

Summary of *Merchant of Venice*, Act I

The act opens in the streets of Venice, where the merchant Antonio is lamenting to his friends Salerio and Solanio that he is sad, but can't explain why. His friends dismiss it as simply anxiety over Antonio's trading ships at sea, but Antonio dismisses the claim, knowing that if any one of his ships crashes, he has many more investments to protect his fortune. Antonio just as easily dismisses the claim that he may be in love.

Bassanio and his two friends Lorenzo and Graziano enter meet up with them on the street, and Salerio and Solanio say their goodbyes. Graziano, upon seeing how sad Antonio seems, proposes that Antonio stop taking things so seriously, lest he become old and miserable. Graziano and Lorenzo then leave the scene, allowing Bassiano to talk with Antonio in private. To pique Antonio's curiosity, he reveals his plan to borrow another sum of money and to chase after the rich and beautiful Portia, so that he may eventually pay off his debts. Antonio isn't able to give Bassiano a lone at this time, as all his money was invested; but he offers to back any loan that Bassiano makes.

Bassanio and Antonio thus approach Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. Shylock has a soliloquy about his hatred for Antonio, who undermines his own business by providing free loans and who has an utter loathing for Shylock himself. He loans Bassanio three thousand ducats for a three-month period, but doesn't believe Antonio will be able to guarantee the lone. Instead, he asks for compensation in the form of one pound of Antonio's flesh, should the loan not be repaid. Bassanio balks at such an arrangement, but Antonio assures him that his ships will arrive soon and provide him with more wealth than ever before.