely do. You tell him, Miriam.

MIRIAM: We've come to claim my dead brother's estate. We heard it had been claimed by Gratiano.

LODOVICO: I never knew Othello had a sister.

GRATIANO: And I'd forgotten. I renounce my claim, and ask forgiveness, Miriam, P.J.

APPLEBY: Bad luck, Graitiano, you just picked up the wrong cards.

GRATIANO: You were born to win, P.J.

DUKE: You'll have to go to Cyprus, Mr Appleby.

OTHELLO: No, your Grace. That will be my task.
They all look at him.

The family's affairs are mine to settle, and heaven defend your good souls that you think I will this serious and great business scant.

DUKE: You bear a close resemblance to your uncle. Does he not, Gratiano?

GRATIANO: He does indeed, your Grace. Better than resembling his natural father.

DUKE (*TO Othello*): Then you may sail with Cassio and Gratiano.

OTHELLO: I humbly thank your Grace.

DUKE: And will the family stay awhile in Venice?

MIRIAM: No, your Grace. We must return to Belmont.

LODOVICO (*to Sibylla*): Won't you stay? We've lovely things to show you in our city, though none so lovely as your own reflection.

SIBYLLA: Thank you, sir, but I go with my parents.

DUKE: A sweet child.
Enter attendant, followed by Cassio.

ATTENDANT: Your Grace, Cassio's here.

DUKE: Welcome, Cassio.
He dismisses the attendant.

You know all present, save the Applebys. This is Othello's sister.

CASSIO: Othello's sister! I thought his family had long died out!
He kisses Miriam's hand.

I'm glad that I was wrong.

DUKE: This her husband, these her son and daughter.

CASSIO: It's an honour.

He greets them, and kisses Sibylla's hand too. He is evidently impressed.

DUKE: I fear we must cut short these courtesies. Cassio, we have grim news from Cyprus. Montano has been murdered.

CASSIO: What? Montano? Who killed him?

DUKE: Thieves as it would seem. Montano and Iago walked at night, two men attacked them, but themselves were killed. Men must not walk too late. Montano died, but Iago lived, bearing slight injuries.

CASSIO: Montano dead! Thank God Iago's safe!

DUKE: We wondered if his safety might be due less to God's grace than to the earthly fact that he was the attacker not the attacked.

CASSIO: What do you mean, your Grace?

DUKE: Is Iago honest? At every death he's lurking in the shadows – Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo.

GRATIANO (*to Cassio*): When you were struck, Iago came from those shadows, and now Montano's dead.

CASSIO: I can't believe it.

GRATIANO: Cassio, we were duped. Iago tricked us.

DUKE: To vouch this is no proof, but imputation leads directly to the door of truth.

CASSIO: Yet he seems honest!

OTHELLO: Men should be what they seem.

Again everyone's attention is drawn.

Your Grace, may I ask Cassio a question?

DUKE: You may.

OTHELLO: My uncle thought you stole his wife. What made him think that you and she were guilty?

CASSIO: A handkerchief he'd given Desdemona, which as a token merely of her friendship she asked Iago to pass on to me. Iago thought it signified her love – illicit love – and so informed Othello.

GRATIANO: I have it here with me, this handkerchief.

He produces it. Miriam gasps, and they all look at her.

MIRIAM: Oh, let me have it! (*Gratiano gives it to her.*) If she loved my brother, she never could have given this away.

DUKE: Why not?

MIRIAM: Because there's magic in the web. It was our mother's. Just before she died, she gave it to my brother for his bride. When he wed Desdemona, she'd have known that losing this meant also losing him.

GRATIANO: Then Emilia told the truth!

DUKE: What did she say?

GRATIANO: Iago begged of her to steal the napkin. By chance she found it, and she gave it him.

CASSIO: Oh heavenly God!

OTHELLO: Cut short all intermission. Front to front, bring thou this fiend of Venice, and myself; within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape, let heaven forgive him too.

DUKE: Cassio, you are governor, go to Cyprus, arrest Iago, send him back to Venice, and we ourselves shall fix the penalty. The young Othello will accompany you, to take possession of his uncle's things.

The attendant enters at speed.

ATTENDANT: Your Grace, your Grace!

DUKE : What is it?

ATTENDANT: I should report that which I say I saw, but know not how to do it.

DUKE: Well, say, sir.

ATTENDANT: A fleet of ships, your Grace, has come to Venice, and disembarked an army on our shores.

DUKE: The Turks?

CASSIO: That cannot be. Their fleet was wrecked.

ATTENDANT: No, sir, they are Cypriots and Venetians.

DUKE: What?

ATTENDANT: Your Grace, they're marching on the palace.

Loud noise off stage.

DUKE: What's happening?

Iago enters with several guards.

CASSIO: Iago!

IAGO: Seize them all!

The guards do so, amid general consternation.

DUKE: What is the meaning of this rude intrusion?

GRATIANO: Let go of me!

APPLEBY: Hey, what's going on?

LODOVICO: Iago, this is treason!

IAGO: Quiet, all of you! Forgive my "rude intrusion", your Grace. Cassio, Lodovico...and Gratiano. So many friends together.

DUKE: Iago, this is...

IAGO: Speak when you're spoken to, "your Grace". I have taken command of Venice.

GRATIANO: You're mad, Iago.

IAGO: Oh, there's method in it. *(To Othello)*: Are you the ghost of our dead general's youth?

OTHELLO: My name's Othello.

IAGO: And my name's Iago.

OTHELLO: The devil himself could not pronounce a title more hateful to mine ear.

IAGO: No, nor more fearful. *(He looks at the others.)* Othello's sister? And Othello's niece. Then will I swear beauty herself is black.

OTHELLO: Let her alone.

IAGO: The let-alone lies not in your good will, half-blooded fellow. You, being Launcelot's son, are blackest of the bastards.

Othello spits on him. Iago wipes the spit away, then strikes Othello full in the face.

Mad as your uncle, stupid as your father. Now, my fine judges, how shall we sentence you? First to the dungeons, friends, then to the gallows. Take them away.

GRATIANO: I'll see you hanged, Iago.

IAGO: In the portrait gallery of the Dukes of Venice.

CASSIO: I thought you honest, Iago. I trusted you.

IAGO: Your trust, dear Cassio, was my greatest ally.

He motions to the guards, who take out the Duke, Gratiano, Cassio and Lodovico. He stops them taking the Applebys.

 Tell me, Texan, why did you leave Belmont?

APPLEBY: Well, sir, to claim the estate of Miriam's brother.

IAGO: Which Gratiano tried to steal from you. But yet the pity of it, Texan! O! Texan, the pity of it, Texan! O! The estate has gone!

APPLEBY: What do you mean, gone?

IAGO: Distributed amongst the poor of Cyprus. That is to say, the poor soldiers of Cyprus. You, soldier, did you have your slice of Moor?

GUARD: Yes, sir.

IAGO: He is well satisfied that is well paid. *(To Appleby)*: You should have stayed with what you had in Belmont, since now in seeking more you will lose all.

MIRIAM: What are you going to do to us?

IAGO: What indeed? Place you in safety. Where I am safe from you. Take them to the dungeons. Not the girl. The girl stays here.

APPLEBY: You leave my daughter alone!

MIRIAM: Don't you dare touch her!

IAGO: Touch her? Touch your daughter? Has she not yet been touched? Well, your concern for such an untouched treasure is...most touching.

He motions to the guards to take the Applebys away. Othello stops in front of him.

OTHELLO: I have no words. My voice is in my sword...

IAGO: You have no sword, and so you have no voice.

MIRIAM: Sibylla!

SIBYLLA: Mother!

APPLEBY: Let me go, damn you!

They are all taken out. Iago motions to the guard holding Sibylla.

IAGO: Wait outside.
The guard leaves. Iago sits in the Duke's throne, and strokes its arm.
Duke of Venice. Come here and stand before me.

She does.

Perdition catch my soul but I do love thee. Soft and gentle, warm and moist and yielding. Sibylla – the very name is music. Would we could call such delicate creatures ours. Rude am I in my speech, and little blessed with the soft phrase of love. Now, were I Cassio, I would not be Iago. A proper man, framed to make women false. Is he not handsome?

SIBYLLA: Yes, sir.

IAGO: A man whom you could go to?

SIBYLLA: Go to, sir?

IAGO: Go to, go with, go under. What qualities does he have that I have not?

SIBYLLA: I can't say, sir.

IAGO: Why not?

SIBYLLA *(close to tears)*: I don't know what to say, sir.

IAGO: Manners, breeding, shows of courtesy, all the soft parts of conversation, young, handsome – these are the requisites that signify to folly and green minds. If I touched you, would you flinch, Sibylla?

No response.

If my flesh touched your flesh, would you shudder?

She is crying.

You know that I can take you if I want you.

He goes to her. Her head is lowered as he puts his hands on her shoulders and kisses her neck. She shudders.

You like that, Sibylla?

SIBYLLA: No, sir.

IAGO: That's a pity. Venice is mine, and everything in Venice. If I wish, I can have you hanged.

He reflects, lets her go, and walks away from her, totally changing his tone.

Oh what a desolate life, to be a ruler. Responsibility, the weight of power. No-one to share the burden, warm the heart. I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief, need friends. This torment is the plague of great ones; prerogated are they less than the base; 'tis destiny unshunnable, like death.

He confronts her again. Still no response.

We trifle time, Sibylla. I must have you.

He grasps her roughly.

SIBYLLA: Please sir, no!

IAGO: Lie down.

SIBYLLA: Please!

IAGO: Lie down, damn you!

He hits her, and she screams.

SIBYLLA: No! Please don't hurt me! Don't hurt me!

He drags her off. The sounds of the rape are violent, and evidently he does hurt her a great deal. The rape is followed by a silence that is broken only by Sibylla's sobs.

Iago eventually emerges, straightening his clothing.

IAGO: Little slut. Guard!

The guard enters..

Take her to the Duke's bedchamber, and lock her in.

GUARD: Yes, sir.

The guard goes off and returns with Sibylla, whom he has to half carry.

IAGO: She'll be all right. Lay her on the bed.

The guard goes out with Sibylla.

All that fuss over a piece of skin. What else are women for? Now then, to business. We have the city, not the citizens. We'll teach them how we've saved them from oppression, cry out upon abuses, seem to weep over our country's wrongs; and by this face, this seeming brow of justice, will we win the hearts of all that we do angle for. I'll try these honest nobles one by one, and one by one they'll fall before the people. There's none among them that can match my wit, and so my lies will make their truths unfit. Launcelot! Recruit more soldiers and disband the senate, take all decisions and withhold all trust. I need more Launcelots – Launcelot, I say! – fools that cannot think but will obey.

Launcelot enters.

LAUNCELOT: You called me, sir?

IAGO: We have work to do. How is my insane father?

LAUNCELOT: Insane, sir.

IAGO: Good. We shall need him soon. There's to be a trial, Launcelot – a trial of traitors.

The guard enters.

GUARD: Excuse me, sir.
 IAGO: What is it, man?
 GUARD: The girl, sir.
 IAGO: What girl?
 GUARD: That you sent to the Duke's chamber, sir.
 IAGO: What of her?
 GUARD: I locked the door, as you said, sir, but there was a noise, and I went back in to investigate.
 IAGO: Well?
 GUARD: She jumped from the window, sir. I'm afraid she's dead.
Slight pause.
 IAGO: A pity. She might have been sport for Jove.
He dismisses the guard.
 She was a relative of yours, Launcelot.
 LAUNCELOT: Of mine, sir?
 IAGO: Her brother is your son.
 LAUNCELOT: My son, sir?
 IAGO: The son of Othello's sister, whom you made pregnant.
 LAUNCELOT: Then what's she doing here, sir?
 IAGO: Nothing, I fear, as the dead are apt to do. Her mother and father are with your son in the dungeons.
 LAUNCELOT: They're here? Did the Duke incinerate them?
 IAGO: The fiery Duke? No, Launcelot, they burn at my command. Now then, to work. There are enemies of the state whom we, to gain our peace, must send to peace, including my Jessica mother and Shylock grandfather. Come with me, and you shall have the list.

They go out.

Scene Two

Venice. A dungeon in the palace. Appleby, Othello and Miriam, who is crying.

MIRIAM: What will he do to her? And to us? We should never have come to Venice!
 APPLEBY: Don't cry, Miriam.
 OTHELLO: We could not look into the seeds of time. But heaven's above and knows our cause is just. I'll grind that viper's head into the dust.
 LAUNCELOT (*off*): Let me enter, and close the door after me.
He enters.
 I'll call you when my mission is replete. Miriam?
 MIRIAM: Who are you?
 LAUNCELOT: You don't remember me?
 MIRIAM: No, sir.
 LAUNCELOT: Launcelot Gobbo that was, is, and shall be at your service.
 MIRIAM: Launcelot! I thought you were dead!
 LAUNCELOT: And so did I. But I've been reselected. P.J., still wearing the same hat?
 APPLEBY: Well, fancy seeing you here, Launcelot.
 MIRIAM: Othello, this is your real father.
 OTHELLO: Is't possible?

LAUNCELOT: Not only possible, but truly and in truth incredible. (*To Miriam:*) I spy a close dissemblance to your brother. And yet there's a look in the eye that's distinctly Gobbo.

MIRIAM: What are you doing here, Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT: Ah! Well, I am here in my incapacity as ancient to Lieutenant Iago, or rather General Iago, or rather Governor Iago, or as must now be frutified, Duke Iago.

OTHELLO: You serve Iago?

LAUNCELOT: That is the jest of it, yes.

OTHELLO: Then you are neither father nor friend to us.

LAUNCELOT: I am your father, and ergo I am your friend. I've come to help you.

APPLEBY: How can you help us, Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT: I wish I knew. Our Lieutenant-General-Governor-Duke is planning a trial.

OTHELLO: Who's to be tried?

LAUNCELOT: The Duke and all the nobles, one by one, so they can't support each other's testicles.

OTHELLO: What?

LAUNCELOT: Now I have a plan to help you to escape, but honest as I am, I cannot plan the plan. If you could plan the plan, then I could help you.

OTHELLO: On what authority have you come to us?

LAUNCELOT: I have a letter of authorship from his Dukeship.

OTHELLO: Let me see it.

Launcelot shows him the letter.

“...give all assistance to the bearer of this letter...who acts in my behalf...” Signed by Iago. Father, with this, you can save us and Venice!

LAUNCELOT: Tell me how, and I'll do it.

OTHELLO: Give me some time. 'Tis here, but yet confused.

MIRIAM: Can you help Sibylla too?

Pause.

LAUNCELOT: I fear, mistress, that your daughter cannot be helped.

APPLEBY: Why, Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT: By God's sonties, how do you make bad news sound good?

OTHELLO: Hum, I guess at it.

MIRIAM: O! My fear interprets.

LAUNCELOT: The new Duke had her locked in the old Duke's bedchamber, from where she jumped, as I am sure, to Heaven.

OTHELLO: Then she is dead.

LAUNCELOT: Yes.

Miriam utters a cry of anguish and falls into Appleby's arms.

OTHELLO: If all his hairs were lives, my great revenge would still have stomach for them all! Sister, thy death rebukes false fortune's frown. Thy virtue yet will bring this tyrant down.

Lights out.

Scene Three

Venice. Shylock's house. Shylock and Jessica.

SHYLOCK: Taken the city, imprisoned the Duke and nobles. Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

JESSICA: Let me go to him, father.

SHYLOCK: What son comes home and then ignores his mother? And now this madness. He should have died in Cyprus.

JESSICA: You always judge. You always claim the truth. He was acquitted of the crimes in Cyprus.

SHYLOCK: Acquittal is a sign of good defence, but not of innocence.

JESSICA: He has his reasons. Judge not, father, that ye be not judged.

SHYLOCK: What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?

JESSICA: Perhaps he's done no wrong.

SHYLOCK: And pork is kosher.

Launcelot enters and knocks at the door.

Who comes to visit, threading dark-eyed night?

JESSICA: It must be him. At last!

She opens the door.

Iago? Oh!

LAUNCELOT: Do you not know me, mistress?

JESSICA: No. Who are you?

LAUNCELOT: You are Mistress Jessica?

JESSICA: Yes.

LAUNCELOT: Daughter of the richly Jewish and tightly-fisted Shylock?

JESSICA: Yes.

LAUNCELOT: And once served by the long-lost but forgivably unforgotten Launcelot Gobbo?

JESSICA: Launcelot? Launcelot!

She embraces him.

LAUNCELOT: This is a very welcome welcome.

JESSICA: We thought that you were dead!

SHYLOCK: Who is it, Jessica?

LAUNCELOT: Is that the well-loved grating rasp of my former master?

JESSICA: It's Launcelot, father! Launcelot Gobbo!

Shylock joins them.

SHYLOCK: Launcelot? Not dead?

LAUNCELOT: Everyone thinks I'm dead. Do I look like a holy ghost?

JESSICA: What are you doing here, Launcelot? Where have you come from? What happened to you?

LAUNCELOT: I'm doing a visit to you, I've come from the Duke's palace, and to tell you what's happened to me would take longer than it took to happen. But good mistress and good – though I can think of a better inscription – master, in truth I come on an errand of mercy.

SHYLOCK: Whose mercy, yours or ours?

LAUNCELOT: You've killed two nails with one stone, sir. You must save yourselves from the arch-fiend, and save me and Venice at the same time.

SHYLOCK: What fiend?

LAUNCELOT: I mean, sir, your grandson and my lady's son, the whoreson Iago. He plans to have you arrested and locked away in an unsafe place.

JESSICA: But why?

LAUNCELOT: I haven't apprehended the whys and the zeds, madam, but it's to do with a trial tomorrow. The Duke and nobles are to be tried for treason without reason, and you're to be locked up indoors without cause.

SHYLOCK: How can we save Venice?

LAUNCELOT: By furnishing me, sir, with a small but large number of your precious ducats. Corruption powers, sir, and absolute corruption powers absolutely.

SHYLOCK: Let him come in, Jessica. The street has ears.

LAUNCELOT: And ears, Jessica, like noses may be picked.
They go inside. Lights out.

ACT FIVE

Venice. A courtroom in the palace. A crowd of people flanked by guards, with Iago and Launcelot standing to one side.

IAGO: You couldn't find Shylock or my mother?

LAUNCELOT: No, sir, but I heard that they'd left Venice.

IAGO: Then they can't damage us. Go and announce me, Launcelot.
Launcelot advances to the front of the court.

LAUNCELOT: Quiet! Everybody, quiet! Be outstanding for Iago, Duke of Venice!
Iago makes his entrance and sits majestically.

IAGO: Friends, Venetians, countrymen! Lend me your ears! Venice is troubled, with hearts brimful of fear, the Duke deposed, and soldiers everywhere, while I – as you know me all, a plain blunt man, one of yourselves – sit here upon this throne. All images of revolt and flying off. You demand reasons, and reasons you shall have. No blown ambition doth our arms incite, but love, dear love, of this our suffering country. Now hear me speak and if, when I have spoken, your will is that I hand the reins of rule back to those men whom we have just deposed, it shall be so. I ask you but to hear me.
Favourable reactions from the guards and some of the crowd.

Why would a simple soldier risk his life to rise against the great ones of the city? I'll tell you, friends: because I would not see their cruel nails pluck out the eyes of Venice, stealing your gold and stowing it in their coffers. You'll demand proof, and proof I shall provide, to bear no hinge nor loop to hang a doubt on, but first look round you at the ducal walls, the jewels and treasures, priceless works of art. Look in your senators' houses. Are your beds as soft as theirs? And are your palates seasoned with viands like theirs? Where did they get such wealth? Why, from you! Out of your sweat, your labour. You sow the seeds and water them with your tears, and they lie back on cushions, feeding fat. Do you need proof? You can see it, touch it. You feel it in the hollow of your bellies!

Favourable reactions.

Are you content with crumbs from the Duke's table? Are you content with scraps left out for his dogs? Are you content with rags cast off by his horses?

More reactions.

But proof you shall have, from the lips of the Duke himself, from Cassio, Gratiano, Lodovico, the wealthy curled darlings of our nation, who hide their grossness with fair ornament. Bring in Cassio!

LAUNCELOT: Bring in Cassio!

Cassio is brought in.

IAGO: Lieutenant Cassio, governor of Cyprus, adulterer, drunkard, also known for whoring, yet reappointed governor by the Duke. He does not speak. His silence speaks for him.

Cassio stands with lowered eyes.

On Cyprus Cassio caused the tragic death of the finest general Venice ever had: Othello, the Moor, yet far more fair than black, as true to Venice as the sea herself. He was my friend, faithful and just to me, and when he wed the beautiful Desdemona, I shared his joy, but then shared his despair as Cassio smoothly prised his wife away...

CASSIO: That isn't true!

IAGO: Practising upon his peace and quiet, even to madness, till he killed his wife, and then himself.

CASSIO: No, this is a lie!

IAGO: You deny Othello killed her and himself?

CASSIO: No.

IAGO: Then it's true.

CASSIO: Yes, but...

IAGO: He confesses. Confess and be damned for ever. Take him away.

CASSIO: I did not touch Desdemona...

Iago drowns his cries, and a guard claps his hand over Cassio's mouth as he takes him out.

IAGO: That is the stallion appointed to govern Cyprus. A lecher self-confessed. Your wives, your daughters, your matrons and your maids could not fill up the cistern of his lust. Would that might prove the end of our city's shame. Bring in Gratiano.

LAUNCELOT: Bring in Gratiano!

Gratiano is brought in.

IAGO: You are Gratiano?

GRATIANO: Yes.

IAGO: The senator, Brabantio's brother, Desdemona's uncle?

GRATIANO: I am.

IAGO: In your youth known to be a gamester, and a drunkard, and a fortune-hunter.

Gratiano is taken aback.

Answer!

GRATIANO: I was wild in my youth...

IAGO: Wild and dissolute. Were you recently on Cyprus?

GRATIANO: You know that I was.

IAGO: Were you present at black Othello's death?
 GRATIANO: I was.
 IAGO: You know a man called Lodovico?
 GRATIANO: Yes.
 IAGO: A friend of yours?
 GRATIANO: I know him...
 IAGO: A friend. Presently we shall see this friend, when we have done with you. On Othello's death, this friend assigned to you the whole estate, using these words: "Gratiano, keep the house, and seize upon the fortunes of the Moor, for they succeed to you." Is that correct?
 GRATIANO: It is.
 IAGO: On what authority did he make this gift?
Gratiano cannot answer.
 Perhaps as senator, speaking for the Duke?
 GRATIANO: Yes.
 IAGO: And yet he knew, as you did, that Othello had a sister living in Belmont, with greater right than you to the estate. Do you smell a fault? What did they agree? Half for Gratiano, half for Lodovico?
 GRATIANO: No!
 IAGO: You deny he gave you the estate?
 GRATIANO: No, but...
 IAGO: Then confess to the corruption. Yet this is but a minor offence among thy heinous, manifest and many treasons. For instance, in your wild and dissolute youth, you had two friends, Solanio and Salerio?
 GRATIANO: Yes.
 IAGO: Sent to Cyprus for committing murder?
 GRATIANO: Yes.
 IAGO: Fine friends for such a noble man of Venice! On Cyprus did you know Signor Montano?
 GRATIANO: Yes.
 IAGO (*to crowd*): A man as virtuous as he was valiant, loved by the Moor, who in my very presence spoke to him of his family, his sister. Upon Othello's death, the good Montano challenged Gratiano's claim to the estate. And that same night, Gratiano's murderous friends Solanio and Salerio killed Montano.
 GRATIANO: That's a damned lie!
 IAGO: What, you deny his murder?
 GRATIANO: No, but...
 IAGO: Their thrusts would have removed me too, but that my coat was better than they knew. Instead, your friends died beside my friend. But not before Solanio made confession of who he was, and by whom he'd been suborned.
 GRATIANO: No!
 IAGO: What, look you pale, Gratiano? Do you perceive the gastness of his eye? The names were Gratiano and Lodovico; the payment, shares in dead Othello's fortune.
 GRATIANO: This is a total lie!

IAGO: I heard him confess. Why would a dying man confess to lies? I have a witness too, who knew them both in Venice. Launcelot, name the murderers.

LAUNCELOT: Solanio, sir, and Salerio.

GRATIANO: Dear God in Heaven!

IAGO (*to crowd*): Is this proof enough?
Cries of "Yes!" "The Devil!" etc.
 Take him away.

GRATIANO: You'll roast in hell for all these lies, Iago!

IAGO: And you will fry in the fat of your own corruption.
Gratiano is led away.
 My heart is in the coffin with Montano, and I should pause till it come back to me. But is it your will to meet these other butchers?
Cries of "Ay!", "Yes!", "Iago!" etc.
 One woe doth tread upon another's heel. Bring in Lodovico.

LAUNCELOT: Bring in Lodovico!
Lodovico is brought in.

IAGO: Lodovico, youngest senator of Venice. A handsome man. Alas, there is no art to find the mind's construction in the face. We'll waste no breath upon your theft, Lodovico, since Gratiano has confessed it here.

LODOVICO: What theft?

IAGO: What theft? Ah, we must forgive him. He was not here when Gratiano spoke, and so of course he knows not of his guilt.
Laughter from the crowd.

LODOVICO: I've stolen nothing. What are these lies, Iago?

IAGO: Well-painted passion. No more, Lodovico. Let us instead consider your newest crime – so deeply damned that when I merely name it, pity shall blow the deed in every eye, that tears shall drown the wind. Who is Sibylla?

LODOVICO: Sibylla? Othello's sister's daughter?

IAGO: Sibylla. A maiden never bold, of spirit so still and quiet that her motion blushed at herself. You met her family?

LODOVICO: I did.

IAGO: The family of Othello's sister. It must have shocked both you and Gratiano to meet those whose inheritance you'd stolen.

LODOVICO: What?

IAGO: But they are swift of thought, these noble men. A danger spied is a danger soon removed. You sent them to the dungeons, all but one, where they'd be rotting now had I not saved them.

LODOVICO: Oh monstrous lie! You had them imprisoned!

IAGO: Handy-dandy, which is the justice here, which is the thief?

LODOVICO: I have done no wrong!

IAGO: All but one you threw into the dungeons. But for her, the maidenly Sibylla, you had in mind a different side of hell. This child, exquisite, yet untouched by man, you took and raped, then locked in the Duke's bedchamber, from where – her body racked, her mind distraught – this violated angel flung herself from the highest window down to the earth below.

LODOVICO: None of this is true!

IAGO: Not true? Not true? Shall we produce her raped and ruptured corpse?

LODOVICO: Her parents are in the dungeons, where you threw them. They'll be my witnesses.

IAGO: They are no longer there. I have freed them, and you shall take their place, if justice has its way. Oh speak, Venetians, is this man for the senate or the dungeons?

A cry of "The dungeons!" Iago motions to a guard, who takes Lodovico out to a chorus of jeers.

Thus hath the candle singed the moth. Bring in the Duke.

LAUNCELOT: Bring in the Duke of Venice!

The Duke is brought in. The crowd falls silent.

IAGO: We charge you with crimes against the state. You gave high office and authority to Cassio, Gratiano and Lodovico, complicit in their lechery and greed, aiding them to usurp Othello's fortune, and indirectly causing Sibylla's death. Further, you have wrongfully imprisoned the victims of your lust and avarice, and filled your coffers, lined your walls and pockets with wealth by right belonging to the people. These are the charges.

DUKE: I deny them all, and I deny your right to sit in judgment.

IAGO: He denies his wealth! But friends, he speaks the truth, for from this moment, coffers, walls and pockets shall be as barren as the desert air. His fortune's yours, moreover all his walks, his private arbours, and new-planted orchards I give to you for ever – common pleasures to walk abroad and recreate yourselves.

Cheers from the crowd.

But proof you need, and proof you shall be given: a living victim, left for dead, of crimes both undivulged and safe from judgment's whip. Tremble, thou wretch. Now bring in Lorenzo.

LAUNCELOT: Bring in Lorenzo!

Lorenzo is brought in.

IAGO: If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. This is Lorenzo. Do you remember him?

DUKE: No.

IAGO: Let me relume the light of memory. Thirty years ago, this blank-eyed creature could pray and sing and tell old tales and laugh, as we do now. He loved a rich Jew's daughter. The Jew, a surly man, forbade their marriage, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree, and these young hares skipped o'er the Jew's hard meshes, and fled from Venice, taking a few ducats to pay their journey. But the father Jew had a powerful friend – the Duke of Venice, who shared the profits which the Jew extorted from ailing debtors...

DUKE: These are lies, Iago!

IAGO: Wait till my tale is done, then defend yourself. Your friend the Jew appealed to you for help. You had the lovers caught, and gave the girl back into her tyrant father's grasp. Her husband then, whose only crime was love, you threw into the dungeons, where he lost his wife, his youth, his future and his mind. And on the very day you walled him in, his son was born – fatherless and in shame. I am that son. Lorenzo is my father.

He is overcome with emotion.

DUKE: Lorenzo...But he was sent to Cyprus...

IAGO: All the stored vengeance of heaven fall upon you! Take him away before I strike him dead!

DUKE: I do remember...

IAGO: Avaunt and quit my sight!
The Duke is hustled out. Lorenzo remains.
 Vengeance can't minister to a mind diseased. Forgive me, friends, my heart o'ertook my head. But this is my father, and if your souls know pity, you'll understand why I should weep for him.

Sympathy from the crowd.
 What shall we do? Restore to eminence the Duke and all his noble friends of fortune?

Cries of no.
 But who is to govern Venice in their stead?

Cries of "You!", "Long live Iago!", "Duke Iago!" etc.
 You'd have a simple soldier be your Duke?

More shouts of approbation.
 Since you will buckle fortune on my back, to bear her burden whether I will or no, I must have patience to endure the load...

LAUNCELOT: May it please your worship?

IAGO: What is it, Launcelot?

LAUNCELOT: There is another witness.

IAGO: What?

LAUNCELOT: Bring in Othello Junior!
Othello Junior is brought in. When he is directly in front of Iago, the guard releases him. He seizes Iago before the latter can react, and holds a knife to his throat.

IAGO: Ah! You dog! Guards, seize this man!

OTHELLO: Move, and I'll slit his throat from ear to ear.
Stillness in the court.
 I am Othello, nephew to the Moor, and I'll refute the lies of this assassin. We were imprisoned, not by Lodovico, but by Iago, who would have let us die, had not this saviour led us all to safety.

Launcelot bows.
 And now hear other truths from those that know them. Bring in the prisoners.

LAUNCELOT: Bring in the prisoners!
The Duke, Cassio, Gratiano and Lodovico are brought in.

OTHELLO: Unhand them, gentlemen, they are no villains. The only villain in this court sits here. But ere these truths are told, we'll hear one other, of how Lorenzo came to lose his mind. Call Shylock and his daughter Jessica.

LAUNCELOT: Call Shylock and his daughter Jessica!
Shylock and Jessica enter.

IAGO: What?

Othello tightens his grip. Jessica gazes pityingly at Lorenzo, who continues to stare into space. Then she looks at Iago, and there is a moment of great tension before she speaks.

JESSICA: Thou art my shame.

OTHELLO: Shylock, this man says the Duke imprisoned Lorenzo here in the palace for loving Jessica. Tell us the truth.

SHYLOCK: He and his friends Solanio and Salerio conspired to kill me to gain his inheritance. But in the dark they murdered my friend Tubal, and for this crime the Duke sent them to Cyprus to fight the Turks. Launcelot went too.

Lorenzo, still not looking at anyone, begins to weep silently.

LAUNCELOT: All of us deserted, and Othello – Othello Senior, that is, that was, because Othello Junior is my son, although I say it as perhaps should not, him being illiterate – incinerated us.

OTHELLO: And Lorenzo?

LAUNCELOT: Went out of his mind, and never found his way back.

IAGO: Launcelot, viper, rat...

OTHELLO: There are more lies this devil brought from hell. Cassio, did you steal Desdemona?

CASSIO: No! With that lie Iago drove Othello to kill his wife and then to kill himself, while Emilia died for trying to tell the truth.

OTHELLO: Gratiano, did you have Montano murdered?

GRATIANO: No, I did not. Iago did that deed.

LAUNCELOT: Who, if I might be bold, sir, for good measure – or rather, bad, since murder has a kind of smell – removed the said Solanio and Salerio himself, claiming he didn't know them though he knew them.

OTHELLO: As for Gratiano claiming my uncle's fortune, this was a lapse of memory, not conscience. He's begged forgiveness and has been forgiven.

DUKE: Othello, where are your parents now?

OTHELLO: Grieving, sir, over my sister's death. A crime Iago blamed on Lodovico.

LODOVICO: I am not guilty.

OTHELLO: No, this devil is. Which is the guard Catullus?

LAUNCELOT: Which is the guard Catullus?

Catullus, the guard who had been on duty during the Sibylla episode, steps forward.

OTHELLO: Catullus, what happened to my sister?

GUARD: I left the general alone with her, and heard her screams as he was raping her. Then afterwards, he ordered me to take her – half swooning, sir, she was, and badly bloodied – to the Duke's chamber, where I locked her in. Later I found she'd opened up the window, and thrown herself down to earth below.

Silence.

OTHELLO: Who should rule Venice? The Devil, or the Duke?

Subdued murmurs: "The Duke!"

May it please your grace to take what's rightly yours.

He forces Iago to rise, and the Duke sits in the throne.

DUKE: Take him to isolation. Put him in chains, until we have pronounced our final judgment.

IAGO: Guards! Seize these men! I am your general! Seize them, I say!
But they seize him.

Fools, every one of you! My curses on you! And may each flame
from hell singe your white souls! I curse you, Jessica! I curse you,
Shylock! A double curse upon the mad Lorenzo! You are the fiends
that made me what I am!

Jessica shrinks, and Shylock puts his arm round her.

And you, Venetians, blowing in the wind, I pray your city sinks
beneath the sea!

As he is taken out, he confronts Launcelot.

You are a fool.

LAUNCELOT: Yes, sir, but not a knave.

Iago goes out.

DUKE: People of Venice, this is no joyful day. The Devil was here, and we
smell the burning flesh. Like a politician he coats his bitter lies with
sweetest truth and feeds us with his poison. But poisons can be
changed to medicines, sent from heaven not to pick bad from bad,
but by bad mend. Iago's truths were truths. In governing, we think
too much of Venice, too little of Venetians. That's a fault. In a
rich city there should be no poor, and distribution should undo
excess. I fear I've taken too little care of this, but I shall put reforms
before the senate. Meanwhile, we owe deep thanks to these two
men, who saved us from Iago's devil-rule. Our saviours are, I hear,
father and son. Launcelot and Othello, please step forth.

They do.

In token of the gratitude of Venice, I give you both the freedom of
the city.

LAUNCELOT & OTHELLO: We thank your Grace.

DUKE: There now remains little for me to say, except to draw the lesson
of this day, which has been true since history began: the greatest
danger to mankind is man.

*He goes out, followed by Lodovico and Gratiano, Launcelot and Othello (arm in
arm), and Cassio. The crowd and the guards disperse, leaving no-one on stage but
Shylock, Jessica and Lorenzo, still weeping and staring into space. Jessica looks at
him, and looks at her father, who nods. She goes to Lorenzo, takes his arm, and leads
him off. Shylock takes his other arm as they go.*

Curtain
The End

