



## Desdemona Script

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## DESDEMONA

1.

### DESDEMONA

My name is Desdemona. The word, Desdemona, means misery. It means ill fated. It means doomed. Perhaps my parents believed or imagined or knew my fortune at the moment of my birth. Perhaps being born a girl gave them all they needed to know of what my life would be like. That it would be subject to the whims of my elders and the control of men. Certainly that was the standard, no, the obligation of females in Venice when I was a girl. Men made the rules; women followed them. A step away was doom, indeed, and misery without relief. My parents, keenly aware and approving of that system, could anticipate the future of a girl child accurately.

They were wrong. They knew the system, but they did not know me.

I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose.

*Desdemona*

Small, uninhabited,



envious of manhood,  
weakened.

You are unworthy of the femininity  
that you haven't recognized in yourself,  
that you distort,  
that elevates and softens  
your sad bitterness.

Though it feels strong,  
beautiful and worthy,  
we see your confusion,  
sadness and hurt.

Mona, Desdemona

#### DESDEMONA:

I exist in between, now: between being killed and being un-dead;  
between life on earth and life beyond it; between all time, which has  
no beginning and no end, and all space which is both a seedling as  
well as the sun it yearns for. All that is available to me. I join the  
underwater women; stroll with them in dark light, listen to their music in  
the spangled deep. Colors down there are more violent than any  
produced by the sun. I live in the roots and heads of trees. I rise in  
art, in masks, in figures, in drumbeat, in fire. I exist in places where I

can speak, at last, words that in earth life were sealed or twisted into  
the language of obedience. Yes, my Lord. By your leave, Sir.

If you had been a man  
you could hardly have achieved more,  
accomplished more.

Manhood in itself is not a plus.

Womanhood never imagined itself as an obstacle.

"Girl" does not know how to be less than "boy".

Together, they were chosen  
to give meaning to life.

Is it a question of deciding  
who is strongest?  
Between He  
who represents strength  
and She  
in whom all strength is rooted,  
grows,  
and is given meaning  
and purpose?

Mona, Desdemona

Who is greater?  
He, who claims supremacy  
here below,  
or She,



without whom there would be  
no life  
here below?

Mona, Desdemona

How can you confuse  
finesse with obedience,  
discretion with ignorance,  
tenderness with submission,  
seductiveness with prostitution,  
woman with weakness?

Did you imagine me as a wisp of a girl? A coddled doll who fell in  
love with a handsome warrior who rode off with her under his arm? Is  
it your final summation of me that I was a foolish naïf who surrendered  
to her husband's brutality because she had no choice? Nothing could  
be more false.

It is true my earth life held sorrow. Yet none of it, not one moment was  
"misery." Difficulty, yes. Confusion, yes. Error in judgment, yes.  
Murder, yes. But it was my life and, right or wrong, my life was  
shaped by my own choices and it was mine.

My mother was a lady of virtue whose practice and observation of manners were flawless. She taught me how to handle myself at table, how to be courteous in speech, when and how to drop my eyes, smile, curtsy. As was the custom, she did not tolerate dispute from a child, nor involve herself in what could be called my interior life. There were strict rules of deportment, solutions for every problem a young girl could have. And there was sensible punishment designed for each impropriety. Constraint was the theme of behavior. Duty was its plot.

I remember once splashing barefoot in our pond, pretending I was one of the swans that swam there. My slippers were tossed aside; the hem of my dress wet. My unleashed laughter was long and loud. The unseemliness of such behavior in a girl of less than one decade brought my mother's attention. Too old, she scolded, for such carelessness. To emphasize the point, my slippers were taken away and I remained barefoot for ten days. It was a small thing, embarrassing, inconvenient, but definitely clarifying. It meant my desires, my imagination must remain hidden. It was as though a dark heavy curtain enclosed me. Yet wrapping that curtain over my willfulness served to strengthen it.



My solace in those early days lay with my nurse, Barbary. She alone encouraged a slit in that curtain. Barbary alone conspired with me to let my imagination run free. She told me stories of other lives, other countries. Places where gods speak in thundering silence and mimic human faces and forms. Where nature is not a crafted, pretty thing, but wild, sacred and instructive. Unlike the staid, unbending women of my country, she moved with the fluid grace I saw only in swans and the fronds of willow trees. To hear Barbary sing was to wonder at the mediocrity of flutes and pipes. She was more alive than anyone I knew and more loving. She tended me as though she were my birth mother: braided my hair, dressed me, comforted me when I was ill and danced with me when I recovered. I loved her. Her heart, so wide, seemed to hold the entire world in awe and to savor its every delight.

Yet that same heart, wide as it was, proved vulnerable. When I needed her most, she stumbled under the spell of her lover. He forsook her and turned her ecstasy into ash. Eyes pooled with tears, she sang her loss of him, of love, and life.

I thought that strength was in unity.  
I thought that having you at my side  
could keep me far from my solitude  
and my fears

Now, I feel lost.  
Now I know that love  
can be a source of evil.  
I love you.  
I forgive you.

I forgot my solitude for a while.  
I wanted to be with you, forever.  
My outstretched hands waiting to be filled  
are empty of disillusion.

My melancholy thoughts are back.  
But I still love the idea of love.

#### DESDEMONA:

Her spacious heart drained and sere, Barbary died. I mourned her so  
deeply, it trembled me. And yet, even in grief I questioned: were we  
women so frail in the wake of men who swore they cherished us? Was  
a lover's betrayal more lethal than betrayal of oneself? I did not know  
the answers so I determined to be otherwise. I determined to search



most carefully for the truth of a lover before committing my own fidelity. That determination was a blow to my father, Senator Brabantio. His sole interest in me as I grew into womanhood was making certain I was transferred, profitably and securely, into the hands of another man.

3.

With my father's invitations, and according to his paternal duty, I was courted by many men. They came into my father's house with empty ornate boxes designed to hold coins of dowry gold, or deeds of property. They glanced at me and locked their glistening eyes on my father's.

Showing their teeth in dotting smiles they slid in soft shoes on our marble floor. One by one they came in velvet and fur-trimmed silk, prettified hats stitched with silver thread. Each one, whether a stuttering boy or an aged widower, was eager for a chatelaine weighted with riches. I was thought beautiful, but if I were not, even if I were a giantess, a miniature or a horse-faced shrew, suitors cruising



for a bride would have sought my hand. Those already wealthy ranked me with other virgins on their menu. Those in desperate straights needed no evaluation.

My father instructed me on the virtues of each offer and when I first refused he thought me fastidious. With my next refusal, he chastised me as stubborn; finally, as the refusals continued, as an embarrassment: a single female of a certain age, un-nunned, sitting at his sumptuous table instead of fasting in a convent.

I had reached the cusp of unmarriageability—that lightless abyss into which a family can fall—burdened by an eating mouth, tied to a poor unseeded womb, disconnected from the chain that the clan pays out to increase its length and its profit.

Yet my flaw was more serious than pride. It was revolt. I yearned for talk, for meaning, for winds from a wider world. Seas beyond canals, populations living other ways, speaking languages of music and roar, beasts and gods unimagined within these walls. I longed for adventure out there, yes, but inside as well. Adventure in my mind no less than in my heart.



4.

One evening I veiled my surliness and attended another of my father's endless banquets.

Not yet recovered from Barbary's death, I sat mute among the guests. Bountifully fed, they began to dance—partnered, formal, predictably flirtatious. Hoping to exit the mockery, I stood and moved toward my father to ask to be excused. Among those huddled around his chair was this mass of a man. Tree tall. Glittering in metal and red wool. A commander's helmet under his arm. As I approached, he turned to let me pass. I saw a glint of brass in his eyes identical to the light in Barbary's eyes. I looked away, but not before his smile summoned my own. I don't remember what I murmured to my father to explain my approach. I was introduced to the Commander; he kissed my hand, held it and requested a dance. 'By your leave, Senator Brabantio?' In accented language his voice underscored the kiss.

We danced together, our bodies moving in such harmony it was as though we had known each other all our lives.

## OTHELLO

By the grace of God  
destiny smiles upon you.  
The wishes of your grandparents  
have been exalted and fulfilled.  
Great Othello,  
handsome Othello  
only your anger  
can make you lose  
yourself.  
Othello, a great man  
does not give in to anger.  
Contain your rage.  
Let a river of peace  
flow through you,  
the serenity of a breeze  
from the prairies.  
Man should not make ugly  
that which is beautiful  
by the will of God.  
No one should despise  
what God wished to be desirable.  
Do not allow the anger  
to open in you  
a fault that makes  
your misfortune.  
Othello, Othello



hold back your fury.  
One does not destroy  
what one loves.  
One does not destroy  
because one loves.

OTHELLO

Come to me Desdemona. Here on this bed let us make a world.

DESDEMONA

You will teach me?

OTHELLO

If you know how to laugh you will not need lessons. Desire is  
nature's purest gift.

DESDEMONA

And what is in this world we will make?

OTHELLO

Singing children watching men like me, warriors needing love, put  
down their swords to dance.

DESDEMONA

And women?

OTHELLO

Like you. With eyes than cannot hide the mind's sharp intelligence; a  
throat demanding my lips; shoulders inviting caresses; strawberry  
nipples hiding a bold and loving heart.

DESDEMONA

And laughter is our teacher?



OTHELLO

And our flesh is its lesson.

DESDEMONA

Then let my flesh be re-born through yours.

OTHELLO

Having captured glee, we melt and become one.

DESDEMONA

I adore you.

OTHELLO

I love you. Turn away old world, while my love and I create a new one.

5.

Two women approach each other. One is dressed in simple cloth, the other in a sumptuous gown. They both have white hair and carry a torch.

M. BRABANTIO:

'Who are you?'

SOUN:

'My name is Soun, and you?'

M. BRABANTIO:

'I was Madam Brabantio in life.'



SOUN:

'What brings you to this dark place?'

M. BRABANTIO:

'I feel comfortable here. It suits me since I lost my daughter. And you?

What brings you here?'

SOUN:

'The same. I lost my son.'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Who was he?'

SOUN:

'A brave Commander named Othello.'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Oh, no. Not he who murdered my daughter?'

SOUN:

'Desdemona?'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Yes.'

SOUN:

'Are we enemies then?'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Of course. Our vengeance is more molten than our sorrow.'



SOUN:

'Yet, we have much to share. Clever, violent Othello.'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Headstrong, passionate Desdemona.'

SOUN:

'Both died in and for love.'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Miserable. I prayed to Mother Mary for help when your son  
slaughtered my daughter.'

SOUN:

'A waste. I spoke to my gods for guidance when, in remorse, my son responded with suicide.'

M. BRABANTIO:

'Here are their graves. Let us kneel.'

SOUN:

'Not yet. I come from a land wildly different from yours. A desert land pierced by forests of palm. There we obey nature and look to it for the language of the gods. We keep close the traditions they have taught us. One is our way of cleansing, of diluting the poisons life forces us to swallow.'

M. BRABANTIO:

'And what is that way?'



SOUN:

'An altar. We build an altar to the spirits who are waiting to console  
us.'

**DONGORI**

"Beautiful"

will be my plan.

Strong,

up to the task

and filled with pain.

Radiant,

I push back the hurt.

I harness myself

to every good thing

I can produce

whatever

my destiny.

Dongori,

violence.

Dongori,

obliteration.

Dongori,

enslavement.

Dongori,

I break the cord,

I undo the knot.

I free myself  
from this vine of thorns.  
At the heart of marriage  
I grant myself  
dignity  
as my first  
duty.

Today  
I aspire to self respect.  
Mama,  
do you understand me?  
Today,  
I aspire to self esteem.  
Papa,  
will you forgive me?

6

Who could have thought a military commander, trained to let blood,  
would be more, could be more, than a brutal arm educated solely to  
kill?



I knew. How did I know?

We sat on a stone bench under an arch. I remember the well of softness in his eyes.

And this is what he told:

OTHELLO:

"As an orphan child a root woman adopted me as her son and sheltered me from slavers. I trailed her in forests and over sere as she searched for medicinal plants, roots, and flowers. She taught me some of her science. How to breathe when there is no air.

Where water hid in cactus and certain vines. She worshipped the natural world and encouraged me to rehearse certain songs to divine its power.

Yet soon I was captured by Syrians. I lived with the camels and oxen and was treated the same. I ate what I could find. It was a happy day for me to be sold into an army where food was regular and clothes respectable. There I learned quickly the art of arms and the

strength of command. In my first battle, I pointed my childish anger with a daring completely strange to me. I was happy, breathless and hungry for more violent encounters. Only as a soldier could I excel and turn the loneliness inside into exhilaration."

And this is what he told:

OTHELLO:

"Our ship, upon an onslaught from land, sank. I alone was able to swim ashore. As I crawled along the beach I saw no enemy waiting on a ridge above the white sand. But I had heard the people of this place were invisible. Others said they were not invisible—they were chameleons able to assume the shades they inhabited. They could be detected only by their smell which meant in order to encounter their odor, one had to get close enough to be killed. I chose not to discover which was true: invisibility or camouflage. I knew there were tunnels in the sea. If you walk the beach and listen carefully you can hear the wind's music sighing from a certain kind of rock or swirl of sand.



They signal an opening. Enter and a corridor of light shines in front of you, a hallway as dry as the Sahara, cool as the Himalayas. I waited in the light of that sea tunnel three days until the enemy believed me dead."

And this is what he told:

OTHELLO:

"There is an island surrounded by a lavender ocean where fish leap into your boat, or you can reach into the waves and catch them in your hand; where trees bear fruit year round; where birds speak as humans; where the islanders have no heads and their faces are settled in their chests. Once, desperate for food and water, I was cast upon their shores. Although they laughed at my deformity, at the hilarity of my own head rising awkwardly and vulnerably above my shoulders, they were generous. They fed me and tended to my needs. All human attributes were theirs except for one: they could not sing for they had no throats. When I sang for them the songs the root woman had taught me, they crowded about. Tears rolled down to their waists as

they wept their pleasure. It was difficult to sail away, so awed was I  
by their civilization."

And this is what he told:

OTHELLO:

"There are armies of women who kill men in battles so fierce the moon  
itself hides from the ribbons of shed blood. They cut off their right  
breasts to ease the arrow shots of their long bows to lethal precision.  
For this they are called No-Breast or A-Mazon and must remain virgins  
until after the first time they kill a man. With male blood they stain  
their hair and with his bone they sharpen their arrowheads. Whole  
regiments fall before them. They rule wooded nations and desert  
kingdoms. Waters and precious stones have their names. I have seen  
them and marveled at their war skills."

*Kemeh Bourama*  
From your bloody battles  
Dame Amazon,  
could you bring me  
the enemy's blood  
so I can wash my face with it,



his intestines  
so I can make a belt,  
his skull  
so I can make it  
my throne?

The battle reaches its height.  
Master of war  
let your will be done.  
Let his last victory be celebrated.  
His victory over weakness,  
cowardice, and mediocrity.  
Let his courage be celebrated  
here for the last time in his presence  
and forever,  
once he has been defeated  
by what he has done.  
The battle reaches its height.  
Master of war  
let your will be done.

DESDEMONA

And this is what he confessed:

OTHELLO

"Part, perhaps, most of the joy, the pleasure, of battle I took as a child soldier came from having comrades who were like me and who loved the fresh green leaves we were given to eat. Chewing them infused us with more than courage: we were potent and indifferent to blood, cries of pain, debasement—to life, even our own. Rape was perfunctory. Death our brother. It took capture, imprisonment for months to be rid of the craving for the leaves and to absorb what we had become. The self loathing, however, could only be quieted by the glint of honor an honorable army provided. My acceptance into the mighty forces of Venice was my salvation. Since then, military justice coupled with the virtue of the corps have guided me. Your gaze, spilling pity and understanding, embolden me giving me hope that this, my secret, will be our bond."

DESDEMONA:

Those are the tales he told. Tales that stopped my heart as much as they fired my mind. Tales of horror and strange. I was captured by love and the prospect of inhabiting a broad original world where I could compete with the Amazons.



My husband knew Iago was lying, manipulating, sabotaging. So why did he act on obvious deceit? Brotherhood. The quiet approval beamed from one male eye to another. Bright, tight, camaraderie. Like-mindedness born of the exchange of musk; the buck's regard of the doe; the mild contempt following her capture. The wide, wild celebrity men find with each other cannot compete with the narrow comfort of a wife. Romance is always overshadowed by brawn. The language of love is trivial compared to the hidden language of men that lies underneath the secret language they speak in public. But real love, the love of an Amazon, is not based on pretty language or the secret sharing between males.

Remember your last confession? The last tale you told?

## OTHELLO

Aroused by blood letting, Iago and I entered a stable searching for food or drink. What we found were two women cowering. After a

first glance, they never looked at us again. They lowered their eyes and whimpered. They were old, so old. Fingers gnarled by years of brutal work; teeth random and softly withering flesh. No matter. We took turns slaking the thirst of our loins rather than our throats. I don't know how long it lasted. Our groans and their soft crying drape my memory of passing time. Once sated, we heard a noise behind us coming from a heap of hay. We turned to see a child, a boy, staring wild-eyed at a scene that must have seemed to him a grotesque dream. Except for the women's whimpering, silence fell.

DESDEMONA

Surely, surely you did not assault the boy. Tell me you did not.

OTHELLO

No. We never touched nor threatened him.

DESDEMONA



Then mercy triumphed, at last.

OTHELLO

Not mercy at all.

DESDEMONA

What then?

OTHELLO

There was a look between us. Before our decision to do no more harm  
our eyes met, Iago's and mine, in an exchange of secrecy.

DESDEMONA

And of shame?

OTHELLO

Shame, yes.

DESDEMONA

The unspeakable is no longer. Now you have pried loose the screws twisting your tongue. The telling is itself courage.

OTHELLO

You don't understand. Shame, yes, but worse. There was pleasure too. The look between us was not to acknowledge shame, but mutual pleasure. Pleasure in the degradation we had caused; more pleasure in leaving a witness to it. We were not only refusing to kill our own memory, but insisting on its life in another.

DESDEMONA

That is obscene, monstrous.



OTHELLO

Without question. Yet there is another question, a vital one. Can you forgive me?

DESDEMONA

No, I cannot. But I can love you and remain committed to you.

OTHELLO

In spite of what I have described?

DESDEMONA

In addition to what you have described. Did you think loving another was a profit-driven harvest: choosing the ripe and discarding the rot? Love is complete, whole, fearless; otherwise it is merely a banquet, a feast planned to sate a hunger for variety, not commitment to one

choice. Honest love does not cringe at the first roll of thunder; nor  
does it flinch when faced with the lightning flash of human sin. I  
always knew you were caressing me with fingers hardened by swords  
and that your hands stroking my breasts also drew blood. My error  
was in believing that you were more than the visage of your mind.

#### OTHELLO

I pray I am more.

#### DIANFA

Do you know what torments me?  
Do you want to know my anguish?  
I fear the ultimate betrayal.  
Will you abandon me?  
Honey and sweetness  
will never be separated.  
Its acrid taste  
remains faithful to the dah.  
The kaicedrat will never lose  
its bitterness.



Don't leave me.  
My power is so frail  
here below.  
In one way or another  
my time  
is coming to  
an end.

For me, old age  
would be a pleasure.  
I would destroy  
whatever death might spare.  
You are nothing more  
than a game.  
A game in which  
I would still like  
to take part.

Grant me the time I need  
for wisdom  
to grow in me  
and give me the strength  
to smile at my pain.  
Don't leave me.  
Honey and sweetness  
will never be separated.  
Its acrid taste  
remains faithful to the dah.

The kaicedrat will never lose  
its bitterness.

Stay with me  
for the time it takes  
for me to conquer my fears,  
to overcome my agony.  
You took back the substance  
and the meaning you gave my life,  
that rewarded my life.  
Now, you abandon me  
to nothingness.

8.

EMILIA:

Well, well. If it isn't the martyr of Venice. Remember me? We died  
together, How do you do?

DESDEMONA:

Emilia! I've wondered if I'd see you again.



EMILIA:

Did you know I was the first to lay dying next to you?

DESDEMONA:

All is known here, though not always understood.

EMILIA:

What's left to understand? Both of us murdered, we failed. Noble as we tried to be, we failed.

DESDEMONA:

Failed? As women? Emilia, you confound me. Didn't you acquiesce to all of Iago's demands, even the most vile, corrupt ones? Yet you admitted to me your willingness, eagerness even, to betray your own husband if it led to higher status. Your deception, your dangerous, murderous silence led to my death. And it led to yours.

EMILIA:

Life is what it is. Women try to survive, since we cannot flourish.

DESDEMONA:

I wonder if collapse of virtue is not survival at all but cowardice.

EMILIA:

I resent that coming from one who had no defense against lies or her husband's strangling fingers.

DESDEMONA:

And you, Emilia? You and I were friends, but didn't the man you knelt to protect run a gleaming sword through your survival strategies?



EMILIA:

And why did he? Because I befriended and supported you. I

exposed his lies, you ingrate! That is your appreciation for my

devotion to you? "My cloak, Emilia," "My night gown, Emilia."

"Unpin me, Emilia." "Arrange my bed sheets, Emilia." That is not how

you treat a friend; that's how you treat a servant. Someone beneath

you, beneath your class which takes devotion for granted.

DESDEMONA:

It's true. I relied on your help and mistook it for benevolence. I was

deceived.

EMILIA:

You always thought me deceptive, simply because I would let myself

be seduced in order to gain higher status. To own my life I had to

forge a secret path.

DESDEMONA:

Doesn't deception lead to ruin?

EMILIA:

So does honesty, as your example shows. Like you I believed marriage was my salvation. It was not. Lust charged everything; satisfied itself everywhere; signaled by handkerchiefs; hid behind curtains. And all of that passion generated nothing. Not an infant among us. No progeny; no future. I was an orphan. I learned what I had to and polished those lessons daily. Otherwise the sorrow of motherlessness coupled with childlessness would have broken me.

DESDEMONA:

Emilia, I wish I had known you when we were children. You had no family. I had too much. You had no mother. I had no mother's love.



EMILIA:

It's not the same. An orphan knows how quickly love can be withdrawn; knows that complete safety is a child's hopeless dream.

DESDEMONA:

You are right to correct me. Instead of judging, I should have been understanding.

EMILIA:

Thank you for saying so. I am glad you never knew how desperate life is for the truly orphaned, our fear of losing our place. The long hours of servility in the grand halls of mistresses, the rush to hide from lascivious men – including your husband – the vulnerability, the ever-present danger. I stared at the moon for guidance, at the sea for answers.

They had none. Then, one day I saw a tiny lizard dozing in sunlight. Suddenly her scales seemed to move, to tremble. I watched as she

shed her dull outer skin; struggled, then finally, crawled out of it, exposing that which had been underneath—her jeweled self. No one helped her; she did it by herself. What struck me, more than the brilliance of her new skin, was that she did not leave the outer one behind. She dragged it with her. As though the camouflage would still be needed to disguise her true dazzle. That little lizard changed my life.

9.

DESDEMONA:

Barbary! Barbary. Come closer. How I have missed you. Remember the days we spent by the canal? We ate sweets and you saved the honey for me eating none yourself. We shared so much.

BARBARY:

We shared nothing.



DESDEMONA:

What do you mean?

SA'RAN:

I mean you don't even know my name. Barbary? Barbary is what you call Africa. Barbary is the geography of the foreigner, the savage. Barbary? Barbary equals the sly, vicious enemy who must be put down at any price; held down at any cost for the conquerors' pleasure. Barbary is the name of those without whom you could neither live nor prosper.

DESDEMONA:

So tell me. What is your name?

SA'RAN:

Sa'ran.

DESDEMONA;

Well, Sa'ran, whatever your name, you were my best friend.

SA'RAN:

I was your slave.

DESDEMONA:

What does that matter? I have known and loved you all my life.

SA'RAN:

I am black-skinned. You are white-skinned.

DESDEMONA:

So?



SA'RAN:

So you don't know me. Have never known me.

DESDEMONA:

Because of your skin? It is you who lack knowing. Think. I wed a Moor. I fled my home to be with him. I defied my father, all my family to wed him. I joined him on the battlefield.

SA'RAN:

And he slaughtered you. Now do you know our difference?

DESDEMONA:

And your lover slaughtered you as surely as if he had strangled you. Remember the song you sang every day until you wasted away and embraced death without fight or protest?

SA'RAN:

The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,

Sing all a green willow;

Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee.

Sing willow, willow, willow.

The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur'd her moans;

Sing willow, willow, willow;

Her salt tears fell from her and soften'd the stones;

Sing willow, willow, willow—

SA'RAN:

Stop. Don't.

DESDEMONA:



Listen to me.

SA'RAN:

No, you listen. I have no rank in your world. I do what I am told. I brought you what you wanted before you knew you wanted it. I kissed your every cut and bruise. I held you when fever made you tremble, and when your parents made you weep. You never had to wash your hands or feet or face. I did that for you.

DESDEMONA:

You blame?

SA'RAN:

I clarify!

DESDEMONA:

Sa'ran. We are women. I had no more control over my life than you had. My prison was unlike yours but it was prison still.

Was I ever cruel to you? Ever?

SA'RAN:

No. You never hurt or abused me.

DESDEMONA:

Who did?

SA'RAN:

You know who did. But I have thought long and hard about my sorrow. No more "willow". Afterlife is time and with time there is change. My song is new:

"Someone leans near  
And sees the salt my eyes have shed.  
I wait, longing to hear



Words of reason, love or play  
To lash or lull me toward the hollow day.  
Silence kneads my fear  
Of crumbled star-ash sifting down  
Clouding the rooms here, here.  
I shore up my heart to run. To stay.  
But no sign or design marks the narrow way.  
Then on my skin a sudden breath caresses  
The salt my eyes have shed.  
And I hear a call-clear, so clear:  
'You will never die again.'  
What bliss to know  
I will never die again."

DESDEMONA:

We will never die again.

10.

DESDEMONA:

Your cloak is tattered.

OTHELLO:

So am I.

DESDEMONA:

Why, may I ask?

OTHELLO:

The endlessness of time and the depth of regret equals hell.

OTHELLO:

I always wanted to know why you stopped struggling when I encircled your throat and cut off your breath. Why did you let my rage run free? Why did you deny I murdered you?

DESDEMONA:



You were not killing me. You were killing Othello. The man I believed you to be was lost to me. So what was left to struggle for?

OTHELLO:

Tell me about this Othello you believed me to be.

DESDEMONA:

More than the rapture of his body; more than the sword at his side.  
My Othello is not the man who chose to believe what you must have known was false.

OTHELLO:

It's clear now. You never loved me. You fancied the idea of me, the exotic foreigner who kills for the State, who will die for the State.  
Everyone I slaughtered was someone who wanted your head on a pike. How comforting it must have been—protected by a loyal black warrior. What excited you was my strange story: enslaved youth

ruined by war then redeemed by it, fantastic adventures, stories of freaks and miracles. A confession known only to you, my wife. And you thought that was all there was to me—a useful myth, a fairy's tale cut to suit a princess' hunger for real life, not the dull existence of her home.

DESDEMONA:

You are wrong! You believed a lie. You broke my hymen and thought I was unfaithful the next day? Me?

OTHELLO:

I don't know. I did suspect. Actually I don't care. Listen to me. More than infidelity my rage was toward your delusion. Your requirements for a bleached, ultra-civilized soul framed in blood, for court manners honed by violence. Have you any idea what it took to get to the position I held? Who sabotaged me, delayed promotions, took credit for my victories? Who fed rumors about my intelligence, my virility, my character? Even with the gore of their enemies, the smell of it, the



drips of it on my sword, their contempt over-powered what should have been glistening gratitude. Only perseverance, discipline and a shrewd sense of what truly matters kept me going. While you played with my reality; toyed with it; turned it into—into spectacle.

[CASSIO interrupts]

CASSIO:

Speaking of spectacle, I reckon it is superior to a feeble reality, especially one that has collapsed and become a barely controlled nightmare. Those in charge of defending the State slew one another like rival scorpions, abusing their former comrades with deceit and fury. But first came the poison of weak, disloyal women. Fair Desdemona? Innocent Desdemona? Hah! I have touched her and she neither screamed nor slapped my hands away. Then, to hurry the demise, came that vain, arrogant Othello, swanning about above his station and way above his geography and his history. A dangerous godless mix, unable to govern, to know with certainty what is best for

the State. I am compelled now to repeal and replace whatever they have initiated into law.

Dissolute. It's true. That is the word that accurately describes my youth. Four liters of wine I consumed before the sun touched the top of heaven. Following its descent, well, I couldn't tell anyone how much I drank. The point is, it not only didn't interfere with my duties, it helped me execute them. But when I gave up brew, I was promoted by Othello; then demoted by him. Why? I was tricked into drunkenness! I relied too heavily on my intimacy with Desdemona, hoping she would make Othello give me back my job. Then tricked again with the theft of a dirty handkerchief. Finally wounded by the man I believed my friend.

I acknowledge Othello was competent, even intelligent. I understand he had vision. But of what value is either in day-to-day rule? Who needs vision to declare war and win it at all costs? The needs of the State are mundane, and therein safety lies.

The arrogance of that Moor riles me still. Undermining him improves my status daily and solidifies my power.



Now Cyprus is under my reign. I am the one who decides. Othello gone from life; Iago suffering in a prison cell. A clean sweep that allows me to rule and perhaps help Venice return to its prominence. Wars will be won, not abandoned. Perhaps a stumble here and there; some resisting voices of course, but their subtlety will merely produce confusion.

So let me be clear. Power is more than responsibility; it is destiny. Destiny few men are able to handle. While there may be so called 'slaughter of the innocents' in its wake, none of that will deter me. I bow, modestly, to destiny's demands. Me alone. I am its servant and it is mine.

DESDEMONA

To think I tried to save him. I was wrong, so wrong. Was Cassio always such a fool?

OTHELLO:

Always. He enrages me as much now as he did then. But I hid my fury and overlooked his fatal ignorance because I believed him loyal. Fidelity is a necessity in the military. Lives depend on it, but I could not. I was doubted and deceived at every turn. Why? Because I am African? Because I was sold into slavery? Or because I was better than they? Whatever the reason, I had to prove myself over and over again. Cassio's fawning I welcomed in that malign atmosphere, until lies from every quarter infected me and disturbed the balance of my mind.

DESDEMONA:

I apologize for a profound error in judgment.

OTHELLO:



Apology is a pale word for what I am called upon to recognize. I am beyond sorry; it is shame that strafes me. And shame too for diminishing our life together as spectacle. It was never that.

DESDEMONA:

True. Yet Cassio lives to rule and we do not because love cannot survive without trust.

Your doubt and my righteousness mangled our love.

OTHELLO:

We should have had such honest talk, not fantasy, the evening we wed.

My love for you was mind deep.

I murdered myself and you to stop the drama. If I could slay myself again, I would. But afterlife forbids a double death.

DESDEMONA:

I am sick of killing as a solution. It solves nothing. Questions nothing, produces nothing, nothing, but more of itself. You thought war was alive, had honor and reason. I tell you it is well beyond all that. My mistake was believing that you hated war as much as I did. You believed I loved Othello the warrior. I did not.

I was the empire you had already conquered.

Alone together we could have been invincible.

OTHELLO:

And now? Together? Alone? Is it too late?

DESDEMONA:

'Late' has no meaning here. Here there is only the possibility of wisdom.



Of knowing the earth is not quiet nor waiting. In the screech of color and the whisper of the lightless depths of the sea, it boils, breaks or slumbers. And in this restless rest human life is as unlimited and miraculous as love. Here the infidel can embrace the saint just as sunlight creates the air we breathe.

*Kélé Mandi*

When two beings meet,  
each brings to the other a bit of themselves.  
So we learn, we construct our selves, we evolve.  
I bring what makes me different from you.  
Give me a bit of what you are.  
But do it with gentleness and tolerance,  
since all that you impose upon me with force  
will only leave the imprint  
of your violence and your arrogance.  
One can't force the other  
to accept what is offered.  
In accepting what you have to give,  
I open you to what I have to offer.

DESDEMONA

The world is alive and even if we kill it, it returns fresh, full throated  
and hungry for time and space in which to thrive. And if we haven't  
secured the passionate peace we yearn for, it is because we haven't  
imagined it. Is it still available, this human peace? In our privileged  
position in timelessness, our answer is a roar.

If it's a question  
of working together  
on the task,  
I would be happy to take part.  
Whether we are from the same place or not.  
Whether we are from the same culture or not.  
Should we celebrate this moment?  
It would fill me with joy.

Must we discuss,  
understand each other,  
and decide?  
I would be yours.  
It would fill me with joy.  
But for now,  
while we talk,  
I know that I can only shine  
in the light of adversity  
that opposes  
my self  
and my vices.



DESDEMONA:

We will be judged by how well we love.

My pride,  
my foolish pride in being human  
disgusts me.  
It is the source of so much evil.  
I have no ambition to exist  
in this world  
except as an impermanent  
element  
facing eternity  
with no choice  
but to burn  
then finish  
one way  
or another.