

# Act 1, Scene 1

## Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The scene opens with Roderigo and Iago discussing the marriage of Othello to Desdemona. Roderigo is unhappy about the marriage because he loves Desdemona, and Iago is angry because Othello picked Cassio as his lieutenant instead of picking Iago. Iago sneers that Cassio's military experience is all talk. Iago decides he will pretend to be a faithful servant to Othello in order to use him to promote his own interests.

Roderigo suggests they tell Brabantio, Desdemona's father, about the marriage. They think it will upset him. Together, they go to the window of Brabantio and wake him with loud calls. When Brabantio realizes that it's Roderigo calling, he tells him to go away; Desdemona is not for him. In response, Roderigo and Iago tell Brabantio that his daughter has married Othello. He doesn't believe them at first, but then discovers she is not in her bed.

Iago leaves, telling Roderigo to bring the search party to the inn, where he will be with Othello. Brabantio emerges, shouting for Roderigo to help him capture Desdemona and Othello. He suggests that it would have been better if Roderigo had married her.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

Roderigo and Iago both have reasons to dislike Othello. Roderigo was interested in having Desdemona for himself; Iago is upset with Othello for choosing Cassio over him. They plan revenge against Othello for these grievances, and their first step is to tell Desdemona's father about the situation.

These two men are rough, coarse and not very subtle. They make several references to the animalistic nature of sex, especially because Othello is a "Moor," a black man. Certainly, in Shakespeare's time, racism was at least as common as it is in our era, and it was probably viewed as unthinkable for a black man and a white woman to be together. They compare Othello to "an old black ram," and Desdemona to a "white ewe." They know this will infuriate Brabantio.

Iago says he will be at the inn, pretending to be a true servant of Othello while really intending to betray the man. Roderigo is like a pawn in Iago's game, spurred on by his own jealousy.

## **Act 1, Scene 2**

### **Act 1, Scene 2 Summary**

Iago and Othello enter, discussing business. Iago pretends he is not a man who likes to kill others. They discuss Othello's marriage, and Othello speaks of his great love for Desdemona, claiming there is nothing for which he would be willing to give her up. As they are talking, some messengers from the duke arrive to summon Othello to a matter of business. Cassio, one of the messengers, asks Iago why Othello is at the inn. Iago responds that Othello is married, but before he can name Othello's bride, Othello reenters the room.

Just as they are about to leave, Brabantio, Roderigo, and some other men arrive to arrest Othello. Brabantio accuses Othello of bewitching Desdemona into marrying him. Othello is very well spoken and patient during all of this, reminding Brabantio that the duke has summoned him and probably has summoned Brabantio. Therefore, they leave to go to the duke's house. Brabantio ends the scene by declaring that the senate will surely agree with him that he has been wronged.

### **Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis**

Iago is a great pretender, suggesting that he doesn't like killing, even in battle. However, Othello trusts him at this point. Othello appears to be very different from the descriptions of him provided by Iago and Roderigo in Scene 1. Othello speaks and acts with honor, dignity, and patience. He is obviously in love with Desdemona, as well as devoted in his service of the duke. Even when threatened with imprisonment by Brabantio, Othello remains courteous, restrained, and even friendly. Brabantio, on the other hand, appears to overreact to the situation, especially in accusing Othello of bewitching his daughter. The theme of bewitchment could likely accompany the issue of racism. By this point, the audience or reader should realize that Othello is a man of stature and honor, while Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio are not.

# Act 1, Scene 3

## Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

The duke and some of the senators enter, discussing the Turkish fleet they have spotted and its destination. It appears the Turks are heading to Cyprus. Othello, Brabantio, Iago, Roderigo, and others enter. The duke orders Othello to leave at once to fight the Ottomans. The duke then notices Brabantio, who recounts his accusations against Othello, namely that he used witchcraft to coerce Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona, into marriage. The duke asks to hear Othello's side of the story. They decide to hear Desdemona's version as well.

While messengers are sent to bring Desdemona to the duke, Othello tells how it was that he and Desdemona came to be together. Apparently, Brabantio invited Othello into his home and listened heartily to Othello's tales of his adventures. Desdemona also listened, whenever she could steal away from her household duties. Therefore, they spent many hours talking and falling in love.

Desdemona arrives and acknowledges that she freely married Othello and owes him all the duty a wife owes her husband. At this point, Brabantio wants nothing more to do with her. He bemoans her decision and expresses gladness that he has no more children, lest he should have to "hang clogs" on them to prevent their running away like Desdemona. Brabantio, finished with wasting everyone's time, suggests that everyone get back to the business of state. The duke again orders Othello to travel to Cyprus to fight. Othello requests housing and allowance for Desdemona, who pleads to be sent to Cyprus as well so that she can be with her husband. It is settled that Othello will leave at once and Iago will later come to Cyprus with Desdemona, who will be attended by his own wife, Emilia.

Roderigo and Iago are left alone on stage. Roderigo is obviously upset by the turn of events. He had hoped Desdemona would be his, and now he declares that he wants to drown himself. Iago tells him to stop talking nonsense. He convinces Roderigo that Desdemona will soon tire of Othello, or vice versa. Reassured, Roderigo exits, leaving Iago alone on stage.

Iago plots his revenge. He picks Cassio, a good guy, as his pawn. Iago plans to tell Othello that Cassio is after his wife. He believes Othello will be easily swayed into believing this claim.

## **Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis**

This scene serves to complete the setup of Act 1. The duke needs to send Othello away to fight a war. As a result, Desdemona will be separated from him long enough for Iago to put his plan into action. Brabantio's ridiculous claims of witchcraft are proven wrong, and at first, one might wonder what the point was. However, it serves the plot that he should renounce his daughter; otherwise, she might stay with him while Othello is off fighting. This would not allow Iago an opportunity to convince Othello of her infidelity. Furthermore, Brabantio's accusations also create a chance for Desdemona to reveal her true feelings and her strong love for Othello.

The lines are clearly drawn in the sand by the end of Act 1. Othello is an honorable man who loves his wife, and his wife returns his affection. The duke is reasonable and good. Roderigo is a misguided and jealous suitor, who follows Iago blindly. Iago is the most evil, conniving one of all.