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**The characters in the play**

* [Antonio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_%28The_Merchant_of_Venice%29) – a prominent merchant of Venice
* Bassanio – Antonio's close friend; husband of Portia
* Gratiano – friend of Antonio and Bassanio; the husband of Nerissa
* Lorenzo – friend of Antonio and Bassanio; husband of Jessica
* [Portia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portia_%28The_Merchant_of_Venice%29) – a rich heiress; the wife of Bassanio, disguises as a male lawyer
* Nerissa – Portia's waiting maid, wife of Gratiano; disguises herself as Portia's clerk
* Balthazar – Portia's servant
* Stephano – Portia's servant
* [Shylock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shylock) – a miserly Jew; moneylender; father of Jessica who married a Christian named Lorenzo, a friend of Antonio and Bassanio.
* [Jessica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jessica_%28The_Merchant_of_Venice%29) – daughter of Shylock, later the wife of Lorenzo
* Tubal – a Jew; friend of Shylock
* Launcelot Gobbo – servant of Shylock; later a servant of Bassanio; son of Old Gobbo
* Old Gobbo – blind father of Launcelot
* Leonardo – slave to Bassanio
* Duke of Venice – authority who presides over the case of Shylock's bond
* Prince of Morocco – suitor to Portia
* Prince of Arragon – suitor to Portia
* Salarino and Salanio (also known as Solanio) – friends of Antonio and Bassanio[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Merchant_of_Venice#cite_note-ThreeSallies-1)
* Salerio – a messenger from Venice; friend of Antonio, Bassanio and others[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Merchant_of_Venice#cite_note-ThreeSallies-1)
* Magnificoes of Venice, officers of the Court of Justice, gaolers, servants to Portia, and other attendants and Doctor Bellario, cousin of Portia

**GIST OF THE STORY**

The gist of the story leading to the famous Court scene in the play is as follows:

Bassanio, a young [Venetian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Venice) of noble rank, wanted to seek the hand of the beautiful and rich Portia. He needed 3,000 [ducats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ducats) for that which he did not have. Bassanio approached his friend [Antonio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_%28Merchant_of_Venice%29), a wealthy merchant of Venice who had previously and repeatedly bailed him out. Antonio agreed, but since he did not have the cash on him as his ships and merchandise were out at sea to [Tripolis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripoli%22%20%5Co%20%22Tripoli), [the Indies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Indies), [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Spain) and [England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) – he promised to cover a bond if Bassanio could find a lender, so Bassanio turned to the Jewish moneylender Shylock and named Antonio as the guarantor.

Antonio and Shylock were not friends because of their respective religious beliefs and business style and often had hurled insults to each other in public. Antonio lent money to people for which Shylock’s money lending business suffered as he had to charge lower interest rates than what he desired. At first Shylock was reluctant to give the loan to Antonio citing abuse he had from Antonio, Finally, he agreed to lend the sum to Bassanio without interest upon one condition: if Antonio was unable to repay it at the specified date, Shylock could take a [pound](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pound_%28mass%29) of Antonio's flesh. Bassanio did not want Antonio to accept such a risky condition; Antonio was surprised at this offer as he though considered it as Shylock’s generosity of charging no interest. He signed the bond with Shylock. no "usance" – interest – is asked for), and he signs the contract. With money in hand, Bassanio leaves for Belmont with his friend Gratiano, who has asked to accompany him. Gratiano is a likeable young man, but he is often flippant, overly talkative, and tactless. Bassanio warns his companion to exercise self-control, and the two leave for Belmont.

Meanwhile, in Belmont, Portia is awash with suitors. Her father left a [will](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will_and_testament) stipulating that each of her suitors must choose correctly from one of three caskets, made of gold, silver and lead respectively. Whoever picks the right casket wins Portia's hand. The first suitor, the Prince of Morocco, chooses the gold casket, interpreting its slogan, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire", as referring to Portia. The second suitor, the conceited Prince of Aragon, chooses the silver casket, which proclaims, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves", as he believes he is full of merit. Both suitors leave empty-handed, having rejected the lead casket because of the baseness of its material and the uninviting nature of its slogan, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath". The last suitor is Bassanio, whom Portia wishes to succeed, having met him before. As Bassanio ponders his choice, members of Portia's household sing a song that says that "fancy" (not true love) is "engend'red in the eyes, / With gazing fed";[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Merchant_of_Venice#cite_note-2) Bassanio chooses the lead casket and wins Portia's hand.

At Venice, Antonio's ships are reported lost at sea, so the merchant cannot repay the bond. Shylock has become more determined to exact revenge from Christians because his daughter Jessica eloped with the Christian Lorenzo and converted. She took a substantial amount of Shylock's wealth with her, as well as a turquoise ring which Shylock had been given by his late wife, Leah. Shylock has Antonio brought before court.

At Belmont, Bassanio receives a letter telling him that Antonio has been unable to repay the loan from Shylock. Portia and Bassanio marry, as do Gratiano and Portia's handmaid Nerissa. Bassanio and Gratiano leave for Venice, with money from Portia, to save Antonio's life by offering the money to Shylock. Unknown to Bassanio and Gratiano, Portia sent her servant, Balthazar, to seek the counsel of Portia's cousin, Bellario, a lawyer, at [Padua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padua).

The climax of the play is set in the court of the [Duke of Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doges_of_Venice). Shylock refuses Bassanio's offer of 6,000 ducats, twice the amount of the loan. He demands his pound of flesh from Antonio. The Duke, wishing to save Antonio but unable to nullify a contract, refers the case to a visitor. He identifies himself as Balthazar, a young male "doctor of the law", bearing a letter of recommendation to the Duke from the learned lawyer Bellario. The doctor is Portia in disguise, and the law clerk who accompanies her is Nerissa, also disguised as a man. As Balthazar, Portia repeatedly asks Shylock to show mercy in a [famous speech](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_quality_of_mercy_%28Shakespeare_quote%29), advising him that mercy "is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes" (Act IV, Sc 1, Line 185). However, Shylock adamantly refuses any compensations and insists on the pound of flesh.

As the court grants Shylock his bond and Antonio prepares for Shylock's knife, Portia deftly appropriates Shylock's argument for "specific performance". She says that the contract allows Shylock to remove only the *flesh*, not the blood, of Antonio (see [quibble](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quibble_%28plot_device%29)). Thus, if Shylock were to shed any drop of Antonio's blood, his "lands and goods" would be forfeited under Venetian laws. She tells him that he must cut precisely one pound of flesh, no more, no less; she advises him that "if the scale do turn, But in the estimation of a hair, Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate."

Defeated, Shylock consents to accept Bassanio's offer of money for the defaulted bond: first his offer to pay "the bond thrice", which Portia rebuffs, telling him to take his bond, and then merely the principal; but Portia also prevents him from doing this, on the ground that he has already refused it "in the open court". She cites a law under which Shylock, as a Jew and therefore an "alien", having attempted to take the life of a citizen, has forfeited his property, half to [the government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian_Republic) and half to Antonio, leaving his life at the mercy of the Duke. The Duke spares Shylock's life and says he may remit the forfeiture. Portia says the Duke may waive the state's share, but not Antonio's. Antonio says he is content that the state waive its claim to half Shylock's wealth if he can have his one-half share "[in use](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_tenancy)" until Shylock's death, when the principal would be given to Lorenzo and Jessica. Antonio also asks that "for this favour" Shylock convert to Christianity and bequeath his entire estate to Lorenzo and Jessica. The Duke then threatens to recant his pardon of Shylock's life unless he accepts these conditions. Shylock, re-threatened with death, accepts with the words, "I am content." (IV, i).

Bassanio does not recognise his disguised wife, but offers to give a present to the supposed lawyer. First she declines, but after he insists, Portia requests his ring and Antonio's gloves. Antonio parts with his gloves without a second thought, but Bassanio gives the ring only after much persuasion from Antonio, as earlier in the play he promised his wife never to lose, sell or give it. Nerissa, as the lawyer's clerk, succeeds in likewise retrieving her ring from Gratiano, who does not see through her disguise.

At Belmont, Portia and Nerissa taunt and pretend to accuse their husbands before revealing they were really the lawyer and his clerk in disguise (V). After all the other characters make amends, Antonio learns from Portia that three of his ships were not stranded and have returned safely after all.

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**SCENE I. Venice. A court of justice.**

*Enter the DUKE, the Magnificoes, ANTONIO, BASSANIO, GRATIANO, SALERIO, and others. They take their respective positions in the court room*

**DUKE (sitting in the judge’s position)**

Is the Merchant Antonio here?

**ANTONIO**

Yes, your grace.

**DUKE**

I am sorry for you. You have a heartless adversary. Shylock is an inhuman wretch with no pity and mercy.

**ANTONIO**

Your grace. I heard that you have tried very hard to persuade Shylock to withdraw his unreasonable and cruel case against me. But he is adamant. I am prepared to fight his anger with my patience. I am ready to accept the verdict of this court of justice.

**DUKE.**

Someone, go and call Shylock into the court.

**SALERIO**

He is ready at the door: he comes, my lord.

*Enter SHYLOCK*

**DUKE**

Make room, and let Shylock stand before us so everybody can see him.

Shylock, the world thinks, and I also think
That you lead a strange and cruel life.

You have come here today to claim a pound of flesh of poor Antonio, the merchant, which he owes you according to the agreement he signed with you, because he failed to pay back the money that he borrowed from you by the due date.

The court requests that you show some human gentleness, love, and sympathy. Think of the merchant’s losses, have pity on him, and make an alternative demand. ‘

The court expects you to show some courtesy and give a gentle answer.

**SHYLOCK**

I have told your grace what I desire.

I shall have what is due to me. I shall not forfeit my bond of one pound of flesh of Antonio whom I dislike and detest. That is my answer

**BASSANIO**

This is no answer, you cruel man
**SHYLOCK**

I am not bound to please you with my answers.

**BASSANIO**

Do all men kill the things they do not love?

**SHYLOCK**

Does a man hate anything that he would not kill?

**BASSANIO**

Every offence is not a hate at first.

**SHYLOCK**

Would you like a snake to bite you twice?

**ANTONIO**

My lord, it is no use asking the Jew to be soft and kind
I request you not to make him any more offers.

Let me have judgment and the Jew his will.

**BASSANIO**

I offer you six thousand ducats for your three.

**SHYLOCK**

I shall have my bond.

**DUKE**

You cannot expect any mercy, as you do not offer mercy to others.

**SHYLOCK**

I have done no wrong. So, I do not fear any judgement.

When I ask you to free your slaves, you will say that you bought the slaves with your money,

So, I answer you. I bought the pound of flesh of Antonio. It is mine and I shall have it.

**DUKE**

 I shall wait for Bellario, a learned doctor who will help me in deciding this case.

**SALERIO**

My lord, a messenger from Padua has brought letters from the doctor.

**DUKE**

Call the messenger. Let us see the letters.

**BASSANIO**

Cheer up Antonio! Have courage. I shall fight for you.
The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones and all,
before he harms you.

**ANTONIO**

Bassanio, my friend. It is my time to die. You live and write my epitaph.

*Enter NERISSA, dressed like a lawyer's clerk*

**DUKE**

Have you brought some message from Bellario in Padua ??

**NERISSA**

Yes, my lord. Bellario sends you his greetings, your grace.

*Presenting a letter*

**BASSANIO**

Why do you sharpen your knife so seriously?

**SHYLOCK**

To cut the flesh of the bankrupt Antonio.

**GRATIANO**

Listen jew. You are sharpening your knife, but your jealousy is sharper than your knife.

Are there any prayers sharp enough that can enter your heart?

**SHYLOCK**

No, There is none.

**GRATIANO**

O, you dirty dog.

**SHYLOCK**

I do not waste my breath. I am here for the law and want my bond.

**DUKE**

This letter from Bellario recommends a young and learned doctor to our court.
Where is he?

**NERISSA**

He is outside and awaits your consent to admit him.

**DUKE**

With all my heart. Some of you go, greet him courteously and bring him to the court. In the meantime, the clerk shall read out to the court the letter from Bellario.

**Clerk**

[Reads]

Your grace, when I received your letter then I was sick. But at the time when your messenger came, I had a young visitor with me from Rome, a doctor of law, whose name is Balthasar. I told him about the case between Shylock, the Jew. and Antonio, the Merchant. We discussed the case at length and consulted many books. He is fully familiar with the case and my opinion. So because of his learning and knowledge of the case, I recommend him strongly, your grace, to fill my position in your court. His age should not be an impending factor as he is extremely bright and intelligent for his age. I leave it up to your grace to accept this young lawyer and allow him to take my place in the court.

**DUKE**

You have heard what the learned Bellario has written. And, here, I understand is the young doctor?

*Enter PORTIA, dressed like a doctor of laws*

Give me your hand. Has old Bellario sent you?

**PORTIA**

Yes, my lord.

**DUKE**

You are welcome. Take your place.
Are you acquainted with the case in question in the court?

**PORTIA**

I am thoroughly informed of the case.
Which is the merchant here, and which is the Jew?

**DUKE**

Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.

**PORTIA**

Is your name Shylock?

**SHYLOCK**

Shylock is my name.

**PORTIA**

You have lodged a strange case. But according to Venetian law we have to proceed without disputing your demand.

(looking at Antonio)

You are the one who is in danger, is it not?

**ANTONIO**

Ay, sir..

**PORTIA**

Do you agree to the bond?

**ANTONIO**

I do.

**PORTIA**

Then the Jew must be merciful.

**SHYLOCK**

Tell me, why must I be meciful?

**PORTIA**

;
Mercy is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself.

Consider this, Jew. Although you seek justice, no one should be harmed. God teaches us all to be merciful. If you follow that teaching and reduce your demand then this court of Venice will be able to give a reduced sentence to the merchant.;

**SHYLOCK**

I want the law and full execution of my bond.

**PORTIA**

Is the merchant not able to pay back the money?

**BASSANIO**

Yes, here I give for him in the court, two times the money he borrowed.

If that is not sufficient, I will give ten times the money.

If that is not accepted, it will appear that malice will override truth.

I beseech you, your grace. Use your authority to do something to stop this evil man from getting what he desires

**PORTIA**

It cannot be. There is no power in Venice which can change an official order of law. If that is done once, it will set a precedence that will lead to many misjudgements in future. It cannot be.

**SHYLOCK**

A Great judge.
O wise young judge, how I honour and respect you.

**PORTIA**

I pray you, let me see the bond.

**SHYLOCK**

Here it is, most reverend doctor, here it is.

**PORTIA**

Shylock. You have been offered three times the money you had lent.

**SHYLOCK**

An oath, an oath, I made an oath to heaven.

I do not want to be guilty of perjury for bringing peace and happiness to Venice.:.

**PORTIA**

Why, this bond is genuine. And by law the Jew may claim
a pound of flesh of Antonio. He may cut it from nearest the merchant's heart. Be merciful.:
Take three times your money and allow me to tear up the bond.

**SHYLOCK**

It appears that you are a worthy judge;
You know the law, your explanation of the case has been very clear and sound: I charge you by the law,
to give your judgement. No man can make me change my demand. I want to stick to the agreed bond.

**ANTONIO**

I beg the court to give its judgement, which I shall happily accept.

**PORTIA**

Why then, the judgement is as follows:
You must prepare your bosom for Shylock’s knife.

**SHYLOCK**

O noble judge! O excellent young man!

**PORTIA**

By law, this penalty is due according to the signed bond.

**SHYLOCK**

It is very true: O wise and upright judge!
You are far wiser than your looks and age.

**PORTIA**

Therefore, Antonio, lay bare your bosom.

**SHYLOCK**

Yes, his breast:
So says the bond, Is it not, noble judge?
'Nearest his heart:' those are the very words.

**PORTIA**

It is so. Are there balance here to weigh the flesh?

**SHYLOCK**

I have them ready.

**PORTIA**

Shylock, have some surgeon ready to stop his wounds so that he does not bleed to death.

**SHYLOCK**

Is that mentioned in the bond?

**PORTIA**

It is not mentioned as such. But what does it matter?
You can do that much for charity.

**SHYLOCK**

I cannot find it. It is not in the bond.

**PORTIA**

You, merchant, have you anything to say?

**ANTONIO**

No, I have little to say. I am all prepared for my fate.
Give me your hand, Bassanio: I bid you farewell!
Do not grieve and think that this happened because of you.

I consider myself fortunate that as per custom, I shall not live to be an old and miserable man when all my wealth is gone. Fate cuts me off from such punishment and misery. Tell about me to your honourable wife, how Antonio met his end.

Tell her that Bassanio once loved this friend of his.

But do not feel sorry that you lost him because he did not feel sorry that he died because he paid your debt.

If the Jew cuts deep I’ll pay the debt willingly.

**BASSANIO**

Antonio, I am married to a wife
Which is as dear to me as life itself;
But I am ready to sacrifice everything, my life, my wife, and all the world,
and give everything to this devil, to save you.

**PORTIA**

If your wife was here she would thank you little for offering your life for your friend.

**GRATIANO**

I have a wife, whom I love very much:
I wish she was in heaven, so that she could ask some power there to change the mind of this angry Jew.

**NERISSA**

It is good that you make such wish when she is not present. If she heard it there would be great argument and commotion in your house.

**SHYLOCK**

These are Christian husbands. I have a daughter;
I wish that any Jew from Barrabas was her husband than a Christian!

*Aside*

We waste time: I pray, give the sentence.

**PORTIA**

A pound of the merchant's flesh is yours:
The court awards it to you according to the law of Venice.

**SHYLOCK**

Most rightful judge!

**PORTIA**

And you must cut this flesh from off his breast:
The law allows it, and the court awards it.

**SHYLOCK**

Most learned judge! A sentence! Come, prepare!

**PORTIA**

Wait a moment. There is something else.
This bond does not give you a single drop of blood;
The words say clearly - 'a pound of flesh:'
Take your pound of flesh according to the bond
But while cutting the flesh if you shed a single drop of blood of this Christian, by Venetian law, your lands and properties will all be confiscated and transferred to

the state.

**GRATIANO**

O upright judge! Mark, Jew: O learned judge!

**SHYLOCK**

Is that the law?

**PORTIA**

You can check the law.:
For, as you want justice, be assured
that you shall have justice, more than you desire

**GRATIANO**

O learned judge! Mark, Jew: a learned judge!

**SHYLOCK**

I shall take the previous offer of three times the bond money
I shall then let the Christian go.

**BASSANIO**

Here is the money.

**PORTIA**

Gently!
The Jew shall have full justice; there is no hurry

He shall have nothing but the penalty.

**GRATIANO**

O Jew! an upright judge, a learned judge!

**PORTIA**

Therefore prepare to cut off the flesh of Antonio.
Do not shed any blood. You should also not cut more or less.

Just one pound of flesh and nothing else.

If the weight of the flesh cut is off by one hair you will die and all your properties will be confiscated..

**GRATIANO**

A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew!
Now, infidel, I have you on the run.

**PORTIA**

Why does the Jew pause? take the flesh that you have earned

**SHYLOCK**

Give me my principal, and let me go.

**BASSANIO**

I have it ready. here it is.

**PORTIA**

He has refused it in the open court:
He shall have only justice and his bond.

**GRATIANO**

A great judge, I say, a wise judge indeed!
I thank you, Jew, for teaching me that word.

**SHYLOCK**

Can I not have only my principal?

**PORTIA**

You shall have nothing but what you have won,
which you must take very carefully.

**SHYLOCK**

Why, then let him benefit!
I have no more question. I will go.

**PORTIA**

Wait, Jew:

You are not yet free to go.
According to Venetian laws if it can be proved that either directly or indirectly

someone was planning to kill a citizen, then the half of the plotter’s property

and goods will go to the other party; the other half will go to the state.

You plotted against the life of the defendant, and I have told you of the grave

 danger you were putting the defendant into.

Now, you are the guilty one and therefore you should beg mercy of the duke.

**GRATIANO**

Beg for permission to hang yourself.

But as your wealth and property will be forfeited to the state

You will not even have money to buy a rope for hanging.

Therefore, you must be hanged at the state’s expenses.

**DUKE**

You will see the difference in our spirits.

I pardon you and spare your life before you ask for it. I award half of your wealth to Antonio.

Instead of asking you to transfer the other half to the state I shall be kind on you and impose a fine on you.

**PORTIA**

Yes, for the state, not for Antonio.

**SHYLOCK**

No, take my life and all; do not pardon anything.

**PORTIA**

What mercy can you render him, Antonio?

**GRATIANO**

A beating in public with a halter. Nothing else.

**ANTONIO**

My lord and all the court. I am content if the court stops imposing the fine if the first become a Christian and then records a gift that when he dies everything will go to his son Lorenzo and his daughter who married a Christian

**DUKE**

He shall do all this. Otherwise, I will withdraw the pardon.\

**PORTIA**

Art you content Jew? What do you say?

**SHYLOCK**

I am content.

**PORTIA**

Clerk, draw up a deed of gift.

**SHYLOCK**

I pray, give me permission to go from here.
I am not feeling well. Send the deed to my home. I will sign it.

**DUKE**

I give you permission to go. But be sure to sign the deed.

**GRATIANO**

If I had been the judge, I would have sent you to the gallows for hanging not to the font for christening.

*Exit SHYLOCK*

**DUKE**

**(TO Portia)**

Sir, I earnestly request you to join me for dinner at my home.

**PORTIA**

I seek your pardon, your grace. I have to go to Padua tonight.

**DUKE**

I am sorry that you do not have the time.
Antonio, look after this gentleman,
I believe that you owe him much.

*Exeunt Duke and his train*