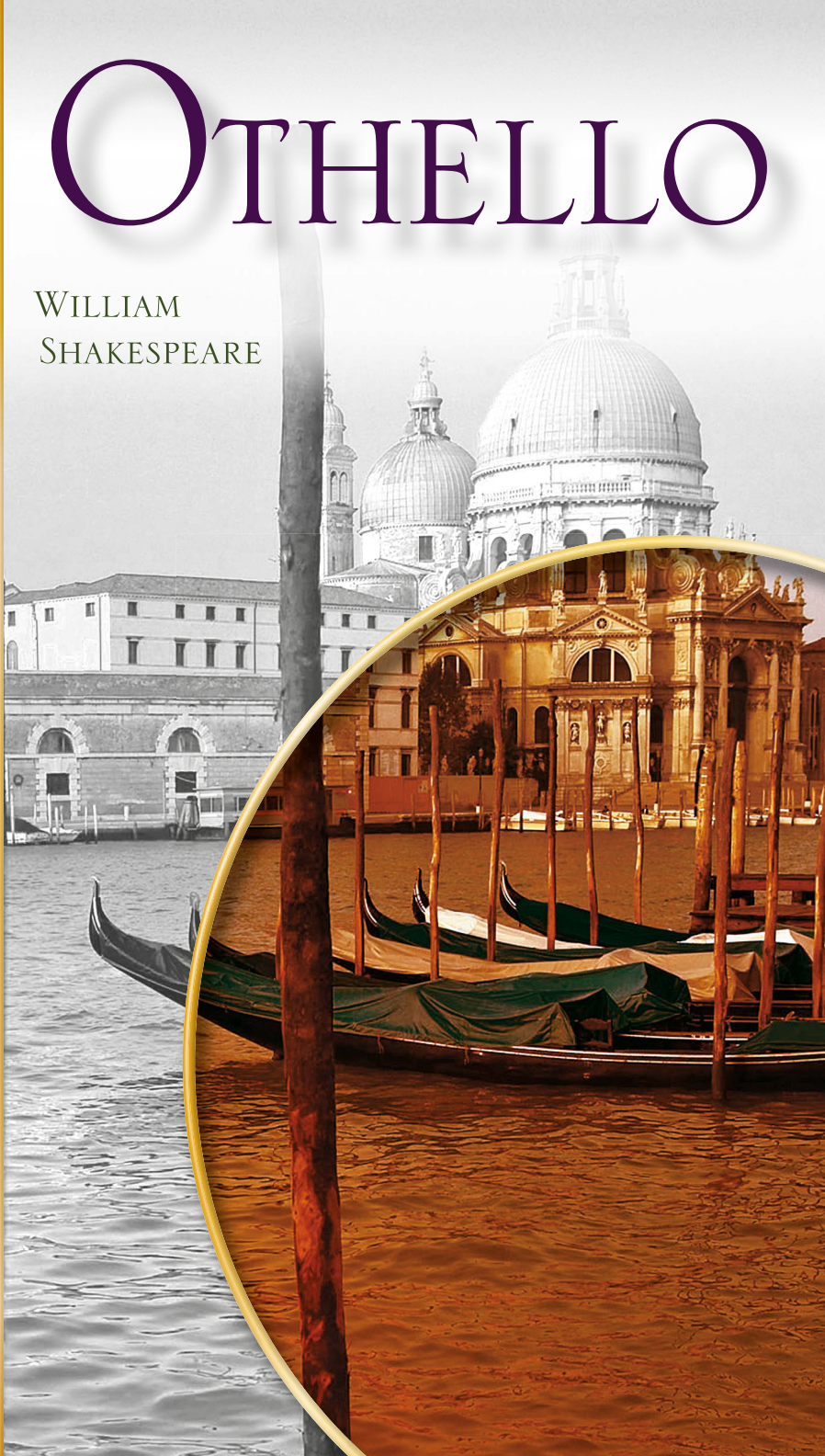
Othello

William Shakespeare



Timeless Shakespeare

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– INTRODUCTION –

This play is set in Venice, Italy, and the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea. The time is the early 1600s. Othello, a Moor from northwest Africa, is the great army general of Venice. As the play opens, Othello's ensign Iago has been passed over for a promotion. Instead, Othello has promoted Cassio, a younger man. Iago is very angry. To get revenge, he plans to drive a wedge between Othello and his bride, Desdemona, by playing on Othello's jealousy. As the play continues, the noble Moor falls into Iago's trap, and tragedy follows.

– CAST OF CHARACTERS –

DUKE OF VENICE

BRABANTIO Desdemona's father, a senator

GRATIANO Brabantio's brother; a noble Venetian

LODOVICO a relative of Brabantio; a noble Venetian

OTHELLO a noble Moor in the military service of Venice

CASSIO Othello's honorable lieutenant

IAGO Othello's ensign; a villain

RODERIGO an easily fooled young gentleman

MONTANO the governor of Cyprus before Othello

CLOWN Othello's servant

DESDEMONA Brabantio's daughter; Othello's fair young bride

EMILIA Iago's wife

BIANCA a woman involved with Cassio

GENTLEMEN, SAILORS, OFFICERS, MESSENGER, HERALD, MUSICIANS, SERVANTS, and **SENATORS (SIGNIORS)**

ACT 1

Scene 1

*(Enter **Roderigo** and **Iago** on a street in Venice.)*

RODERIGO: Why didn't you say so earlier?

IAGO: You never listen to me anyway.

RODERIGO: But you told me you hated him—

IAGO: I do. I deserve to be his lieutenant.
Yet he picked Michael Cassio instead.
Cassio has never proved himself in battle.
And I, who led men on many battlefields,
Will be Othello's mere ensign, the lowest rank of officer!

RODERIGO: I would rather be his hangman.

IAGO: A new system is in place.
It's who you know that counts—not what you can do.
Now, sir, judge for yourself whether I have any reason
To love the Moor.

RODERIGO: Why do you follow him, then?

IAGO: Don't be fooled. I only follow him to get back at him.
We can't all be in charge—nor can all

those in charge be truly followed.
In following him, I'm looking out for my own good.
As heaven is my judge, I act not out of love and duty,
Even though I must make a show of service.
I am never what I seem to be.

RODERIGO: We can't let him get away with this!

IAGO: Let us wake up Desdemona's father. Making him angry will lessen Othello's joy.

RODERIGO: Here is her father's house.

IAGO: Wake him! Yell as if the town is on fire!

RODERIGO: Hello! Brabantio! Signior Brabantio! Hello!

IAGO: Wake up, Brabantio! Thieves! Thieves!

BRABANTIO *(appearing above, at a window)*: Why all the noise? What's wrong?

RODERIGO: Heavens, sir, you've been robbed! Your heart is burst. You have lost half your soul.
Even now, a ram is with your white ewe.
Arise! Wake your neighbors with the bell,
Or else the devil may make you a grandfather.

BRABANTIO: Have you lost your mind? Who are you?

RODERIGO: I am Roderigo, sir. Don't you know my voice?

BRABANTIO: You are not welcome here! I've told you my daughter is not for you.

RODERIGO: I have come to you with simple and pure reasons.

IAGO *(supporting Roderigo)*: We're here to help you. If you don't act quickly, your daughter will be mated with a Moorish horse. You'll have chargers for grandsons.

BRABANTIO: What kind of foul talk is that?

IAGO: It is the truth, sir. Your daughter and the Moor are together.

BRABANTIO: Villain! You'll answer for this.

RODERIGO: Sir, I will answer anything. Maybe it is your wish
That your fair daughter, in the middle of the night,
Has been carried off in the gross embrace of a lustful Moor.
If so, we must apologize for bothering you.
But if you did not know about it, then you should thank us.
Why don't you find out for yourself?
If she is in her room or your house,

Bring the justice of the state against me for thus lying to you.

BRABANTIO: Give me a candle! Wake up the household!
Light, I say! *Light!*

(He exits from the balcony above.)

IAGO *(to Roderigo)*: Farewell, for I must leave you.
It wouldn't help me to be used as a witness against Othello.
I know that he is in favor with the state.
Oh, he might get some slight punishment.
But the state needs him to lead in the Cyprus wars.
Though I hate him, I must show outward signs of love.
Bring the search party to the inn. I will be there with him. Farewell!

*(**Iago** exits. **Brabantio** enters below. **Servants** carrying torches are with him.)*

BRABANTIO: It is too true an evil. She is gone!
What's left of my life will be nothing but bitterness.
Now, Roderigo, where did you see her?
Oh, the foolish girl!
With the Moor, you said? Oh, treason of the blood!

How did you know it was she? Oh, she deceived me!
Wake up my family! Are they already married, do you think?

RODERIGO: Truly, I think they are.

BRABANTIO: Oh, heavens! How did she get out? Such deception!
Fathers, from now on, do not trust your daughters' minds
Based on how you see them act. Is there not magic
By which the nature of youth and virginity
May be abused? Haven't you, Roderigo, read of such things?

RODERIGO: Yes, sir, I have indeed.

BRABANTIO: Oh, if only she had been yours!
Do you know where we may find her and the Moor?

RODERIGO: I think I can find them.

BRABANTIO: Please, lead on! Good Roderigo, I'll reward you for this.

Scene 2

*(**Othello**, **Iago**, and **servants** enter on another street.)*

IAGO: Though I have killed men in war,
It goes against my conscience to commit murder.
I'm not evil enough to serve my own needs. Nine or ten times
I thought about stabbing Brabantio right here, under the ribs.

OTHELLO: It's better that you didn't.

IAGO: But he spoke rudely, insulting you.
I could hardly keep from attacking him!
But, I ask you, sir—are you married? You can be sure of this:
Brabantio will see that you are divorced,
Or bring whatever charges against you that the law allows.

OTHELLO: Let him do his worst.
The services that I have done for the state
Will speak louder than his complaints. No one knows this yet,
But when the right time comes, I will make it known that
I am descended from men of royal rank.
I can claim as great a fortune as my wife can.
Know this, Iago: If I didn't love the gentle Desdemona so much,

I would not have given up my freedom for
all the treasure in the sea.
But look! What lights are coming this way?

*(Enter **Cassio** and other **officers**, with **servants** carrying torches.)*

IAGO: That's the awakened father and his friends! You'd better go in.

OTHELLO: No. I must be found. My talents, my title, and my perfect soul
Shall speak right of me. Is it they?

IAGO: I don't think so.

OTHELLO *(to Cassio's group)*: Greetings, friends! What is the news?

CASSIO: The duke sends greetings, General.
And wants to see you right away.

OTHELLO: What do you think is the matter?

CASSIO: Some news from Cyprus, I imagine.
Many important men are with the duke already.
They are calling for you, too.
When they did not find you at home,
The Senate sent three groups to find you.

OTHELLO: It's good that you have found me.
I must tell my household I am leaving.
Then I'll go with you. *(He exits.)*

CASSIO *(to Iago)*: Ensign, why is Othello here?

IAGO: To tell you the truth, he has boarded
a rich vessel tonight.
If it turns out to be a lawful prize, he'll
be rich for life.

CASSIO: I do not understand.

IAGO: He's married.

CASSIO: To whom?

*(**Othello** re-enters.)*

IAGO: Why, to—Come, captain, ready to go?

OTHELLO: I am ready.

CASSIO: Here's another troop looking for you.

*(Enter **Brabantio**, **Roderigo**, and **officers** carrying torches and weapons.)*

IAGO: It is Brabantio! General, be warned:
He comes with bad intentions.

OTHELLO: Hello! Stand right there!

RODERIGO *(to Brabantio)*: Signior, it is the Moor.

BRABANTIO: Down with him, the thief!

(Both groups of men draw their swords.)

OTHELLO: Put away your bright swords.
The dew will rust them.
(to Brabantio): Good signior, it's better
to use the wisdom of your age
Than weapons to make your point.

BRABANTIO: Oh, you foul thief! Where have you hidden my daughter?
You've put a spell on her. Why else would a girl like her—
So tender, fair, and happy—be with you?
She has refused the best men in Venice.
Surely you have cast a foul spell on her!
You must have used drugs or minerals that weaken the will.
Therefore, I arrest and charge you as a
Practicer of forbidden and illegal arts.

OTHELLO: Where must I go to answer this charge of yours?

BRABANTIO: To prison, until you are called to trial by the court.

OTHELLO: I will gladly obey. But what about the duke, who has sent these messengers *(pointing to Cassio and his men)* to bring me to him?

BRABANTIO: What? The duke is in council
At this time of the night? Let's go see him!
Mine is not a minor case.
The duke himself would feel this wrong
As if it were his own.
If, after such actions, you're allowed to go free,
Then bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.

TIMELESS SHAKESPEARE

OTHELLO

Iago is bitter over the loss of an important job promotion. How can he get revenge? Aha! Nothing could hurt Othello worse than the ruin of his own marriage.

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