

ACT I

SCENE 1 *Venice. A street.*

Enter Antonio, Salarino, and Salanio

Antonio. Truly, I do not know why I feel so sad. The feeling makes me depressed, and you say that it makes you depressed too. Where I had the feeling from, found it, or got it, and what it consists of and how it originated, I have yet to know. The depression makes me such a dull fellow, that I fail to know who I am.

Salarino. Your mind is at the sea. There your ships filled with cargo move on the waves like great lords and wealthy citizens. The large ships pass in a magnificent procession and rule over the smaller ships. The small ships bow before the bigger ships as they speed past them with their canvas sails (that appear as wings).

Salanio. Believe me, sir, if I had such financial ventures in danger, the greater part of my thoughts would be fixed on my hopes abroad. I would then be plucking the grass and throwing it up to see in which direction the wind is blowing. I would also study the maps, harbours and channels, and consider everything that might pose danger to my business. This, certainly, would make me sad.

Salarino. When I blow upon my soup to make it cold, I tremble with fever to think of the damage a strong wind might do on the sea. The sight of the sand running out from the hourglass makes me think of dangerous shallow waters and sand banks. These make me imagine that my loaded ship is grounded in sand, her mast dipped down

lower than her sides, as if trying to kiss the sands that surround her. If I go to church to see the holy building of stone, it makes me think of dangerous rocks. These, I imagine, could hit against the sides of my ship, and scatter her cargo of spices on the waters and the floating rich silks would clothe the roaring waves. In short, it makes me think that at one moment I have so much, and the next moment, I have nothing! If I can imagine all this could happen, I can also imagine the grief which the occurrence of such a disaster would cause me? I know that Antonio is sad because he is thinking of his rich cargo.

Antonio. Believe me, it is not true. I thank my good fortune because my business is not dependent on one ship, nor on any single location. Nor does my financial position depend on the commercial enterprises of the current year. Therefore, it is not my loaded ships that make me sad.

Salarino. Why, then you must be in love.

Antonio. What nonsense!

Salarino. What, not in love either! Then we may say that you are sad because you are not happy. It would be easy for you to laugh and jump about and say that you are happy because you are not sad. Now, by Janus, the two-headed Roman god, I say that Nature has created some strange men! Some of them look out through their eyes half-closed with laughter, and laugh foolishly like parrots if they hear the sound of a bagpipe. There are other men with such gloomy faces that they will not smile at anything, even if the grave Nestor swears saying that the joke is most amusing.

Salanio. Here comes your noble relative, Bassanio, with Gratiano and Lorenzo. Goodbye, Antonio. We shall now leave you in a better company.

Salarino. I would have stayed here with you till I could make you happy, if the arrival of your worthy friends had not prevented me from doing so.

Antonio. I have great regard for you. I think that it is your business which takes you away from us. That is why you make use of this opportunity to leave.

Enter Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano

Salarino. Good morning, my good lords.

Bassanio. Good gentlemen, will both of you tell us when we shall be merry? Tell me when. You have become like strangers. Is it necessary to be so?

Salarino. We shall find some free time to speak to you.

(Salarino and Salanio depart)

Lorenzo. My Lord Bassanio, since you have met your friend Antonio here, we two will take your leave. But I request you to remember the place where we should meet again at dinner-time.

Bassanio. I will not fail to be there.

Gratiano. You do not look well, Sir Antonio. You are too much burdened with worldly affairs. People lose everything when they do not enjoy their wealth and, when they are overanxious in obtaining it. Believe me, you have changed so much.

Antonio. I consider this world, Gratiano, only as a stage on which every man has to play a part; and mine is a sad one.

Gratiano. Well, let me play a jester's role. Let there be joy and laughter till I have wrinkles as if in my old age. Let me warm my body with wine rather than cool my spirit with painful groans. Why should a man with warm blood in his veins sit like his grandfather's statue made of white marble? Why should he sleep during waking hours, and catch jaundice due to his bad temper? I tell you Antonio, that I love you. It is my love that makes me speak. There are men with faces covered as a stagnant pool is covered with slime and dirt. Such men remain silent to have a reputation for wisdom, seriousness, and deep thought. It is as if they said, "I am the fountain of wisdom, and when I speak, let others keep quiet."

O dear Antonio, I know such men. They are known as wise, as long as they are silent. I am sure that, if they spoke, those who heard them would curse their ears for the sin of calling their brothers fools. I shall speak more about this at some other time. But do not look for popularity with such a tool as your sad face. Come, Lorenzo. Farewell for now. I shall finish my advice to you after dinner.

Lorenzo. Then we shall let you be free till dinner time. I must be like one of those silent wise men, for Gratiano does not allow me to speak.

Gratiano. Well, if you only give me company for two years more, you will not recognise the sound of your own voice in the case.

Antonio. Farewell, I will start speaking after your advice.

Gratiano. Thanks indeed, for silence is only praiseworthy in a dried ox-tongue.

[Gratiano and Lorenzo depart]

Antonio. Is there anything of concern now?

Bassanio. Gratiano indulges in such idle talk, much more than any other man in Venice. His speech is like two grains of wheat hidden in two bushels of worthless stuff. You may spend a whole day to find them. When you find them, you find them not worth the search.

Antonio. Well, tell me who is the lady to whom you have decided to pay a visit secretly. You promised me to tell me about her today.

Bassanio. You know, Antonio, how I have spent my meagre fortune by having a more lordly way of living than my moderate income would allow me. I do not complain that I can no longer live in such a style as the nobles. My main worry now is to come honourably out of my heavy debts I have incurred due to my youth and its extravagance. I owe you most, Antonio, both in terms of money and love. Your affection gives me enough strength to disclose to you my plans and pay off my debts.

Antonio. Tell me everything, good Bassanio. If your plan is perfectly honourable as you are, you may be sure that my money, my body, and all my resources will be available for your use.

Bassanio. In my school-days when I had lost an arrow, I shot another, watching carefully in the same direction to recover the first. By risking a second arrow, I often got both. I give this childhood example, because what I propose now is harmless. I owe so much to you, and like a self-willed young man, I have lost everything that I got from you. But if you give me another loan like the first one, I do not doubt while I watch the aim so carefully, that I shall repay you both the loans. At any rate, I can pay back at least your second loan, and remain your grateful debtor for the first.

Antonio. You know me well to know that you only waste my time by all the references to my love. Surely you wrong me more by doubting about my readiness to help you with a bigger amount of money, than you would actually spend. That holds good even if it means making me to lose all my wealth. You have only to tell me what you want me to do. If you know that I can do it, I will be obliged to do it. So please speak.

Bassanio. In Belmont there is a lady who has inherited much wealth. She is beautiful, and has great virtues. Sometimes I have received from her eyes lovely silent messages. Her name is Portia, and she is no less precious than Cato's daughter, who was the wife of Brutus. Indeed the whole world is aware of her worth; for famous suitors are sailing towards her from every coast. Her pretty hair adorns her forehead like the Golden Fleece, so that her home at Belmont is like the ancient kingdom of Colchos. Many suitors like Jasons go there to win her. O, Antonio, had I the money to compete with them, my instincts tell me that I should surely be the winner.

Antonio. You know that all my money is invested in my ships at sea. I have neither cash, nor anything on which money could be raised. But go out and see what my credit can do in Venice. It shall be stretched to the utmost limit to enable you to go to Belmont, and win over the beautiful Portia. Go at once and inquire and I shall do the same, wherever money could be had; and I have no doubt that I shall have it, either on account of my business credit or against my personal surety. *[They leave]*

SCENE 2 *Belmont. A room in Portia's house.*

Enter Portia and Nerissa

Portia. Honestly, Nerissa, my little body is tired of this great world.

Nerissa. You would be tired, dear madam, since you have as many miseries as you have good fortunes. Yet as far as I can think: people who have too much are just as sick as those who are ill and starving by having nothing with them. It is not a bad fortune, then, to be placed between the two extremes of having too much and too little. The man who has too much wealth soon becomes grey-haired, but he who has just enough wealth, lives longer.

Portia. Good words, well spoken!

Nerissa. It would be better, if they were well followed.