

## Merchant of Venice Plot Summary

Bassanio, needing money to be a suitor to Portia, asks his friend Antonio for a loan. Antonio's money is all tied up in shipments away from Venice, so he approaches Shylock, a money-lender. Shylock agrees to lend the money, on condition that if Antonio does not pay it back by an appointed time, Shylock may cut a pound of flesh from him. Not taking him seriously, Antonio agrees. Bassanio prepares to leave, allowing his friend Gratiano to accompany him.

Launcelot Gobbo, Shylock's servant, decides to leave him, telling his father about his plan. Lorenzo, with the help of Solanio, Salerio and Gratiano, plot to help Jessica, Shylock's daughter, to escape. While Shylock is out dining with Antonio, Jessica and Lorenzo elope with some of Shylock's money.

Meanwhile Portia is unhappy with her suitors. Her father has decreed that she must marry the man who chooses from three caskets the one containing her picture. Fortunately for Portia, both the Prince of Morocco and Arragon both fail, being seduced by the external glamour of the two incorrect caskets.

When Bassanio arrives he chooses the right casket. Gratiano falls in love with Nerissa, Portia's waiting woman.

In Venice, Solanio and Salerio hear that some of Antonio's ships are lost, and Shylock promises to redeem his bond. Another Jew, Tubal, brings him news of Antonio's loss and Jessica's fortune.

Portia and Nerissa give Bassanio and Gratiano rings in honour of their love, and make them vow never to be parted from them. Salerio arrives with Lorenzo and Jessica, bringing news that Antonio, unable to repay his loan, has been arrested and that Shylock is demanding his bond. Bassanio returns to Venice with money from Portia to repay the loan. Shylock refuses to listen to Antonio's pleas.

Portia and Nerissa travel to Venice, disguised as a lawyer called Balthasar and his clerk, to defend Antonio against Shylock, leaving Lorenzo and Jessica in charge of the house. At the court, the Duke hears Shylock present his case, protesting but accepting the legal validity of the claim. Shylock rejects the offer of money from Bassanio. 'Balthasar' arrives and agrees that Shylock must take his bond, if he will not be merciful, but only if the pound of flesh is exactly excised and no blood is spilt. Realizing this cannot be done, Shylock tries to leave, but because he has tried to take the life of Antonio, his goods are confiscated, and his life falls into Antonio's hands. Antonio lets him live if he agrees to become a Christian and gives his possessions as a dowry to Lorenzo and Jessica when he dies. Shylock agrees, and leaves.

By way of thanks for their work, the disguised Portia and Nerissa each ask for the ring they had given Bassanio and Gratiano in their true identities. Reluctantly the men agree. Portia and Nerissa then return to Belmont, where Jessica and Lorenzo are waiting. When Bassanio and Gratiano arrive soon after, along with Antonio, the woman trick their men into begging forgiveness for giving their rings away. They then reveal their identities at the court. Antonio learns that his ships are safe. The couples prepare for their marriage.