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Background

Bassanio asks his friend Antonio for money to woo the heiress Portia. Antonio borrows the money from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. Because Shylock hates all Christians—and Antonio in particular—he foregoes his usual interest. Instead, he asks for a pound of Antonio’s flesh if the money is not repaid in three months.

Then Antonio’s business goes bad. He loses all his money and is unable to repay Shylock. Now even angrier toward Christians because of his daughter’s elopement with one, Shylock wants his pound of flesh. All looks hopeless until Portia shows up at the trial, dressed as a judge. Will she be clever enough to render a fair judgment and thus save poor Antonio’s life?





— Cast of Characters —

THE DUKE OF VENICE, PRINCE OF MOROCCO,
and **PRINCE OF ARAGON:** Suitors to Portia

ANTONIO: A merchant of Venice

BASSANIO: Antonio's friend

GRATIANO, SOLANIO, and SALERIO: Friends of
Antonio and Bassanio

LORENZO: In love with Jessica

SHYLOCK: A Jewish moneylender

TUBAL: Another Jew, and friend of Shylock

LANCELOT GOBBO: Servant to Shylock and later Bassanio

OLD GOBBO: Lancelot's father

LEONARDO: Servant to Bassanio

BALTHAZAR and STEPHANO: Servants to Portia

PORTIA: A wealthy lady of Belmont

NERISSA: Portia's waiting-maid

JESSICA: Shylock's daughter

**OFFICERS OF THE COURT OF JUSTICE, A JAILER, SERVANTS,
AND ATTENDANTS**





ACT 1

Summary

Antonio talks to his friends Salerio and Solanio about the sadness he feels. His friends try to cheer him up. Bassanio approaches, along with two other friends. When the others leave, Bassanio asks Antonio for a loan so he can go to Belmont to court a rich heiress. Antonio says that his money is tied up, but he will borrow money for Bassanio.

Meanwhile, in Belmont, Portia and her maid, Nerissa, are talking about the system set up by Portia's father. Anyone who wants to marry Portia must choose one of three caskets—gold, silver, or lead. The right choice will win Portia as the prize. Portia doesn't like any of the men who have come to court her.

Back in Venice, Shylock agrees to lend Antonio the money needed by Bassanio. Antonio must sign a contract that calls for a pound of his flesh if he can't repay the loan in time. Antonio isn't worried about it, however, because he's expecting his ships to come in a month before the loan is due.





Scene 1

A wharf in Venice, Italy, in the sixteenth century.

Antonio is talking to his friends **Salerio** and **Solanio**.

ANTONIO (*sighing*): I don't know why
I'm so sad. This mood wearies me.
You say it wearies you, too.
But just how I caught it, found it,
or came by it,
I do not know. I feel so sad,
I hardly even know myself.

SALERIO: Your mind is tossing on the ocean.
(*pointing toward the sea*) It's out there,
Where your ships with their billowing sails
Lord it over the common working boats.

SOLANIO: Believe me, if I had taken the risks
That you have, I would be worried, too.
Anything that put my investments at risk
Would make me sad.

SALERIO: As I blew on my hot soup to cool it,
I'd catch a chill when I thought
What harm a strong wind might do at sea.
As I looked at the sand in an hourglass,



THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

I'd think of shallow waters and sandbanks
And see one of my ships stuck in the sand.
Every time I went to church, the holy stones
Would make me think of dangerous rocks.
They'd only have to touch my delicate ship
To scatter all her spices into the sea
And clothe the wild waters with my silks!
One moment I'd be rich—
And the next I'd be worth nothing.
How miserable I would be
If such a thing happened!
You can't fool me. I know Antonio must
Be worrying about his merchandise.

ANTONIO: Believe me, that's not it. I'm lucky.
My investments are not all in one ship
Or all in one place. Nor is all my money
At risk at this time. So my merchandise
Is not what is making me sad.

SOLANIO (*teasing*): Why, then, you must
Be in love!

ANTONIO (*protesting*): Not at all!

SOLANIO: Not in love, either? Then let us say
You are sad because you are not merry.
And, if you wanted to, you could laugh.





(Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano enter.)

Here comes Bassanio, your noble kinsman.
Gratiano and Lorenzo are with him.
(seeing his chance to leave) Farewell!
We'll leave you now with better company.

SALERIO *(also seeing his chance)*:

I would have stayed to cheer you up
If worthier friends had not stopped me.

ANTONIO: That's good of you, but I take it

Your own business calls you.
This gives you the chance to leave.

SALERIO *(to the newcomers)*: Good morning!

BASSANIO *(warmly)*: Gentlemen both!

When shall we have a laugh together, eh?
You're almost strangers! Must it be so?

SALERIO *(eager to get away)*: Yes, yes. We'll get
together one of these days.

(Salerio and Solanio exit.)

LORENZO: Bassanio, now that you have

Found Antonio, we will leave you.
Remember that we're meeting for dinner.

BASSANIO: I'll be there!



THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

GRATIANO: You don't look well, Antonio.

You let things get you down.

Don't worry so much. Believe me,

You don't seem like yourself lately.

ANTONIO: I take the world as it is, Gratiano,

A stage, where every man must play a part,

And mine a sad one.

GRATIANO: Let me play the fool, then.

Let mirth and laughter give me wrinkles,

And let my emotions get heated with wine

Rather than let my heart cool with sighs.

Why should a warmblooded man

Act like a stone-cold statue of his grandfather?

I tell you what, Antonio—

And I speak out of friendship—

Some men have faces that never change.

They stay still, hoping to be thought of as

Wise, serious, and important. Antonio, I know

men whose reputation

For being wise is based on saying nothing.

I am very sure that, if they would speak,

They would prove themselves fools.

I'll tell you more about this another time.





But don't go fishing for this fake reputation
With melancholy as your bait, Lorenzo.

(to Antonio): Farewell for now.
I'll end my speech after dinner.

LORENZO: Yes, we'll see you at dinnertime.
I must be one of those silent wise men,
For Gratiano never lets me speak.

GRATIANO: Be my friend two more years—
You'll forget the sound of your own voice!

ANTONIO *(to Gratiano)*: I guess I'd better start
talking, then.

GRATIANO: If you like. Silence is only good
In dried ox tongues and young maids!

(Gratiano and Lorenzo exit.)

ANTONIO: What do you think of that?

BASSANIO *(laughing)*: He talks more trash
Than any man in Venice! Any truth
Gratiano speaks is like two grains of wheat
Hidden in two bushels.
Look all day, and when you find them,
They are not worth the search!