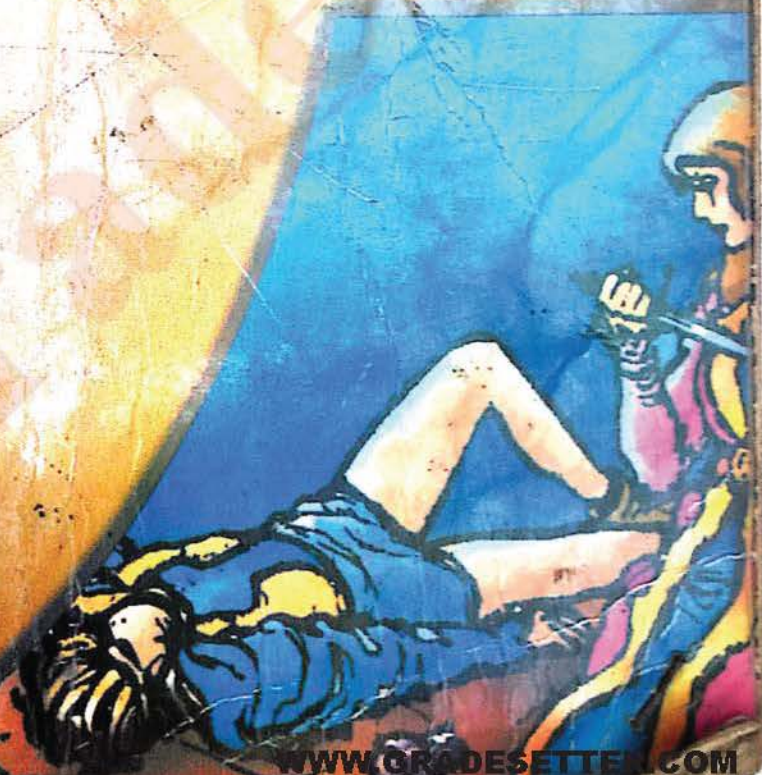


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Charles and Mary Lamb

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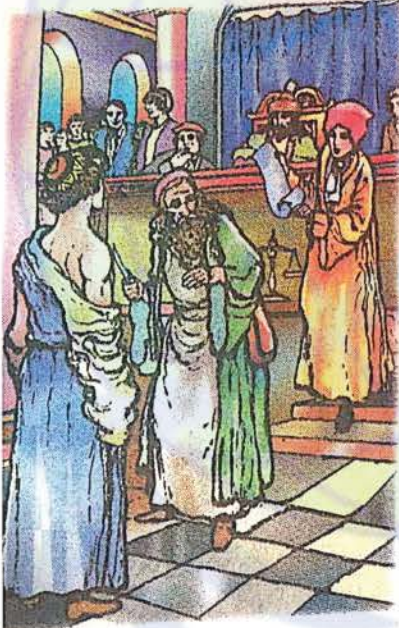


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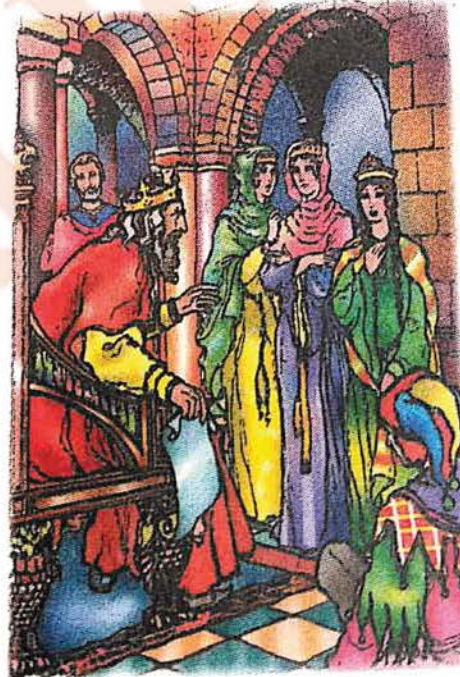
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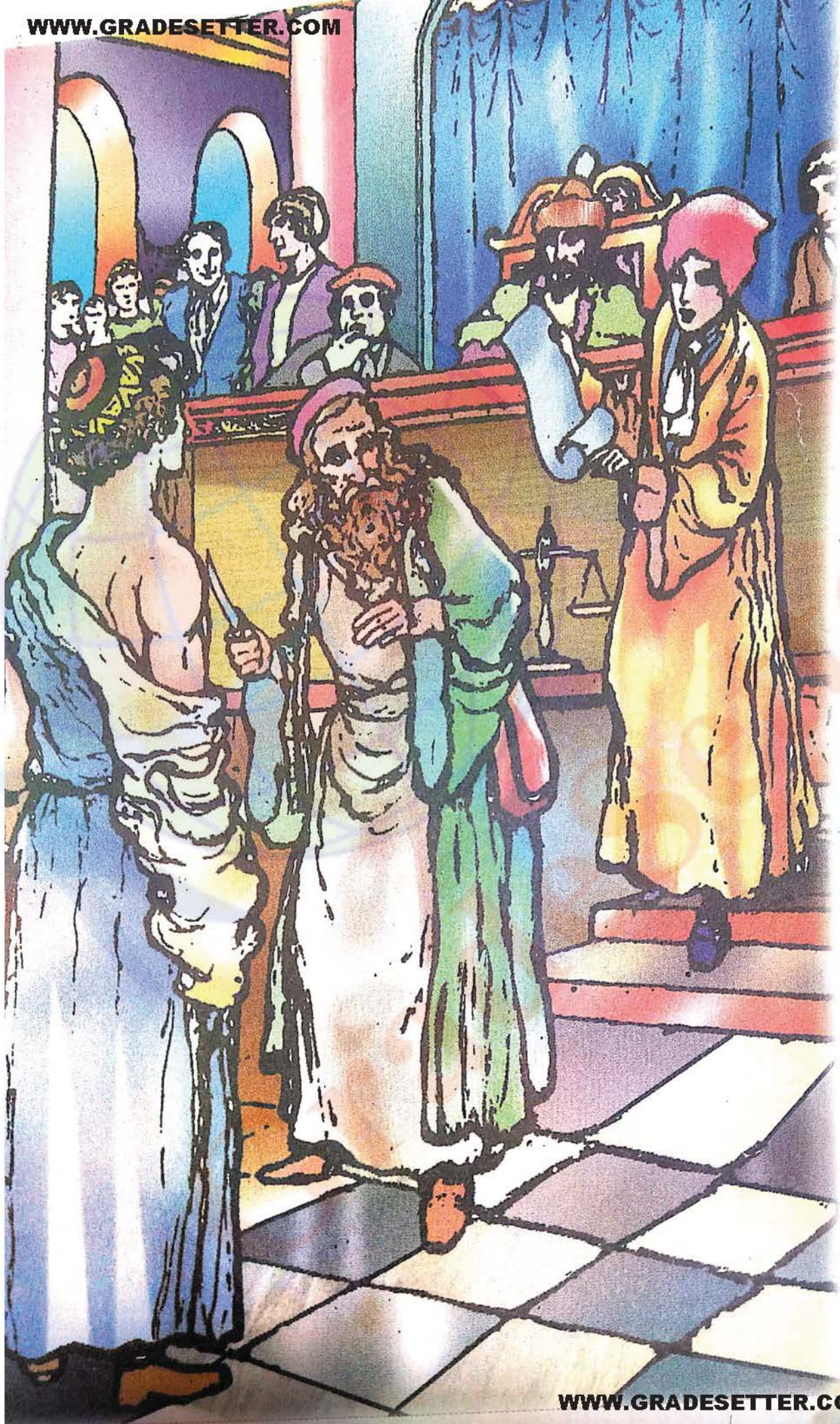
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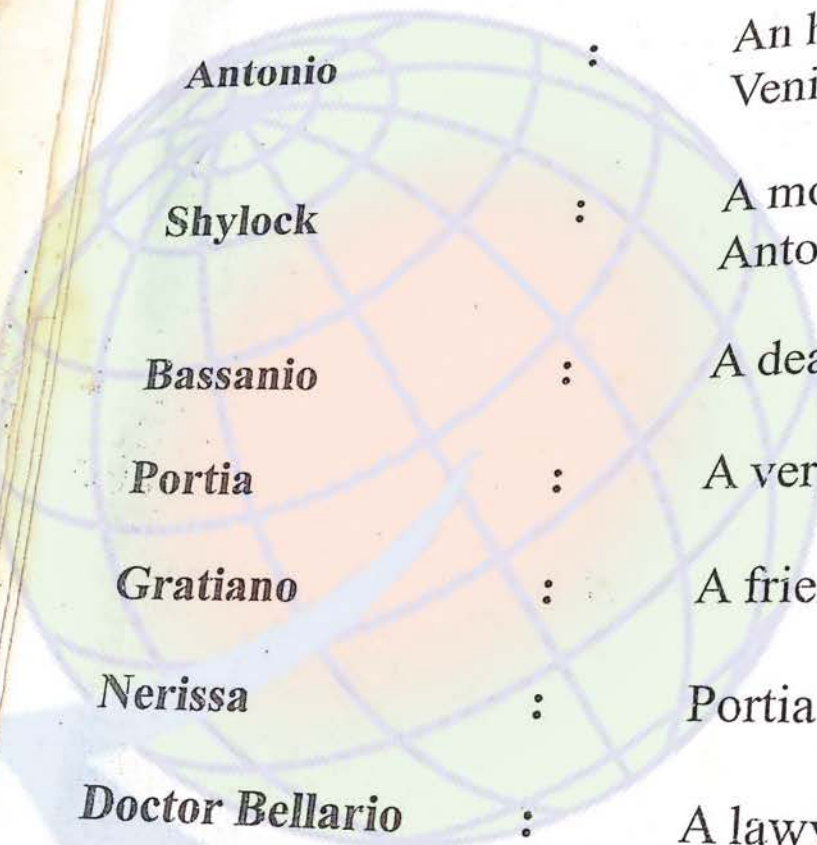
# Tales from Shakespeare





# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

## The People in the Story

- 
- Antonio** : An honest, young merchant in Venice.
- Shylock** : A money-lender in Venice and Antonio's enemy.
- Bassanio** : A dear friend of Antonio's.
- Portia** : A very wise and beautiful lady.
- Gratiano** : A friend of Bassanio's.
- Nerissa** : Portia's maid and friend.
- Doctor Bellario** : A lawyer and Portia's cousin.
- Doctor Balthazar** : The name used by Portia when she is in disguise.
- Jessica** : Shylock's daughter.
- Lorenzo** : Husband of Jessica and a friend of Antonio's.
- The Duke of Venice**



1

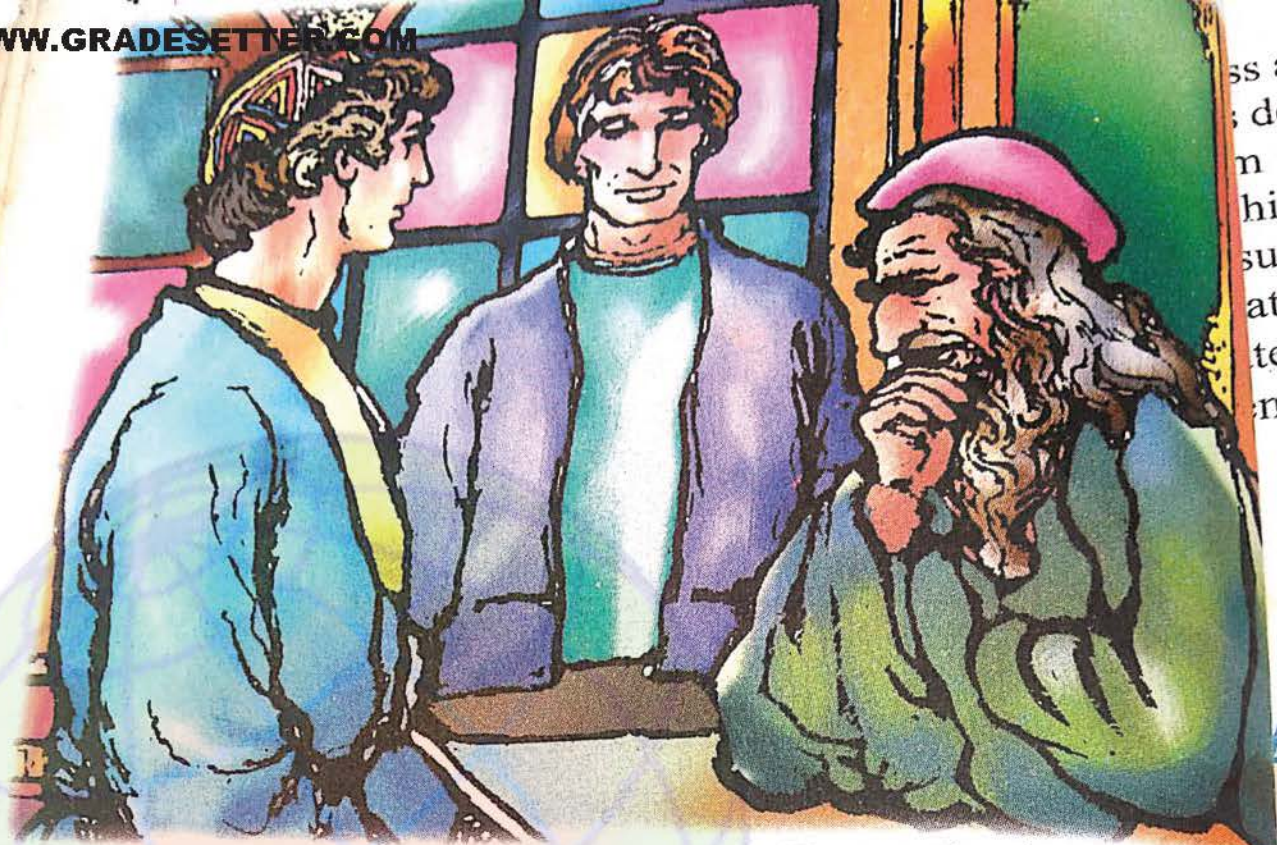
## ANTONIO, HIS FRIEND BASSANIO, AND HIS ENEMY SHYLOCK

The city of *Venice* was once rich and powerful. Its riches came from trade with other countries near and far. The chief citizens of Venice were rich merchants. Among the richest of these was *Antonio*, a merchant well-known for his honesty and kindness.

Antonio had a close friend named *Bassanio*. *Bassanio* was a handsome young man of noble birth, but he was always in need of money. This was because he liked to live in a grand style. Antonio, who was very fond of *Bassanio*, often lent him money or gave it to him willingly.

It happened that *Bassanio* fell in love with a lady of great beauty, wisdom and wealth. Her name was *Portia* and she lived just outside Venice at *Belmont*. *Portia* had shown some liking for *Bassanio* and *Bassanio* hoped to win





her for his wife. In order to impress her, Bassanio decided to visit her in Belmont grandly dressed and attended by many servants. Having no money to do so, he asked Antonio to lend him three thousand ducats.

At the moment, Antonio did not have such a great sum. All his ships were at sea. When they came back with rich cargoes, he would have plenty of money, but till then, he was short of money. Therefore he said that he would borrow the money from a money-lender, offering his ships as a security for the loan.

Antonio and Bassanio went to *Shylock*, the money-lender, to ask for the loan of three thousand ducats. Shylock, in fact, was Antonio's enemy. Antonio was a kind man, it is true, but he had always treated Shylock most unkindly. The reason for this was that Shylock was a Jew. Antonio was a Christian and at that time there was great ill-feeling between Christians and Jews. Besides this, Shylock lent money for profit and asked for a high interest on his loans. Antonio, on the other hand, lent money out of kind-

ess and asked for no interest on it. When a debtor could not pay his debt, Shylock showed no mercy towards him and would send him to prison. Antonio, on the contrary, showed much kindness to his debtors and would never send them to prison. Antonio had insulted Shylock in public. He had called him "a dog" and had spat upon him. Shylock had good reason to hate Antonio and he hated him with all his heart. He waited patiently to have his revenge on him.

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## A STRANGE BOND

Antonio's request for a loan gave Shylock his chance of revenge. At first, Shylock pretended to hesitate about lending the money. "You say that you will pay me back when your ships come home," he told Antonio. "But how can I be sure that they will come home safely? They may be wrecked in a storm. They may be captured by pirates." He thought for a while, making a cunning plan. He went on, "Well, I will be generous. I will lend you the money and I shall not ask for any interest on it." Here Shylock smiled a strange smile and added, "As a joke, you will have to promise this: if you cannot pay me back in three months' time, you must give me a pound of your flesh. And you must allow me to cut that pound of flesh from any part of your body





that I choose. If you agree to that, I will lend you the money. Will you agree to it? Will you sign a bond agreeing to this?"



Antonio agreed willingly and thought that Shylock was unusually kind. Bassanio was suspicious and begged his friend not to sign the bond. "Good Antonio," he said, "I will not sign. This bond is a strange one and it hides an evil purpose. Think what will happen if your ships don't come home safely. Shylock will claim his pound of flesh, and he will claim it lawfully. He will pierce your heart out! And I shall be the cause of your death." "Gold

friend, I beg you not to sign it," he repeated.

Bassanio begged in vain. Antonio laughed at his fears, signed the bond and obtained the money.

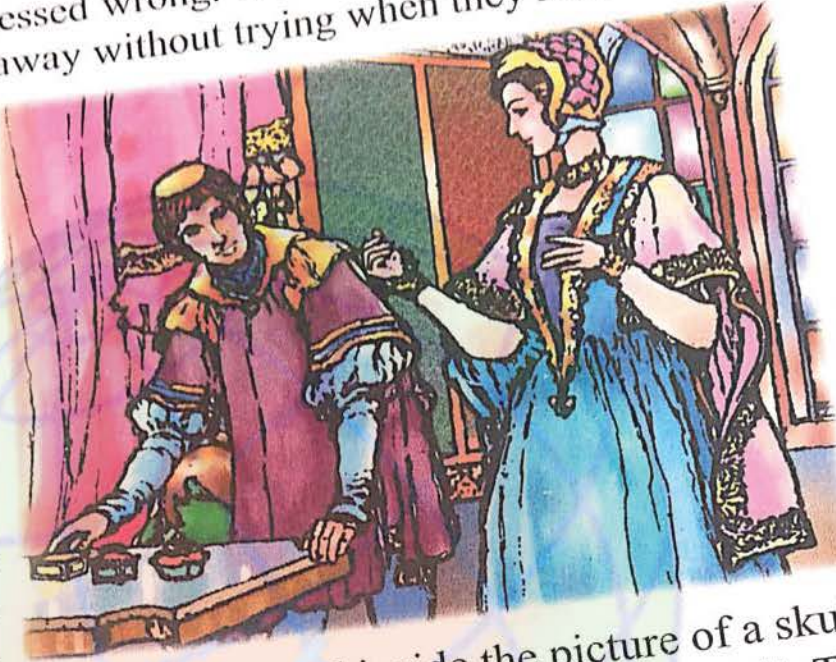
Bassanio set out for Belmont. He was richly dressed and had a splendid train of attendants. He had high hopes of winning the beautiful Portia for his wife. Antonio's danger was forgotten. Bassanio's mind was filled with thoughts of love.

## THE THREE CASKETS

Portia's father, who had lately died, had thought of a curious plan to find the right husband for his daughter. He had given her three caskets. The first of these was made of gold, the second of silver, and the third of lead. The portrait of Portia was in one

caskets. The suitor who first guessed which casket held the trait would be Portia's husband. All suitors had to promise never marry if they guessed wrong. This was a hard condition and many suitors went away without trying when they heard of it.

The first to try was a prince from Morocco. He looked at the silver and lead caskets and said to himself, "They are too poor metals, they are too good to hold the precious picture of the noble Portia." He therefore chose the lead casket.



He opened it and found inside the picture of a skull. There was also this message: "All that glitters is not gold". The prince from Morocco left Belmont at once. He went home, a sad and a wiser man.

The second suitor was a prince from Spain. He looked for a long time at the silver casket on which were these words: "He who chooses me will get what he deserves". He liked the words. He was a prince with a high opinion of himself. He thought that he deserved the best. He therefore chose the silver casket. He opened it and found inside the picture of a blinking idiot. He too left away from Belmont at once. He was deeply disappointed and offended.

Then Bassanio arrived. Portia liked Bassanio very much and she was afraid that he would choose the wrong casket. Therefore she begged him to stay with her for a while and then make his choice. Bassanio, however, was impatient to try. He would not wait and went into the room where the caskets were.

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For a long time Bassanio studied the gold casket, watched him anxiously. "Appearances are often deceiving," Bassanio thought. "Bad men appear good. Ugly people hide ugliness by fine clothes." He chose the plain, lead casket and opened it. Inside there was the portrait of Portia!

Bassanio turned to look at Portia and saw that she was as happy as he was. Indeed, Portia told him at once that she loved him. "I give to you," she said, "myself, my house, my servants, and all that I have. And, as a token of this, I give to you this ring. If ever you part with this," she said, "I shall know that you no longer love me."

"Only death can take this ring from me," Bassanio promised her.

## ANTONIO IS RUINED

Another pair of lovers were in the room at this time. They were *Gratiano*, the friend of Bassanio, and *Nerissa* who was Portia's maid and friend. They now came forward to wish Bassanio well.



Sunit Kumar

and Bassanio great happiness. They also begged leave to marry when Portia and Bassanio did. Their request was instantly granted. What joy there was at Belmont that day!

This joy was soon spoilt by some sad news. A messenger arrived with a letter for Bassanio from his dear friend Antonio. Bassanio turned deathly pale as he read:

*"My ships have been lost at sea. I cannot pay the money I owe to the Jew and so I have to pay the penalty. Dear friend, come to see me if you can. I want to see you once again before I die."*

The messenger added that Antonio was now in prison like any other common debtor. His trial would take place in a few days' time.

This news turned all joy to sorrow. Bassanio cried out in his despair. Antonio had risked his life for him. Now his dearest friend must die.

And it was his fault. He told Portia everything: how he had needed money to come to Belmont in a grand style; how Antonio had borrowed money for him; how Shylock had lent the money on a strange condition; and how Antonio had signed the bond.

When Portia heard of Antonio's sacrifice, she was eager to help her dear Bassanio's friend. Although she wished to keep Bassanio with her at Belmont, she told him to go at once to Antonio in Venice. "I will give Shylock half of my fortune if he will free Antonio," she promised.



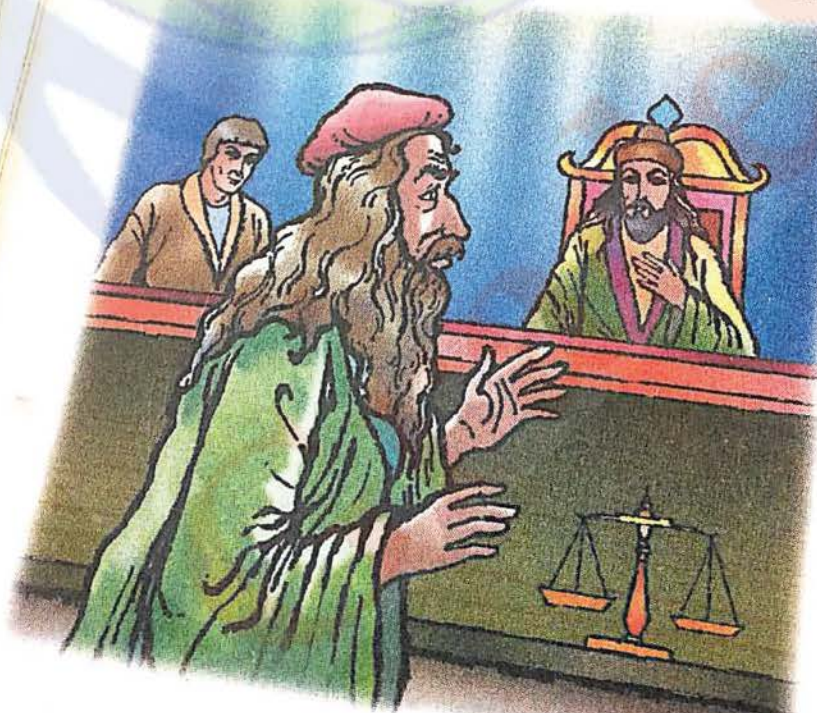
and Gratiano at once got ready for their journey to

Venice. Before they left, however, Portia and Bassanio were married and so were Nerissa and Gratiano. Sadly the two couples said farewell to their wives and set out.

Portia began to think how she could help Antonio. At last she thought of a way. She wrote to her cousin, Doctor Bellario. At last she was a learned lawyer. She asked him to send her his advice and also his lawyer's gown. Doctor Bellario did so. In a short time Portia and Nerissa were also on their way to Venice. The former was dressed as a lawyer while the latter was disguised as a law clerk. Portia had decided to act as a lawyer and do her best for the life of Antonio.

Meanwhile, Bassanio and Gratiano had reached Venice. They were already in the Court of Justice, waiting for the trial to begin. Soon the Duke entered with his attendants. He took the seat and the trial began.

The Duke asked Shylock to be merciful and not to claim a pound of flesh. Shylock would not listen to him. Bassanio offered



Shylock twice the sum of money that he had lent Antonio. Shylock would not accept it. "I claim a pound of flesh," he said. "The law is on my side. Antonio must pay the penalty that is written in the bond."

The Duke pitied Antonio but he could do nothing.

ing to help him. The law was on Shylock's side and the law must be obeyed. The wisest lawyer in Venice, Doctor Bellario, was coming to speak in defence of Antonio. Even he, the Duke feared, could do nothing to save the unfortunate merchant.

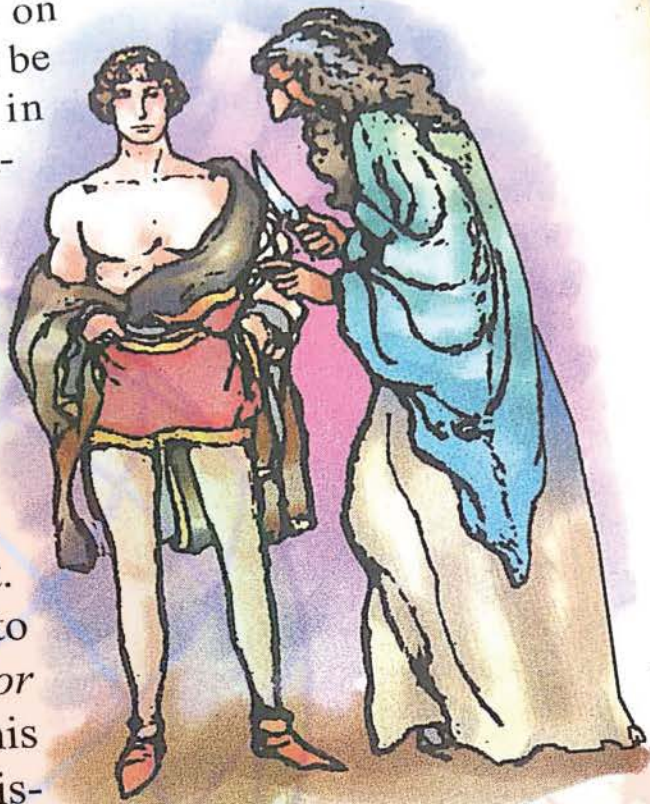
Then a young clerk entered with a message from Doctor Bellario that illness prevented him from coming to the Court. He therefore begged the Duke to let a young friend of his, *Doctor Balthazar*, defend Antonio in his place. The Duke gave his permission and Doctor Balthazar entered the Court. He looked strangely young to be a lawyer whose wisdom could save Antonio. He was, of course, Portia in disguise. The clerk who had brought the message was Nerissa—also in disguise.

Portia begged Shylock to be merciful just as the Duke had done. "Mercy," she said in a noble speech, "brings a blessing to him who shows it and to him who receives it. All of us pray to God for mercy. But God will only have mercy on us if we have mercy on others." Shylock paid no attention to her noble words. "I demand the penalty," he told her, "the lawful penalty, the penalty that is written in the bond."

"Can Antonio not pay his debt?" asked Portia.

"Yes," cried Bassanio. "He can pay it, and more. I am ready to pay ten times the sum he owes."

"Will you not take the money, Shylock?" Portia asked.



"No, I demand the lawful penalty. I claim my pound of flesh. Give me my pound of flesh, I say."

"Let me see the bond, Shylock," said Portia.

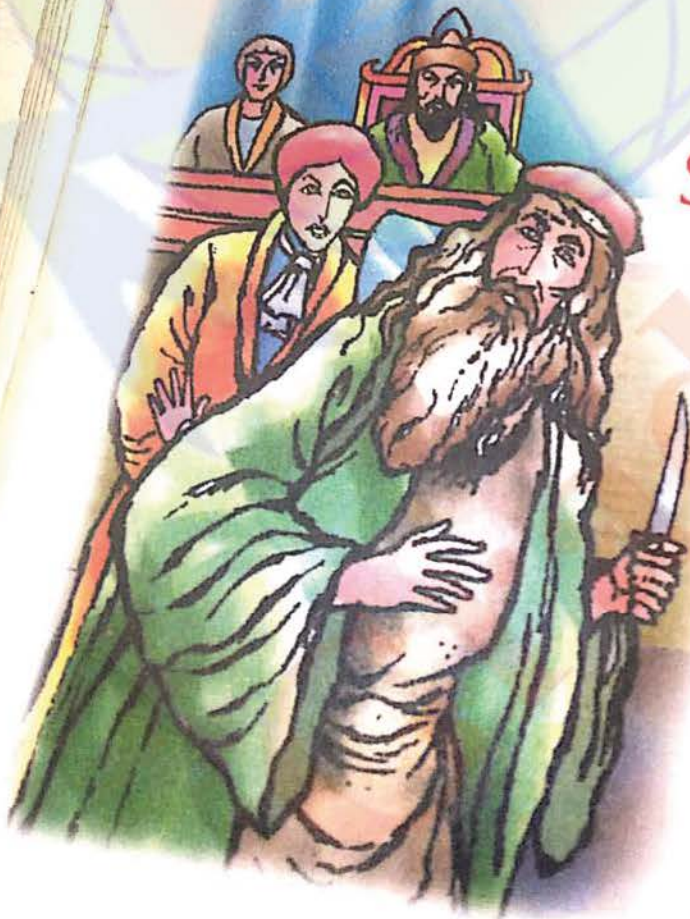
Shylock handed her the bond. She read it and said, "You are quite right, Shylock. You may claim the pound of flesh. But be merciful, I beg you. Take the money offered to you and let me tear up this bond."

Shylock still demanded the lawful penalty. Then Portia turned to Antonio, saying, "Make ready for Shylock to cut his pound of flesh. The law awards it to him."

Hearing these words, Shylock was filled with joy. "Oh, noble judge!" he cried out. "Oh, excellent young man!" He called Portia "a second Daniel". Daniel, being a wise man, was held in high honour by the Jewish people.

"Come, Shylock, cut your pound of flesh!" cried Portia.

Shylock moved forward towards Antonio. His knife was ready in his hand. He raised it and told Antonio to bare his chest.



## SHYLOCK IS RUINED

**B**efore Shylock could use his knife, Portia spoke again. "Wait, Shylock! There is something else. This bond does not allow you to shed one drop of blood. The words are 'a pound of flesh'. There is no mention of blood. If, in cutting your pound of flesh, you shed one drop of blood, then you

Duni K. Kumar

must pay the penalty, and the penalty is this: the state will take all your property from you. You will lose everything you now own, Shylock."

Shylock was silent. At last he asked in a tone of despair, "Is that the law?"

"That is the law," Portia told him.

Shylock's face showed his bitter disappointment. Gratiano saw this and called out mockingly, "Oh, noble judge! Oh, excellent young man! A second Daniel!"

Shylock turned to Bassanio. "You offered me ten times the sum. I will take it and Antonio can go free."

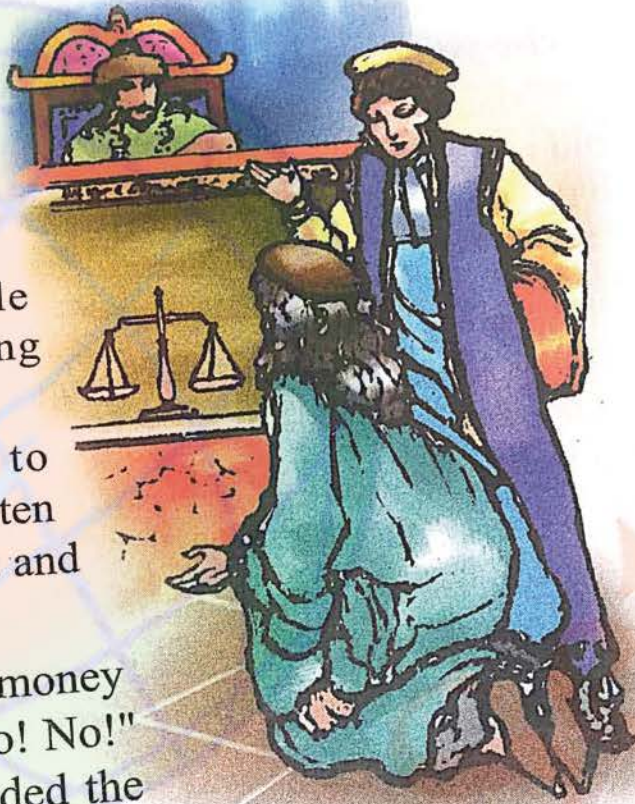
Bassanio held out the money but Portia stopped him. "No! No!" she cried. "Shylock demanded the penalty according to the law. He shall have that and nothing else."

Gratiano, unable to hide his delight at the Jew's defeat, again mocked him, crying out, "Listen, Jew! Oh, noble judge!"

"Well, Shylock, take your pound of flesh. But be careful! Not one drop of blood!" said Portia.

"Then just give me back the sum I lent," begged Shylock. Bassanio was about to do so, but Portia stopped him. "He refused it here when you offered it to him. All of us are witnesses to that. He shall have the penalty he demanded and nothing else."

Shylock moved to leave the Court. He looked a broken man.





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He had hardly taken two steps when Portia called out:

"Wait! I have something else to say. According to the law, any foreigner who plots to kill a citizen of Venice is punished thus: half his property goes to that citizen and the other half goes to the state. Besides this, the Duke may add other punishment. I may even sentence the criminal to death. And so, Shylock, I would advise you to kneel before the Duke and beg for mercy."

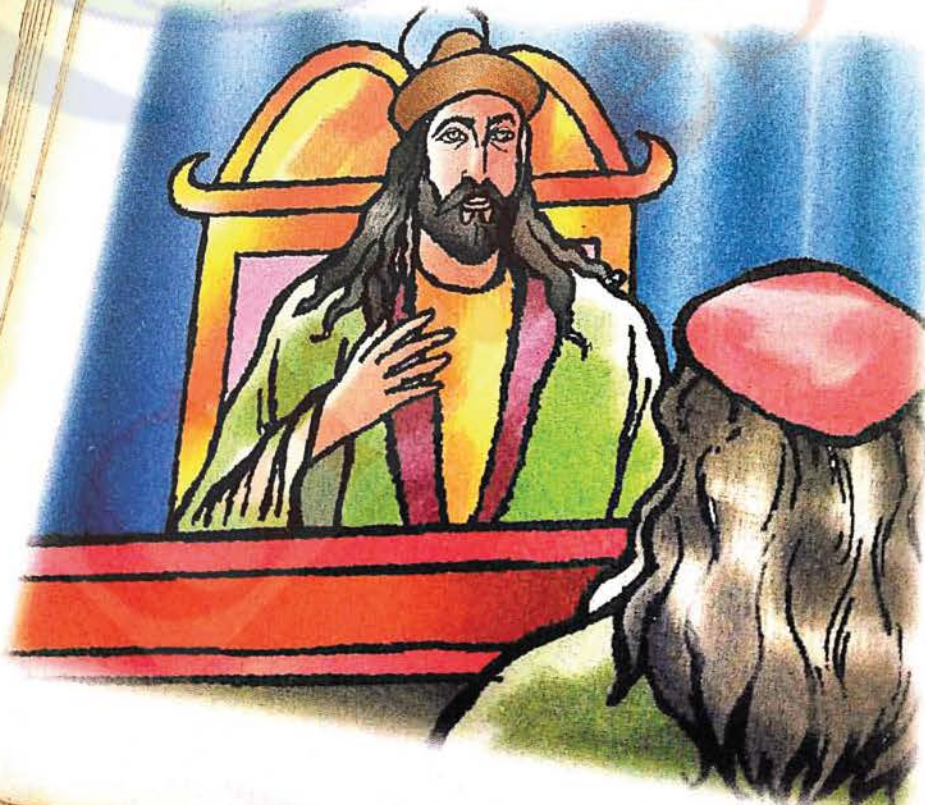
The Duke was merciful. He spared Shylock's life. "But," he told him, "half your wealth will go to Antonio and the other half to the state."

Then Antonio spoke. "I will not take my half. If Shylock becomes a Christian, he can keep my share." Shylock also had promised that, on his death, he would leave his wealth to his daughter Jessica and her husband Lorenzo, a friend of Antonio's. Jessica had run away from home in order to marry Lorenzo and this had almost broken Shylock's heart.

Shylock had lost his daughter and now he had lost much of his wealth. Gone too was his hope of revenge. He turned deathly pale and put his hand to his aching heart. "I am unwell. Let me go home,"

he begged pitifully. "Send the agreement after me and I will sign it."

The Duke let Shylock go. He then set Antonio free and dismissed the Court.



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7

## THE RINGS

Throughout the trial everyone had been wondering at the youth and wisdom of Doctor Balthazar. Portia had disguised her appearance and her voice so well that not even Bassanio recognised her. All thought her to be an unusually clever lawyer.



As soon as the trial was over, Antonio

went up to Portia and begged her to accept the three thousand ducats that Shylock had lent to him. When Portia firmly refused to do so, Bassanio begged her to accept some token of their gratitude.

"Since you insist," Portia said to him playfully, "I will take your gloves." Bassanio instantly took them off and handed them to her. "And," added Portia, "I will also take that ring you are wearing."

"Ah! That is one thing I cannot give you," Bassanio told her in dismay. "My wife gave it to me and I promised never to part with it."

Portia laughed at him. "That's a common excuse that men make when they're unwilling to make a gift. Your wife, I am sure,

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