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# Ngatish

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**NGATISH**

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**TITLE**

**BY**

**DALE MOSLEY**

**THESIS**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS**

**1998**

**I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
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Dale Mosley  
Abstract  
Ngatish

Ngatish is a tragedy involving the lives of Othello's African family. My purpose in writing this play is to explore the shifts in roles between women and men in powerful and subservient positions. Therefore, I have created an historical 16th-century African setting for the play while the story-line explores the lives of Othello, his African family, and his first wife, Ngatish.

Through Ngatish, I want to answer some to the unknowns in Othello: how was such a notorious general so easily and readily duped by an obviously envious man as Iago: what were his secrets; his torments; what drove Othello to agree to murder? (In Cinthio's original Tale of The Moor, Othello agrees to Desdemona's murder, but Iago carries out the deed.)

I use the tragic drama as a means for expressing the relationships between the characters because of the parallel with Othello and my belief that a character like Othello would have more than one tragedy in his life. A realistic play, Ngatish attempts to portray relationships as they truly exist--all of us at one time or another being either the antagonist or the protagonist as we believe the situation warrants.

## Introduction

The idea of writing Ngatish first occurred in the summer of 1994. I had read Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in an earlier undergraduate class and had found it fascinating. The interesting area of Tom Stoppard's play was his use of the Shakespearean innuendo and temperament. Stoppard took Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and exposed hidden facets. Telling the story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern opened my eyes to the vast dominion of possibilities that awaits every piece of literature--that after consideration and review can still be explored. These are the areas in which we vicariously fill in the gaps, sometimes not being consciously aware that we have concluded an unfinished portion of a manuscript, but identifying that missing portion with a "guess" at its conclusion while focusing on the main story-line.

In *Ngatish*, I wanted to answer some of the unknowns in *Othello*: how was such a notorious general so easily and readily duped by an obviously envious man as Iago; what drove Othello to agree to murder; his secrets; his torments? In order to answer these questions I have studied books on ancient and or historical Africa, the Moors themselves, Giovanni Cinthio's original version of The Moor, and Shakespeare's retelling of Othello.

My play is a tragedy involving the lives of Othello's African family and explores the shifts in roles between women and men in powerful and subservient positions. Therefore I have created an historical 16th-century African setting for the play

while the story line explores the lives of Othello, his African family, and his first wife, Ngatish.

Othello's lack of moral character motivates the play and the other characters in Ngatish. Othello has set a strange, chain of events into motion. These events do not effect him while he exists in his father's kingdom, but they parallel the events that occur in Venice and Shakespeare's interpretation of Othello as an unstable over-achiever. Giovanni Cinthio, who originally wrote the story of The Moor, gives Othello a trustful character. Cinthio's Moor is innocent and a stranger in a world whose customs he does not understand and whose ideologies he doesn't question. These characteristics may evoke pity for either author's interpretation; however, Othello's actions or reactions remain inexcusable whatever the provocation.

I don't believe Othello has any predictable characteristics other than his strong belief in what constitutes men's worlds as opposed to the worlds of women. The Moor's culture places women in lateral roles making them heads of the household and making the Moor a guest in his own home, but leaving the Moor in control of the kingdom and its armies (Burckhardt 93). This would explain Cinthio's Moor and his confusion when confronted with Desdemona's interferences in his affairs of state, but doesn't explain either Shakespeare's Moor or mine. Shakespeare's Moor was seldom in his home, nor was Desdemona thus, laying no foundation for a true home as the Moor understood it. Since Ngatish's Othello is only seen in Yukaara, he is not held by Moorish standards of home as he is a Christian who lives in a

state free of Muslim controls, and who has all but taken command of his father's kingdom. Othello has control of his parents' household, which doesn't give him any reason to award Ngatish, his wife, the reigns. Ngatish has been bred into these customs and expects no less than control of her household, but she is treated like an outsider much the same as Othello when realizing he has no control over his affairs of state in Venice.

I have chosen to tell Ngatish's story from this outsider view based upon the facts of the sixteenth century Moorish households and their treatment of the female royalty within. There was no visible political power among the women. When their husbands died, they ruled from behind the scenes until the successor matured, but were not entered into historical records. (This was not true of all of Western Africa; women held many offices and acted openly in the political structure of the country) (Ajayi and Crowder 224-225). These incidents compel my belief that women in Moorish Africa were as adept in private and ruled strong households. However, these possibilities were not explored in Othello's character as described by Shakespeare because Othello took charge of everything until Desdemona's interference beyond traditional roles. Ngatish was bred to rule a household and knew her position and status, but her attempts to explore her role were considered interference by Othello and his family.

After reading Cinthio, I could only believe that Othello's misfortune was due to his trust in Iago. After reading

Shakespeare, I could only conclude that Othello's misfortune was due to his history; Iago only used Othello's own sense of guilt against him. In Ngatish I have tried to pull these two views together by foreshadowing the cause of Othello's gullibility.

Critics of Shakespeare have called Othello a farce, melodrama, the story of Iago. After research and critical study of Cinthio's original Moor and Shakespeare's Moor, I have to agree that the story is more about Iago than Othello or Desdemona.

Shakespeare gives Iago a back seat in his version and makes the Moor a hot tempered dolt easily misled by rumor and innuendo. I don't know if this was done so that Shakespeare could simply use Othello as a representative of the enemies of England and thereby prove that all men's strengths were only as strong as their beliefs, making what they believed to be most important--and making their passions the key to those beliefs, or if, in a very delicate approach, Shakespeare was attempting to challenge the lifestyles, hearts and the minds of the princes of England, and Othello's complexion was used to distance the immediacy of his message (Othello would not be the first man of royal blood to kill or order the death of a wife who 'just wasn't working out').

Elmer Edgar Stoll notes discrepancies in Othello's character and the rapidity with which his jealousy builds to the point of irrevocable eruption (1-2). Stoll also notes that Schlegel also explained the Moor's demeanor as emanating from "the crust of



discipline and Venetian culture" which simply and logically capped "the red lava of sexual passion and barbarism; or, with Gervinus, Ulrici, and Wetz, have thought that his later passions free within him, though in the germ" (qtd. in Stoll 3). These ideas are frightening revelations of human nature from both the writer and the critics. To afford Othello different beliefs because of his culture is one thing, but to portray that culture as barbaric, tyrannical, and driven by passion to fits of rage is another. It appears that Shakespeare's historical analogy of the Moor influenced societal beliefs that Moors were more fanatical in their religious beliefs than the English or the French and therefore, more violent conquerors. For Shakespeare to emphasize this trait in Othello as though it were a novelty to human kind is understandable considering that he did not want to offend the men who paid him. But, for Shakespeare to introduce this trait in the body of the Moor is also misleading. All men are capable of these passions, and to demonstrate them in any 'body' other than that of the ruling class could possibly cause the moral to miss its mark and reinforce or cause racial stereotypes. I can only hope that Shakespeare utilized the Moor as a mechanism to reveal the soul of all men--the educated and lay, since inhumane is what men become once they are stripped of all educable reasoning. Shakespeare's message then should be 'beware the passions, not the man'. Passions rule most men and women. Men in power achieve it through the same means and education as Othello, and each man is ultimately driven by his own passionate

beliefs. Othello is not a play of colors until placed into Shakespeare's hands. The Blackamoor's presence only allowed the English aristocracy to superficially distance themselves from the Moor's behavior; they would not readily, willingly, nor openly agree with having understood the Moor's behavior, nor would they immediately identify with the Moor's unchained passions because of the color of his skin. Knight believes that Shakespeare was simply confused as to the appearance of the Moor (qtd. in Taylor 13). I disagree. This absence of immediacy allows the playgoer to indulge unknowingly "of the divine simplicity with which the poet once felt" as he is led "back out of the modern world into the poet's" and into a basic reality (Stoll 63). I addressed Ngatish from Shakespeare's inferences to complexion because Othello's blackness has become a "matter of mental fact" although Moors' complexions run the full range, olive to black. Imaginably, Ngatish will have some of the same effects as Othello. However, I hope that the audiences won't assume catharsis because they don't immediately identify with any of the characters who happen to be black or Hispanic.

I disagree with Stoll when he says the nearest to any subliminal suggestions occurring in Shakespeare "is when Othello cries, 'Goats and Monkeys!' on making his exit after striking his wife," possibly echoing Iago's statement about the lovers being "as hot as goats and as prime as monkeys" (qtd. in Stoll 68). There is no subliminal message here. The message is overt. Their innocent passions are the couple's only visible likeness.

Moreover, Othello's entire 'complexion' premise is subliminal because Othello's complexion acts as a synthesizer and allows the audience to quietly diffuse the play's impact as a statement about the aristocracy or ruling class (black or white), whom I hope Shakespeare sought to address. This is verifiable because of the changes Shakespeare makes to Cinthio's original version of The Moor in which Iago was not only the usurper, but the murderer of Desdemona. By placing the pillow in Othello's hand, Shakespeare has made Othello a murdering fool. On the other hand, Cinthio's tale focuses upon Iago's characteristics and motivations. Cinthio's Moor is a victim until the end. Thomas Paner calls Othello a "bloody farce" because his "love and jealousy are no part of a soldier's character, unless for comedy" (qtd in A Casebook of Othello).

Stoll is correct in saying "the situation, not a character, is the author's point of departure" (69). Perhaps this is why I had such difficulty pinpointing the protagonist and antagonist in Ngatish. Any character may show a different side of him or herself depending upon the situation. These characters induce a bit of realism into Ngatish because we all switch roles depending upon our needs. Ngatish grows with the play because she has changing needs. Puella also grows, not because her needs change, but because her ideas on how to achieve her needs change.

Given all of this, I must lean towards Cinthio's version of the story as being the less complicated of the two in terms of dramatic presentation because he easily portrayed the paradoxical

relationship between good and evil. His play does operate through its characters and leans towards the melodramatic, with none of its characters changing dramatically in the end. Certainly, the Moor's suicide could reflect his return to his original beliefs (those which he was always suspected of having and possibly only pretended to change, or perhaps, driven by the pressures of constant observation and judgement by those who pretended to be his peers, he converted his actions to match the suspicions of those around him). Having dishonored himself and family and finding no hopes of forgiving himself, the honorable thing for him to do was to atone for his sins.

On the other hand, Shakespeare's Moor, being better known to audiences, forces its way into the limelight. Since Cinthio's characters are melodramatic, there is no room for growth. Shakespeare makes an attitude adjustment in Othello's character and portrays him in an instinctively emotional mental state. This suggests many aversions in Othello's character and makes Othello appear to be hiding some aspect of his personality or his past. However, the flaws in Shakespeare's Othello also demonstrate Othello's human side and his subsequent confusion with the role he plays in the world that surrounds him. In some aspects, Othello's confusion makes him more vulnerable and pitiable than Cinthio's Moor because Cinthio's Moor allows his faith and trust (often interpreted as innocence) to transform into rage, while Shakespeare's Moor is consistent with the pretentiousness of his life--he never really understands himself

until it is too late. Both writers have captured Othello's innocence and his foolishness.

### My Approach

I use the tragic drama as a means for expressing the relationships between the characters because of the parallel with Othello and my belief that a character like Othello would have more than one tragedy in his life. A realistic play, Ngatish attempts to portray relationships as they truly exist--all of us at one time or another being either the antagonist or the protagonist as we believe the situation warrants. Since the story occurs during the same time period as Othello's junket to Venice, it is not a precursor of these events but an exploration of Othello's reaction to the events in Venice.

The play is reflective of society's indifference to the ramifications of its actions making its theme universal. The action occurs simultaneously with Othello's trip to Venice and continues to develop and parallel with the news of Othello's remarriage and the death of Desdemona. Although the play suggests an explanation of Othello's character, the explanation is not portrayed through Othello's eyes, but through Ngatish's perspective. The parallel with Othello adds to the intrigue and causes the audience to think beyond the immediate, thereby developing the play's full potential for audience comparisons and reflections.

This is a modern language version of a play set in the

sixteenth century, historically and incorporated with traditional aspects of African societies (many anecdotes were found in the books written by Poole and Meakin listed in the bibliography). I have also placed Othello's family in the kingdom of Yukaara, a fictitious state edging the northern border of the very real state of Keebe, which flourished during the 16th century. Keebe was run by Askii (rulers) and was founded by one such ruler who abdicated from Senegal and gave refuge and support to other would-be rulers with ideologies different from those of the Senegalese ruler. I have also added a battle poem and a love poem written by Othello and performed in Moorish tradition the night before he leaves for Venice.

I have chosen to tell Ngatish's story from this outsider view based upon the facts of the sixteenth-century Moorish households and their treatment of the female royalty within.

Once Othello leaves Yukaara, Ngatish (his first wife) and Puella (his maid and concubine), slowly begin to realize the roles they play (Ngatish as a breeder for the heir; Puella as bed-warmer and in-house spy). Puella means *girl* in Latin; I gave her this name because she has no identity, responding to others like a chameleon adjusting to whatever situation surrounds it. Although Othello's mother, Queen Innocencia, continues her role as Queen of the harem, she remains loyal to her husband because she has accepted the power that comes with her position. Innocencia's name indicates her conformity and acceptance of the norms within her household; she is not innocent, but pretends

innocence in order to maintain a false peace within the world she has created inside her household. The next few scenes focus on the changing, embittered relationship between the three women who love Othello. Their interactions portray the changing roles between protagonist and antagonist. Ngatish changes from a straight-forward, honest woman into a plotting liar. Puella changes her role to suit her purpose: freedom at any cost. Queen Innocencia begins to question Theolas about his indiscretions, but soon allows him to convince her that Ngatish baits her anger.

#### My Approach to the Characters

I find it extremely difficult to tell Ngatish's story by placing her in the Aristotelian role of antagonist or protagonist. Therefore, I had hoped to eliminate the roles of antagonist and protagonist (because I see them as interchangeable) and, as Stoll suggests, utilize the situation, not the character to carry the story to its tragic end. My focus will however, remain on what the "situation brings to the characters" (Stoll 69).

Originally, the opening scene begins in Othello and Ngatish's chambers as Othello stands packing for Venice. However, after reconsideration, I have placed the family at a feast where Othello and his father discuss Othello's departure at the behest of the Venetian council. Without beating a drum, I have tried to foreshadow the events of the earlier tragedy by

having Othello ask his father's counsel. King Theolas warns Othello that he must seek good counsel or his efforts will prove fruitless. This foreshadowing sets the play in motion.

Ngatish's action and story line parallel Othello's. I vollied the idea of Othello being a nice guy or a philanderer. The final decision rested with a combination of Othello's being Cinthio's victim and Shakespeare's fool. Approaching Othello as Shakespeare saw him, I would have to ensure these answers for the audience in terms that were not insulting or surprisingly O. Henryish. Therefore, Othello's treatment of Ngatish becomes the crux of his treatment in Venice. His own guilt and constant denials of adultery to Ngatish begin to echo in the voice of Desdemona. Othello's guilt motivates his mistrust of his wife and his gullibility to Iago, while Ngatish's desires for the marriage and the kingdom she will never share with the man she loves cultivate her moral decline.

In accordance with this fool, Cinthio's victim must also emerge, for what is Othello if not a mere mortal given to the sin of self-indulgence? In Cinthio's tale, he is not the epic hero, for there is no villain of extraordinary cunning. There is only Iago, whom Othello does not recognize as his true target until it is too late. In Ngatish, Othello's parents--Theolas and Innocencia--over-indulge him. Ngatish's Moor is victim to a dotting mother, a philandering father, and a wife whom he does not have the maturity to properly care for. He is a man, but weak in the ways of familial ties. Always having been the "spoiled



brat", he continues to be insecure about his movements within a household and his position therein because he no longer has the security of his own (or his father's) kingdom. He believes battling to be his only strong point. As a warrior, his position is clear. As a conquering hero, he rests in the limelight until finding another escape in the form of another war.

Othello's personality exhibits neither compassion, nor conscience. Only after his tribulations in Venice does Othello become aware of his feeble character. This explains his inability to forgive himself because his actions have been exemplary of his life. Othello has nowhere to go. His actions have been condoned by his parents throughout his life. The only voice of reason he can trust is that of Ngatish's, but in realizing this, Othello also realizes the injustice he has done her. All of this and nothing more kills Othello, just as Ngatish's desires to obtain control of Othello and then her freedom destroys her values and begins another tragedy. They both believe their world's have come to an end. Othello can not face himself when he recognizes what he has become. At the same time, Ngatish never realizes what she has become.

King Theolas and Queen Innocencia never change. It is important that they remain the two doting, self-centered, manipulative characters that they began as. It's important because they play a key role in Othello's maturation process having fulfilled his every desire since his return from slavery. Puella's role is equally important, as her character is

representative of the choices we all make as thinking human beings. She is the side-kick who looks for anything that will give her the advantage. She is the female version of Iago, and although she doesn't appear as deadly as Iago does, she is.

Puella allows Ngatish to overhear the King and Queen's conversation of Othello's marriage. For reasons of her own, Puella tells Ngatish of the Kings interception of Ngatish's letters to her father. Puella helps Ngatish escape when she finds Ngatish's cause more beneficial to her own. Whom should she side with? "She is only a servant" the Great Askii of Keebe finally impresses upon Theolas. She is only trying to survive. How could she pledge loyalty to anyone who wanted to keep her in servitude? Human nature forces us to seek our own paths.

While Puella has choices to make, Ngatish must make decisions. What happens to Ngatish is as important as what happens to Othello. Ngatish returns home, but to do so she must become like those who hold her captive. In the end, Ngatish forces the chain of events. The difficulty with Ngatish and Puella is that they are women, and unless their characters are blotted with grotesque flaws, it becomes difficult for an audience to dislike and mistrust them. Both are simply trying to survive, but at what costs?

Puella can probably be seen as a strong character. She withstands abuse from all sides as does Ngatish. However, Ngatish's role is distinguishable from Puella's because her words are justified and only hold the truth until her role changes and

she is forced to make decisions necessary for her survival. Both lies and truths are utilized as weapons of attack. Puella and Ngatish begin to respond positively towards each other: each changing slightly, each growing toward the other, each eventually achieving a sense of balance that helps them survive. I am leery of how the audience will come to understand these two--seeing Puella as the victim and Ngatish as a woman who is constantly causing trouble. Ngatish needs to be told the truth and allowed to make her own decisions. I think that the audience should be able to deduce Ngatish's true character, but one never knows. I hope I have emphasized her changed characteristics during the final scene when she miscarries.

Ngatish and Puella are survivors, but each survives by her own means. Puella, even in her escapades with Othello and Theolas, is only doing what she believes she has to in order to survive. However, during the sixteenth century a servant could shun amorous affections and could possibly, if chosen, marry into any family she desired. So, why was it necessary for Puella to assume the role she did?

Each woman's role is distinct. Queen Innocencia, as I have said, is unchanging. She is *set in her ways*, and her ways include an unrealistic approach to the world around her. Perhaps her compassion causes her troubles and she is as much a victim as anyone else...but probably not because she is aware of what transpires in the kingdom but does nothing to intervene. Innocencia's self-centeredness is her only motivation: what will

work best for her and, after herself, her husband. Innocencia and Theolas are given to Machiavellianism.

I did not originally intend to include an appearance by the Askii of Keebe, but his appearance became a necessary part of the denouement. As far as the women are concerned, he is no equal opportunity Askii. In fact, he chides Ngatish for her lies and her assumption that a mere woman would be able to hold a man's interests even while they are separated. He accepts Othello's infidelity as part of a rite-of-passage for men. The Askii himself places great demands upon Ngatish's character. He is your basic chauvinist with power, power he intends to keep. The Askii, therefore, has no room for lies because he does not have the time to decipher them. He expects the truth from everyone, not only Ngatish. I deliberately had him ignore Ngatish after embracing her to emphasize his philosophy of who rules the household. The Askii not only questions Theolas in a man-to-man confrontation, but he also questions Innocencia. After all, he is in her home and assumes she is well aware of what transpires there.

Nontraditionally, there are no heroes; each character lives his/her own tragedy because of his inability to learn from his/her previous actions.

#### Production Notes

Ngatish is written in standard play format. I have not

written many stage directions and have basically given the actors the freedom to improvise their movements. King Theolas's attitude must begin to diminish, but how does an actor respond to this? Writing these directions into the play itself would have given the actor another acting role within an acting role, and I believe this adjustment would have been too transparent for the stage or any other viewed media. So, I went for the psychological effect of erasing the word *king* from his role. I believe the literary adjustment creates a very real uneasiness for the actor, and this uneasiness should become a part of Theolas's character--a man unaware that he is losing his kingdom. The Askii never addresses him as *king*.

As for *Queen Innocencia*, she remains *Queen* until the end in hopes of emphasizing that she is well aware of the role she plays within the castle. This role does not change throughout the play.

The stage consists of an elevated throne room towards the rear of the stage, Theolas's library, Ngatish and Othello's chambers, and a banquet room. The location of the rooms is at the directors discretion because of staging possibilities.

Where stage directions are written, they must be followed as they emphasize a gesture movement which is used to suggest several theoretical possibilities about the person or the play itself but, is basically designed to make the audience think and reflect.

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NGATISH

by

Dale T. Mosley

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ngatish (Othello's wife)

Othello

King Theolas (Othello's father)

Queen Innocencia (Othello's mother)

Puella (Othello and Ngatish's handmaid)

Guard

Messenger

The Askii of Keebe

## SETTING

16th Century Yukaara on the northern Keebe boarder.

SCENE I

(The stage consists of an elevated throne room towards the rear of the stage, Theolas's library, Ngatish and Othello's chambers, and a banquet room. Opens with OTHELLO and KING THEOLAS seated in the banquet room at a feast. The maids, who are fair-skinned, tend to their needs. OTHELLO and KING THEOLAS watch as the royal dancers, two women and one man, dance.)

KING THEOLAS

My son, what is your heart's desire on this eve of your departure? You have but to ask, and if I may give, it is yours.

OTHELLO

I desire your advice, Father.

KING THEOLAS

Very well. Ask.

OTHELLO

I am summoned by the Venetian Council to head an army against the Ottomans who, they are afraid, will soon advance towards Cyprus. Their cause is but that, their cause. Civilizations are conquered daily and change is inevitable. I go only for the sake of battle. Such wealth here softens me, and I sometimes feel the loss of my manhood.

KING THEOLAS

What is your question, my son?

OTHELLO

Should the other Princes become content, we have none to blame but ourselves, for contentment breeds debauchery...

(A MAID comes to attend him.

OTHELLO shuns her.)

and descent. None now seek my counsel on battles and armies, they seek my advice on the care of women. Is it wrong of me to desire the risks of battle?

KING THEOLAS

One must answer his calling. Yours is to do battle, lest we fall victim to history, only to lose all that we have gained--again. I envy you, my son. If I were not old and feeble, I would go with you and swear you good company. Promise me that you will not fall victim to bad counsel. Trust no man, and depend on only those who seek the glory of battle during battle--for no matter what treachery a man holds in his heart, he will not surrender his life on the battle-field out of vengeance.

OTHELLO

I only hope to find counsel half as wise as yours. Of my wife, Father.

KING THEOLAS

What of her?

OTHELLO

Her father secures our borders to the south. Keep her amused for I fear my return to a kingdom no longer yours. His wrath is fierce.

KING THEOLAS

As is his daughter's.

OTHELLO

I love Ngatish, but I love freedom more. She can not journey with me, for she is with child and irritable.

KING THEOLAS

(Takes grapes from an attendant and begins to smile. NGATISH and QUEEN INNOCENCIA enter.)

My Queen and my beautiful daughter.

OTHELLO

My mother and my bride, come, join us.

(The women are seated at the table.)

What is your desire, my Princess?

NGATISH

That you not leave me, my husband. That you remain until the birth of our child. Then we will both travel with you and I can tell our son of the great deeds of his father.

OTHELLO

You know it is a son, do you? How does my beautiful wife determine this?

NGATISH

In Keebe, my home, the gender is determined by the position of the belly, and we are very seldom wrong.

OTHELLO

If I were sure, I would never leave you for long. But you know I must fulfill my pledge to the council. I have accepted their terms. I go to battle the Turks.

NGATISH

Is there not enough battle here? Why not join with my father?

NGATISH (Cont)

He battles for land and freedom.

OTHELLO

Your father would see me a kept man. There are vast worlds with many riches and peoples to conquer. I shall build a kingdom in the new world, for I hear the people are easily persuaded to Christianity, and the land is rich with gold. I no longer wish to battle the Senegalese; they live for their religion.

NGATISH

You have your faith, and there is gold here.

OTHELLO

The gold belongs to this household. I have had my faith since being enslaved as a boy, and all I remember of my journey is that there is but one god. I will no longer accept religion as a personal challenge and an excuse to wage war. I desire new challenges.

NGATISH

I agree, my husband. There is but one god. But I have grave doubt that god be female, or I believe you would remember lying next to her, but would have trouble keeping it a secret. Do you seek to replace me too, Othello?

OTHELLO

On my sword, I seek only glory.

NGATISH

That would be your excuse for your present infidelity?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Let us not discourse on painful issues, for tonight my son shall be treated like a king.

PUELLA

(Leaning between OTHELLO and King Theolas)

May I serve you, my King?

(OTHELLO and THEOLAS each raise their goblet. PUELLA fills both)

KING THEOLAS

She takes your mother at her word. But, one day you will be a king. Hurry home, my Son.

(BOTH drink a toast.)

What poesy have you prepared for your departure?

A poem for battle, father.

OTHELLO

(OTHELLO removes the poems from his vest pocket.)

Silence, my son speaks.

KING THEOLAS

OTHELLO

The calm breeze awaits the victor  
And its predecessor, the hurricane spins its dreams into realities,  
But even its beginning is generated by the calm winds  
Like the life in my father's kingdom.  
Life has here been easy,  
And if not forewarned by the previous contentment in the territories,  
Then forewarned by the frolic of the people.  
No, I say to sensual pleasures  
Militia, I am  
To fight, I live  
To rest too contentedly, I die--as does my flame.  
To battle then and victory,  
For the valor of those I serve  
And the fruits that will build the foundation of my own kingdom.

KING THEOLAS

And your victory will be great, my Son.

OTHELLO

I have one more for my wife and child..  
Two loves have I  
And serve one, so as to better serve the other.  
Although treasures do not compare to your beauty,  
Their richness can only adorn the purity of your heart.  
Your body rich with the life of our mingling,  
None as sweet have I found,  
The rare flower that blossoms only at my touch  
None truer have I found,  
One who loves me above all earthly things,  
None more tender have I met.  
To bless us with child  
wills me to return with a swiftness to be by your side  
My wife, my princess, my Ngatish.

KING THEOLAS

Well, say something, woman. Does this not please you?

NGATISH

It pleases me, my Lord, and will only cause me to suffer more at

NGATISH (cont)

his absence. My husband, I wish only to be your true love and intimate friend. It was wrong of me to make your final evening here unpleasant. My only regret is that I can not be with you in Venice and wherever this battle will take you.

(OTHELLO kisses NGATISH and they embrace. The king and court applaud except for Puella who is angry and stands in a corner, and purposely drops a tray of food. Everyone turns, but their attentions are quickly given to the messenger.)

MESSENGER

My Lord Othello, the royal ship-master bids you know the tide shifts in two nights and we are two days' journey from the coast where a swift wind will carry us quickly to Venice.

OTHELLO

When does he wish to take leave?

MESSENGER

Now, my Lord.

OTHELLO

And of my emissary from Venice, Iago, has he arrived?

MESSENGER

His ship awaits us two miles from shore, two days journey from here.

OTHELLO

(Looks at his family.)

Very well, I gather my things. Come wife.

(OTHELLO and NGATISH head towards the door. The KING and QUEEN follow.)

KING THEOLAS

I prepare your treasury, son.

(Touching OTHELLO'S shoulder.)

It seems a short time since your return from slavery, but you have been with us for over ten years. Still, my sadness could not be more painful.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I will pack your favorite fruits for the journey.

(OTHELLO and NGATISH enter the door to their chamber. KING THEOLAS enters the door to the library. QUEEN INNOCENCIA exits through door to the hallway. The MESSENGER exits. The lights in the throne room go out. The only light comes from Othello's chambers. PUELLA enters from the darkened hallway and sexily drapes a scarf across OTHELLO'S shoulder.)

PUELLA

My Lord, I have found your scarf. You will need it for your long journey.

(OTHELLO takes the scarf.)

NGATISH

Where did you find my husband's scarf, girl?

PUELLA

In the servants' quarters, my Princess.

OTHELLO

I must have left it somewhere else and one of the servants retrieved it. Puella, come help me pack.

NGATISH

Are you sure, my husband? Or did you lose it while saying your good-byes last night.

(OTHELLO doesn't answer, but only stares at NGATISH.)

My husband, you look at me as though I do not exist. Your eyes pierce my very existence. Othello! do you not hear my voice, or are you too enraptured with the pale skin of our slaves! Careful, my husband, unless you become slave to your own obsession.

OTHELLO

I will never be slave to any man.

NGATISH

She is not a man, and if you had paid heed to my words, you would not speak of other men. Tell me, Othello, do you believe yourself to be the world's true lord and master?

OTHELLO

I am lord and master of your world. And beyond your world, you should not venture.

NGATISH

In thought or deed, my dear husband? For indeed it is you who have left me behind in thought. (Pause; weakly.) Does my Prince find her more beautiful than I?

OTHELLO

I find no one as beautiful.

NGATISH

Your words flatter, my Prince, but yet disguise your true feelings. When, Othello?

OTHELLO

When?

NGATISH

When will you abandon me?

OTHELLO

My intentions are not to abandon, but to honor you.

NGATISH

If you leave this land, then I am abandoned.

OTHELLO

Only for a short time. You shall be well cared for, and upon my return, I shall adorn your beauty in spun gold.

NGATISH

I wish only to be adorned by your love and to radiate again the gleam in your eyes.

OTHELLO

You do radiate my soul (takes her in his arms) and soon the two will radiate my life.

(Tenderly places both hands on her stomach, then gently pushes her away.)

I must go and claim a legacy for my first born, for he shall inherit a kingdom as rich as his mother's beauty...

NGATISH

But, hopefully, not as empty as her heart.



OTHELLO

Enough! Do not lay ill omen upon my journey. I will again honor you. You shall see.

(Kisses her cheek. Approaches door.)

NGATISH

(In low voice.)

Again? What have you done this time, Othello, that you must again prove my worthiness as your princess? (Loudly.) Othello, what surprise awaits me?! (Walking towards him.) I am your queen and demand the truth! Should I again be prepared for the chatter of the guards and their tales of you at the harems?

OTHELLO

(Facing open door.)

Guard! Fetch my Queen's attendant so she may be made comfortable. My departure is too great a problem for her delicate condition. (GUARD enters. OTHELLO whispers to him.)

OTHELLO

Keep her to her bed until I have departed.

GUARD

Yes, my Prince.

NGATISH

Tell me, Othello, what secrets await? Your departures always culminate in the midst of a storm. What am I to expect?!

OTHELLO

Expect only my love.

(Exits.)

NGATISH

My husband pretends that it is war that calls him, yet I find him disenchanted. I am a Princess given the witness of a maid, while he and his father elevate the maids to my state. I will not be discarded.

(NGATISH exits the room, crosses the hallway, and directly enters KING THEOLAS' library. The KING sits at a table with pen in hand. He hears NGATISH enter, yet continues writing...she begins to speak.)

NGATISH (Cont)

My, Lord...

(The KING raises his hand to silence her. As he does so, OTHELLO enters the room.)

OTHELLO

Father, You have prepared my treasury?

KING THEOLAS

(Dropping his pen and turning towards the door.)

My Son, of course...come in. (Hugging OTHELLO) I only hope it would be enough. There is always more. Should you find yourself in need, send a swift courier on an even swifter steed.

OTHELLO

This steed need be more than swift, it must also don wings, for my travels take me over waters much too deep for any steed to -traverse. Nonetheless, should I truly need, I would send the fastest schooner to bring you the fruits of my battles, for one must send a swift ship to transport a pale and perfumed cargo suitable for a King.

(OTHELLO takes off his hat and bows...then notices NGATISH. Still bending over, he looks under his arm at NGATISH.)

Ahem, and for my wife, the finest cloth.

(Standing upright and raising his hat into the air. The KING sits down and looks to the opposite side of the room.)

Unless, of course, you would like something more?

NGATISH

It appears as though I have already asked you for too much of what you do not will to give. You offer me fine cloth to make gowns which never quite please you upon my person, but upon my hand-maid you find them enchanting. Tell me, Othello, would it be my imagination, or will these colors too match her eyes?

OTHELLO

(Sighs.)

What is your business here, woman?

NGATISH

I have come to see your father, but god forgive, I know now not why, for your attentions span the same dimensions and all be female. I only hoped to persuade him to speak with you about the disservice you do me, but he is guilty of the same. I shall take my leave, and pray a swift messenger bring news of your death...and of my freedom.

(Exits to hallway.)

OTHELLO

(Turns towards his father.)

I think she would find happiness in my departure, since my presence extracts such venom. Tell me, my father, what has brought her to you?

KING THEOLAS

(Throwing his hands in the air.)

I know not what brings her, yet her departure does not prove difficult distraction.

(In the hall, NGATISH sits weeping on a bench. QUEEN INNOCENCIA enters from the center door and attempts to console NGATISH.)

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Ngatish, my Dear, why so sad? Othello will soon return with riches from across the worlds and make you proud of being his Princess...(QUEEN Hugs NGATISH.) I too will miss him, but he must go. Life here is restless for him. He is a warrior. What good is a warrior in a peaceful land? The calm bores him, as it does the sons of our ministers.

NGATISH

Is my anger not excitement enough for him?!

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Your anger is not what he needs now. My son goes on a dangerous journey in a place as foreign to him as the stars to Nostradamus. Othello now needs your understanding and warm heart. Be careful you do not chase him away.

NGATISH

Care is obsolete. I have done nothing but care for Othello, and he has done nothing but care for his hand-maid whom he has, by the way, given me as mine until his return. Three years I have been away from my father and my home, attempting to make a life

NGATISH (Cont)

here with Othello, but he has merely fulfilled his part of our fathers' agreement...Do you think he ever loved me?

(NGATISH gets up from the bench.)

I loved him from first I saw him...he does make a handsome warrior...But a poor husband. I saw that in his eyes too, my mother. I thought he might one day grow into respecting our father's peace agreement, but in his father's castle, Othello looks to his mother to fulfill his duties as my counsel and my friend. I do not interfere with his affairs of state, for my father has always told me that the man rules the kingdom.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

(Gets up and walks towards

NGATISH.)

You must realize, Ngatish, that we are women, and our place is behind our men, whether we agree with their decisions or not.

NGATISH

Standing behind Othello should not be a problem if it were only fate between us. However, several fates rest between my husband and me...and only after his parents and hand-maid does my time arise from amid the other shadows. Yes, my father has told me of the worlds of men, yet he has also told me of the world of women.

I should have my own home, and Othello should beg entry. Instead, it is I who constantly beg for his respect of my status. And he...(Begins to weep again). He has begged me to bear this child and with yet four months remaining, he leaves us both to fetch play-things for himself and his father. Tell me, my Queen, how have you maintained your reasoning, knowing that your husband can no longer see you, for ahead of him walks the shadow of your son, and immediately behind, rest the shadows of your hand-maids? Tell me what influence you have in a kingdom where you can no longer be distinguished from those who serve you?

(OTHELLO and THEOLAS enter the hallway from Theolas' library.)

OTHELLO

Just the two we were looking for. I'll say good-bye now and take my leave.

(Hugs his father, kisses his mother on the cheek, and kisses NGATISH on the belly.)

My journey will bring unbelievable changes to this kingdom. We shall have our place in history.

(OTHELLO kisses NGATISH on  
the forehead and leaves.)

SCENE II

(Two months have passed. The scene opens with NGATISH sitting in  
her chamber and having her hair groomed by the chamber maid.)

NGATISH

Tell me, Puella, did you groom my husband this well?

PUELLA

My master has said that I must take good care of you in his  
absence, for you are with child.

NGATISH

Is that the only reason you've shown such great attention to my  
needs? Or perhaps you have some mischief in mind.

PUELLA

What mischief could I possibly find? The Prince is gone since  
two months, yet daily you accuse me of sleeping with him. Do I  
sleep with his memory?!

NGATISH

If you could. I'm sure the King keeps you occupied in Othello's  
absence. Tell me, has Theolas sent you to spy on me?

PUELLA

Spy, my Lady?

NGATISH

Yes, you do understand the word, don't you?

PUELLA

My Lady is not well. I am neither bed-warmer nor spy, nor  
combination of the same. How could I be such things? My family  
has been servants here for centuries. One truly could have  
counted the hairs on my head when I was brought here...and thus  
groomed to become a royal servant.

NGATISH

Servant, my Dear. Not the royal whore.

PUELLA

Are you so sure, my Lady?

NGATISH

I am sure that your groomers shall answer to me. My will is they not nurture anyone else in this manner. I shall speak to the king.

PUELLA

It is the king who makes it so.

NGATISH

And the queen?

PUELLA

She turns a blind eye.

NGATISH

Why do you tell me these things? Is this what the king has sent you to bait me with?

PUELLA

Oh, I again become the spying whore.

NGATISH

You have never stopped, or you would not be filled with such great confidence and speak to me thus.

PUELLA

(PUELLA pins NGATISH'S hair into a bun.) Does this serve you well, my Princess?

NGATISH

(Looks in mirror.)  
It feels cool upon my neck and will serve well...  
(NGATISH walks around the chambers.)

Puella?

PUELLA

Yes, my Princess?

NGATISH

Do you resent existing here? For truly you have no life, but to serve.

PUELLA

I am pleased.

NGATISH

You are pleased with being a servant; never having a family of your own; and taking sexual pleasures at my husband's and his father's wills? This is strange, for not even I am pleased and have forgotten happiness...and I have so much more than you...(Laughing) and I don't have to sleep with good King Assinus! (BOTH giggle.) Refresh yourself with drink and come sit.

(PUELLA pours a goblet of wine and sits in the princess's chair.)

You see, Puella, how with such ease you do not attempt to even feign personal pleasures, but accept them with the full authority of one who is accustomed to having what she wants...even as a slave.

(PUELLA starts to drink but stops.)

No, no, indulge yourself, for this has become your home and my prison...perhaps I should pin up your hair?

PUELLA

(Puts down the drink and stands up.)

I am sorry, Princess. Your husband has sworn me to your care until his return...

NGATISH

To my care, or that of his child?

PUELLA

Both, my Princess.

NGATISH

And what has he promised you for this favor? Fine cloth? Perfumes?...My throne?

PUELLA

The Prince has offered me nothing. It is my duty.

NGATISH

And how long have you loved my husband?

PUELLA

I have loved him since we were children. He is like the family I never knew.

NGATISH

It is more than a brotherly love you have for the Prince. Have you any children, Puella?

PUELLA

No. I am not allowed.

NGATISH

Your mother was not allowed, yet here you stand. She must have gained some great favor with the Egyptian Minister and been quite convincing to make him believe that you were of his loins. For he allowed you both to live. Yours must be a blessed life, for here you have found favor with the king and his son. Tell me, Puella, when my husband returns with his precious cargo, what place will you hold?

PUELLA

Place, Princess?

NGATISH

Yes. Place? How long will you continue to be their favorite? Othello goes to fetch his father great wealth as well as women. They will soon tire of you and you will become like me. Or almost, for my father will never stand for Othello's indiscretion to manifest in the form of a child...thus you can not even become a well-kept breeder.

(There is a knock at the door.)

Enter.

GUARD

(The GUARD enters the room and bows.)

Princess, the king would like to see Puella.

NGATISH

Tell his highness that I will send her towards evening.

GUARD

I beg you, my Princess, he bade me not come without her.

NGATISH

Then if it is your life you fear, take her.

(BOTH bow before the PRINCESS. Before the two completely exit, the QUEEN enters.)

Leave the door open, for I am on my way to the kitchen for nourishment.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Guard, tell the kitchen to send fresh fruit and meat for the Princess...And bring fresh water, too.



GUARD

Yes, your Majesty.

(Exits.)

NGATISH

I prefer gathering my own foods from the kitchen.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Sit, Child, and place your feet here, before they double in size.

(QUEEN pats a chaise, NGATISH  
sits down.)

NGATISH

Should my feet double, it will only be because my heart grows smaller. I am like a prisoner here. Am I to be confined to this room until Othello's return?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

(Sits at dressing table)

My Dear Ngatish, you may roam as you will. I simply ask that you take along a servant. Puella perhaps?

NGATISH

(Laughing.)

It would do you great favor if I were to constantly keep vigil with Puella, for this would give you some time alone with the King. It is not my welfare you guard, but your own!

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I know you are tired, but your condition makes you delirious.

NGATISH

No, my Queen. My condition only magnifies your treachery as you now have an excuse to keep me secluded. Does your problem magnify itself in Othello's absence? Remember, you must be patient and understanding, for we are but women.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

So, you mock me, Ngatish.

NGATISH

My words are as sincere as they were when you spoke them. Did you mock me?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I was only trying to give you comfort as best I know how.

NGATISH

Perhaps you should learn some new ways and realize that all things do not go away with such ease. Now, tell me, my Queen, has your husband sent you here to spy also?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Spy? Ngatish, I have come only to inquire about your welfare. Should not the concerns of my husband also concern me? You are in this household, and what transpires here is my concern. I may choose to share my knowledge with the king, or ignore him.

NGATISH

Then you do admit to having been sent here by your husband.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

In my home, my husband can only ask. What I share with him depends on you, Ngatish

NGATISH

What do you mean?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I too have suffered and understand your discomforts in this kingdom. When Othello returns, you will have your own home and be able to choose your own servants.

NGATISH

Perhaps you are unaware that Othello intends to bring back his choice of servants--not only for himself, but also for his father.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Then you must send them away if you do not care for them. They will only make your life miserable.

NGATISH

My life here is already filled with misery. I know that you were not born ill, my Mother, and that your reasoning can be sound if given proper cause. But, I would like to know if you did not find it proper cause to send Puella away once you found her loyalties misplaced?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

The king...

NGATISH

Say no more. If it would please, your majesty, I would like to walk through the gardens this evening. And don't worry, I will take Puella with me. That will give you time to tell the king all that you have learned, or ignore him.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

You have told me nothing.

NGATISH

How thoughtless of me. Tell the king this, my Mother, that I wish to see my father before this baby is born. It is our tradition that the mother be blessed by the Askii before giving birth. My time grows near, and I want my son to have the best the world has to offer.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

That is no more or less than I wished for my own son. Tell me of this custom.

NGATISH

I grow weak from hunger. What is keeping the guard?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I will find him, and while you eat, you may tell me of this custom.

(The QUEEN exits. NGATISH starts to get up from the chaise, but falls down while holding her stomach. PUELLA enters.)

PUELLA

(Rushes to NGATISH.)

Princess, what makes you ill?

(PUELLA puts NGATISH'S legs back on the chaise, wets a towel, and wipes NGATISH'S face.)

I will get the queen.

NGATISH

(Reaching for PUELLA.)

No! Do not tell the queen of this, nor the king. Tell no one.

PUELLA

But, Princess, Lord Othello has demanded that I let nothing happen to you or his child.

NGATISH

When he left us, he no longer had a child. Something inside me seemed to rip away at my heart. The pains have only worsened since I have not been allowed the comforts of fresh air and peace of mind. I am fine. I simply worry about my husband. It has been two months, and I have heard nothing from Othello. Has the king any news?

PUELLA

None, my Lady.

NGATISH

None that you can tell, or none that you will tell?

PUELLA

Neither.

NGATISH

Very well. You may leave.

PUELLA

Yes, Princess.

(PUELLA exits, but leaves the door ajar. Lights up in the library.)

KING THEOLAS

What have you learned, my Dear?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Only that she wants to see her father.

KING THEOLAS

Her father?! What does this mean?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

It is for a ritual that brings health to the child. I have asked her to tell me more, but there was no time.

KING THEOLAS

My Dear, all she has is time. What excuse did she give you?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

There was no excuse. She became hungry after waiting several minutes for the guard to bring her something from the kitchen.

KING THEOLAS

If she can not speak without nourishment, supper should be the place we both question her about this ritual. We can not let her leave for she may hear of Othello's remarriage to the counselor's daughter and deny us audience with our grandson.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

We can begin grooming him the day he is born. Our kingdom will flourish.

KING THEOLAS

I will promise him all the lands I hold, that he will, one day, share with the Askii to the south. Ngatish is no longer important, only my grandson need be healthy. The Askii would not dare attack our kingdom while his flesh and blood are kept inside.

(The lights slowly come up in the throne room. The SERVANTS bring food to the table.)

PUELLA

(Knocking on the king's door.)

Your Majesty, supper awaits.

KING THEOLAS

We will be out shortly. Go and assist the princess.

PUELLA

I don't think the princess will be joining you, your Majesty.

KING THEOLAS

Nonsense. She will join us at the table. I insist.

PUELLA

Yes, your Highness.

(PUELLA taps on NGATISH'S door, then enters. The room is dimly lit.)

Princess?

NGATISH

Yes, Puella?

PUELLA

The king bids you join him and the queen at supper.

NGATISH

I do not wish to.

PUELLA

I have suggested that, but the king insists, Princess. Do you feel any better than before?

NGATISH

Some.

(NGATISH gets up slowly and PUELLA brushes back her hair.)

PUELLA

Does this help at all, my Princess?

NGATISH

That you have cared enough to help me, helps me, Puella. Tell me, Puella, why have you not sought a husband of your own? I have no doubt the queen would grant your freedom to a husband who could provide for you and his children.

PUELLA

I have not met such a man.

NGATISH

Only Othello, heh? If my father and I had not appeared, you think Queen Innocencia would have allowed you to marry her son, do you not?

(PUELLA says nothing, but begins to fluff the pillows beneath Ngatish's head.)

I know you want to kill me, but no one would ever forgive you. Oh, they would not mind if you killed only me, but killing me would destroy the heir. You are as useless here as I. You are only needed for your services, as I am only needed for my child.

I have heard the king say as much. Your virtue was your only hope. When you shared it with the king and his son, you sealed your fate with the queen. She hates you. You will never be happy here.

(NGATISH tries to get up from the chaise but grabs her head.)

Help me, Puella, please.

PUELLA

Because I have sworn to.

NGATISH

When will you understand, Puella? Othello is gone. You must help me because you want to, not because you think helping me will win Othello's favor. If he cares so little for me and I carry his child, why would you believe he will return for you?

PUELLA

When Othello was captured and enslaved as a boy, he once told me he had never forgotten my face. It was his memories of me that made him fight to return home.

NGATISH

Then why are you not now his wife? To Othello those were words of passion--words to mold your mind and body to suit his needs. Does the king tell you as much, or do you feel sorrow for an old

NGATISH (cont)

man who promises you wealth if you keep his secret?

(PUELLA glares at NGATISH.)

You look at me with such disdain, which can only mean that I am very close to your reasoning. If you did not feel pity for an old fool, then what made you sleep with him? Was it Othello? Othello asked you to sleep with his father? What man who loves a woman could ever ask such a thing? What woman who loved herself could ever do such a thing? I am truly sorry for you, Puella.

PUELLA

Will you dine with the king, Princess?

NGATISH

Yes. I have some questions to ask of him. Will you help me?

(As PUELLA helps NGATISH into the royal banquet hall, the lights in NGATISH'S chambers begin to dim. NGATISH is seated between the KING and QUEEN, who sit at the ends of the table.)

KING THEOLAS

So nice of you to join us, my dear. The queen had Cook prepare you something light.

(The KING claps his hands and a server arrives with a tray of food.)

PUELLA

Allow me to prepare and taste it for you, princess. One can never be too careful. After all, your father is a powerful man, and one never knows when his enemies are about.

(PUELLA tastes the food.)

In the mean time, your majesty, allow me to slice some fruit for you.

KING

Who would dare try to poison my daughter in my own kingdom? Surely her father receives none but heroes' praises here. Why don't you go to the kitchen and prepare a goblet of milk for her yourself. Then you will be assured that no sorcerer has spun magic.

PUELLA

Cook, fetch milk directly from the goat and bring it to the princess. (Turns to KING THEOLAS.) My king, your son has bid me to care for the princess, and care for her I shall. Mine were not promises made in vain.

KING THEOLAS

(Clears his throat and looks at the  
QUEEN.)

Very well. If my son has asked it.

(PUELLA continues to slice the  
fruit.)

So, Ngatish, tell me of this ritual between you and the Askii.  
What magic does he perform to gain blessings for you and your  
child?

NGATISH

You speak of my father as though he were some coward, praising  
everything that did not praise him first. There is no sorcery  
nor magic. Everything he does, he does with his own two hands.  
He does not send his wife nor servants to settle his disputes.  
This is why the touch of his hands is so important; they lend  
support to my decision to bear this child; they give me strength.

(PUELLA places the sliced fruits in  
front of NGATISH.)

Now, you tell me of this rumor of Othello.

KING THEOLAS

What rumor?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

There is rumor of my son?

NGATISH

I suppose one could call it rumor. Tell me, father, what makes  
up the rumors in your palace? If I hear talk from the servants,  
should I believe it?

KING THEOLAS

By no means!

(He looks at PUELLA.)

What has this she-devil said?

NGATISH

She has told me nothing, but I have spoken with the queen today.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I? What have I told you? We barely started a conversation when  
you accused me of spying. I have spread no rumors.

NGATISH

I hear so many things, your majesty, but I do not know which I am  
to believe or dismiss as rumor.



KING THEOLAS

If I have said something, my dear, then you can count that as fact. The same as you would something your father says. But, if you are told anything by the servants, I would not pay special attention to that information.

NGATISH

Then, my father, this must be fact, for it was you who spoke it.

KING THEOLAS

And what have I said?

NGATISH

That my husband has taken another bride.

THEOLAS

Anything of importance to you I would tell. Nothing must spoil your spirits, for soon Othello will be coming home, and we will celebrate the birth of our heir.

NGATISH

Othello? You have heard from him then.  
(THEOLAS ignores her.)

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

None but a short message saying he hopes to see us all soon and that his battles with the Turks have been victorious.

NGATISH

Did he not ask of his wife and son?

THEOLAS

Surely he did, my daughter. You carry his fruit. Othello rants about how he misses your company and your charm. He expects to return home before his son reaches the mark of his first year. He wants us to start building a home for you as soon as the baby is born.

NGATISH

All this in such a short note.  
(THEOLAS glares at NGATISH.)

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

The note was short to a mother who misses her son.

NGATISH

Then you must imagine the turmoil I experience not even having such a note. If I had not asked, would you have told me of Othello's message?

THEOLAS

Of course. We have nothing to hide. Eat, my child. You need your nourishment.

(ALL continue to eat, lights fade.)

SCENE III

(Three days later. NGATISH rests in her chambers. PUELLA enters.)

PUELLA

My Princess?

NGATISH

Yes, girl.

PUELLA

Is there anything you desire?

NGATISH

Would you be willing to give your life for this Princess? The princess whom you believe stands between you and the man you love?

PUELLA

No, for I do not know that princess. She lives in Cyprus. I gave long thought to your words and have come to find them filling the emptiness in my heart. Othello has betrayed us all.

NGATISH

And this upsets you?

PUELLA

I thought...I thought he loved me.

NGATISH

Othello does not know love. He only knows circumstance.

PUELLA

What do you mean, Princess?

NGATISH

I mean that if Othello had truly loved you, you would be princess. Here it is not uncommon for royalty to marry the servants and make them a true part of the family. But, all this you now understand?

PUELLA

I understand this and more. I understand that had Othello loved me, he would have never shared me with his father.

(PUELLA begins to pace.)

When Othello was a boy, he was kidnapped by Moors and taken to Mauritania as a slave. Travelers and traders were many on that coast. Othello was befriended by a man of Christian faith, who later bought him from his captors and took him to many shores along the northern coast, including my country, Espana. Othello bought his freedom and came home. He fascinated me with his tales of war and especially of life in a country I never knew. He said I would feel at home there, but wished I could find happiness here with him. I thought I was happy, but soon became pregnant with child. I was not as lucky as my mother. Before we came here, the Queen took my child and sold him to nomads. I was forbidden to speak or ask of him. I never knew him, as I never knew Othello. He hid behind his mother's robe, and I became the castle whore. My son should be five.

NGATISH

I am truly sorry.

(NGATISH suddenly falls to the floor holding her stomach.)

Puella, I don't think this son will ever see the sunlight.

(PUELLA rushes to her side.)

PUELLA

I'll get the Queen!

NGATISH

No! This dying child is the only thing that keeps me alive. He has moved but little in over three days. I have prayed for him and made my peace. You must help me, Puella.

(PUELLA places a chair in front of the door.)

Othello, see what lives you have ruined!

(PUELLA helps NGATISH to the chaise, retrieves a piece of cloth and wets it.)

NGATISH

Do not use that. Take the cloth from my bureau drawer.

(PUELLA goes to the bureau and removes a scarf.)

PUELLA

But, Princess, this is Othello's wedding gift to you.

NGATISH

It was a death decree for my son's future. Come, wrap all his scarves and trinkets and dispose of them. I must trust you to bury these ill memories, for I will not be permitted to leave. Othello will not return. Go out this way.

(NGATISH points to another door.)

PUELLA

I will hurry and I will return to help you.

(Lights dim.)

SCENE IV

(One hour later. NGATISH lies on the chaise, PUELLA sits at its foot.)

NGATISH

Yes, I think the king's feelings of guilt will force him to allow me to journey to my father's house.

PUELLA

Will I ever see you again?

NGATISH

You will be with me. Surely you don't think Othello's parents will allow me to leave here alone. They will insist that you travel with me and will probably give you a spy of your own to return information to the castle at your will.

(A knock at the door. The GUARD enters. The lights in the library come up.)

GUARD

Puella, the king and queen demand your presence in their library.

PUELLA

Very well. Tell them I will be there. I have but to make the princess comfortable.

GUARD

As you wish.

(GUARD exits and can be seen crossing the hall and reporting to the KING and QUEEN, who are engaged in unheard conversation.)

NGATISH

This will be their test. Be wise not to show me favor, or they will groom another to take your place.

PUELLA

I am your worst enemy and always the spy.

NGATISH

I am sorry to use you this way, Puella.

PUELLA

It is I who am sorry. I do this because it is right and needs be done.

(PUELLA exits across hall to the KING'S library, where the KING and QUEEN sit waiting. PUELLA enters the room and bows her head.)

You have sent for me?

THEOLAS

Indeed I have. What goes on there?

(THEOLAS points across the hall.)

PUELLA

The princess is restless, your Highness.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Restless? We have given her the best of all we have in preparation for our grandson. Tell me, what does Ngatish desire?

PUELLA

She speaks only of her father's blessing, as though without it this child would not be well nor accepted as the Great Askii of Keebe's grandson. I think she plots something.

THEOLAS

What do you think she plots?

PUELLA

Escape.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Escape? (laughs.) My dear Child, she is no captive here. She is free to come and go.

THEOLAS

Surely she has not used the word "escape"?

PUELLA

She has used the word and all its components.

THEOLAS

It is as I thought. These are your suspicions and your words because of your hatred for her. The thought of seeing her father does excite her. Perhaps a short visit will brighten her sour moods.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

We are able to trust her to return?

(KING places his head in his hand.)

THEOLAS

You are right. She can not leave.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I will send Puella to Senegal for fabric. This will delay Ngatish's journey until she is too far with child to travel.

THEOLAS

You will leave immediately and stay for eight nights. That should be long enough to discourage Ngatish. I will send a message saying we have begun building Ngatish's home and she will be unable to journey home in order to oversee its construction before Othello's return. The Great Askii must surely understand this.

PUELLA

My Lord, Othello returns?

THEOLAS

Do what you are told without question, Girl. You will have your information soon enough.

(THEOLAS cups PUELLA'S face in his hands.)

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

You may leave now, Girl! I must speak with my husband.

PUELLA

Yes, your Majesties.

(PUELLA smiles at THEOLAS, curtsies and retreats to Ngatish's chamber. NGATISH is still relaxing on the chaise. PUELLA gently knocks, then enters.)

Princess, I have news.

(NGATISH sits up.)

The queen sends me to Senegal for fabric in hopes to delay your journey and stop you from going to Keebe.

NGATISH

When?

PUELLA

I leave right away.

NGATISH

You can not go to Senegal, Puella. Help me, and you will be given your freedom.

PUELLA

Freedom? I shall be lost in Keebe. But I relish the thought of my freedom.

NGATISH

You will stay as long as you like. And I will help you with what you decide. Please, do not betray my trust.

PUELLA

I know one must earn trust. Perhaps...  
(BOTH stop speaking and clasp hands.)

I am beginning to understand, my Princess.

NGATISH

You must go to Keebe and take these things to my father.  
(NGATISH goes to bureau and gives PUELLA some jewels.)

Tell him of this place and my captivity. You must beg for my freedom.

(The GUARD slowly closes the door to the private passage.)

Scene V

(The king's banquet room, nine days later. NGATISH, INNOCENCIA, and THEOLAS eat breakfast.)

THEOLAS

Ngatish, the queen and I have discussed your making a visit to your father's kingdom.

NGATISH

And what have you decided?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

We were willing to send you, my Dear, but, you are not any less with child. Perhaps you should wait until after the child is born.

NGATISH

That's impossible. My father would never forgive me, nor you. Besides, Puella has given me news of your intentions, and I have sent my personal messenger to my father's kingdom.

THEOLAS

What personal messenger?

NGATISH

Why, Puella, of course.

THEOLAS

Nonsense. The girl is at the Senegalese market buying cloth for my wife.

NGATISH

You are wrong, Father. She has been in Keebe and will return with my father's escorts at any moment.

THEOLAS

When did this alliance come about?

NGATISH

This began when you hid the truth about Othello's remarriage.  
(THEOLAS chokes on his breakfast.)

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Who has spoken to you of Othello?

NGATISH

Does it matter, my Queen?



QUEEN INNOCENCIA

It matters if you were given information which was not true.

NGATISH

Even if the information comes from your own lips?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

I have not uttered such blasphemy.

THEOLAS

Don't you see, my Dear Queen, again she accuses us of having betrayed her. This is the same riddle she spoke two weeks past.

Ngatish, I fear your time is too near and makes you delirious. I too have taken the liberty of contacting your father. All that awaits Puella is death.

NGATISH

What do you mean? What have you done?

THEOLAS

Simple. The personal items you gave her as introduction to your father, I simply sent a messenger ahead and told him a liar and a thief visited his kingdom. I signed your name--and then mine. The only emissary that arrives today will be the one which delivers her head.

(THEOLAS continues eating.)

NGATISH

No!

(NGATISH stands up from the table.)

You lie! My father would never believe you over one who says she is sent by me.

THEOLAS

Of course not, my Dear. That's why, as I have just said, I signed your name first and then mine. My Dear Inno, please pass some fresh fruit.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Surely, my Dear.

(INNOCENCIA claps her hands and a servant appears with a tray of fresh fruit. As the servant approaches THEOLAS, NGATISH knocks the tray to the floor.)

NGATISH

You can not have found our plans. Your words are lies.

THEOLAS

No, my Dear, your words are lies. Tell me now, since you have cast all of your stones, what was it you gave Puella to get rid of some days ago?

NGATISH

I don't know of what you speak.

THEOLAS

The guard saw her exit the hidden tunnel that leads from Othello's chambers. He said she took a small bundle, weighted it, and tossed it in the quick-sand. What was it?

NGATISH

I do not know.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Come now, my Dear. You must have some idea.

(QUEEN to servant.)

When you finish cleaning that, bring his majesty another tray.

NGATISH

I do not know. Are you sure it was Puella?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Who else could it have been?

NGATISH

Perhaps one of his majesty's favorites who did not wish to suffer her majesty's wrath.

(INNOCENCIA looks quickly to THEOLAS.)

THEOLAS

Calm down, my Dear. Ngatish attempts to anger you with no cause.

NGATISH

He baits you, my Queen. He has a favorite whom rumor says was carrying his child. I only know this after spending so much time in my room among the servants. It was not Puella you saw, but someone else.

THEOLAS

That is enough of your lies. I liked you better when you were angry and bitter--at least you were honest.

NGATISH

I apologize for having trespassed into your territory. It seems you and your wife have vendor's rights on lies.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

So, you admit you lied.

NGATISH

I admit nothing.

(A MESSENGER enters.)

MESSENGER

Your Majesty.

(MESSENGER bows.)

THEOLAS

What is it!

MESSENGER

The Askii of Keebe arrives at the castle.

NGATISH

Father!

THEOLAS

If you value your life and that of your child, you will say nothing. Is he alone?

MESSENGER

No, your Highness. He brings a thousand armed men, and a thousand more have sworn him allegiance since he landed at the river's edge.

THEOLAS

Traitors! How long has he been in Yukaara?

MESSENGER

A full day, your Majesty.

THEOLAS

Why am I only now informed when he embarks upon my doorstep?

MESSENGER

I do not know, my Lord.

NGATISH

Perhaps Puella was more convincing than your forgery of my signature.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Mind your tongue, Princess. Your home still remains with us. We have an agreement with your father. You are married to our son.

(The ASKII OF KEEBE enters and ascends the steps to throne room.)

ASKII

We no longer agree upon anything. My daughter was promised to your son, not to you.

NGATISH

Father.

(NGATISH bows then runs to greet him. The ASKII embraces his daughter.)

ASKII

Tell me, Theolas, does this servant speak the truth?

(The ASKII raises his left hand and the GUARDS bring in PUELLA and force her to her knees in a position to be beheaded.)

THEOLAS

What has she spoken to you, my Lord?

(THEOLAS slowly edges his way into the throne room and eases into his chair.)

ASKII

That you hold my daughter prisoner; that her husband, your son, Othello, has taken another wife in Venice; that my daughter has had no correspondence with your son, her husband, since his departure. What appalls me most is that your treachery has caused my daughter to become no better than you. She had to lie and connive to get home. I would have killed this girl with her message, for my daughter would not stoop to such deceit. I was about to kill her when your messenger arrived with a note more bizarre than her tale. What transpires? And make no mistake with me, Theolas.

THEOLAS

This servant lies. She has convinced your daughter of Othello's infidelity only because she herself wants Othello.

ASKII

And you, Innocencia. Do you agree with your husband?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

(Ascending the stairs.)

It has been my observation that the girl loves Othello and would say or do anything to gain his favor.

ASKII

But, alas, Othello is not here. Tell me, what then must be her motivation?

THEOLAS

Well...

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Let me, my Husband. I recently banned her from the castle because she had designs on my husband. He of course would have none of her charms but, in his kindness, would not allow me to have her beheaded. I was forced to exile her to the desert. She tried many times to seduce Othello before his departure, but when those efforts were fruitless because of the great love our son has for Ngatish, your daughter, she turned to my husband for comfort which later turned to desire.

(The ASKII looks at THEOLAS.)

ASKII

Innocencia, I am sure your husband once was as handsome as Othello, but what would such a young woman desire from Theolas now--power, position? She is a servant. She can only have what you allow. But if I find my daughter sent her to me and her words are true...

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Your daughter, Great Askii, is with child and well due. These are the times when a woman nears sanity's end and may say or do anything, yet later deny any of it, if not all of it.

ASKII

You ask me to believe a great deal about my daughter and this servant. I know ruling over a kingdom cultivates many plans of deception; however, this girl is hardly a threat to you and has probably been Theolas's concubine since pubescence. My daughter should have the power and position and therefore no need to overthrow or escape Yukaara. No, perhaps there is more, and perhaps what truly saved this servant's life was my guard's interception of this message.

(The ASKII raises his left hand and PUELLA is released. PUELLA runs to NGATISH.)

THEOLAS

What message?

ASKII

A message for you saying that Othello has killed his wife.

THEOLAS

This must be some devil. As you can see, Othello's wife is alive and well.

ASKII

It was confusing for a moment until I realized Othello is still in Cyprus and that your servant, perhaps, spoke the truth. Any man who kills his wife is a fool. He simply gets another one--except when it comes to my daughter. She will remain Othello's first wife...according to our agreement.

(NGATISH steps forward.)

NGATISH

Perhaps Othello no longer wants me as his wife, Father. I do not belong where I am not wanted.

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

My dear Daughter, who has led you to believe such a thing? Othello adores you.

NGATISH

You have known for quite some time of Othello's second marriage, yet you neglected to tell me, nor would you confirm my suspicions--even when I questioned you this very morning. Now my husband has been accused. Queen Innocencia, did you ever send a courier with my words to Othello, or did you have my letters destroyed?

QUEEN INNOCENCIA

Nonsense.

ASKII

My Daughter, you flatter yourself into thinking that mere words on paper will stop a man from seeking companionship, even if he must remarry in order to indulge his desires. A man's position gives him the right.

NGATISH

And of me, Father, what rights do I have? A father who barterers me for land, giving me no more worth than a stable of camels? Can I expect my husband to accept my infidelity, my second, third, or fourth marriage? Am I allowed still only one husband who honors me with position I can not utilize, wealth I can not

spend, and a child I can not feel?  
NGATISH (Cont)  
(NGATISH reaches for PUELLA with her left hand and grabs her stomach with the other.)

Help me take the princess to her room.  
PUELLA  
(To GUARD.)

My son is no more, Father.  
NGATISH

Hurry!  
PUELLA  
(The guards carry NGATISH to her room and place her on the chaise. The curtains remain drawn and a dim light comes up, silhouetting the movement in the bedroom.)

Bring cloth and heated water to the princess's chambers.  
QUEEN INNOCENCIA  
(INNOCENCIA claps her hands and other servants appear from the hallway.)  
(The SERVANTS exit. INNOCENCIA exits to Ngatish's room.)

How long has my daughter been this way, Theolas?  
ASKII

She is in labor, my Lord. This has just come about. You witnessed it as I did.  
THEOLAS

Not true! She said "a child she can not feel." This can not be the first you have heard of this.  
ASKII

She has said nothing. This I swear.  
THEOLAS

And all else? Do you swear to all you have told me?  
ASKII  
(NGATISH screams.)  
Let me this swear to you, Theolas. Should any harm come to my daughter or this child, you will have but a few moments to

ASKII (Cont)

straighten your affairs of state and make preparations for your widow. Your words are empty, Theolas. You have held my daughter prisoner for your own needs. You needed a child. The child that sleeps in her belly.

THEOLAS

Surely, I have done nothing but care for Ngatish. Nothing is more important to me than her health and well-being.

ASKII

Not even your kingdom?

THEOLAS

Not even my kingdom.

ASKII

You do not lie well, Theolas. But, I shall take you at your word. Should this slave speak the truth, then your lies have cost you your kingdom. Ngatish shall rule here...upon your death.

THEOLAS

I leave my kingdom to my son. I will wage a war on Keebe that the Senegalese will applaud.

ASKII

Your son has his own problems. He will have neither the time, nor the patience to rule rightfully...should he return.

THEOLAS

What do you know of Othello?

ASKII

Only that which you have confirmed.

THEOLAS

But, your words are "should he return."

ASKII

Surely you do not believe your plans to kill my daughter will go unpunished? Your death will soon be a matter of historical fact. Othello will never return through the Niger River, and a grieving old widow can not run this kingdom without help. Make no mistake, Theolas, you may yet rest peacefully, if I find you have mistreated my daughter.



THEOLAS

No other rulers will swear you allegiance.

ASKII

They will, for it is part of your kingdom that awaits as reward for your death, and the death of your son. They have no loyalties to your laurels. They wish their own kingdoms, and you have sworn them to the protection of Yukaara--for your sake.

ASKII (Cont)

Should Othello have remained in Yukaara, perhaps my presence would not be a great threat, but your people feel abandoned and left to the lusts of an unfit king.

THEOLAS

My people were happy to come to Yukaara. I have been nothing but kind. I hardly ever interfere with their lives.

ASKII

Then you do not know that they are hungry for battle, much as Othello was? They also depend on my kingdom to protect them from the Senegalese--cutting my throat would only cause them to - strangle. You have already begun to smother them.

THEOLAS

They do not need war. Othello will battle for our kingdom and return with riches and the blessings of the Venetian Council. They will have their chance at war, but not upon this soil. True, I am old, and I want to live these years in peace.

ASKII

You have forced the hand of peace on this soil. Did my daughter speak of our ritual with our grandchildren?

THEOLAS

She spoke of such a ritual, but only this morning and she was too close to time to make the journey.

ASKII

Careful, your words betray you.

THEOLAS

I only speak the truth.

ASKII

I now know what I have come for.

(The lights come up in Ngatish's chambers. The SERVANTS exit. PUELLA remains and is seen wrapping and anointing a bundle. The ASKII

raises his left hand and his GUARD approaches. The ASKII lowers his hand and the GUARD stops.)

Theolas, is your son capable of running a kingdom from such a great distance as Hades?

THEOLAS

I beg you, Askii, do not leave my wife alone.

(NGATISH and INNOCENCIA start towards the throne room with the bundle. INNOCENCIA sits on the steps and weeps.)

ASKII

She will not be alone. She will have some servants to amuse her, as you did.

(ASKII starts to raise his left hand.)

NGATISH

Father.

ASKII

You should not be up.

NGATISH

Here is your grandson.

(NGATISH places the bundle on the floor and hugs the ASKII'S feet. The ASKII picks up the baby with his left hand and lifts it over his head.)

ASKII

Behold! Death is the result of your treachery and deceit. Ngatish will bear more children, but you will not know them, Theolas. (Hands the baby to NGATISH.) You have made a mockery of all that I have taught Ngatish. You have destroyed her character and forced her to become someone I barely recognize. For this, you will only suffer my wrath, for Ngatish should have used better judgement. But for the death of my grandson, who was innocent, you will die.

(The ASKII helps NGATISH to her feet and places the still bundle in her arms.)

THEOLAS

Perhaps if Ngatish had told us sooner of your ritual, your grandson, our grandson, would be alive. It was her evil stubbornness that killed my grandson!

ASKII

You fool. There is no such ritual. Do you think me superstitious? There is no place for superstition when power is at stake. I was told this by the girl, Puella. Whomever she was spying for also knew of this tale. No, it is you who confirm this tale's existence and witness Ngatish as its teller. The tale is a lie and only confirms her attempts to deceive you. She sought to leave this place, and you held her captive as the girl has said. Bring the girl.

(PUELLA is led in by the Askii's GUARD.)

Gather the princess's possessions and yours. After all, Theolas and Innocencia have no need of you. Is that not so, Theolas?

THEOLAS

She is yours. There no longer is need of her care here.

ASKII

Nor for care of this kingdom.

(The ASKII raises his hand and the GUARD approaches.)

Take them to the caravan. We will leave at once.

(NGATISH and PUELLA exit. A MESSENGER enters.)

MESSENGER

A message from Cyprus.

(The ASKII takes the message.)

ASKII

Surely you don't mind if I read this. After all, we had an agreement.

THEOLAS

It is yours, my Lord.

(The ASKII reads the message.)

ASKII

I was going to kill you, Theolas, but this news should suffice. There is no need to destroy what is already dying. Perhaps your enemies will have pity too?

(The ASKII throws the message on the floor and exits. INNOCENCIA bows as the ASKII passes, and picks

the message up from the floor,  
reads it, screams, and falls across  
the steps.)

THEOLAS

What is it? What has happened?

(INNOCENCIA hands THEOLAS the  
message. He reads it and falls  
to his knees.)

My son!

(Lights fade.)

THE END