



Leaving Cert English

Free Notes

Othello

Act 4 – Scene 1

Summary Act 4

Scene 1

Othello and Iago enter in mid-conversation. Iago is in the process of goading Othello, by saying there's nothing wrong with a kiss his wife and Cassio might have shared in private. He continues by arguing that maybe they were just naked together and nothing happened, and that if he gave a handkerchief to his own wife, she could do with it as she pleased. This all sounds to Othello like Iago is merely trying to soften the blow, and the persistent insinuations of Desdemona's unfaithfulness work him into an incoherent frenzy. He focuses obsessively on the handkerchief and keeps pumping Iago for information about Cassio's comments to Iago. Finally, Iago reluctantly admits that Cassio has told him he was on top of Desdemona in bed, and Othello "falls down in a trance".

Cassio enters, and Iago mentions that Othello has fallen into his second fit of epilepsy in two days. Cassio says they should do something to revive him, but Iago convinces him it must simply run its course, and that Cassio should leave before Othello awakens. Before Cassio leaves however, Iago tells him that he would like to speak to him once he has gone. Othello comes out of his trance, and Iago explains that Cassio was there and that he has arranged to speak with the ex-lieutenant. Iago tells Othello to hide nearby, and that he will quiz Cassio on his time spent with Desdemona, and whether he plans on sleeping with her again. Othello will be able to observe Cassio's face during their conversation. When Othello is gone however, Iago informs the audience of his actual intention. He will joke with Cassio about the prostitute Bianca, so that Cassio will laugh as he tells the story of Bianca's pursuit of him. Othello will be driven mad, thinking that Cassio is joking with Iago about Desdemona.

The plan works: Cassio laughs uproariously as Iago tells him there is a rumour going around that he will marry Bianca. Cassio denies it, and says she made it up because she thinks he is in love with her. He tells Iago the details of Bianca's love for him, and even makes gestures in an attempt to depict her sexual advances. Every time he speaks, laughs or makes a movement, Othello imagines that he is recreating the scene of how he took Desdemona from their

bedchamber. Just as Cassio says that he has to get rid of Bianca, she herself enters with the handkerchief and again accuses Cassio of giving her a love token given to him by another woman. Othello sees her holding his handkerchief. Bianca tells Cassio that if he doesn't show up for supper with her that evening he will never be welcome to come back again, and then leaves. Iago urges Cassio to follow her, and he admits he must or she'll start screaming in the streets. Othello comes out of hiding when they are gone, and immediately asks Iago how he thinks he should murder the former lieutenant. He goes on to despair over his own hardheartedness and love for Desdemona, but Iago reminds him of his purpose. Othello has trouble accepting that his beautiful, graceful and pure wife could have carried out adulterous actions. He suggests that he will poison his wife, but Iago advises him to strangle her in the bed that she contaminated through her infidelity. Iago also promises to arrange Cassio's death. With poor timing, Desdemona chooses that moment to enter, unaware that an event which will seal her fate has just transpired. She comes with Lodovico, who has come from Venice with a message from the duke. Othello is still caught up in images of Cassio and Desdemona playing him for a fool, and he reacts with irritation when Lodovico inquires about Cassio. Desdemona worsens the situation by answering Lodovico, and telling him that though Othello and Cassio have fallen out, perhaps the situation can be put right. Othello scoffs at her, but when she asks him what he means, he pretends to be engrossed in the Duke's letter. The letter itself is also a source of upset for Othello, however. He has been called back to Venice, with orders to leave Cassio as his replacement in Cyprus. When Desdemona hears the news she exclaims that she is delighted to be returning home. Then, seemingly for no reason, Othello strikes her. She begins to weep at his ill-treatment, but he claims her tears are false, and she rushes offstage. Lodovico, who is horrified by Othello's loss of self-control, asks Othello to call her back and apologise. Othello does so, but then makes matters worse by merely calling Desdemona back just to mock her tears once more. He tells Lodovico that he will obey the duke's orders, commands Desdemona to leave, and storms off. Lodovico is shocked by what has transpired, and asks if he's dealing with the same man he once knew. He asks Iago if Othello is losing his mind, and through feigning reluctance to talk, Iago plants the seeds of doubt in Lodovico's mind. Iago refuses to answer Lodovico's questions, telling him that he must see for himself.

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