

Cast of Characters

MIKE, 18 years old, a senior student of drama

LORIS, 18 years old, a senior student of drama

Set

A high school theatre stage, with enough scenery and props for rehearsal of Act V, Scene ii, *Othello*.

AN ODIIOUS, DAMNED LIE

PLACE: A practical, modest high school theatre in a central California small city. The stage has minimal, suggestive scenery.

TIME: Lunch break. Early April, 1990.

AT RISE: MIKE and LORIS are waiting to rehearse lines from William Shakespeare's *O t h e l l o* --Act V, Scene ii.

MIKE

Are you all right?

LORIS

Of course.

MIKE

Then take it from the top.

LORIS

Can't we wait for Charlie? I want to get it right. Today, in class, it has to be right.

MIKE

He's always late. Not very professional. Even graduating from high school is no big deal to him. He doesn't have his eye on a career. Not like us. Well, we might as well use the time, at least walk through the

blocking. What with Teach's bringing over the drama coach from the college, you

MIKE (*Continued*)

know it's an audition, sort of, for their summer production. Also, you're getting graded next period.

LORIS

It's not the grade. It's the part. I've been preparing every way I know. I'll do anything to get it right.

MIKE

A good actress senses the time to do her best Yeah, this is it. You know, you are a good actress. And we both know you'd do anything, absolutely anything to get a part that develops your talent. I know how serious you are about theatre. Someday, I'll be able to say I knew you when.

LORIS

Today matters. I have to get into the part, really into it. Whatever it takes. If I don't do it right . . . I should know this part. I went over it five times last night with Mom.

MIKE

Your mom helped you?

LORIS

Well, yes.

MIKE

Right.

LORIS

She'd promised.

MIKE

Yeah, sure.

LORIS

And she did.

MIKE

Good.

LORIS

What do you mean by that?

Mean? MIKE

Yes, what? LORIS

I just . . . MIKE

Well? LORIS

I just meant: fine, she helped you. MIKE

Well, she did. LORIS

Okay! MIKE

Okay! LORIS

Start from the top? MIKE

Let's wait. LORIS

C'mon. MIKE

I want to do the scene. Really. I just don't want to do it alone. LORIS

I'm here. MIKE

You're directing. You're not Charlie; you're not acting Othello. LORIS

What's wrong; like, I want to know. There is something wrong. Is it your mother again? MIKE

LORIS

How can I tell you?

MIKE

You used to tell me anything . . . everything.

LORIS

That was then.

MIKE

Look, we need to put our past behind us and get on.

LORIS

We have! Haven't we?

MIKE

Your mother saw to that.

LORIS

What difference does it make now?

MIKE

Yeah, what?

LORIS

I mean, if you and Mom can't get along, at least we can.

MIKE

Your mother would raise hell if she even knew we still have this oneclass together. She would really raise hell.

LORIS

She's good at that.

MIKE

If she helps you with this scene, she knows you take drama. What does she think, that I gave it up this late in the term just to please her?

LORIS

She asked me if you were in the class.

MIKE

What did you say?

LORIS

I told her that you wouldn't even consider being in any class with me anymore.

MIKE

Consider? Think twice about it? 'Course not. I just thought once: I'm going to take what I want to take, no matter what your mother wants. I want this class.

LORIS

If she'd have known you were still enrolled, she'd have taken me out.

MIKE

She knows the class 's your favorite, you're going to major in drama in college.

LORIS

She'd still have taken me out.

MIKE

Does she feel that way when she's sober?

LORIS

I don't know.

MIKE

Oh, no!

LORIS

Yes.

MIKE

How long has it been this time?

LORIS

Three weeks, ever since you stopped coming over.

MIKE

You mean, since she stopped me from coming over. It was her, not me.

LORIS

Okay.

MIKE

All that time I used to come by your house, I didn't even suspect. I must have been blind. How can anyone stay drunk three weeks?

LORIS

but then when I get home after school, she's had all day, so she's that way again when I get home.

MIKE

What does her new gentleman say?

LORIS

Him? Oh, he's quiet. At least, he was. I haven't seen him for a while.

MIKE

How long?

LORIS

These three weeks.

MIKE

Coincidence? Any connection with us?

LORIS

No.

MIKE

Where is he?

LORIS

I don't know.

MIKE

He's working odd hours?

LORIS

I just don't know, that's all. I don't think he's been around for three weeks.

MIKE

How can you live in that house and not know if he's not around?

LORIS

I pretty much stay in my room. I think he calls her at night. The phone rings in the middle of the night. She doesn't always answer it. It only rings once, she picks up the receiver, sometimes she talks, sometimes she just puts it back down without saying anything.

MIKE

She must know it's him.

LORIS

I don't know what she knows. I don't care what she knows.

MIKE

You'd care if she found out we are in the same class.

LORIS

Yes.

MIKE

Why?

LORIS

Why?

MIKE

Why would you care?

LORIS

One of us would have had to transfer out.

MIKE

Hey, wait a minute. I just said I'm going to take what I want to take, and I want this class. It's going to be my major in college, you know that.

LORIS

Then it would have had to be me.

MIKE

I wouldn't mean for that to happen.

LORIS

It would have had to be one of us, if she had found out.

MIKE

She'd have to sober up before she could come to see your counselor and make trouble. That would have been too great a sacrifice for her.

LORIS

She could have, if she'd wanted to.

MIKE

You don't believe it, that she could sober up, just quit, just like that. Not anyone who stays drunk for three weeks.

LORIS

Maybe she's not that way all the time. I don't see her in the morning,

LORIS

She could have.

MIKE

If she has that much will power, why does she keep on drinking?

LORIS

She always has had to have a reason not to drink.

MIKE

Oh, no, she has to have a reason to drink. What is it?

LORIS

How would I know?

MIKE

You're in the middle of it.

LORIS

Maybe I'm out of it.

MIKE

You're not her reason for drinking. If anything, you're the one thing in her life right now to make her proud.

LORIS

For the past year, I've not been worth that much to her.

MIKE

You said she helped you with the scene, that she sobered enough to help you with the scene.

LORIS

Oh, did I?

MIKE

Look, . . . that's not true?

LORIS

I went over and over the scene, I did.

MIKE

But she didn't help you?

LORIS

No.

MIKE

She had promised, then she didn't keep the promise.

LORIS

No, that's not it.

MIKE

What, then?

LORIS

She hadn't promised me.

MIKE

Why do you make up stories to cover for her?

LORIS

I used to make them up for her sake. Then, I think, I did it for mine.

MIKE

Cover up for her to other people if you must. But not to me. I know her.
Don't cover up to me. You and me, we don't lie to each other.

LORIS

I don't lie, to you, to anyone else.

MIKE

What do you call it then?

LORIS

I don't know.

MIKE

A lie by any other name . . . Look, no doubt there are other names for
it. I'll bet I could find one in the psychology text. Whatever, it's not
the name that matters. It's what you say to me.

LORIS

You don't really care.

MIKE

I've never said I don't.

LORIS

You let her come between us. You wouldn't have done that if you really cared.

MIKE

You were the reason.

LORIS

I don't understand.

MIKE

You have to live the rest of this last semester at home. After you explained to me the kind of mother she is, I knew if she didn't get her way, she'd make your life hell.

LORIS

I'm not going to stay at home.

MIKE

You have to.

LORIS

I can't.

MIKE

Hey, look, you went over this scene five times last night? You studied this scene when you had something like leaving home on your mind?

LORIS

Yes.

MIKE

Oh, no.

LORIS

What do you mean?

MIKE

I mean, you've got some priorities screwed up. Getting a part isn't worth living in hell for the rest of the year.

LORIS

You don't know me.

MIKE
I know you better than anyone.

LORIS
Yes.

MIKE
That's true, isn't it?

LORIS
Yes.

MIKE
And we know each other . . .

LORIS
Stop.

MIKE
I won't go on. I just had to be sure that . . .

LORIS
You can be sure.

MIKE
I know.

LORIS
You doubted?

MIKE
No, I never.

LORIS
You did, or you wouldn't have said . . .

MIKE
Look, I know we're the only ones for each other. I know that. I've known it ever since last fall.

LORIS
Well, that's that.

MIKE
That's that.

Yes. LORIS

Yes. So far. MIKE

Oh! LORIS

Look, don't cry. Don't. MIKE

Just go away. LORIS

I can't. MIKE

Go! LORIS

Not now, now while you're upset. MIKE

We can just call the scene off. LORIS

No, it's your scene. You always make the one you're working on better than all the others you've done before. I want to help you with it. MIKE

For the credit! LORIS

I get no credit! Teach doesn't give credit for directing this project, just for the acting. Did you hear anything in class about assigning directors? MIKE

Didn't you arrange with him to get special credit, for an optional project, or something? LORIS

MIKE

I never. He just mentioned that the scene could do with some direction and that I just might be able to handle the directing.

LORIS

And what do you want out of this?

MIKE

Do I have to have some ulterior motive?

LORIS

Everybody does.

MIKE

Here, blow. That's not you talking.

LORIS

I've changed.

MIKE

What's new? We've all changed. We change everyday.

LORIS

I don't know about everybody else. I only know about me. Oh, that's not true. I don't even know about me.

MIKE

I've seen the change. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You just had to do what she wanted. And you will have to, until you get . . .

LORIS

Go ahead, say it.

MIKE

Look, I'm not going along with this leaving home idea.

LORIS

I have to leave.

MIKE

Look at me. Look at me. What is the problem?

LORIS

Here. No, don't touch it.

MIKE

Ohmygod! She did that!

LORIS

She didn't realize she was doing it.

MIKE

When?

LORIS

Last night. I was in my room, going over the scene. She came in, sat on my bed, and watched. I tried to do it the best I could, to impress her, to get her to understand how much this means to me. She started tapping her glass against the foot of the bed, but I stayed in character. Part of me was wondering about her reaction, still I went on. When it was over, she looked at me, she took another drink, then just sat there looking at me. I waited, sitting at my desk. Then she started laughing, laughing at me. She came over to me and started punching me. It was light at first, you know, just taps. Then it got harder. Suddenly, she stopped and started to leave the room. She stumbled and had to catch onto the door handle to keep from falling. Then she started crying, laughing and crying. She stopped, grew quiet. Just stared at me. She went over to the frame where I used to have your picture. It was just the frame, nothing in it. She wanted to know where the picture is. I told her I'd thrown it out, as she'd told me to do. She didn't believe me. She knew I was lying. She came at me with the glass, hitting me with it. She was screaming and got louder and louder. I kept thinking they would hear her next door. I had been backing away, but when she got so loud, I did something. I ducked under her arm. You know how they teach us in swimming to get to the rear of someone who is panicking? It was like I was in the water and she was drowning. I got behind her and grabbed one of her arms, bent it around behind her with one hand, then I put my other arm around her neck. I started to pull her. I don't know where I was trying to pull her. But my arm started getting tighter and tighter around her neck. I pulled and pulled and held her tighter and tighter. She collapsed. She was just limp, and my arm was holding her . . . tighter. I was trying to save her. I was trying to kill her. I don't know. I don't know what I was trying to do. I somehow got her onto my bed. She just lay there. You know, she was all limp, but in her hand was the glass. She may have been dying, but she had enough strength to hold onto that glass. I pried it from her fingers and put it on the nightstand. I didn't know what to do next. I thought about phoning for an ambulance. I thought about calling you. I just sat beside her and took her into my arms and started crying. Then I could feel her coming back. It was faint, then stronger, then I knew she was going to live. She began to cough. I got the glass, ran into the bathroom and got some water, and brought it to her. I helped her sip. She kept looking at me as she took little sips, at first, then more. She finished the glass, and spoke. She said, "Get me a drink." I started to the bathroom with the glass, but she said, "I mean a drink." She kept staring at me. I went into her room and poured

LORIS (*continued*)

whiskey into the glass and brought it to her. She kept staring, and smiled, and said, "Thanks, I owe you." I felt I feared her. She always used to say that before she beat me. There was something in the way she said it; she really meant it. I almost knew what was going to happen next. I sat on the edge of the bed and waited. She finished her drink slowly as if using it to bring back all her strength. I waited for my mother to beat me, again. And she did. With the glass, after she'd emptied it. As she hit me, I thought the glass might break and cut me, even kill me. I hoped she wouldn't kill me. But I let her hit. I cried out for mercy, and I let her hit and hit and hit. I let her. I kept thinking, this is it, this is the last time you will ever beat me, so go ahead and make the most of it. She hit me until she was tired. We were both on the floor. Then she got up and stumbled out of the room. She wasn't laughing or crying anymore. She was just gasping for breath. I heard her go to her room and slam the door. I locked my door and took off my clothes and looked in the mirror. Somehow, as always, she'd been careful to hit me only where it wouldn't show, where my clothes would cover the bruises. I got into the shower and let the water run cold over the marks, to keep them from swelling. I just let it run and run. That's what I always did when she beat me. But this time, I knew it was the last time. . . . I'm leaving home.

MIKE

Where will you go?

LORIS

I don't know.

MIKE

Would it help, for the moment, if I held you? I don't want to hurt . . .

LORIS

Let me hold you.

MIKE

I love you so much. I always have. Even when she made up those lies and convinced you that I didn't. I knew she made you stop calling, writing, seeing me. I knew it was her.

LORIS

My face isn't bruised. Hold my face.

MIKE

I could kill that woman.

LORIS

You don't want to even say that. Don't talk about killing.

MIKE

No, I could. I know exactly how you could have choked her. Even though you love her. But I don't love her, I only hate her. For what she's done to you. Why didn't you tell me? All the time we were together, you never mentioned the drinking, the abuse. You should have told me.

LORIS

What could you have done?

MIKE

I'd have stopped her, somehow.

LORIS

If I couldn't stop her, how could you?

MIKE

We could've reported her.

LORIS

They would have arrested her and put me into some sort of custody, a home somewhere, in another town, away from you.

MIKE

She did split us up.

LORIS

At least, I could watch you around school. I knew I loved you, even in spite of the things she made me believe about you. I couldn't help myself. We were separated, but I had to be able to see you.

MIKE

You didn't put up with the beatings for me!

LORIS

I did.

MIKE

Ohmygod! I thought you used to tell me everything.

LORIS

No one tells everything.

MIKE

I did.

LORIS

Well, I couldn't. Don't you understand? You'll understand later.

MIKE

Maybe. I Of course.

LORIS

I'll do the scene in class, and nobody but us will know it's a farewell.

MIKE

You don't have any place to go.

LORIS

That's all taken care of.

MIKE

What do you mean?

LORIS

It's no problem.

MIKE

Okay, we'll take care of whatever comes, when it comes.

LORIS

We?

MIKE

I said *we*.

LORIS

No.

MIKE

We!

LORIS

Looks like Charlie's not coming. Will you run the scene with me? Not just prompt. Do the part right now?

MIKE

I know the lines up to where Emilia calls.

LORIS

You didn't miss a word when you coached me yesterday. I know both parts; I can prompt.

MIKE

Okay. Places. Character.

LORIS

Give me a moment.

MIKE

Nod when. Curtain. Act V, Scene ii. "A bedchamber in the castle: Desdemona in bed asleep; a light burning. ENTER Othello."

*It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,—
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!—
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light:
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again,
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.*

Kissing her.

LORIS

Not like that, like Othello.

MIKE

I couldn't help myself.

LORIS

Look, this is important to me.

MIKE

All right. All right.

*Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love the after. One more, and this the last:
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love.*

LORIS

Who's there? Othello?

MIKE

Ay, Desdemona.

LORIS

Will you come to bed, my lord?

MIKE

I . . . uh . . .

LORIS

“Have you pray'd . . . “

MIKE

No, no, I remember.

Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemona?

LORIS

Ay, my lord.

MIKE

*If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight.*

LORIS

Alas, my lord, what do you mean by that?

MIKE

Well, do it, and be brief; I will walk by:

MIKE (*continued*)

*I would not kill thy unprepared spirit;
No; heaven forbend! I would not kill thy soul.*

LORIS

Talk you of killing?

MIKE

Ay, I do.

LORIS

Then heaven

Have mercy on me!

MIKE

Amen, with all my heart!

LORIS

If you say so, I hope you will not kill me.

MIKE

Hum!

LORIS

*And yet I fear you; for you are fatal then
When your eyes roll so: why I should fear I know not,
Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel I fear.*

MIKE

Think on thy sins.

LORIS

They are loves I bear to you.

MIKE

Ay, and for that thou diest.

LORIS

*That death's unnatural that kills for loving.
Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?
Some bloody passion shakes your very frame:
These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,
They do not point on me.*

MIKE

Peace, and be still!

LORIS

I will so. What's the matter?

MIKE

*That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee
Thou gavest to Cassio.*

LORIS

*No, by my life and soul!
Send for the man, and ask him.*

MIKE

*Sweet soul, take heed,
Take heed of perjury; thou art on thy death-bed.*

LORIS

Ay, but not yet to die.

MIKE

*Yes, presently:
Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin;
For to deny each article with oath
Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception
That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.*

LORIS

Then Lord have mercy on me!

MIKE

I say, amen.

LORIS

*And have you mercy too! I never did
Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio
But with such general warranty of heaven
As I might love; I never gave him token.*

MIKE

*By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in 's hand.
O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart,
And makest me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:
I saw the handkerchief.*

LORIS

*He found it then;
I never gave it him: send for him hither;
Let him confess a truth.*

MIKE

He hath confess'd.

LORIS

What, my lord?

MIKE

That he hath used thee.

LORIS

How? unlawfully?

MIKE

Ay.

LORIS

He will not say so.

MIKE

*No, his mouth is stopp'd;
Honest Iago hath ta'en order for't.*

LORIS

O! my fear interprets: what, is he dead?

MIKE

*Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge
Had stomach for them all.*

LORIS

Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.

MIKE

Out, strumpet! weep'st thou for him to my face?

LORIS

O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

MIKE

Down, strumpet!

LORIS

Kill me tomorrow: let me live to-night!

MIKE

Nay, if you strive,—

LORIS

But half an hour!

MIKE

Being done, there is no pause.

LORIS

But while I say one prayer!

MIKE

It is too late.

He stifles her.

And that's where he hears Emilia's call from the next room. It's a good place to cut although Desdemona dies later. Are you okay?

LORIS

Oh, yes. Yes, I feel the part. I'm ready.

MIKE

You know the mood, the feelings And her fear! You show it! How did you get that?

LORIS

Only with your help. You did it for me.

MIKE

You were so different. Something new. You didn't have this before, nothing like it. Just keep whatever it is you have going inside. Can you hang onto that character until class? . . . I wish I were doing Othello with you today.

LORIS

It wouldn't work. It wouldn't be a surprise. Othello mustn't know what's in her mind. Not knowing drives him over the edge. I'll surprise Charlie and send him right over. He'll be wondering and worrying and a bit frightened, too. We'll get that spark between us.

MIKE

Maxwell Anderson's "holy fire"?

LORIS

I've worked hard, totally prepared to make Desdemona three-dimensional.

MIKE

Prepared how?

LORIS

For three weeks, I've been working up to this—with your help.

MIKE

No, no. You recall, we've been apart these last three weeks, all that time, except in class and until last Wednesday, when I started helping you two with the blocking.

LORIS

I told Charlie not to come, rehearsal had been cancelled. I needed to talk to you alone.

MIKE

Why? You've insisted on his being with us every rehearsal so far, until now.

LORIS

I had to have him here. Until now. You're the only one who understands me.

MIKE

Not right now, I don't.

LORIS

I had to test my preparation, not on Charlie, on you.

MIKE

What does that mean?

LORIS

You know my mother tried to break us up?

MIKE

Yeah.

LORIS

No, she didn't. At least, it wasn't her idea, and she didn't mean it. I asked her to. It was my idea. We were spending all our time together, and you were about all that I could concentrate on. But I have to get into college.

MIKE

You wanted to break up? I don't get it.

LORIS

I told her that I had to have time to get ready for this audition, and she agreed to "separate" us while I worked on the part.

MIKE

Wait a minute!

LORIS

I had to get into my character. Feel what Desdemona feels. I thought I could only do it alone, but I hated being away from you, so I asked Teach to have you direct the scene. I had to get into the part, really into it. Whatever it took. It took getting you to believe my fear—as if it were really real. And when you believed me, I knew I was getting the right emotion. I had to get you to get me into the part. And you did it for me, just now.

MIKE

You set me up!

LORIS

I had a helluva time getting the makeup right for this bruise. Mom helped me.

MIKE

I don't believe this!

LORIS

See, it smears off if you rub hard on it.

MIKE

Your mom, she drinks?

LORIS

No. Or, just socially.

MIKE

Her gentleman?

LORIS

He's nice. She may get serious about him. After I act my way into a college scholarship.

MIKE

So, that's it!

LORIS

Mom and I sat down about a month ago and looked hard at the cost of college and at our bankbook. Your folks can send you to school, but without a scholarship, I'm not going anywhere. I have to convince that college director I can act. I convinced you about Mom, didn't I?

MIKE

And where do I fit into your plans after having been the fool?

LORIS

You're no fool. You were just sort of tricked, a little bit. You just believed my acting. I had to do it! Come on, you said a few nice things to me before we ran the scene. Did you mean them?

MIKE

When I get my mind back together, maybe I'll know.

LORIS

You'll know. Whether I become rich and famous or poor and unknown, you'll know that you are the love of my life.

MIKE

Are you acting now? When can I believe you?

LORIS

Do you remember later in the scene, after I die, Emilia asks Iago if he had said I was false?

MIKE

Yes.

LORIS

Emilia hits him with “You told a lie; an odious, damned lie”

MIKE

Yes.

LORIS

Now, was my story about Mom so “odious and damned”? If I were going to confess to you as soon as I could?

MIKE

I’m glad I fell for it. I’m like Othello, “one that loved not wisely but too well.”

LORIS

You can see, I never lied to you. I was just acting.

MIKE

And should I be asking, are you acting now?

LORIS kisses MIKE.

CURTAIN

NOTE: Shakespeare’s words appear in italics.

