

Summary of *Merchant of Venice*, Act III

Salerio and Solanio are discussing rumors that Antonio's ships have been wrecked. Shylock arrives to accuse them of aiding Jessica's escape, to which they proudly admit. Salerio then asks Shylock to confirm about Antonio's ships. Shylock replies with resolve that the rumors are true, and he'll soon be able to collect his pound of flesh from Antonio. He reveals his mistreatment is only because he is Jewish, and that he is resolved to use what he has learned from Christian intolerance against Antonio. Salerio and Solanio leave to find Antonio. Tubal, a Jewish friend of Shylock, arrives and says that he cannot find Jessica nor a ring that she stole, sending Shylock off on a rant, wishing her dead. Tubal also reveals that Antonio's ships have run into trouble, however, brightening his spirits.

Meanwhile, Portia begs Bassanio to hold off a day or two from choosing a casket, cause she doesn't want to lose him. However, Bassanio insists that he choose now, so they can be wed sooner. He carefully inspects the three caskets (like the Greek hero Hercules, in Portia's mind), before choosing the lead casket. Inside is Portia's portrait, along with a poem congratulating him that he won. They promise their eternal love and devotion to each other, and Portia gives Bassanio a ring that he must hold on to forever, or else signifying the end of his love for her. Nerissa and Graziano congratulate them and reveal that they've also fallen in love, suggesting a double wedding.

Lorenzo and Jessica arrive too, along with Salerio, who gives a letter to Bassanio, reading that all of Antonio's ships are lost. Bassanio is wrought with guilt, and though Portia offers to pay the sum, Jessica knows her father's more interested in revenge. Antonio asks for a brief reunion before he dies, and Portia urges him to leave for Venice. Meanwhile, Shylock brings Antonio to prison, bankrupt. He tries to plead with Shylock, but he doesn't listen. However, Antonio claims that Venice is a wealthy city with a reputation for upholding the law, and that the duke will judge fairly.

Lorenzo assures Portia that Antonio is a good man, while Portia says that she could never deny help to anyone so close to Bassanio (helping as if she were saving her own husband). She declares that she and Nerissa will stay in a nearby monastery, with Lorenzo and Jessica to guard her estate. She then sends Balthasar to Padua to meet her cousin Doctor Bellario, who will give him certain documents and clothing. From there, he is to go to Venice, where Portia will meet him. Portia's plan is for she and Nerissa to visit their husbands dressed as young men, though for what purpose, she doesn't reveal.

Meanwhile, Lancelot says he fears for Jessica's soul for the sins of her father. She claims that her marriage will save her. Lorenzo enters and banter, until Lancelot leaves for dinner. Lorenzo asks Jessica what she thinks of Portia, to which she replies that Portia is perfect in nearly all respects. Lorenzo says that he is like that, too.