

Act 3 Scene 1

Scene Summary

- Cassio hires musicians to play for Othello. The clown sends them away.
- Iago sends Emilia to speak with Cassio. She promises to arrange a meeting between Cassio and Desdemona.

Before the castle.

Enter CASSIO with Musicians

CASSIO

Masters, play here; I will content your pains.¹
Something that's brief – and bid 'Good morrow, general.'

[*Music*]

[*Enter CLOWN*²]

CLOWN

Why masters, have your instruments been in Naples,³ that
they speak i' the nose⁴ thus?

FIRST MUSICIAN

How, sir, how!

CLOWN

Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?

FIRST MUSICIAN

Ay, marry, are they, sir.

CLOWN

O, thereby hangs a tail.⁵

FIRST MUSICIAN

Whereby hangs a tail, sir?

CLOWN

- 10 Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument⁶ that I know. But,
masters, here's money for you, and the general so likes
your music, that he desires you, for love's sake, to make
no more noise⁷ with it.

¹ I will...pains: I will reward you for your trouble

² **Clown**: a comic servant.
Shakespeare often gave his comic characters names but not in *Othello*

³ **Naples**: a city known for venereal disease

⁴ **speak i' the nose**: 1. speak with a nasal voice associated with Naples
2. suffer from venereal disease

⁵ **tail**: 1. story 2. penis

⁶ **wind instrument**: 1. musical instruments (e.g. flutes) 2. anus

⁷ **noise**: the clown is making a crude joke about flatulence

FIRST MUSICIAN

Well, sir, we will not.

CLOWN

If you have any music that may not be heard, to't⁸ again.
But, as they say, to hear music the general does not greatly care.

FIRST MUSICIAN

We have none such, sir.

CLOWN

Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I'll away. Go,
20 vanish into air, away!
[*Exeunt Musicians*]

CASSIO

Dost thou hear, my honest friend?

CLOWN

No, I hear not your honest friend; I hear you.

CASSIO

Prithee, keep up thy quillets.⁹ There's a poor piece of gold for thee: if the gentlewoman that attends the general's wife be stirring, tell her there's one Cassio entreats¹⁰ her a little favour of speech. Wilt thou do this?

CLOWN

She is stirring, sir. If she will stir hither, I shall seem to notify unto her.

CASSIO

Do, good my friend.
[*Exit CLOWN*]
[*Enter IAGO*]

In happy time,¹¹ Iago.

IAGO

30 You have not been abed, then?

CASSIO

Why, no: the day had broke before we parted.
I have made bold, Iago, to send in to your wife.
My suit to her is, that she will to virtuous Desdemona
Procure me some access.¹²

⁸ to't: play it

⁹ Prithee...quillets: Please, stop using puns

¹⁰ entreats: asks

¹¹ In happy time: You've come at a good moment

¹² Procure...access: help me to see her (Desdemona)

IAGO

I'll send her to you presently –
 And I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor
 Out of the way, that your converse¹³ and business
 May be more free.

CASSIO

I humbly thank you for't.
 [Exit IAGO]

– I never knew

40 A Florentine¹⁴ more kind and honest.
 [Enter EMILIA]

EMILIA

Good morrow, good lieutenant. I am sorry
 For your displeasure, but all will sure be well.
 The general and his wife are talking of it,
 And she speaks for you stoutly.¹⁵ The Moor replies,
 That he you hurt is of great fame in Cyprus,
 And great affinity,¹⁶ and that in wholesome wisdom¹⁷
 He might not but refuse you, but he protests he loves you
 And needs no other suitor but his likings
 To take the safest occasion by the front
 50 To bring you in again.¹⁸

CASSIO

Yet, I beseech you,
 If you think fit, or that it may be done,
 Give me advantage of some brief discourse
 With Desdemona alone.

EMILIA

Pray you, come in.
 I will bestow you where you shall have time
 To speak your bosom¹⁹ freely.

CASSIO

I am much bound to you.
 [Exeunt]

¹³ **converse**: conversation

¹⁴ **Florentine**: i.e. one of my own people. Cassio is from Florence; Iago is from Venice. Cassio, like Othello, is an outsider

¹⁵ **she speaks...stoutly**: she speaks strongly in your favour

¹⁶ **great affinity**: has powerful relatives

¹⁷ **wholesome**: sensible/beneficial

¹⁸ **but he protests...in again**: but he loves you and wants no one to replace you; he will grab the first safe opportunity to reinstate you

¹⁹ **speak your bosom**: speak what's in your heart

Commentary

- **This scene provides some comic relief** for the audience after the violence and tension of the previous scene. The clown's crude puns and the jokes he makes at the musicians' expense are unsophisticated but still humorous.
- **Cassio is clearly desperate to be reinstated as Othello's lieutenant.** He hires musicians to play outside Othello's lodgings and bribes the clown to depart in case he causes offence. Having not slept since the brawl, he attempts to secure a meeting with Desdemona, thus playing into the hands of Iago.
- **Emilia is kind and tries to oblige Cassio.** However, without realising it, she too is helping Iago achieve his sinister goal of driving Othello into a jealous rage.

Questions

1. Many productions cut the part of this scene which features the clown.
(a) Why do you think this is often done?
(b) If you were directing this scene would you do the same? Why / why not?
2. Why is Iago keen for Cassio to meet with Desdemona?
3. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience know something that a character on stage does not. Find an example of dramatic irony in this scene.
4. In Act 1 Scene 1, Iago remarked that Cassio is a 'Florentine'. What point is Cassio making when he says, 'I never knew / A Florentine more kind and honest'?
5. What is your initial impression of Emilia from this scene?