Merchant of Venice Commentary provides a comprehensive description of every act with explanations and translations for all important quotes.

Merchant of Venice Commentary - Act I.

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Act I. Scene I. - Venice. A Street.

Antonio a wealthy merchant is not happy since he is worried about his enterprises. Antonio's friend Bassanio owes Antonio money but unable to pay his debts, asks Antonio for more money so he may marry the wealthy Portia and so pay back his friend. Antonio has no money but tells Bassanio to use his name to try to get a loan...

The play begins with the picture of one depressed Antonio. Antonio is a wealthy "Merchant of Venice" but he is not happy. His friends Salarino and Salanio suggest he is worried about his ventures or business enterprises. Antonio's wealth comes from the ships he owns and Salarino comments that Antonio is worried for his ships which could easily be at peril from storms or pirates. One of Antonio's friends is Bassanio. Bassanio has a problem; he still owes Antonio a great deal of money and wants to pay it back. He has a plan. If Antonio lends him still more money, he will pursue the very beautiful and wealthy Lady Portia whose "sunny locks / Hang on her temples like a golden fleece;" (Line 170). He suspects she likes him and says, "sometimes from her eyes I did receive fair speechless messages:" (Lines 164-165). Her hand in marriage will give Bassanio the money he needs to pay back Antonio. Antonio agrees, but he has no money, all his wealth is tied up at sea in his ships. He will however help, urging Bassanio to look for moneylenders, adding that his good name will help. "Try what my credit can in Venice do:" Antonio urges (Line 181).

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Act I. Scene II. - Belmont. A Room in Portia's House.

Portia: "I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise."

Portia laments that she has yet to find her special someone. She famously complains about the faults of all her past suitors and her father's will which chooses her husband for her. Portia's father will choose Portia's husband by means of three caskets, one gold, one silver and one lead. A suitor must choose one of the three caskets, a picture of Portia being contained in the correct casket. When a suitor chooses a casket, he makes his worthiness to Portia clear, this devise ensuring that only the right man for Portia will marry his daughter. Though Portia does not like any of her past suitors, she does however, remember one man fondly, Bassanio...
Within a room in Portia's house at Belmont, a tired Portia laments her situation, "By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary [tired] of this great world" (Lines 1-2). She is also tired of her continuous stream of suitors, mocking each in comedic fashion. Nor is she happy about her father's will denying her the right to choose for herself her future husband.

Nerissa tells Portia that her father was wise:

Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations; therefore, the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will, no doubt, never be chosen by any rightly one but one who you shall rightly love. (Lines 30-36)

(Your father was ever virtuous and holy men near their deaths often have good inspirations. Thus the lottery your father has devised whereby a man must choose between three caskets, one gold, one silver and one lead, each proving his true desire, will no doubt ensure that the man you will marry will be the one who you will rightly will love), (Lines 30-36).

Of her "Neapolitan prince", the "County Palatine", "The French lord, Monsieur Le Bon", a young English baron (Falconbridge), "the Scottish lord," and the "young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew", Portia dislikes them all. So far none have taken up the challenge for Portia. To lose is to agree never to marry, nor ever see Portia again. She remembers, Bassanio fondly however: "I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy [my] praise" (Line 130).

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**Act I. Scene III. - Venice. A public Place.**

Bassanio gets his loan of three thousand ducats from a Jewish moneylender named Shylock. The price for not paying the debt back is high, namely a pound of flesh from Antonio, but Antonio is not worried. His ships (and wealth) come back a month before the debt is due...

Back in Venice, Bassanio secures his three thousand ducats from a rich Jewish named Shylock. Shylock hates Antonio and has little love for Bassanio. Antonio tells Shylock to make the terms of the loan those he would give any enemy.

Feigning friendship towards Antonio he agrees to lend the money. However there is a catch; if Bassanio does not repay the debt within the specified two months, Shylock who hates Antonio can by agreement, cut from him a pound of flesh. Antonio is not worried, "My ships come home a month before the day" (Line 183).
**Act II. Scene I.** - Belmont. A Room in Portia's House.

The Prince of Morocco is willing to take the challenge set by Portia's father for Portia's hand in marriage.

Back at Belmont, The Prince of Morocco has sought the fair Portia's hand in marriage. Unlike the previous suitors, he is willing to take his chances for the fair Portia.

**Act II. Scene II.** - Venice. A Street.

Meanwhile, Launcelot Gobbo, Shylock's servant has a problem; he hates his boss. Bassanio arrives and after some conversation, Launcelot becomes Bassanio's new servant.

**Act II. Scene III.** - The Same. A Room in Shylock's House.

Jessica, Shylock's daughter plans to elope with Lorenzo against her father's wishes, were he to know. Jessica reveals her shame for her father...

At Shylock's house, Jessica is planning to leave her father. She tells Launcelot that "Our house is hell, and thou, a merry devil, / Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness" (Line 2).

Jessica also reveals that Launcelot will help her to escape her father Shylock by conveying a letter to Lorenzo, the man Jessica intends to marry by elopement.

She bids Launcelot, Shylock's servant good-bye and privately expresses her shame of her father Shylock and her intention to reject her father and his Jewish religion, to become Lorenzo's wife and a Christian, thereby rejecting all that her father Shylock believes in...

Jessica: "Alack, what heinous sin is it in me / To be asham'd to be my father's child! But though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo! If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, / Become a Christian, and thy loving wife" (Lines 16-20).
Lorenzo: "tell gentle Jessica I will not fail her; speak it privately."

Lorenzo explains to his friends Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino and Salanio, how they will help him help Jessica run away from her father. Launcelot, Shylock's former servant delivers to Lorenzo a letter from Jessica explaining that Jessica will be waiting at her house for Lorenzo and friends and that she has taken some of her father's jewels and gold as well. The letter also explains that Jessica will be disguised as a boy to aid her escape from her father...

Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino and Salanio enter, Lorenzo telling his friends what preparations are required of them for their plan to help Jessica escape Shylock to be with him.

Lorenzo explains that they will help Jessica escape by disguising themselves, returning in an hour (Lines 1-3). Salarino makes reference to torch-bearers being needed so Bassanio's party, a masque (masked ball) to be held that night will be well lit.

Lorenzo explains that they have much to do adding that is now "four o'clock:" and they have just two hours left...

Launcelot enters, bearing a letter. Lorenzo reveals to Gratiano that the letter comes from Jessica and tells them how they will proceed...

Thanking Launcelot for conveying the letter, Lorenzo tells Launcelot to return to Jessica and to "tell gentle Jessica I will not fail her;" telling Launcelot to tell Jessica this privately (Lines 20-21).

Jessica in her letter has told Lorenzo how he will take Jessica from her father Shylock's house, Jessica explaining that she will be bringing some of Shylock's jewels and gold with her.

This "dowry" of sorts will help Lorenzo and Jessica once they have eloped and are married. She also explains that she has a "page's suit" (Line 33) or the uniform of a male page ready which she will wear to disguise herself as a boy.

Lorenzo speaks glowingly of his future bride by saying, "If e'er [ever] the Jew her father [Shylock] come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter's [Jessica's] sake;" (Line 34).

Lorenzo now tells Gratiano that it is Jessica who "shall be my torch-bearer", a metaphor for her love always guiding him (Line 39).
Act II. Scene V. - The Same. Before Shylock's House.

Shylock bumps into Launcelot, learning that the Bassanio's party which he will be reluctantly attending, will be a masque. Shylock tells his daughter Jessica to stay at home and to do her best to ignore the Christians' revelry which Shylock despises.

Before his house, Shylock happens upon Launcelot who is returning Lorenzo's message to Jessica that Lorenzo will soon come for her. Shylock makes his lack of love clear to Launcelot for working for Lorenzo by telling him "thou [you] shalt not gormandize, / As thou hast done with me;" and to "sleep and snore," as he has done to Shylock (Line 3).

Shylock now announces that he is leaving for supper, to go to Bassanio's party where Shylock intends to "go in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian" by using his hospitality out of spite (Line 14). Shylock reveals that he does not feel right, that "There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest, / For I did dream of money-bags to-night" (Line 17).

Launcelot now scares Shylock by telling him that Bassanio and friends have decided to make Bassanio's party a masque or a masked ball.

This terrifies Shylock who tells Jessica to "Lock up my doors;" and to not "thrust your head into the public street / To gaze on Christian fools with varnish'd [the masks] faces, / But stop my house's ears," so as to prevent the sounds of these Christian activities from penetrating into his house or as Shylock describes it, "the sound of shallow foppery enter / My sober house" (Lines 32-34 and Line 35).

Shylock explains to Launcelot that he will go to the party despite his misgivings, Launcelot then exiting (Before Line 44).

Shylock now remarks that his former servant Launcelot "sleeps by day / More than the wild cat:" (Line 47), reminding Jessica again to "Do as I bid [tell] you; shut doors after you: fast bind, / 'Fast bind, fast find,' / A proverb never stale in thrifty mind" (Lines 53-54).

Jessica who now is conveniently alone where she can make her escape, ends the scene, bidding her father farewell, "Farewell; and if my fortune be not crost, I have a father, you a daughter, lost" (Lines 55-56).
Jessica escapes from her father's house to live a new life as a Christian and the wife of Lorenzo. Jessica is embarrassed to be dressed as a boy. The masque is canceled and Lorenzo and Jessica are to sail with Bassanio instead of attending the masque...

Gratiano and Salarino, described as "masqued" or masked in the text, are waiting anxiously for Lorenzo at the "penthouse under which Lorenzo / Desir'd [desired / wanted] us to make stand" or under the extended (overhanging) roof of Shylock's house (Line 1).

They are surprised that Lorenzo is not already there waiting for them for as Gratiano comments, "lovers ever [always] run before the clock" (Line 4) or are usually extremely punctual. Salarino agrees and Lorenzo now enters (Line 21), thanking his friends for their patience and explaining that "my affairs," have made them wait (Line 22).

Asking who is within Shylock's house, Lorenzo discovers that it is his beloved Jessica, dressed in boy's clothes who is waiting for them from above. Jessica asks who Lorenzo is, Lorenzo replying: "Lorenzo, and thy [your] love" (Line 28).

Jessica now tosses down a casket to Lorenzo and company, explaining that its contents (Shylock's jewels and gold) are "worth the pains" or the trouble of receiving it (Line 33).

Jessica now makes it clear that she is reluctant to be seen in boy's clothes, saying that she is glad it is night, "For I am much asham'd [ashamed / embarrassed] of my exchange [into a man];" (Line 35), famously adding "But love is blind, and lovers cannot see / The pretty follies [silly things] that themselves commit [do]; / For if they could, Cupid himself would blush / To see me thus transformed to a boy" (Lines 36-39).

Lorenzo now tells Jessica to descend or climb down to him, asking Jessica to be his "torch-bearer" (Line 40). Jessica is not so happy about this, asking why she must "hold a candle [a torch] to my shames?" a reference again to her wearing men's clothes (Line 41).

In Jessica's opinion, her appearance "should be obscur'd" (Line 43) or covered from sight and she makes it quite clear that she is reluctant to be seen this way at Bassanio's masque.

Lorenzo however makes it clear he does not mind and that she will be his "torch-bearer" at Bassanio's party, which they will soon go to.
Before leaving, Jessica says that she will "make fast the doors," or lock Shylock's house as her father requested and then take some more ducats (money) and return to Lorenzo immediately (Line 49).

Lorenzo now reaffirms his love for Jessica by saying, "I love her heartily;" (Line 52) adding that "she is wise," as well as "fair, and true" and so "Shall she be placed in my constant soul" (Line 57).

Jessica returns and we learn from Antonio that the masque has been canceled, the wind has changed direction and that Bassanio and his men will sail tonight; they have sent twenty men to tell Lorenzo this. Gratiano makes it clear that he is happier to be sailing than at a masque.

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**Act II. Scene VII. - Belmont. A Room in Portia's House.**

The scroll within the gold casket: "All that glitters is not gold; / Often have you heard that told...."

**The Moroccan Prince undergoes the three-casket challenge for Portia's hand in marriage, choosing the gold casket and losing.**

Back at Belmont, The Moroccan Prince chooses the gold casket. It's inscription says: "Who chooseth [chooses] me shall gain what many men desire" (Lines 5-6).

The second, a silver casket bears the inscription, "Who chooseth (chooses) me shall get as much as he deserves" (Line 6).

The third casket is lead, bearing the inscription, "Who chooseth [chooses] me must give and hazard [risk] all he hath [has]" (Lines 8-9).

We are told the right casket bears Portia's picture. The Prince chooses the gold casket and finds "a carrion Death, within whose empty eye / There is a written scroll" (Line 63).

The scroll famously says "All that glitters is not gold; / Often have you heard that told:" (Lines 65-73).

In choosing the wrong casket, the Prince has failed and must now depart empty handed, never to see Portia again nor ever marry...
Salario and Salanio comment that a ship has recently floundered, hoping it is not one of Antonio's. We learn that Lorenzo and Jessica escaped successfully from Shylock who was too late to prevent his daughter's escape. Shylock is furious at having lost his daughter, his gold and his precious jewels to a Christian and knows that Antonio was partially involved and swears revenge...

Meanwhile, back in Venice, Salarino and Salanio, friends of Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano and Jessica, comment on news of a ship floundering "in the narrow seas that part / The French and English," (Line 28).

They hope it isn't one of Antonio's ships. We also learn of Jessica and Gratiano's escape; Shylock (Jessica's father) attempted to find Jessica on Bassanio's ship but "He came too late, the ship was under sail." (Line 6).

Antonio pledges to the Duke that, "They were not with Bassanio in his ship" (Line 11). We also learn of Shylock's immense anger at the loss of his daughter and her theft of his ducats: "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!" (Line 16).

Salario ends this scene, commenting that Bassanio has now departed for Belmont to woo the fair Portia:

I saw Bassanio and Antonio part: / Bassanio told him he would make some speed / Of his return: he answered 'Do not so; / Slubber [slur over, soil, ruin] not business for my sake, Bassanio, / But stay the very riping of the time; / And for the Jew's bond which he hath [has] of me, / Let it not enter in your mind of love: (Lines 36-45).
The scroll inside the silver casket: "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves."

Meanwhile, at Belmont, another suitor has arrived, The Prince of Arragon. Not blinded by the inscription on the gold casket which bears the phrase, "Who chooseth [chooses] me shall gain what many men desire" (Line 24), he instead chooses the silver casket which bears the inscription, "Who chooseth [chooses] me shall get as much as he deserves" (Line 21) since he believes that what many men desire is superficial, the Prince realizing that those men who would choose the gold casket are being led by appearances and nothing more (Line 50).

Opening the silver casket, he finds a "portrait of a blinking idiot," (Line 54), mocking him and presenting a schedule or letter to him which he reads (Lines 64-72), and realizing he has lost, The Prince of Arragon heads home in failure.
Merchant of Venice Commentary - Act III.

Act III. Scene I. - Venice. A Street.

Shylock: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

Shylock makes it clear that he no longer wants repayment of Bassanio's debt of three thousand ducats. He would prefer his pound of flesh from Antonio instead since he now sees Antonio as the source of all his miseries and reaffirms his desire to make Antonio pay for this...

Back in Venice, we learn that Shylock will no longer accept money; Shylock resents Antonio's persistent mocking of him because as he says, "I am a Jew." He earlier mentions that Antonio has "disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends," (Lines 58-61) and "heated mine enemies;" (Lines 61-62).

Famously, Shylock points out that in being human like Antonio, who feels, thinks and acts the same way, he deserves better:

Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same water and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? (Lines 63-72)

Shylock ominously adds that in seeking revenge, he will simply be following what in his own eyes, he sees as Christian custom, "If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (Lines 73-78).

From Shylock's friend Tubul, the loss of Antonio's ship is confirmed. Shylock is delighted, "I am very glad of it: I'll plague him; I'll torture him: I am glad of it" (Lines 124-125).
Act III. Scene II. - Belmont. A Room in Portia’s House.

Bassanio arrives to court Portia who is reluctant to never see Bassanio again if he fails the casket challenge. Bassanio takes the challenge, choosing correctly. Bassanio will therefore marry Portia and it is revealed Gratiano has fallen in love with Nerissa, Portia’s maid and so another marriage will also occur. We learn from Salanio that Antonio has forfeited his debt to Shylock and now stands to lose a pound of his flesh and with it his life for helping his friend Bassanio. Portia enthusiastically offers to pay Shylock Bassanio’s death twelvefold to avert this...

Back in Belmont, Bassanio arrives to pursue Lady Portia. Portia is delighted and scared; she fears she will never see Bassanio again if he chooses the wrong casket (the gold or silver caskets) and pleads with him to delay his attempt. Bassanio however cannot wait.

Shunning the materialistic, Bassanio ignores the gold and silver caskets instead choosing the one made of lead which bears the inscription, "Who chooseth [chooses] me must give and hazard [risk] all he hath [has]:" (Act II, Scene IX, Line 21).

Bassanio finds in it Portia’s portrait and realizes he has won the fair Portia. Overjoyed, Bassanio and Portia learn that Bassanio’s friend Gratiano has also fallen in love with Portia’s maid, Nerissa.

Marriage plans are made at once but then we learn by letter from Salanio that Antonio has forfeited the debt and Shylock will kill him when he extracts his pound of flesh.

It appears Antonio has lost all his ships at sea and so avoiding forfeiting the debt is now impossible. Portia learning this and no doubt aware that Antonio’s actions allowed Bassanio to court her, beseeches Bassanio to save his friend with money she provides, telling Bassanio: "Pay him [Shylock] six thousand, and deface the bond; / Double six thousand, and then treble that, / Before a friend of this description / Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault" (Lines 300-303).

Act III. Scene III. - Venice. A Street.

Antonio pleads to let him pay back Bassanio’s debt but Shylock wants Antonio’s pound of flesh and therefore his death instead...

Out on the streets but accompanied now by a "gaoler," or a jailer, Antonio tries to plead with Shylock not to demand the bond. Shylock will not listen, saying: "I'll have my bond; speak not against my bond:" (Lines 3-4).
Antonio realizes Shylock will not be reasoned with, commenting that "I'll follow him no more with bootless [useless] prayers. He seeks my life; his reason well I know" (Lines 20-21).

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**Act III. Scene IV. - Belmont. A Room in Portia’s House.**

*Portia and Nerissa leave Belmont on a secret mission to save Antonio...*

Within a room of Portia’s home at Belmont, Portia instructs Jessica and Lorenzo to mind her house; she and Nerissa intend on praying at the monastery which is "two miles off," (Line 31).

Portia tells Jessica and Lorenzo not to tell anyone. With Jessica and Lorenzo gone, she instructs Balthazar, her messenger to deliver a letter "In speed" (Line 49) to Padua, to be placed into the hands of her cousin, a Doctor Bellario and to deliver the "notes and garments he [Doctor Bellario] doth give thee, [to Balthazar]" and deliver them "with imagin’d speed / Unto the traject, to the common ferry / Which trades to Venice" (Line 53).

She implores Balthazar to waste no time, "Waste no time in words, / But get thee gone: I shall be there before thee [you]" (Line 54). Portia tells her maid Nerissa to join her for as Portia says "I have work in hand / That you yet know not of: we'll see our husbands / Before they think of us" (I have work to do that you Nerissa do not yet know about. We'll see our husbands before they even begin to think of us), (Line 57).

Portia tells Nerissa that their husbands will indeed see them "but in such a habit / That they shall think we are accomplished / With that we lack", (Lines 61-62) a reference to the two girls looking so much like men that their own husbands will think they are men.

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**Act III. Scene V. - The Same. A Garden.**

Within a garden at Portia’s house, Launcelot believes Jessica to be damned telling her to "hope that your father got you not, that you are not the Jew's daughter" (Lines 11-12).

Jessica replies that "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath [has] made me a Christian" (Lines 20-21). Lorenzo arrives, engaging Launcelot in witty banter.
The Duke of Venice attempts to convince Shylock to let Antonio pay back Bassanio’s debt. Shylock refuses, threatening the Duke that if he ignores their agreement, Venice will lose credibility as a place for merchants...

Portia, disguised now as a man, defends Antonio, winning his life, through the technicality defense that Shylock can take only a pound of flesh and no more, a clearly impossible task. Furthermore she argues that Shylock has conspired to murder, an offense that is punishable by asset confiscation and death in Venice. A compromise is reached whereby Shylock must become Christian and give half his assets to Jessica when he dies.

Back in Venice, things don’t look good for Antonio. He has forfeited the debt and Shylock wants justice. Shylock is unlikely to show mercy easily, the Duke commenting that Shylock is "A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch / Uncapable of pity, void and empty / From any dram of mercy" (Lines 4-6).

The Duke attempts to appeal to Shylock's sense of "human gentleness and love," (Line 25). Shylock, however will have none of it; he wants his justice and he wants it delivered by the court, reminding the Duke that "If you deny it [Shylock's pound of flesh from Antonio], let the danger light / Upon your charter and your city's freedom" (Lines 38-39).

Shylock explains that he would rather have, "A weight of carrion flesh than to receive / Three thousand ducats:" (Lines 41-42).

To the Duke questioning his motives for the pound of flesh, Shylock explains that he can offer no reason other than "a certain loathing I bear Antonio, that I follow thus / A losing suit [for Antonio] against him" (Lines 60-62).

Bassanio pledges six thousand ducats for his friend, "For thy [your] three thousand ducats here is six" (Lines 83-84). Shylock will not be deterred from his revenge: "If every ducat in six thousand ducats / Were in six parts and every part a ducat, I would not draw them; I would have my bond" (Lines 85-87).

The Duke intercedes asking, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?" (Lines 87-88). Shylock replies that since the Duke and court all have slaves with which they can do as they please, so too, can Shylock of Antonio, since his right to him, like that of using slaves has been "dearly bought;" (Line 100).
Shylock reminds the Duke of his obligation to uphold the law commenting that, "If you deny me, fie upon your law! There is no force in the decrees of Venice. I stand for judgement: answer; shall I have it?" (Lines 101-103).

Seeing no other way to stall time, the Duke replies that, "Upon my power I may dismiss this court, / Unless Bellario, a learned doctor, / Whom I have sent for to determine this, / Come here [arrives] to-day" (Lines 103-107).

The Duke is brought a letter from the eminent and well regarded Dr Bellario. It explains that he cannot make it, but that instead, he will send a very learned colleague of his in his place. Nerissa, disguised as Portia's clerk, arrives, "dressed like a lawyer's clerk." Portia later arrives "dressed like a doctor of laws."

The Duke asks Portia if she is familiar with the nature of the dispute. She answers that she is. She claims that Shylock must be merciful, claiming that the quality of mercy is "twice bless'd; / It blesseth him that gives and him that takes." (Lines 186-187). Shylock disagrees, demanding his justice.

When Bassanio pledges twice the sum owed, Portia explains that "There is no power in Venice / Can alter a decree established:" adding that this case will form a precedent (Line 218). Portia explains that since the bond is forfeit, "the Jew may claim / A pound of flesh, to be by him cut off / Nearest the merchant's heart" (Line 231).

This shocking advise by Portia (still disguised as a man) overjoys Shylock no end and Portia implores Shylock to be merciful and take "thrice [three times] thy money offer'd thee [to you]" (Line 226). Shylock will not and demands a verdict. Portia implores Shylock to have a surgeon on hand to stop the bleeding.

Shylock replies that it is not in the contract. Says Shylock, "I cannot find it [the surgeon provision]:‘tis [it is] not in the bond" (Line 263).

Antonio resigns himself to the worse (Portia, the doctor of laws appears to have just taken Shylock's side) and Bassanio explains that he would be happy to lose his wife: "I would lose them all, ay, sacrifice them all, / Here to this devil [Shylock], to deliver you" (Lines 287-288).

Portia comically replies, "Your wife would give you little thanks for that, / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (Lines 289-290).

Gratiano makes a similar statement to which his wife the disguised Nerissa replies, "'Tis well you offer it behind her [Nerissa's] back; / The wish would make else an unquiet house" (it is just as well you make this offer behind her back. If she knew of it, there would be no end of trouble), (Line 294).
Portia makes her judgment. Since the "bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;" (the bond gives you no right to blood), the words only refer to the flesh, Shylock may have his pound of flesh if he draws no blood (Line 307).

This is impossible. Shylock cannot have his bond.

Secondly, as Portia explains, it is an offense to take the life of any citizen of Venice directly or indirectly. The demand for the pound of flesh qualifies.

As such, the state can have half Shylock's assets, the other half going to the citizen in question and Shylock may be hanged at the Duke's discretion or will...

A compromise is however reached. Antonio suggests that Shylock not lose half his assets to the state, and that the other half of his assets should be given to his daughter upon his death. Shylock is spared death and must become a Christian, a verdict all involved can live with.

The scene ends with a grateful Antonio and Bassanio. The Duke asks Portia to have dinner with him but Portia politely turns the Duke down, saying she must leave Padua tonight (Lines 402-405). Similarly, Portia politely refuses Bassanio's offer of "Three thousand ducats," which was the sum originally due to Shylock (Line 412).

Bassanio politely insists that Portia whom he does not recognize take some gift from them in remembrance and appreciation. She insists on his wedding ring. He refuses, he was told by his wife never to surrender it following his marriage.

"Good sir, this ring was given me by my wife; / And, when she put it on, she made me vow / That I should never sell nor give nor lose it" Bassanio explains (Line 443). However Antonio later talks Bassanio into giving away the ring. This he does, giving it to Gratiano to give to Portia.

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**Act IV. Scene II. - The Same. A Street.**

Portia ensures that Shylock will sign a deed making the verdict binding. Gratiano meets Portia and gives her Bassanio's ring.

Nerissa tells Portia that she too will get the ring of her husband (Line 13). Portia decides to make both men regret their rash action (giving away their rings), (Line 16).
Portia: "I'll not deny him anything I have; No, not my body, nor my husband's bed."

Portia and Nerissa arrive back at Belmont before Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano and their followers, all whom are unaware that it was Portia and Nerissa who defended them in Venice. Nerissa and then Portia scold their husbands for giving away their wedding rings, an important symbol of their love and fidelity to their two wives. Much comedy ensues as the two men attempt to make excuses for this. Portia ends Bassanio's and Gratiano's suffering by producing a letter which explains their role in Venice. The two men are embarrassed that they could not even recognize their own wives...

Lorenzo and Jessica exchange sweet nothings. Stephano, a messenger arrives, bidding news that Portia will soon be back at Belmont.

Portia and Nerissa arrive at Belmont and shortly after, arrive Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano and their followers. Bassanio introduces his friend Antonio to his wife, Portia. He describes him as a man, "To whom I am so infinitely bound" (Line 134). Portia replies that "You should in all sense be much bound to him, / For as I hear, he was much bound for you" (Line 136).

We hear Gratiano pleading with his wife that he gave his ring to the "judge's clerk:" (Line 143). Nerissa replies that "You swore to me, when I did give it to you, / That you would wear it till your honour of death," (Line 152).

She does not believe Gratiano's excuse, fearing it now belongs to another women, cheekily adding since that clerk was her, that "The clerk will ne'er [never] wear hair on's a face that had it." Given that the clerk was of course Nerissa, this statement is both comedic and ironic in nature.

Portia now takes Nerissa's side and Bassanio in an aside (a speech sharing his innermost thoughts with the audience but not other characters) thinks up an excuse: "Why I were best to cut my left hand off, / And swear I lost the ring defending it" (Line 177).

Gratiano drops Bassanio into the mess, telling everyone that Bassanio gave his ring to the judge "that begg'd it," adding that the clerk (Nerissa in disguise) demanded his ring too (Lines 180-183).

Portia asks Bassanio if this is true. Sheepishly, he confirms it. He tries to defend himself with little success (Lines 192-221).
Portia tells him that as holder of her ring, should the judge ever come by her house she will not deny him anything she has (Lines 224-233), including, ominously for Bassanio, her body: "I'll not deny him [the holder of the ring] anything I have; / No, not my body, nor my husband's bed" (Lines 227-228), warning Bassanio to never let her out of his sight.

Bassanio, now quite scared of losing his wife forever, pleads that he will never again break an oath again to his wife: "Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear I never more will break an oath with thee [you]" (Line 247). Greatly disturbed by all this, Antonio nobly steps in offering his soul upon forfeit should his friend break his promise.

Satisfied, Portia gives Antonio her ring telling him to make sure Bassanio takes better care of it this time. Bassanio is amazed to see the same ring. Portia teasing Bassanio says, "by this ring, the doctor lay with me" (lay meaning made love), (Line 259).

Nerissa adds that the doctor's clerk lay with her. Gratiano is not impressed (Line 265). To clear the air and end the two men's torment, Portia produces a letter.

It explains her role in the court case (Lines 266-279). Antonio is dumbstruck, "I am dumb" he says and the two husbands are left to ponder the fact that they could not even recognize their own wives.