***Act IV Scene II***

***Analysis:***

***Synopsis:***

Portia tells Nerissa to bring the deed to Shylock's house and tells her how happy Lorenzo will be with what they have done. The women plan to return to Belmont when Gratiano arrives with the ring. Portia asks him to show Nerissa to Shylock's home, and Nerissa tells Portia that she will also try to get her ring from Gratiano. Portia imagines she will, and thinks how they will embarrass their husbands when they swear they gave the rings to men.

By getting the rings away from the men, Portia is again exhibiting her superior cunning and intellectual skills. The letting go of the ring again brings the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio to question, as it appears that Antonio feels he should be valued above any wife and Bassanio defers to that thought. Though Antonio's attitude toward women is more reflective of the reality of women's roles at the time, Bassanio is caught between the reality and the love and respect he has for his wife.

***Summary:***

* On the street in Venice, Portia and Nerissa, still disguised as Balthazar and his attendant, continue to do their legal stuff. Portia tells Nerissa to find Shylock's house and give him the deed of gift they drafted for Lorenzo and Jessica's inheritance.
* Portia announces that their plan is to go away tonight and be home before their husbands return tomorrow. Portia notes that Lorenzo will be stoked about Shylock's deed of gift (though she leaves out how Lorenzo will feel about Shylock becoming a broken, defeated man).
* Just then, Graziano shows up and gives Portia Bassanio's ring, saying he changed his mind. Furthermore, he wants them to come to dinner. Portia accepts the ring, refuses the dinner invite, and plots with Nerissa to raise hell for their men once they get home. Nerissa, quite the little copycat, had also given Graziano a ring, and had, just like Portia, also made him promise never to give it away. Nerissa decides that, in her disguise and with her originality, she'll ask Graziano for this very ring and see if he gives it up.
* Portia jokes that they'll really give it to their husbands when they come home without their rings. The men will of course swear that they gave the rings to other men, not to random women, but the women, knowing the truth, will swear otherwise. Portia then asks Graziano to show her to Shylock's house.

***Critical Study:***

Still in Venice after the trial, Portia stops on a street and instructs Nerissa to find Shylock's house and have him sign the deed bequeathing everything he owns to Lorenzo and Jessica; then they will be home by tomorrow.

Gratiano catches up with them and presents Portia with the ring from Bassanio, who, he says, also sends an invitation to dinner. Portia accepts the ring but declines the dinner invitation. She asks Gratiano, however, to show Nerissa ("my youth") the way to "old Shylock's house." Nerissa, in an aside, whispers to Portia that on the way she will try to get the ring which she gave to*her*husband on their wedding day, a ring which she made him "swear to keep for ever." Portia is delighted at her friend's plan. She is certain that Nerissa will succeed, and then both of them will have a merry time hearing their husbands try to explain how and why they gave their wedding rings away to other men.

This act's final, brief scene continues the previous scene's closing mood; it is really its conclusion. By this point in the play, we are absolutely sure that Portia and Nerissa will both "outface" and "out-swear" the men. It is almost a commonplace that in every one of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, the women emerge as shrewder and wittier than the men. Portia is one of those Shakespearean heroines. She is not only superior to all of the men in the climactic scene in word — but she also excels them in deed. It is she who plans and executes Antonio's deliverance and sees that merciful justice is carried out.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia) instructs [Nerissa](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Nerissa) to go to [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock)'s home and have him sign the deed that gives his property to [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) and Lorenzo. Before she leaves, [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano) arrives to deliver [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio)'s ring and invite her to dinner. She turns down the dinner invitation but accepts the ring and asks Gratiano to show Nerissa the way to Shylock's house. Nerissa tells Portia she will try to get her own ring from Gratiano. Portia believes she will get the ring easily and assures Nerissa they will have the last word on their husbands.

[Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia) plans to return to Belmont with [Nerissa](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Nerissa) immediately after [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) has signed the deeds associated with his trial, which provides a practical reason for her to reject [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio)'s invitation to dinner. To preserve their ruse, the women need to return to Belmont before their husbands. However, [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano)'s delivery of the ring provides an additional reason for Portia to avoid Bassanio. She now knows his loyalty to [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio) has persuaded him to part with the ring she warned him never to lose or give away. The doubts this exchange raises about her marriage prompt Nerissa to subject Gratiano to a similar test of his affection for her. Portia believes Gratiano will also give up his ring, reflecting a cynical state of mind in response to Bassanio's blunder.

This brief scene offers a bit of comic relief after the high drama of the previous scene. The two women will have tricked their husbands in two ways: first, by convincing their own husbands they are men and complete strangers and second, by persuading them to give up the rings. When they meet again in Belmont, this will be revealed to have been a joke, albeit a pointed one. But it will also give the women ammunition to use against their husbands throughout their marriages.

***Significance:***

Meanwhile, Portia sends Nerissa to Shylock’s house to ensure that Shylock signs the deed that will leave his fortune to Lorenzo and [Jessica](https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/character/jessica/). Portia observes that Lorenzo will be happy to have this document. Once they complete this task, the disguised women plan to leave for Belmont, which will ensure their arrival a full day before their husbands’. Gratiano enters, offers Bassanio’s ring to Portia, and invites her to dinner. Portia accepts the ring, but declines the invitation. Portia asks Gratiano to show Nerissa to Shylock’s house, and Nerissa, before leaving, tells Portia that she will likewise try to convince Gratiano to part with his ring. The plan satisfies Portia, who imagines how Gratiano and Bassanio will swear up and down that they gave their rings to men, and looks forward to embarrassing them. Nerissa turns to Gratiano and asks him to lead her to Shylock’s house.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia), still dressed as "Balthazar," instructs [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters), still dressed as the pageboy, to go to [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock)'s house and bring the deed for him to sign, giving half of his property to [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio). Then they will have to speed to get back to Belmont before their husbands. Portia comments that the deed spells good news for Lorenzo, who is now going to inherit all of Shylock's wealth, not just what he and [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) managed to steal.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Portia's remark on Lorenzo's luck in inheriting Shylock's wealth once again mixes money and financial incentives with love.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) enters, carrying the ring from [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio). He tells [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) that Bassanio has sent the ring and asks him to join them at [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio)'s house for dinner. Initially startled, Portia recovers her composure. She takes the ring and tells Gratiano to thank Bassanio for it, but declines the invitation to dinner. Then she asks him to show [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) to [Shylock's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) house.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Portia's gift of the ring came out of love. Now Bassanio has given the ring out of friendship. Generosity and gift giving introduce economics into the realms of love and friendship.

***Summary Part 3:***

In an aside, [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) tells [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) that she will try to trick her husband into giving her his ring. Amused, Portia looks forward to hearing their husband's excuses when they return to Belmont without their rings. Nerissa leaves with [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters).

***Analysis Part 3:***

Nerissa also joins in the ring subplot: this will be the main thread of the play after the climax of the trial. In looking forward to the men's excuses for giving away their rings, Portia implicitly contrasts Bassanio's flighty behavior with her obedience of her father's will.