***Act II Scene VIII***

***Analysis:***

***Synopsis:***

Having witnessed Shylock’s rage upon learning of Jessica’s elopement, Solanio describes the scene to Salarino. Shylock, he reports, railed against the loss of his daughter and his ducats, and he shouted a loud, urgent appeal for justice and the law to prevail. Solanio hopes that Antonio is able to pay his debt, but Salarino reminds him of rumors that the long-awaited ships have capsized in the English Channel. The two men warmly remember Bassanio’s departure from Antonio, wherein the merchant insisted that his young friend not allow thoughts of debt or danger to interfere with his courtship of Portia.

***Summary:***

* Salerio and Solanio are, yet again, hanging about the streets of Venice. They gossip about the latest news: Bassanio's ship has sailed with Graziano but not Lorenzo. Shylock found his daughter had disappeared and raised the Duke of Venice from his sleep to find her. They didn't locate Jessica, but the Duke did find out that she was last seen with Lorenzo in a gondola filled with love (and Shylock's money).
* Solanio reports that Shylock's reaction was strange—he lamented his lost ducats intermittently with his lost daughter, both stolen by a Christian: "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!" and so on.
* He was mocked by all the boys in Venice, who trailed behind him crying of ducats and daughters. Solanio says Antonio better repay Shylock on time or he'll definitely have to pay. Shylock is going to want to find someone to take his anger out on.
* Speaking of Antonio, Salerio announces that he recently got some bad news from a Frenchman, who told of an Italian ship that was wrecked between France and England. Salerio sure hopes it wasn't one of Antonio's ships. The men reason back and forth over whether they should tell Antonio the potentially disastrous news.
* Salerio credits Antonio with being one of the nicest guys on the block, and he tells of how he watched Antonio and Bassanio part as the latter was on his way to Belmont. Antonio told Bassanio not to rush but to stay as long as he needed to win Portia. Aw. In the meantime, Antonio counseled Bassanio not to worry about his (Antonio's) debt with Shylock. Instead, he should be happy and think of love and courtship.
* And he had a tear in his eye as they shook hands. Aw.
* They set off to try to cheer Antonio up.

***Critical Study:***

Salarino and Salanio discuss developments in Venice. When Shylock discovered that Jessica was gone, he demanded that the Duke of Venice have Bassanio's ship searched; this proved to be impossible because Bassanio had already sailed. Antonio, however, assured the duke that Lorenzo and Jessica were *not* on board Bassanio's ship. Salanio then describes how Shylock raved in the streets, crying, "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian," while "all the boys in Venice" followed him, mocking him, his daughter, and his ducats.

Salanio worries about what will happen to Antonio: He knows Shylock's temper. Jessica's elopement and Antonio's swearing that Bassanio had no part in her escape "bade no good" for Antonio. He knows that Antonio *must*"keep his day" (repay his debt when it comes due) or else "he shall pay for this." Salanio is likewise worried about Antonio's future. Only yesterday, a Frenchman told him about an Italian ship that had sunk in the English Channel. He immediately thought of Antonio, hoping that the ship was not one of his. The news about the shipwreck must be broken gently to Antonio because Antonio is a sensitive man. Realizing that Antonio may need cheering up, Salanio and Salarino decide to pay him a visit.

Salarino's and Salanio's opening lines are hurried and excited. Here and elsewhere in the play, notably in Act I, Scene 1, these two act more or less like a chorus; that is to say, they discuss developments of the plot not shown on the stage so that the audience will be aware of them and also of their importance. Here, they are concerned about Antonio's fate, since Shylock is in a terrible temper, and the once "merry bond" is no longer "merry."

Salanio's speech, beginning at line 12, is introduced here for two reasons: First, Shylock's rage must be described *before*it is shown so that we can anticipate his state of mind at his next entrance. Second, Shylock's loss of both his daughter and much of his money are important for our understanding the extent of Shylock's desire for revenge. At the beginning of the play, he has only two real reasons for hating Antonio — a commercial hatred and a religious hatred. To these is now added a shattering personal loss — he has lost his daughter, his only child, to a Christian, a friend of Antonio — making plausible his implacable desire for revenge against all Venetian Christians in the person of a man whom he has legally cornered: Antonio. In a very real sense, our sympathy goes out to Shylock, yet Shakespeare keeps us from pitying the man by having Salanio enact a sort of exaggerated parody of Shylock's greedy, histrionic behavior as he tells his friend Salarino how Shylock was chased in the streets by young boys, howling after him. Shylock's repetitions of "O my ducats! O my daughter! . . . my ducats and my daughter" indicate that Jessica is simply, at this point, another possession, like his coins. Thus we are prevented from being too oversympathetic to an obsession which has blinded the old moneylender to the true difference between monetary and human values.

***Critical Analysis:***

Salarino and Solanio meet in the city square to review recent events. They have seen [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) set sail with [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano), but they say Lorenzo and [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) did not depart with them. [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) wanted to search Bassanio's ship and got the duke's approval to do so, but the ship was already gone. [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio) has assured Shylock and the duke that Jessica and Lorenzo did not set sail with Bassanio, so Shylock has been seen in the streets wailing for his lost daughter and lost money. Children mock him. There has also been some discouraging news about a ship from Venice lost near England, and Antonio hopes it is not his. Salarino and Solanio both express their liking for Antonio, saying "A kinder gentleman treads not the earth." They talk about Antonio's sadness at Bassanio's departure and speculate that Antonio "only loves the world for [Bassanio]." They decide to go try to raise Antonio's spirits.

It is a typical conceit in [Shakespeare](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/author/)'s plays to use conversation between characters to explain what has happened or is happening offstage. Since Salarino and Solanio are gossips, they are perfect for taking on this important role of providing plot exposition. From a practical standpoint, their conversation in [Act 2, Scene 8](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-2-scene-8-summary/) spares the time (as well as the expense of sets and props) of staging scenes showing [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) attempting to search [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio)'s boat, the loss of the ship near England, and [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio)'s farewell to Bassanio.

As much as Salarino and Solanio seem to like Antonio and want good things for him, their dialogue also carries a tone that indicates they enjoy the drama unfolding around them. Solanio delights in speculating about Antonio's grief when he hears of the wrecked ship. Salarino relishes the details when he describes Bassanio's departure from Venice. Yet in these cases their enjoyment is subtle. When Solanio recounts Shylock's anguish at the loss of his daughter, he emphasizes how Shylock cries out for his lost money and calls Shylock a dog with a confused passion, as if Shylock does not know which loss upsets him more. The Christian merchants take Shylock's confusion as evidence of his greed instead of evidence of simple confusion over his family having been turned upside down. After all, his daughter has not only left and betrayed him but has abandoned the principles of their religion.

***Significance:***

Salarino and Solanio are discussing the scene, when Shylock realizes that Lorenzo and Jessica had ran off together. Shylock appeals to the Duke to search Bassanio's ship, but they are too late, for Bassanio has already sailed. Antonio leads them off the path, saying that he saw them on a gondola. Shylock is visibly upset by both the loss of his daughter and his ducats. The two men voice concern for Antonio's debt, for if he is unable to pay, Shylock will be ready for vengeance at his loss. The concern is great, for there are rumors that Antonio's ships were wrecked in the English Channel. Solanio tells Salarino that he needs to tell Antonio what he has heard, but that he should tell him in time. The men feel that Antonio is too sad now that Bassanio has left, and so they go to cheer him up.

Salarino and Solanio serve to move the plot of the play forward by giving a summary account of what has been happening. Though they revel in Shylock's misfortune, the audience feels for Shylock's losses. Shylock is not a fully sympathetic villain, though, as he places the loss of his daughter on the same level as the loss of his money and valuables. However, we begin to worry for Antonio, for we now know that his ships may be lost at sea, and Shylock will have a way to seek his revenge.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

On the street in Venice, [Salerio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) gossip about [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Lorenzo's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) elopement and [Bassanio's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) departure for Belmont to woo [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia). They laugh about [Shylock's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) desperate search for Jessica. Upon learning that Jessica had eloped and stolen his money, Shylock cried "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian!" (2.8.15–6) again and again. Salerio adds that all the boys in Venice now follow Shylock imitating his anguished refrain, demanding: "Justice, the law, my ducats, and my daughter!" (2.8.17).

***Analysis Part 1:***

In addition to exhibiting more of the Venetians' prejudice against Shylock, this scene reemphasizes the connection between a woman's value and money, by placing "daughter" and "ducats" next to each other. Shylock's crying for justice also shows the turning point where he will really start to push for revenge against the Christians through their own court system.

***Summary Part 2:***

Their tone suddenly grows somber, though, when [Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) remarks that [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) may be the one who ends up paying for [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock)'s loss. [Salerio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) reports that he has heard rumors that a Venetian ship has been wrecked. He worries it is one of Antonio's. Solanio urges him to tell Antonio, but to break the news gently.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Struggling to make out the truth of rumors and hearsay, Salerio and Solanio anticipate that these events will give force to Shylock's desire for justice and revenge against their friend.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) says of Antonio, "a kinder gentleman treads not the earth." He adds that when [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) departed for Belmont, he overheard [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) tell Bassanio not to worry about the money he had borrowed, but only to think of his courtship of [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia). Solanio remarks that Antonio "only loves the world for" Bassanio (2.8.50). They set off to find Antonio and distract him from his sadness at Bassanio's departure.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Solanio and Salerio describe Antonio as uniquely generous, and identify that generosity as arising from his love for Bassanio. They also convey the intensity of Antonio's love for Bassanio, further raising the question of whether that love is romantic or platonic.