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ACT/CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Othello

KEY CHARACTERS:

Othello, the moor~ a Venetian general

Desdemona~ daughter of Brabantio and Othello's wife

Iago~ a villain, third in command to Othello

Cassio~ second in command to Othello

Roderigo~ a Venetian gentleman, duped by Iago

Emilia~ Iago's wife, attending Desdemona

ACT I:

Iago lost the big promotion to Cassio.

Iago thought he was next in line, but their boss, Othello, doesn't play by the old rules.

Iago decides to get even....he knows that Othello has eloped with the lovely Desdemona, which is sure to cause a scandal when the news becomes public.

Although he is a great and decorated general, and popular in Venice, Othello is a Moor. A broad minded Venetian might invite a Moor to his house, but he wouldn't want his daughter to marry one.

Brabantio is no exception....so when Iago and Roderigo wake him in the middle of the night with the news, he rushes off to "rescue" his daughter.

The two-faced Iago warns Othello about Brabantio, but Othello is not concerned because he and Desdemona are in love. Plus, Venice needs Othello's good will because he is their best general.

Cassio enters with a summons from the duke. It calls for Othello to defend Cyprus from the Turks.

The duke wants to send Othello immediately, but is interrupted by Desdemona's father who brings accusations against Othello.

Desdemona is summoned for her two cents.

While they await her arrival, Othello tells the story of how he visited she and her father....that she had fallen in love with the many dangers he had faced, and he loved her because 'she did pity them'.

Desdemona arrives and confirms the story.

So Brabantio disowns her and is furious.

Othello leaves for Cyprus to fight the Turks. Desdemona insists on going with him. Othello has 'honest Iago' and his wife, Emilia, accompany her.

Iago's plans run deep:

He seeks to supplant Cassio as Othello's lieutenant, and will do so by convincing Othello that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair.

To help execute this plan, he recruits Roderigo who was a former suitor of Desdemona.

Iago gets Roderigo to bankroll this conspiracy by convincing him that he can help him win back Desdemona.

ACT II:

A great storm destroys most of the Turkish fleet, and Othello destroys the rest.

Cassio arrives in Cyprus with the news of Othello's victory.

Then Desdemona and Iago and Emilia.

Finally, Othello arrives, happy to find his wife already there.

Iago's hatred for Othello consumes him.

He directs Roderigo to pick a fight with Cassio. The people of Cyprus do not tolerate street brawling and will demand that Othello dismiss Cassio.

Iago gets Cassio drunk in celebration of the victory over the Turks.

Roderigo continues the fight with Cassio from earlier, Cassio responds in a violent outburst.

Iago lies to the governor of Cyprus, saying that Cassio drinks to excess every night.

Othello demands to know what all the disturbance is about.

Iago resists (a clever acting job), but finally tells Othello and the governor that Cassio threw the first punch.

Othello dismisses Cassio as his lieutenant.

This falls right in with Iago's plan.

Roderigo has now been beaten and is no closer to Desdemona. But Iago points out that Cassio has now been driven away from Othello and that he must have patience for the plan to come to fruition.

ACT III:

Cassio asks Desdemona to take up his cause before Othello, to get him back in the good graces of the general.

Iago leads Othello to where he can see the two talking and plants the seed that they are actually talking of love. Iago warns Othello to watch his wife closely, especially in her relationship with Cassio.

He reminds Othello that she deceived her father when she eloped...it is therefore in her nature.

Desdemona drops a handkerchief, Emilia happens to pick it up.

Iago has often asked Emilia to steal the handkerchief...she doesn't know why Iago wants it, but her plan is to make a copy and give him the copy – that way she can make her husband happy without betraying her friend.

However, Iago discovers her with the handkerchief and takes it away....she is puzzled.

Iago makes up a story about Cassio dreaming of Desdemona, that he saw Desdemona's handkerchief is Cassio's hand....he reports this to Othello. That's all the proof Othello needs, and he orders Iago to kill Cassio. He agrees, but urges Othello not to harm Desdemona, which has the opposite effect, driving Othello to do her harm.... Exactly what Iago is hoping for. Misery for the Moor.

Othello asks Desdemona for the handkerchief. She says she misplaced it earlier and has been looking for it. She thinks that it's unimportant and tries to talk about Cassio. That doesn't go over very well.

Cassio finds the handkerchief, which Iago planted in his room. Where it came from, he doesn't know....but he likes it, so he gives it to a friend to copy, so when the owner comes to claim it he can give it back.

ACT IV:

Iago's masterful manipulation of Othello is almost complete. He tells Othello to hide while he confronts Cassio about Desdemona. In reality, Iago and Cassio talk about the woman who Cassio asked to copy the handkerchief. They begin laughing and making jokes. All the while, Othello believes they are talking about Desdemona. Suddenly the woman appears with the handkerchief....she recognizes that it is another woman's and wants nothing to do with it. Othello sees the handkerchief and assumes that Desdemona gave it to Cassio who then gave it to the woman.

Othello confronts Desdemona, convinced that she is having an affair with Cassio.

Emilia protests on Desdemona's behalf. Iago promises both women that he will try to calm Othello. Desdemona and Emilia have a talk about being faithful, Desdemona revealing how important it is to her.

ACT V:

Iago convinces Roderigo to kill Cassio, but Cassio proves the better swordsman and wounds Roderigo. Iago sneaks up on Cassio but only manages to wound him in the leg. The tumult alerts others, who rush to the scene. Iago sees that Roderigo is still alive (which at this point could ruin his plan) and kills him, under the guise of doing so for attacking Cassio.

Othello accuses Desdemona of infidelity. She denies it. She begs him not to kill her....pleads for more time. He refuses.

Othello suffocates Desdemona in bed.

Emilia rushes in with news that Roderigo is dead and Cassio attacked and wounded. She finds Desdemona dead at Othello's hands.

She learns that Othello got his evidence from Iago and suspects Othello of making up accusations against her husband, whom she believes to be honest.

Iago and others enter to witness Othello's deed. Emilia reveals the truth about the handkerchief, which uncovers Iago's dishonest, evil plan.

Iago cannot silence Emilia, so he kills her.

On Roderigo's body were letters that further expose Iago's role in the whole thing.

Now Othello sees the truth: that Desdemona was faithful and loving, that Iago hated him and was dishonest, and that he was a jealous fool for believing Iago's lies.

Othello finishes his final act of victimization and kills himself.

Iago is taken prisoner and his punishment is left for Cassio to decide.

This play has no kings, armies, battles or ghosts (which is atypical for Shakespeare), only a minor officer as a villain.

But what a villain!

Iago is unshakable and entirely evil...

Othello is entirely vulnerable, despite his intimidating appearance.

Without victims, even the greatest of villains would be nobody.

Love must always be protected, kept safe from lies.

Desdemona is a tribute to that. Think about it...