

STORY FIVE: *Nobody; I Myself*

Othello, the Moor of Venice, begins on a street in Venice, in the midst of an argument between Roderigo and Iago. Roderigo has been paying Iago to help him win Desdemona. But Desdemona has married Othello, a general who passed Iago over for the position of lieutenant in favour of the inexperienced soldier Cassio. Much of the play revolves around Iago's plot to help Roderigo gain Desdemona while exacting his own revenge against Othello, including suggesting to Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. Persuaded of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, Othello smothers her to death. In *Nobody; I Myself*, the narrator pleads with an unknown reader to have compassion for her husband, Joe, whose nightmares from the Vietnam War cause him to try to strangle her in the night. The setting is New Jersey in 1966.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

If you're into Shakespeare

1. How does social isolation influence events in both *Othello* and *Nobody; I Myself*?
2. What role does race play in *Othello* and *Nobody; I Myself*?
3. The military provides Othello a way to gain acceptance in Venetian society. What does the narrator in *Nobody; I Myself* believe will gain Joe acceptance in white society?
4. Othello woos Desdemona with tales of his military travels and battles. What attracts the narrator to Joe in *Nobody; I Myself*?
5. To what extent does Brother D echo Iago?
6. To what extent are Desdemona and the narrator in *Nobody; I Myself* passive victims?
7. How does Desdemona's line in *Othello*—"Nobody; I myself"—resonate in the story?
8. What's the significance of Desdemona dying by smothering and the possibility that the narrator in *Nobody; I Myself* will die from strangulation?

If you're not

1. How does social isolation influence events in the story?
2. What does the narrator sacrifice to be with Joe?
3. What role does race play in the story?
4. What does the narrator believe will gain Joe acceptance in white society?
5. What attracts the narrator to Joe?

6. The narrator confesses her naiveté about what Joe experienced in Vietnam. Is such naiveté possible today? Why or why not?
7. Is the narrator a passive victim? Why or why not?
8. What is the significance of our not learning the narrator's name?
9. How is the narrator's struggle with her ideals informed by her upbringing and the historical times? How might her deep feeling of responsibility for Joe reflect a belief in "the white man's burden"?
10. Is the narrator's willingness to die for Joe true love or a way out of depression? How rational is her proposed solution to getting help for Joe?