

Summary of *Merchant of Venice*, Act V

Back in Belmont, Jessica and Lorenzo are likening themselves to famous couples from classic literature. A messenger arrives to interrupt their professions of love, informing them that Portia will soon be returning. Lancelot soon enters and announces that Bassanio will be returning the next day. He calls for music, and he and Jessica sit on a grassy knoll beneath the starlit sky. Lorenzo comments on the music of the spheres, which mortals cannot hear while alive. Portia and Nerissa arrive to hear the musicians beginning to play, and she comments that it's made more beautiful by the night and the enchanting candles in her estate. She notices that an object's worth is relative to the context it's viewed in. Lorenzo greets her, and she asks that he not mention to their husbands they had been gone.

Bassanio, Antonio, and Graziano arrive and are greeted by Portia and Nerissa, who are introduced to Antonio. Nerissa begins arguing with Graziano that he had broken his promise and given away his ring, presumably to a lawyer's clerk as a fee. In defense, he reveals that Bassanio gave his ring away also, which Portia is outraged to hear. Bassanio tells her that he gave it away to repay the lawyer who saved Antonio, but Portia dismisses his claims, saying that he probably just gave it to another woman. She vows to be equally as unfaithful to him, until Antonio intercedes on both Bassanio and Graziano's behalf, offering his soul should either of them be unfaithful again.

They relent, and give each of their husbands a ring, suggesting they take better care of these. The husbands recognize them as the same rings they had given away, and the wives jest that they had slept with the gentlemen in order to get them back. Before they can get upset, however, Portia reveals that she was the lawyer in Venice, and Nerissa her clerk. At the same time, Antonio gets word that some of his ships had miraculously returned, and Lorenzo is told that he will inherit Shylock's estate when he dies. Everyone rejoices, and they all lived happily ever after.