

The Association of English Medium Secondary Schools

2025 English Drama Fest

Shakespearean Category

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE (*Act V scene i*)

Characters on stage: Lorenzo, Jessica, Portia, Nerissa, Bassanio, Gratiano, Antonio
(and followers)

PORTIA: What, are you having a lovers' argument already? What's the matter?

GRATIANO: It's an argument over a ring of gold, a little ring she gave me with some writing carved on it. The engraving said "Love me and don't leave me."

NERISSA: Why are you talking about the inscription or the value of the ring? You swore to me when I gave it to you that you would wear it until you died, and that it would lie in your grave with you. You should have kept it and at least respected me, if not your promises. You gave it to a judge's clerk! No, as God is my witness, I bet whoever you gave it to doesn't have a beard.

GRATIANO: He will have one, if he lives long enough to grow into a man.

NERISSA: Yes, if a woman can grow a beard.

GRATIANO: I swear on my life that I gave it to a young man, a boy, a little boy no taller than you, the judge's clerk, a chatty boy who begged for it as payment. I simply couldn't deny him the ring.

PORTIA: I have to say, you are to blame for so easily giving away your wife's first gift to you, something stuck on your finger with promises and given in good faith. I also gave my husband a ring and made him swear never to lose it. And here he stands. I'm sure I can swear on his behalf that he would not take it off his finger or ever give it away for all the money in the world. Now, really, Gratiano, you are to blame for causing your wife grief. If I were in her place, I'd be so angry about it.

BASSANIO: [*To himself*] It would be best if I had cut off my left hand so I could swear I lost the ring trying to defend my hand.

GRATIANO: Bassanio gave his ring away to the judge that begged!! Indeed, the judge deserved it. And then the boy, the judge's clerk, who went through a lot of trouble writing things, begged for my ring. Neither the judge nor his clerk would take anything but the two rings.

PORTIA: What ring did you give him, my lord? Surely not....I sincerely hope not the one you got from me?

BASSANIO: If I were able to cover up my mistake with a lie, I'd deny it, but you can see that my finger doesn't have the ring on it. It is gone.

PORTIA: Your false heart lacks truth just like your finger lacks the ring. By heaven, I will never sleep with you until I see the ring.

NERISSA: [*To GRATIANO*] And I will never share your bed until I see my ring again.

BASSANIO: Sweet Portia, if you knew to whom and for whom and for what reason I gave the ring, and if you knew how unwillingly I parted with it when the man would accept nothing else except the ring, you wouldn't be so upset.

PORTIA: If you had known the value of the ring, or if you had realized half the worth of the woman who gave it to you, or if you had thought about your own honor in keeping the ring, then you would not have given the ring away. What kind of unreasonable man would have demanded it as a gift if you had strongly rejected giving it? I will follow Nerissa's example. I'll bet my life that you gave it to a woman.

BASSANIO: No, I swear by my soul, I didn't give it to a woman. I gave it to a lawyer. He refused my offer of 3,000 ducats and begged for the ring, which I refused to give him. I even let him go away feeling unappreciated. He is the one who saved my dear friend's life. What can I say, sweet wife? I was compelled to send the ring after him. I felt compelled by shame and courtesy. My honor would not let me show ingratitude to the man. Forgive me, good lady. I swear by these stars that if you were there, you yourself would have begged me to give the ring to the worthy lawyer.

PORTIA: I hope that lawyer never comes near my house! Since he got the ring which I treasure and that you swore to keep, I will become as generous as you. If he comes here, I won't deny him anything I have. Not even my body or my marriage bed. You'd better not spend a single night away from home so you can watch me carefully. If you leave me alone, I swear by my honour that I'll sleep with that lawyer.

NERISSA: [*To GRATIANO*] And I'll sleep with his clerk. So be very careful about ever leaving me on my own.

GRATIANO: Well, don't let me catch him. If that happens, I'll break his -

ANTONIO: Oh dear, all this unhappy argument is because of me.

PORTIA: Sir, don't worry. You are welcome here regardless.

BASSANIO: Portia, forgive me for this mistake that I was forced into. In front of our friends, I swear to you by your own beautiful eyes in which I can see my image—

PORTIA: Listen to him! In both my eyes he sees two images of himself, one in each eye. If you swear by your 'double self', then that is certainly not a serious promise!

BASSANIO: Listen to me. Please excuse me for this mistake and by my soul I swear I will never break another promise to you.

ANTONIO: Recently, I put my body in danger to borrow money for him, and that arrangement would have killed me if it wasn't for the man who now has your husband's ring. I dare to risk something again: I'll bet my soul that your husband will never again break a promise to you.

PORTIA: [*handing ANTONIO a ring*] Then you will vouch for him. Give him this ring, and tell him to hold onto it better than the last one.

ANTONIO: [*Gives the ring to BASSANIO*] Here, Bassanio. Swear that you will keep this ring.

BASSANIO: OMG! This is the same ring I gave to the lawyer!

PORTIA: He gave it to me. Forgive me, Bassanio, because I slept with the lawyer to get the ring back.

NERISSA: [*Handing GRATIANO a ring*] And forgive me, my gentle husband, because I slept with the lawyer's clerk, in return for this ring.

GRATIANO: We've been cheated on in revenge even though we did nothing

wrong.

PORTIA: You are all shocked.

[She takes out a letter] Here is a letter. It is from Bellario in Padua. In his letter you will learn that Portia was the lawyer and Nerissa was her clerk. Lorenzo will testify that I left here when you did and just got back now, from Venice.

Antonio, you are welcome here. And I have even better news for you than you could ever expect.

[Handing Antonio another letter] Read this letter and you will learn that your three ships suddenly returned to harbour full of riches.

ANTONIO: I am lost for words.

BASSANIO: *[To PORTIA]* Were you really the lawyer and I didn't recognize you?

GRATIANO: *[To NERISSA]* Were you really the clerk that supposedly slept with my wife?

NERISSA: Yes, but the clerk will never sleep with your wife unless he becomes a man.

BASSANIO: *[To PORTIA]* Sweet lawyer, you will share my bed tonight.

ANTONIO: Sweet lady, you have given me life and a living. I read here for certain that my ships have safely returned.

PORTIA: And you Lorenzo....my 'clerk' has some good news for you too.

NERISSA: Yes, here it is. *[Gives LORENZO a document]* I am giving you and Jessica a will from the rich Shylock. After he dies, you will inherit all that he owes.

LORENZO: Fair ladies, it is as if you are giving blessed bread to starving people.

PORTIA: It is almost morning, so let's go inside where you can ask us more questions, and we will answer them honestly.

GRATIANO: Yes, let's do that. The first question that my Nerissa will have to answer is whether she would like to go to bed now, since it's daylight in two hours! Well, as long as I live, I'll always worry about keeping Nerissa's ring safe.

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