ACT I Scene I

On a street in Venice, there is an argument between Roderigo, a nobleman, and Iago, an *ancient* (captain) in the defense forces. Roderigo, in love with the noble lady Desdemona, has paid large sums of money to Iago, on the understanding that Iago would give her gifts from him and praise him to her. Roderigo hopes to win Desdemona's love and marry her. However, they now have news that Desdemona has left the house of her father, Brabantio, a Senator, and eloped with Othello, a Moor (an African) who is a General in the defense forces.

Roderigo fears he has lost both his lady and his money. Iago reveals to Roderigo that it is in his (Iago's) nature to plot and tell lies to get what he wants and that he has a plan. He hates Othello for promoting Cassio to the position of lieutenant, a position that Iago wanted for himself. Iago plans to bring about Othello's downfall, and Roderigo will have Desdemona. First, they must wake Brabantio and cause an outcry. They bang and shout until Brabantio comes out onto the balcony. Iago tells him in inflammatory words that Desdemona has run away with Othello, and Brabantio, enraged, joins Roderigo to wake the neighbors and organize a search party.

Act 1 Scene 2

Iago warns Othello that there may be a legal attempt to break the marriage, but Othello knows his military worth to Venice and meets the Duke and Senators with confidence. Cassio has been sent to fetch him to an urgent meeting about the situation in Cyprus. Iago tells Cassio of Othello's marriage. Brabantio's party arrives; Brabantio threatens Othello with violence and accuses him of using sorcery to seduce Desdemona, his reasoning being that she would never marry Othello voluntarily. Brabantio calls for Othello's arrest and imprisonment but cedes precedence to the Duke's summons to the emergency meeting.

Act 1 Scene 3

Several reports have come in from Cyprus, all calling attention to a Turkish fleet that is expected to attack. The reports differ in the size of the fleet, but all speak of the danger as the combined force has turned back toward Cyprus. Othello enters the meeting with Cassio, Brabantio, Iago, and others, and the Duke immediately appoints Othello to lead the forces to defend Cyprus.

At this point, the Duke notices Brabantio, who believes that his daughter has been corrupted with magic potions because, according to him, she wound never willingly marry such a man as she did. Initially, the Duke promises him support in a prosecution for witchcraft, a capital crime, against the man who has seduced his daughter, but when the Duke realizes the seducer is Othello, he calls on the general to defend himself.

Othello describes his courtship of Desdemona in a dignified and persuasive speech (76-93 and 127-169) and asks the Duke to send for Desdemona so that she may speak. Iago leads the group that goes to fetch her. When Othello finishes speaking, the Duke declares in favor of Othello: "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (170). Desdemona then speaks, gently outlining an argument so strong that it finishes the whole debate: She owes obedience and thanks to her father for her upbringing, but now that she is married, her loyalty is to her husband, just as her mother's loyalty was to Brabantio. Fathers must give way to husbands.

Othello must go immediately to Cyprus to command its defense, and Desdemona requests to go as well. The Duke grants her wish, and Othello, who must leave that night, delegates Iago to follow later in another ship, bringing Desdemona and whatever else is needed. Iago's wife, Emilia, will look after Desdemona as her maid. As Othello leaves. Brabantio warns Othello, "She has deceived her father, and may thee" (289), but Othello is certain of Desdemona's faithfulness.

Iago and Roderigo are left on stage. Roderigo is downcast and talks of drowning himself. Iago replies with scorn that such misery is silliness and convinces Roderigo to go to Cyprus and wait for Desdemona to come to him, as she will surely soon become bored with Othello. Iago, because he hates Othello, says he will help Roderigo have Desdemona and reminds Roderigo to bring plenty of money.

Iago, alone on stage, considers the situation: He has consolidated his source of money, and he has heard a rumor that Othello has had sex with his wife, Emilia. Although he does not believe the rumor, he will act as though he does to feed his hatred. Also Iago will aim to get Cassio's position of lieutenant, which he thinks should have come to him.

Act 2 Scene 1

Act II and all subsequent acts take place in Cyprus, in the Venetian fortifications. Montano, Governor of Cyprus, awaits the arrival of the Venetian forces, delayed by a violent storm at sea. A messenger arrives with news that the Turkish fleet has been so damaged by the storm that it no longer threatens Cyprus. Cassio's ship, followed by Desdemona's ship, is the first Venetian ship to arrive. Desdemona's first question is for news of Othello. The two pass the time, waiting for news, and Iago watches, planning to catch Cassio in his own courtesies.

Othello finally arrives, triumphant, and he, Desdemona, and the others go into the fortress. Iago stays behind to tell Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio and convince him to pick a fight with Cassio to cause mutiny and have him removed. Iago, in his second soliloquy, speaks again of his hatred for Othello. The details are not yet clear, but Iago plans to drive Othello mad.

Act 2 Scene 2

The herald reads a proclamation declaring a night of general festivities to celebrate both the destruction of the Turkish fleet and Othello's recent marriage.

Act 2 Scene 3

Cassio, commanding the night watch during the time of feasting and drinking, takes his orders from Othello, who directs the soldiers to drink with moderation and keep the peace. Cassio and Iago, his second in command, will see to this. Then Othello and Desdemona retire to bed, the first night they will spend together since their marriage.

Alone, Iago makes suggestive remarks about Desdemona to Cassio, which Cassio turns aside; then Iago invites him to drink. Cassio declines, but Iago wheedles and urges him, until Cassio finally relents. Iago spurs Roderigo into a fight with Cassio; others join in and Iago sends Roderigo to ring the alarm bell, waking Othello and bringing him and his armed men to the spot. Othello demands to know who started the fight, and feigning reluctance, Iago names Cassio. Othello relieves Cassio of his post on the spot. Then he and Desdemona return to bed.

Iago advises Cassio to ask Desdemona to speak on his behalf with her husband. Cassio agrees, and Iago uses his wife, Emilia, to arrange a private meeting between Cassio and Desdemona.