

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: A quarrel, ho, already! What's the matter?

GRATIANO: About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring
That she did give me, whose posy was
For all the world like cutlers' poetry
Upon a knife, "Love me, and leave me not."

NERISSA: What talk you of the posy, or the value?
You swore to me when I did give it you,
That you would wear it till your hour of death,
And that it should lie with you in your grave.
Though not for me, yet for your vehement oaths,
You should have been respective and have kept it.
Gave it a judge's clerk! No, God's my judge,
The clerk will ne'er wear hair on's face that had it.

GRATIANO: He will, and if he live to be a man.

NERISSA: Ay, if a woman live to be a man.

GRATIANO: Now, by this hand, I gave it to a youth,
A kind of boy, a little scrubbed boy,
No higher than thyself, the judge's clerk,
A prating boy that begg'd it as a fee,
I could not for my heart deny it him.

PORTIA: You were to blame,—I must be plain with you,—
To part so slightly with your wife's first gift,
A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger,
And so riveted with faith unto your flesh.
I gave my love a ring, and made him swear
Never to part with it, and here he stands.
I dare be sworn for him he would not leave it

Nor pluck it from his finger for the wealth
That the world masters. Now, in faith, Gratiano,
You give your wife too unkind a cause of grief,
An 'twere to me I should be mad at it.

BASSANIO: [*Aside.*] Why, I were best to cut my left hand off,
And swear I lost the ring defending it.

GRATIANO: My Lord Bassanio gave his ring away
Unto the judge that begg'd it, and indeed
Deserv'd it too. And then the boy, his clerk,
That took some pains in writing, he begg'd mine,
And neither man nor master would take aught
But the two rings.

PORTIA: What ring gave you, my lord?
Not that, I hope, which you receiv'd of me.

BASSANIO: If I could add a lie unto a fault,
I would deny it, but you see my finger
Hath not the ring upon it, it is gone.

PORTIA: Even so void is your false heart of truth.
By heaven, I will ne'er come in your bed
Until I see the ring.

NERISSA: Nor I in yours
Till I again see mine!

BASSANIO: Sweet Portia,
If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I left the ring,
When nought would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.

PORTIA: If you had known the virtue of the ring,
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
Or your own honour to contain the ring,
You would not then have parted with the ring.
What man is there so much unreasonable,
If you had pleas'd to have defended it
With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty
To urge the thing held as a ceremony?

Nerissa teaches me what to believe:
I'll die for't but some woman had the ring.

BASSANIO: No, by my honour, madam, by my soul,
No woman had it, but a civil doctor,
Which did refuse three thousand ducats of me,
And begg'd the ring, the which I did deny him,
And suffer'd him to go displeas'd away,
Even he that had held up the very life
Of my dear friend. What should I say, sweet lady?
I was enforc'd to send it after him.
I was beset with shame and courtesy.
My honour would not let ingratitude
So much besmear it. Pardon me, good lady;
For by these blessed candles of the night,
Had you been there, I think you would have begg'd
The ring of me to give the worthy doctor.

PORTIA: Let not that doctor e'er come near my house,
Since he hath got the jewel that I loved,
And that which you did swear to keep for me,
I will become as liberal as you,
I'll not deny him anything I have,
No, not my body, nor my husband's bed.
Know him I shall, I am well sure of it.
Lie not a night from home. Watch me like Argus,
If you do not, if I be left alone,
Now by mine honour which is yet mine own,
I'll have that doctor for mine bedfellow.

NERISSA: And I his clerk. Therefore be well advis'd
How you do leave me to mine own protection.

GRATIANO: Well, do you so. Let not me take him then,
For if I do, I'll mar the young clerk's pen.

ANTONIO: I am th' unhappy subject of these quarrels.

PORTIA: Sir, grieve not you. You are welcome notwithstanding.

BASSANIO: Portia, forgive me this enforced wrong,
And in the hearing of these many friends
I swear to thee, even by thine own fair eyes,
Wherein I see myself—

PORTIA: Mark you but that!
In both my eyes he doubly sees himself,
In each eye one. Swear by your double self,
And there's an oath of credit.

BASSANIO: Nay, but hear me.
Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear
I never more will break an oath with thee.

ANTONIO: I once did lend my body for his wealth,
Which but for him that had your husband's ring
Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,
My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
Will never more break faith advisedly.

PORTIA: Then you shall be his surety. Give him this,
And bid him keep it better than the other.

ANTONIO: Here, Lord Bassanio, swear to keep this ring.

BASSANIO: By heaven, it is the same I gave the doctor!

PORTIA: I had it of him: pardon me, Bassanio,
For by this ring, the doctor lay with me.

NERISSA: And pardon me, my gentle Gratiano,
For that same scrubbed boy, the doctor's clerk,
In lieu of this, last night did lie with me.

GRATIANO: Why, this is like the mending of highways
In summer, where the ways are fair enough.
What, are we cuckolds ere we have deserv'd it?

PORTIA: Speak not so grossly. You are all amaz'd.
Here is a letter; read it at your leisure.
It comes from Padua from Bellario.
There you shall find that Portia was the doctor,
Nerissa there, her clerk. Lorenzo here
Shall witness I set forth as soon as you,
And even but now return'd. I have not yet
Enter'd my house. Antonio, you are welcome,
And I have better news in store for you
Than you expect: unseal this letter soon.
There you shall find three of your argosies
Are richly come to harbour suddenly.

You shall not know by what strange accident
I chanced on this letter.

ANTONIO: I am dumb.

BASSANIO: Were you the doctor, and I knew you not?

GRATIANO: Were you the clerk that is to make me cuckold?

NERISSA: Ay, but the clerk that never means to do it,
Unless he live until he be a man.

BASSANIO: Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow.
When I am absent, then lie with my wife.

ANTONIO: Sweet lady, you have given me life and living;
For here I read for certain that my ships
Are safely come to road.

PORTIA: How now, Lorenzo!
My clerk hath some good comforts too for you.

NERISSA: Ay, and I'll give them him without a fee.
There do I give to you and Jessica,
From the rich Jew, a special deed of gift,
After his death, of all he dies possess'd of.

LORENZO: Fair ladies, you drop manna in the way
Of starved people.

PORTIA: It is almost morning,
And yet I am sure you are not satisfied
Of these events at full. Let us go in,
And charge us there upon inter'gatories,
And we will answer all things faithfully.

GRATIANO: Let it be so. The first inter'gatory
That my Nerissa shall be sworn on is,
Whether till the next night she had rather stay,
Or go to bed now, being two hours to day.
But were the day come, I should wish it dark
Till I were couching with the doctor's clerk.
Well, while I live, I'll fear no other thing
So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring.

[Exeunt]