

The Merchant of Venice

Cast

<i>Portia</i>	<i>Hadyn Gwynne</i>
<i>Shylock</i>	<i>Trevor Peacock</i>
<i>Bassanio</i>	<i>Julian Rhind-Tutt</i>
<i>Antonio</i>	<i>Bill Nighy</i>
<i>Gratiano</i>	<i>Will Keen</i>
<i>Lorenzo</i>	<i>Matthew Delamere</i>
<i>Jessica</i>	<i>Sarah-Jane Holm</i>
<i>Nerissa</i>	<i>Alison Reid</i>
<i>Launcelot Gobbo</i>	<i>David Tennant</i>
<i>The Duke</i>	<i>Geoffrey Whitehead</i>
<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Colin Salmon</i>
<i>Arragon</i>	<i>Robert Morgan</i>
<i>Old Gobbo</i>	<i>Ronald Herdman</i>
<i>Salerio</i>	<i>Jonathan Tafler</i>
<i>Solanio</i>	<i>Nicholas Murchie</i>

Play description

ACT I

Scene 1. Antonio is a rich merchant in Venice; ships bearing his goods sail round the world. Antonio's friend Bassanio has fallen in love with Portia, a wealthy and beautiful young woman dwelling in Belmont, but lacks the means to woo her in appropriate style; he asks Antonio for help. Antonio's fortune is all with his ships at sea, but he vows to borrow whatever sums Bassanio may require in order to help his friend.

Scene 2. In Belmont, Portia complains to her maid Nerissa that she has not been left free to choose her husband for herself. Her dead father has devised a test consisting of three caskets made of gold, silver, and lead; only the suitor who chooses the right casket may marry Portia.

Scene 3. Bassanio has gone to Shylock, a wealthy Jew, to borrow money on Antonio's credit. Shylock is deeply hostile to Antonio, who makes no attempt to hide the contempt he feels for him.

Nonetheless, Shylock is prepared to lend his enemy the sum required on condition that, if the money is not repaid when it is due, Shylock will have the right to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's body.

Bassanio is horrified, but Antonio accepts the condition, confident that his ships will have returned in time.

ACT II

Scene 1. The Prince of Morocco has arrived in Belmont to woo Portia. She tells him that he must submit to the trial of the caskets.

Scene 2. Shylock's servant Launcelot has decided to run away from his master. He meets his old father in the street and teases him. Bassanio enters and Launcelot begs to be taken into his service; Bassanio agrees. Bassanio's garrulous friend Gratiano also has a request: he wishes to accompany Bassanio to Belmont.

Scene 3. Shylock's beautiful daughter Jessica gives Launcelot a letter to deliver to Lorenzo, a young friend of Bassanio's, who has promised to marry her.

Scene 4. Launcelot gives Lorenzo Jessica's letter. She has agreed to steal away from her father's house bringing gold and jewels with her.

Scene 5. Shylock has been asked to supper at Bassanio's house. He bids Jessica keep his goods safe while he is absent.

Scene 6. Lorenzo and Gratiano appear before Shylock's house and call to Jessica, who leaves with them, disguised as a page and bearing a casket of money and gems. They learn that Bassanio is to set sail for Belmont immediately.

Scene 7. In Belmont, the time has come for the Prince of Morocco to make his choice between the three caskets. If he chooses correctly, he will find Portia's portrait within. The Prince chooses the golden casket, which contains a skull.

Scene 8. Shylock is furious that his daughter has fled taking his money with her.

Scene 9. Another suitor, the Prince of Arragon, is undergoing the trial of the caskets; he chooses the silver, which contains the portrait of an idiot. After he has gone, a messenger reports the arrival of Bassanio.

ACT III

Scene 1. News reaches Venice that Antonio's ships have been wrecked at sea. This pleases Shylock, but at the same time he is agonized to hear that Jessica is making free with his wealth.

Scene 2. Portia has fallen in love with Bassanio and begs him to delay his trial lest he fail like the others. Bassanio insists, and, refusing to judge by outward appearances, chooses the leaden casket. This contains Portia's picture, and the two joyfully plight their troth. Gratiano then announces that he and Nerissa also wish to marry. Amid the happiness, Lorenzo and Jessica arrive from Venice with disturbing news: Antonio's wealth has been lost and his debt to Shylock is due. Instantly, Bassanio departs for Venice to help his friend.

Scene 3. Rejecting all appeals for mercy, Shylock insists on the strict terms of his 'bond.'

Scene 4. Leaving Lorenzo in charge of her house in Belmont, Portia determines that she and Nerissa, disguising themselves as young men, will make their way to Venice.

Scene 5. Jessica and Lorenzo jest with Launcelot.

ACT IV

Scene 1. In a Venetian courtroom Shylock has come to demand the payment of his 'bond;' rejecting Bassanio's offer to repay the borrowed money, he insists on exacting the grisly penalty. News comes that a young lawyer, 'Balthasar,' has arrived with his clerk prepared to argue the case—the lawyer and clerk are Portia and Nerissa in disguise. Portia urges Shylock to show mercy, but he refuses and she admits that the law does indeed allow his claim to a pound of Antonio's flesh. Shylock rejoices but at his moment of triumph, Portia points out that, though the law will allow Shylock his pound of flesh, he must not shed one drop of Antonio's blood. Shylock has been foiled; for seeking Antonio's death half of his wealth is forfeited to the merchant and he must agree to make Jessica and Lorenzo his heirs. In return for having saved Antonio's life, 'Balthasar' asks only for the ring Bassanio wears on his finger. Embarrassed, Bassanio refuses—he had the ring from his wife and has promised never to part with it. 'Balthasar' leaves and, at Antonio's urging, Bassanio sends Gratiano to deliver the ring to him.

Scene 2. Still in their male disguise, Portia and Nerissa are met by Gratiano, who delivers Bassanio's ring. Nerissa plots to get from Gratiano a ring she has given to him and that he, like Bassanio, has sworn he will keep forever.

ACT V

Scene 1. In Belmont, Lorenzo and Jessica await Portia's return. News comes of their arrival, shortly followed by Bassanio and Gratiano, who have brought Antonio with them. Nerissa rebukes Gratiano for giving up his ring, and Bassanio has to admit that he, too, has given his away. Mock-angrily, Portia and Nerissa vow to sleep with the young men who have their husbands' rings. Begged by Antonio to forgive her husband, Portia gives Bassanio another ring; this is the same that he had given 'Balthasar.' The secret of Portia's disguise is revealed and all ends happily.

Track list

Disc 1

Track 1	Act I	Scene i
Track 2	Act I	Scene ii
Track 3	Act I	Scene iii
Track 4	Act II	Scene i
Track 5	Act II	Scene ii
Track 6	Act II	Scene iii
Track 7	Act II	Scene iv
Track 8	Act II	Scene v
Track 9	Act II	Scene vi
Track 10	Act II	Scene vii
Track 11	Act II	Scene viii
Track 12	Act II	Scene ix
Track 13	Act III	Scene i

Disk 2

Track 1	Act III	Scene ii
Track 2	Act III	Scene iii
Track 3	Act III	Scene iv
Track 4	Act III	Scene v
Track 5	Act IV	Scene i
Track 6	Act IV	Scene ii
Track 7	Act V	Scene i