

luv yew, me owld woman an' Aw've had a row an' Aw'm all done in. Aw'll pay th' soddin' bill, some'ow; but fer now, fer owld times," 'e says—well Gawd's Wounds, wot was Aw t' do? "Right, then, Tom," Aw said, an' Aw lays down on the bed—'cause 'e liked me to go first—an' 'e puts the straps on me—"Tom," Aw says, "listen, luv, th' straps are bleedin' tight—" An' before Aw knew wot, 'e was lammin' me fer real!! 'E did me fer a jacketin' such as Aw thought would be me last L 'n' Bill! Aw bite me teeth not to scream, 'cause the bobbies won't put up with no row, no matter how many quid Aw pay 'em . . . Well, Tom finally gets it over wif, an' it's *my* turn. "Aw'm sorry, Bianca," 'e says, "if Aw got a bit rough." "Oh, it's nofn', Tom," Aw says—'cause Aw'm determined t' get me own back . . . So Aw tie 'im down on th' bed—'e's a big strapper o' a bloke—An' then Aw lam th' puddin' out o' 'im—!! An' 'e's 'ollerin' like it's th' Second Coming. Then after Aw gi' 'im a royal pasting, Aw go through 'is togs, an' in the back pocket—Aw find a soddin' un been 'oldin' out on me, Tom! Aw've had it ges an' flams—wot kind o' a soup kitchen do e'?'—An' Aw let into 'im again!!—"Bianca—let Aw'll niver flam to ye again!" "BLEEDIN'—Aw says. So Aw copped 'is brass, takes up the 'im loose—straight into the street 'e runs, naked y—Aw had to throw 'is togs after 'im. "Yew ger!" Aw yelled:—" 'Ere's yer togs, an' fer yer e this!" (BIANCA raises her fist and slaps her elbow; catches her breath.)

us. Weren't you scared?

e lvin' if Aw said nay. Aw though it was me last can't be too careful, there's a lot of maggottles in me bus'ness. But Aw can take care o'

DESDEMONA: Doesn't—doesn't it hurt?

BIANCA: Naw—not usual. It's stingy-like, but it's all fakement.

DESDEMONA

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(BIANCA looking into DESDEMONA's eyes, gets an idea.) . . . Aw c'n show you if you likes . . . C'mon, it won't hurt you none—

DESDEMONA: Well . . . yes, all right, Bianca, show me.

Scene 22

The beating scene. EMILIA, BIANCA, and DESDEMONA.

EMILIA: Are you out o' your mind? Lettin' a strumpet strap you in your own house like a monk in Holy Week?

DESDEMONA: Turn around, Emilia, and mind your own business. Go on, turn around, and say your beads. Pay no attention. (To BIANCA.) Sorry—please continue. (EMILIA says her beads through the following.)

EMILIA: Hail Mary Full of Grace the Lord is with Thee—

BIANCA: Get up on the table wi' yer tale end up—

EMILIA: Holy Mary, Mother of—(EMILIA turns and sees DESDEMONA spread-eagled.)—GOD!!!

BIANCA: Right now. Aw'll just take a strap 'ere—an' Aw'll just brush you wi' it—but when Aw let's go, you move yer tail up—all right?

DESDEMONA: I—I think so; it's rather like rising to the trot on a horse—

BIANCA: Right then. One-up, Two-down; all right, now, One: (DESDEMONA moves up.) Two-: (BIANCA lightly straps DESDEMONA as she moves down.) One-: (DESDEMONA moves up.) An' Two-: (DESDEMONA moves down; a strap.)—Does it hurt?

DESDEMONA: No—no, it doesn't really.

BIANCA: Right then. Let's have some sound e-flocks. One; Two—(DESDEMONA screams, EMILIA clutches her rosary.)—NO!!—not that loud! The bobbies would be in on yew so

fast yew wouldn't get yer panties up—just a moan enow to get 'im excited . . . Right, then? Now: One-Two; One-Two; One-Two; One-Two; One-Two; One-Two; One-Two!! (DESDEMONA perfects her synchronized moans, building to a crescendo, at which point she breaks into peals of laughter.)

DESDEMONA: It's smashing!—Mealy—you really must try it!

Scene 23

As before.

BIANCA: Aw want you t'ake this in th' right way, now; but if you weren't born a lady, you'd a been a bleedin'-good blowzabella. One o' the best. An'—well, no matter what fare holds, there's always room fer you in me shop. (*Basilyful*.) Aw means it, too—

EMILIA: —Holy Mother, if anyone had so much as whispered in Venice that you'd be makin' a bonnie whore, there'd be a blood duel to settle in the streets!

BIANCA: Aw'in payin' yer lady me respects as one professional t'anofar. You—you got as much notion of me craft as a donkey has of Sunday.

EMILIA: Why, thank you—at least someone has noted me merit.

DESDEMONA: (*Gently*) I'm very complimented, Bianca . . . and I really did enjoy Tuesday night—but I don't think I'd better risk covering for you again.

BIANCA: —You're—you're not brimmin' fer me anymore?

DESDEMONA: No—I don't think I'd better.

EMILIA: (*To herself*) Heigh-ho! On to the next—

BIANCA: (*Trembling*) But—but we c'n still be mates, wot?

DESDEMONA: Of course we can! I want that very much. I never tire of hearing your stories. They're so lively, so very funny.

What else have I got for amusement's sake. (BIANCA is disturbed. EMILIA smiles.)—but you haven't told me yet about your evening off with Cassio last Tuesday . . . did you enjoy yourself?

BIANCA: You don't want to 'ear about it none, it's not anyfing amusing—

DESDEMONA: Now, just tell me all about it, Bianca; you can tell me your secrets, too. Woman to woman. What did you two do?

BIANCA: (*Shy*) We just talked.

EMILIA: (*Snorting*) All night?

BIANCA: Yes! 'E's differnt, you know. 'E's a gen'l'man, 'e is—an' 'e makes the rest o' the blokes round 'ere look like the niny-hammers they are—

EMILIA: Oh, he's diff'rent, all right. You'd think after all week of tom-foolin' with the like of hicks, you'd have more sense than to go prancin' about with some *nancy* town stallion.

BIANCA: Wot! Nancy! Nancy, is it? Who're you callin' "Nancy?"

DESDEMONA: Now, Mealy, don't tease her—

EMILIA: —the way I see it, it's no acc-i-dent for himself to be an army man—

BIANCA: —Aw tell you wot, M'lord Cassio 'will make a smug more obligin' in bed than the one you've got—

DESDEMONA: (*Warningly*)—Ladies, ladies—

EMILIA: —Well, you 'll never find out what it is to be havin' the like of a proper husband in the bed.

BIANCA: Mayhap Aw will, too. Aw'm ready to let my way of life go fer wash the second 'e arks me.

DESDEMONA: What!

BIANCA: Aw'in giving 'alfe me brass each week to the priest. Father Donahue, so's 'e c'n pray fer me sins an' t'gi' me apsolution—Aw'in ready t' say yes whenever 'e arks me 'and—an' Aw c'n go to th' altar as unstained as you were on yer weddin' night.

EMILIA: (*Seeing BIANCA in a new light.*) So—you're after goin' to the priest reg-ular? (*Impressed.*) That's a lot of money.

BIANCA: Bleedin'-right.

DESDEMONA: (*Crestfallen.*) Oh, Bianca—oh, surely you're—you're not the type that wants to get married? (*Depressed,* DESDEMONA goes and pours herself another mug of wine.)

BIANCA: Wot's wrong wif that? Aw'in still young, an' Aw've got a tidy sum all saved up fer a dowry. An' m'lord Cassio's only got t'arsk fer a transfer to th' garrison 'ere; we'd make a bleedin'-jolly life of it, Aw c'n tell you. Aw'd get us a cottage by th' sea, wif winder-boxes an' all them kinds of fings, an' 'e could go to th' tippel'ouse as much as 'e likes, wifout me sayin' nay. An' then—then Aw'd be bearin' 'im sons so's to make 'im proud—

EMILIA: (*Triumphantly.*) There! There's your new woman, m'lady! Free! Does for herself!

BIANCA: Why, that "new woman" kind o' fings all hogwash! (*EMILIA nods her head in agreement.*) All women want t' get a smug; it's wot we're made for, ain't it? We may pretend different, but inside very born one o' us want smugs an' babies, smugs wot are man enow t' keep us in our place.

DESDEMONA: (*Quietly into her wine.*) I don't think I can stand it . . .

BIANCA: 'Scusin' my cheek, but you're a lucky lady, an' you don't even know it. Your 'ubby might be wot you call a bit doo-lolly-tap-tap up 'ere—(*BIANCA taps her head.*)—but th' marrie knot's tied good 'n' strong. Every time Aw 'ear—

(*Dreamily.*) "Til deaf do us part"—Aw starts t' snuffle. Aw can't 'elp it. If only Cassio would say them words an' make me th' 'appiest o'—

EMILIA:—And what makes you think m'lord Cassio—who's Venetian born, an' wears silk next to his skin, not none of your Cyprus scum, is goin' to be marryin' a tried-on strumper?

BIANCA: 'Coz a gen'l'men don't lie to a bird—Aw should soddin'-well know where ofs Aw speak. Besides, m'lord Cassio gi' me a "token o' 'is es-teen"—

EMILIA: Hmmpf! And I'm after supposin' you gave him the same, as you've given tokens of esteem to all your customers—a scurry clap—that's your token. (*DESDEMONA becomes curious.*)

DESDEMONA:—Hush, Mealy. (*To BIANCA.*) Never mind her, Bianca—I believe you. What type of token did Cassio give?

BIANCA: (*As enthused as a teenage girl.*) It's a real flashy bit o' goods. It's a muckenger so swank Aw don't dare blow me beak in it. (*Confidentially.*) So Aw carry it down in me knockers an' next to me 'eart.

DESDEMONA: (*Lost.*)—A swank . . . muck . . .

BIANCA:—Wot Aw mean is, it ain't yer typic sneezer. (*BIANCA ropes into her bodice, and tenderly takes out an embroidered handkerchief, proudly.*) 'Ere it is, now.

DESDEMONA: (*Startling.*)—Why—(*DESDEMONA looks carefully, then in relief.*) Oh, thank God, Bianca, you've found it. I'm saved. (*DESDEMONA stops.*) But what—whatever are you doing with my handkerchief?

EMILIA: (*To herself.*) Oh, Jesus, he gave it to Cassio!

BIANCA: (*Blank.*) Your handkerchief? Yours?! (*Dangerously.*) What's Cassio doin' wi' your hand-ker-chief?

DESDEMONA: That's precisely what I want to find out—EMILIA—

BIANCA: (*Fierce*.)—Aw bet. So—you was goin' t' 'elp me out once a week fer Cassio? (*Advancing*.) You cheatin' hussy—Aw'll pop yer peepers out—(BIANCA lunges for DESDEMONA; EMILIA runs.)

EMILIA:—She's got a knife!—

DESDEMONA:—Listen, Bianca—

BIANCA: When Aw'm gulled by a woman, she don't live to do it twice—

DESDEMONA:—Bianca, I swear!—(BIANCA sees the hoof-pick and picks it up, slowly advancing on DESDEMONA, who backs away toward the clothesline.)

BIANCA:—Aw'll carve you up into cag-meat an' feed you to the pigs—Aw'll gag yer puddings out yer gob, you'll choke so hard—

DESDEMONA:—I never!—(BIANCA swipes at DESDEMONA with the pick; the two clench each other; breaking away, DESDEMONA falls, and picks up a wine bottle in defense.)

BIANCA: Yer gonna snuff it, m'lady—so say yer prayers, yew goggle-eyed scab o' a WHORE [FORE]. (DESDEMONA ducks behind the hanging clothes, with BIANCA following. We hear a scuffle, grunts, and screams. EMILIA runs for the palace door, calling.)

EMILIA:—GUARD!—GUARD!—! (EMILIA flings the door open. Then she realizes she can't call the guard, and quickly closes the door behind her, turning to face the room with grim desperation. Softly.) Jesus.

BIANCA: (*Off*)—BLOODY!—

DESDEMONA: (*Off*)—MEALY!! (EMILIA runs away from the door, taking out her crucifix.)

EMILIA: Oh, Jesus. Oh, Jesus. (*And then, we hear a scream, a*

splash—and the sound of a bottle breaking. Slowly a dark, wet stain spreads on a cloth drying on the clothes-line. For a moment, there is silence. BIANCA, looking grim and fierce, strides out from behind the clothes, holding the hoof-pick. She looks at EMILIA, who backs away. There is a pause. Then, DESDEMONA steps from behind the hanging clothes, holding a broken wine bottle. The torso of her gown is splashed with dark, indelible burgundy. Softly.) O, thank Jesus—

DESDEMONA: Bianca! . . . Bianca, I never did.

BIANCA: Leave me alone . . . Aw've lost me chance of a smug! (BIANCA erupts into weeping, starts to wipe her nose with the handkerchief.)—There! Take yer filthy linen! Aw wouldn't blow me nose on it—

DESDEMONA: Bianca—I never did. I never did.

BIANCA: Aw loved 'im—

DESDEMONA:—Bianca—

BIANCA:—An' Aw lost 'im—

DESDEMONA:—Bianca—

BIANCA:—An' oh, oh, the cottage by the sea . . .

DESDEMONA: If it makes a difference, I didn't.

BIANCA:—You gulled yer 'usband an' you gulled me! An' Aw thought we was mates! (BIANCA starts to leave; EMILIA calls after her.)

EMILIA: I told you there's no such thing as friendship with ladies—

BIANCA:—You! Washerdonna! Shut yer potato-trap! Don't you be so 'igh an' mighty smart!! (*Reaching the door, BIANCA opens it, and turns*.) And just where was your Iago last Tuesday night! (*Triumphantly, BIANCA slams the door behind her. A very long pause. Then, DESDEMONA tries to sound casual.*)

DESDEMONA: Um, EMILIA dear, just—just where was Iago last Tuesday night?

EMILIA: (*Distressed.*) He . . . he said . . . he said that he was on guard duty . . . (*EMILIA begins to cry.* DESDEMONA sits beside her, and tentatively puts her arms about EMILIA. Then, DESDEMONA rocks her maid.)

END OF SCENE

Lights
wine, sa

Drinking

Scene 25

DESDEMONA and EMILIA, at table, starting ahead into air. DESDEMONA wearily looks into her cup, and pours herself and EMILIA another cup of wine. They look at each other, nod to each other, and drink together.

Scene 26

DESDEMONA is drinking. EMILIA grasps her own mug. Then, in a low voice.

EMILIA: Do you know which one he was?

DESDEMONA: No . . . I don't think so. There were so many that night.

EMILIA: Aye, you were having a proper time at it. Travelin' around the world! (*Pause.*)

DESDEMONA: There was one man . . . (*Hesitating.*) It might have been him.

EMILIA: (*Laughs harshly.*) My husband's a lover of garlic. Was that the man you're remembering?

DESDEMONA: No—it's not that—although . . .

EMILIA: Well, what is it you remember!

DESDEMONA: There was one man who . . . didn't last very long.

EMILIA: Aye. That's the one.

Scene 27

The same.

EMILIA: When I was married in the Church, the knot tied beneath the Virgin's nose, I looked forward to the bed with as much joy as any girl after a hard day. And then Iago—well, he was still a lad, with the softness of a boy, and who could tell he'd turn into the man? (*EMILIA pauses to drink.*) But all that girl-nonsense was knocked out of me by the nights. Night followin' night, as sure as the day's work came after. I'd stretch myself out on the bed, you see, waitin' for my good man to come to me and be my mate—as the Priest said he could—but then. But then I saw it didn't matter what had gone on between us—the fights, my crying, a good meal or a cold one. Days could pass without a word between us—and he'd take his fill of me the same. I could have been the bed itself. And so, you see, I vowed not to be there for him. As he'd be lying on me in the dark, I'd picture up my rosary, so real I could kiss the silver. And I'd stare at the Blessed Cross itself, while he was somewhere doin' his business above, and I'd say the first wooden bead, and then I'd finger the next bead in my mind, and then onto the next—(*EMILIA stops.*) But I never did make it to the medalion. He'd be all through with me by the time of the third "Hail Mary." (*Pause.*) Does my lady know what I'm saying?

DESDEMONA: I'm not sure. I . . . I don't think it's . . . happened to me like that.