



Leaving Cert English

Free Notes

Othello

Act 2 – Scene 1

Summary Act 2

Scene 1

In the next scene the setting moves to Cyprus, where we join Montano - the island's governor - as he watches a storm with two other gentlemen. Montano announces that there's no way that the Turkish fleet of ships could survive the storm, and immediately Cassio arrives and confirms this. As his ship travelled from Venice, Cassio watched as most of the Turks lost their fleets in the tempest. The storm is so strong it's still uncertain whether Othello's ship has been able to sail through it. Briefly, our hopes are raised when voices offstage announce the sighting of a sail offshore, but that ship turns out to be carrying Desdemona, Iago, Roderigo and Iago's wife Emilia. Desdemona disembarks from the ship in search of her husband, but when Cassio breaks it to her that Othello has yet to arrive, a friendly shot announces the arrival of a third ship. While the company waits for the ship, Cassio and Desdemona tease Emilia about being a chatterbox, but Iago takes the opportunity to criticize all women as liars and hypocrites, saying they are lazy in all matters except sex: "You rise to play and go to bed to work". Desdemona reveals her witty nature as she plays along, laughing as Iago belittles women, whether beautiful or ugly, intelligent or stupid, as equally despicable, and pointing out the contradictions in his statements. Cassio then takes Desdemona away to speak with her privately about Othello's arrival, and Iago watches them go. He sees Cassio take Desdemona's hand as he speaks with her and, in an aside, plots to use it as evidence that they are having an affair. Iago wants Cassio to be stripped of his newly gained promotion to lieutenant. "With as little a web as this I will ensnare as great a fly as Cassio," he asserts.

Othello arrives safely and greets Desdemona, expressing his love and devotion to her and giving her a kiss. He is happy to be in Cyprus, and thanks the Cypriots for their welcome and hospitality. He then orders Iago to unload the ship, and everyone except Roderigo and Iago heads to the castle to celebrate the drowning of the Turks. Now is the perfect time for the two to conspire, and Iago tells the despondent Roderigo that Desdemona is too young for Othello, and will soon weary with his ways and faded looks. But, Iago continues, if she seeks a lover then the obvious first choice for Desdemona will be Cassio, whom Iago characterizes over and over again as a "knave". Roderigo tries to argue that in taking Desdemona's hand, Cassio was

merely being polite, but Iago's silver tongue convinces him to start a fight with Cassio at the feast that night. Iago tells him that the fight will come across as worse in such a still-tense city, and will make Cassio fall out of favour with Othello. Left alone onstage again, Iago explains his actions to the audience in a soliloquy. We learn that he secretly lusts after Desdemona, and a factor in this lust is that he suspects that Othello has slept with Emilia, and he wants to get even with the Moor "wife for wife". But, Iago continues, if that is not possible, Roderigo's accusation of Cassio will set his plan in motion - to make Othello suspect his lieutenant of sleeping with his wife and torture Othello to madness.

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