***Act IV Scene I***

***Analysis:***

***Synopsis:***

At the start of the longest scene in the play, Shylock again appears villainous and cruel. Shylock is blinded completely by his own desire for his revenge, and continues to demand the pound of flesh. The men are at a loss to make any decisions, and plead for Shylock to see reason and offer mercy. However, it is upon the entrance of Portia that we see cooler heads prevail.

It was not uncommon for Shakespeare to make women more intellectually superior than men. In a time when women were regulated to specific gender roles, Shakespeare broke through that and offered up women's intelligence to his audience. It is not any of the men that save Antonio from his fate, but a woman. It is not a man that offers judgment on Shylock, but a woman.

By the end of the chapter, the modern audience wonders, though, if Shylock's sentence is too cruel. The audience is able to admire Portia's intelligence, but wonder at her harsh treatment of the Jew. Yet, in Shakespeare's time, conversion was to come at any cost. Though Shylock lost his faith and his method of employment, the audience would believe it was well worth it. By today's standards, the end events offer the modern audience the ability to feel sorrier for Shylock, who is one of Shakespeare's more complicated villains.

***Summary:***

* At the court of law in Venice, the Duke, Antonio, Bassanio, Salerio, Graziano, and various notable personages are gathered for Antonio's trial. The Duke begins the trial by showing how impartial he is: he immediately says he's sorry for Antonio and that Shylock is an "inhuman wretch, uncapable [sic] of pity, void and empty from any dram of mercy."
* Wow, so much for a fair trial. Antonio shrugs this off as no big deal—he knows everyone has done what they can, and he's prepared to face Shylock's fury head-on, patiently suffering Shylock's rage.
* Shylock is called into court, where the Duke addresses him first. The Duke says that he and the whole world are certain that Shylock has only let things get this dangerous out of malice. They're all sure that at the last minute Shylock will go back on his cruelty and renege on wanting a pound of Antonio's flesh.
* They even expect his mercy will extend to forgiving some portion of the debt, especially as Shylock knows of the crippling losses Antonio just faced at sea, losses that would destroy any man. Even a Turk or a Tartar, known for their lack of manners, would be moved to pity facing Antonio and his bad circumstances.
* Shylock is advised that he should have a gentle answer.
* Shylock speaks for himself at court, rather than having a lawyer. He says he's sworn by the Jewish holy Sabbath that he'll get what he's owed for Antonio's forfeiture of the bond. Further, if the city should fail to enforce Antonio's oath, their charter and their freedom will be called into question.
* Shylock simply states that he doesn't actually have to answer why he'd rather have a pound of Antonio's flesh than the 3,000 ducats. Other men have all sorts of preferences—some don't like roasted pig, some pee when they hear bagpipes (we're not kidding—he really says this).
* Just as those men are swayed by their inexplicable passions, Shylock should be allowed to inflict his cruelty against Antonio because he darn well pleases it—no need explaining it to the rest of the world. He adds that he can't give a reason, nor will he, about why he will show no mercy to Antonio. All he can offer is that he loathes the man, and that this should be reason enough to want what Shylock is rightfully owed in the first place.
* Bassanio pipes up and says this doesn't excuse how cruel Shylock is being—do all men kill what they hate? Shylock retorts that a man would only be driven to kill something because he hated it. (En garde!) The two bicker until Antonio cuts them off. It's clear to him that arguing with Shylock is, as he says, as useful as asking the wolf why it ate the lamb and made the mommy sheep cry.
* Antonio claims nothing is harder than the Jewish heart, which nothing can soften. He'd rather they finish all this pleading and hurry up to the trial's conclusion, so he can be judged and Shylock can get what he wants.
* The Duke tries to chide Shylock, asking how he can expect mercy when offers none. Actually, Shylock points out, he hasn't done any wrong. He then brilliantly flips the script. He points out that there are lots of slave owners in the crowd. He notes that if the Duke demanded of those men that they free their slaves and allow them to live peacefully and in equality with their former masters, the men would revolt.
* The justification for their rebellion would be that "The slaves are ours." Just like them, Shylock has bought and paid for Antonio's pound of flesh—Antonio even agreed to it (which is a notch above slavery, he seems to be saying). If the law is worth anything, they will uphold it for Shylock the same way they would protect slave owners.
* The Duke responds to Shylock's arguments with the retort, "Maybe we should all go home now, unless Doctor Bellario, who is the real guy who can settle this, shows up." (Note: "Doctor" seems in this play to be a general term for a learned man, so this guy is probably some sort of lawyer, not a medical professional. Given the terms of the bond agreement, though, one of those probably wouldn't hurt to have around.)
* Conveniently, a messenger has arrived with news from Bellario at Padua.
* Meanwhile, Bassanio and Antonio aren't paying much attention, as they're having their own private pity party. Bassanio promises he'd sooner give up his blood and bones than have Antonio lose a drop of blood on his behalf.
* Antonio counters that he himself is the weakest link, so he's the one who should die. Bassanio would be most useful not by being self-sacrificing but by writing Antonio's epitaph.
* As Shylock and Graziano argue over whether Shylock is the soul of a murderous wolf reincarnated, the Duke gets around to reading the freshly-delivered message. The letter is from Doctor Bellario and says he is sick, but he's sending this young man in his stead. The boy (who is actually Portia) has been briefed on the situation and is prepared to act based on Doctor Bellario's opinion and his own learning.
* Gasp!
* Portia enters and is introduced to the court as "the learned doctor Balthazar." She's all business and immediately asks Antonio if he admits to his oath with Shylock. Antonio does, and Portia immediately concludes "Then the Jew must be merciful." Her reasoning is that mercy is an attribute of God himself, and earthly justice should try to mirror what God would do rather than simply what the law would.
* Portia argues that if legal justice, or justice as the court would provide, was all that mankind followed, everyone would go to hell, because mercy is necessary for salvation. She adds that as we all pray for heavenly mercy, we must be willing to be merciful ourselves here on earth. Her hope in making this argument, she says, is to soften Shylock's plea for justice, strictly interpreted.
* Shylock's says he's here to see justice served according to the law, no more and no less.
* Portia asks whether Antonio can just pay off the debt, and Bassanio immediately offers to pay twice what's owed. In fact, Bassanio is willing to pay ten times the debt, offering his own life up as the guarantee. Bassanio declares that if this is not enough, it will prove that Shylock is more motivated by malice than righteousness.
* Finally Bassanio appeals to the Duke, asking him to—just this once—take the law into his own hands and help Antonio. It would mean a little twisting of the rules, but it would have a good impact. Portia, however—as "the learned Balthazar"—pipes up here that bending the rules simply isn't an option; it would set a bad precedent.
* After looking over Shylock's bond, Portia declares that he has every legal right to what's owed to him because of Antonio's forfeit. Still, she again asks Shylock to be merciful, and suggests he might forget the whole bond by accepting three times what he's owed.
* Shylock compliments Portia for her knowledge of the law, but again states that no man will move him. He will have his due according to the law. Antonio too is tired of all this talk and would rather just get the whole darned thing over with. Portia tells Antonio to bare his chest and be prepared to go under the knife for Shylock.
* They then go over the logistics. Shylock has scales ready to weigh the flesh. (This guy was obviously not joking.) Also, he's going to take the flesh from near Antonio's heart, as was apparently stipulated in the bond. (This is the first time we're hearing this.) Portia asks Shylock if he has a surgeon ready nearby to stop the wounds so Antonio doesn't bleed to death, but Shylock notes that this wasn't part of the agreement.
* Antonio and Bassanio then hold hands and share tearful goodbyes. Antonio tells Bassanio not to be sad that he's dying on his behalf. He tells Bassanio instead to be stoked that Fortune, usually a cruel wench, has allowed Antonio to die mercifully rather than live like a poor person.
* Antonio tells Bassanio to tell his new wife Portia the story of his death—then Portia can then judge whether someone didn't once love Bassanio. In other words, Antonio loves Bassanio, and his wife really needs to know that.
* Antonio then instructs Bassanio only to be sad that he's losing a friend. Antonio himself does not regret paying Bassanio's debt to Shylock with his life, so Bassanio shouldn't either.
* Bassanio then points out that his wife is as dear to him as his life, but even his wife, his life, and the world put together are not worth more to him than Antonio. (Aw!)
* Portia, in disguise, wryly comments that if Bassanio's wife were around to hear this, she wouldn't be stoked (which she is not!).  Then Graziano offers up his wife, too, adding that he wishes she were dead and in heaven so she could plead with God to change Shylock's mind.
* Nerissa, Graziano's wife disguised as Balthazar's attendant, also wryly states that if Graziano's wife were around to hear this, there'd be no peace in his household. Shylock adds that this is the way with Christian husbands, and he laments that a Christian, not a Jew, took his own daughter. (And his money, but who's counting?)
* Finally they're done talking about the merits of marrying Christians, and Portia is back to getting Antonio cut for Shylock. She lays out again the stipulations of the bond: the law gives up a pound of Antonio's flesh, and the law allows Shylock to cut it from Antonio's breast.
* As Shylock is nearly salivating over the prospect of some Antonio flesh, Portia suddenly halts the process. She says the bond allows for a pound of flesh, but not for the shedding of blood. If Shylock takes a drop of Christian blood from Antonio, then the law of Venice states that Venice can confiscate his land and goods. Shylock's all, "What?! Is that really the law?" and Portia points out that since Shylock was so keen on following the letter of the law, he's got to follow all of the law, including the law of Venice on assaulting Christians.
* Hearing this, Shylock quickly backpedals; he'd rather just take three times the bond money and be on his merry way withoutmaking Antonio into fish-bait. But Portia insists this is no longer an option—he wanted the law, and now he'll get the law. He can still have exactly a pound of Antonio's flesh, but if he sheds any blood or if he takes more than one exact pound, then he dies and all his worldly goods will go to the state.
* Shylock, caught, asks only for the principal of the debt, the 3,000 ducats, hoping for the whole affair to just be over with. Though Bassanio offers it up, Portia cuts him off again. Shylock has already refused the offer in court, and he will receive only the law, just as he asked for. Portia insists that Shylock no longer has any right to anything but the forfeiture of Antonio's flesh, which he can take at his own peril.
* Shylock is beat, and he knows it, so he says he won't stick around to hear any more of the case. Again Portia stops him, as the law has more to say about the trial. She brings up another law of Venice, which says that if a foreign national has sought the life of a Venetian, either directly or indirectly, then the would-be victim gets half of his stuff, and the other half will go to the state, while the fate of the would-be murderer is in the hands of the Duke. Things being as they are, it's clear that Shylock sought the life of Antonio, a Venetian, and the state and Antonio can confiscate his stuff. All Shylock has left to do is beg the Duke to spare his life.
* Graziano, always helpful, says it would be nice if Shylock could beg for permission to hang himself, but with his estate gone, he couldn't afford any rope and he'd have to get the state to buy it for him. The Duke, who has apparently gone through more sensitivity training than Graziano, cuts in and pardons Shylock's life before Shylock even asks him to. The Duke declares that half of Shylock's wealth now belongs to Antonio, and the state will be merciful and only charge Shylock a fine instead of taking the other half of his wealth.
* Shylock speaks for the first time and says if they take away his means of living, they may as well take his life. Portia asks Antonio what mercy he can offer Shylock.
* Antonio says he's okay with the state deciding that Shylock doesn't need to pay them their half of the fine. As for his half, he'd like to have it go to Lorenzo and Jessica.
* Antonio also has two conditions: Shylock needs to convert to Christianity, and he needs to put in the court record that when he dies, Jessica and Lorenzo will inherit everything he leaves behind.
* The Duke likes all of Antonio's conditions. (Because forced religious conversion is always a good idea, right?) He says that if Shylock doesn't accept them, he will recant his pardon on Shylock's life. Shylock, who is clearly getting the shaft left and right, has no choice left, so announces that he is content.
* Portia tries to get the clerk to write up the deed of gift to Jessica and Lorenzo, but Shylock is, understandably, not feeling well. He asks them to let him get the hell out of the court and to send the deed after him to sign.
* The Duke invites the disguised Portia to have dinner with him, but she diplomatically defers. She says she really has to be getting back to Padua.
* Bassanio then approaches Portia and offers her the 3,000 ducats they had tried to give Shylock earlier. Antonio adds that he'll love "Balthazar" forever and ever. Portia/Balthazar basically says, "Thanks, but no thanks. I did a good job, and that's enough for me." Still, she teases that the men will recognize her when they meet again.
* Bassanio presses that she really should take something, and also pardon him for being so persistent. Portia/Balthazar relents and asks for Antonio's gloves, which she says she'll wear for his sake.
* From Bassanio she wants his ring (which is actually hers). Bassanio hesitates, saying there's more to this ring than its monetary value. He offers to get Balthazar the most expensive ring in Venice if he can only keep this one. But Portia/Balthazar insists, especially because he insisted so much initially.
* Bassanio then explains that his wife gave him the ring, and to give it away would be to break faith with her, as she made him promise never to give it away, sell it, or lose it. Portia responds sharply—she says this is a common excuse for men who don't want to give away their stuff. She then says if Bassanio's wife is not a "mad woman," she'll understand that Balthazar did Bassanio a great service and therefore deserved the ring.
* Also, Portia-in-disguise counsels, his wife can't be mad at him forever. Then Portia says, in essence, "Okay, never mind." And she leaves.
* Antonio chastises Bassanio after Portia/Balthazar and his attendant leave. He tells Bassanio to give up the ring. It's what Balthazar deserves, and Antonio's love should be worth more than Portia's bossy demands.
* Bassanio wimps out and gives in. He gives Graziano the ring and instructs him to run after Balthazar, give him the ring, and try to get him to come to Antonio's house for dinner. Having done this, Bassanio says he'll hang for the night with Antonio (as he promised Portia he would not do) and then they'll both head to Belmont in the morning.

***Critical Study:***

The trial of Antonio in a Venetian court of justice begins. The Duke of Venice warns Antonio, the defendant, that the plaintiff (Shylock) is "a stony adversary . . . uncapable of pity . . . [and] void . . . of mercy." Antonio declares that he is ready to suffer quietly. He knows that "no lawful means" can save him now. Shylock is called then, and when he enters, the duke says that everyone — "the world thinks, and I think so too" — thinks that he should relent at the last moment and spare Antonio, taking "pity on his losses." But Shylock is adamant; he prefers the penalty of a pound of flesh to repayment of three thousand ducats. Why? "Say," says Shylock, "it is my humor." In other words, Shylock wants the pound of flesh for no rational reason. He wants it only because of "a lodged hate and a certain loathing" for Antonio.

Bassanio then tries to reason with Shylock — but without success. Antonio tells Bassanio that he is wasting his time. He himself asks for no further pleas; he begs that judgment be quickly given. Bassanio cannot believe that his friend is serious. He offers *six* thousand ducats, but Shylock refuses. The duke then asks Shylock a question: "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?" In reply, Shylock cites the mistreatment of many Venetian slaves by the Venetians themselves, justified by the fact that they *bought*the slaves and can treat them as they please; likewise, the pound of flesh which he has "dearly bought" belongs to him, and he can do with it as he pleases. He therefore demands an immediate judgment confirming this right.

The duke declares that he is waiting for a certain "Bellario, a learned doctor," to arrive from Padua before he makes a final decision concerning this case. This matter is too weighty for one man to render a single opinion on; therefore, Shylock's demand for judgment will have to wait, and he will have to cease his demand — or else the duke "may dismiss this court."

Bassanio meanwhile tries to cheer up Antonio, vowing that he himself shall give Shylock his own life in place of Antonio's "ere [Antonio] shalt loose for me one drop of blood." Antonio, however, is without hope. He tells Bassanio to "live still, and write mine [Antonio's] epitaph."

At that moment, Nerissa enters the courtroom, dressed like a lawyer's clerk, and delivers a letter from Bellario to the duke. While the duke reads the letter, Shylock whets his knife on the sole of his shoe to the horror of Antonio's friends. The clerk of the court then reads aloud the letter from Bellario. The doctor is ill, but he has sent in his place "a young doctor of Rome," named Balthasar, whose wisdom in the law belies his youth. Bellario says that he never knew "so young a body with so old a head," and he asks the duke for his "gracious acceptance" of Balthasar in Bellario's stead.

The duke welcomes young Balthasar, who is, of course, Portia "dressed like a Doctor of Laws." Portia acknowledges that she is familiar with this case and its "strange nature," and she is equally acquainted with the integrity of Venetian law. She asks Antonio if his bond is a valid one, and he admits that it is. She then tells him that Shylock must be merciful. At this, Shylock is shocked: Why should *he*bemerciful? Because, Portia answers, "mercy is . . . [like] the gentle rain from heaven"; mercy is "twice blest; / It blesseth him that gives and him that takes." She continues and says that mercy is an attribute of God. It is freely bestowed to temper justice, and those who grant mercy ennoble themselves, especially those people who have the power to dispense punishment and yet award mercy instead. She points out to Shylock that all people "pray for mercy" and "that same prayer" should teach us all to "render the deeds of mercy."

Her speech is lost on Shylock. He "crave[s] the law" and "the penalty and forfeit of [his] bond." He does not care that Bassanio has offered him "thrice the sum" of the bond or even "ten times o'er"; Shylock demands the penalty. Portia pronounces that Venetian law is indeed binding, and whenever decrees are established, alterations set a precedent and "many an error" has been the result. Thus, Antonio's bond is legal, and Shylock can collect the pound of flesh.

Shylock hails the wisdom of this young judge, calling him "noble," "excellent," "wise and upright." He then produces the scales on which he will weigh the flesh, but he balks at Portia's suggestion that he himself personally pay a physician to attend Antonio to see that he does not bleed to death. A judgment is a judgment, and nothing in Antonio's bond mentioned Shylock's hiring a physician. Antonio then turns to Bassanio, bids him farewell, and asks to be commended to Bassanio's "honorable wife," for whose cause the loan was arranged in the first place. He tells Bassanio to tell Portia that he, Antonio, loves Bassanio; Bassanio loses only a friend who loves him dearly. This is all, and "if the Jew do cut but deep enough," death will come quickly. Both Bassanio and Gratiano assure Antonio that they would sacrifice *everything*they have — even their wives — to save him. Both Portia and Nerissa — the Doctor of Law and her clerk of law — comment on this; they doubt that the wives of these loyal friends would "give little thanks" for *that*offer.

Impatient to proceed, Shylock makes ready to begin, but before he can carry out the sentence, Portia stops him. "There is something else," she says. Shylock is legally entitled to take a pound of Antonio's flesh — but no more. That is, Shylock may not take even a single "jot of blood." She then gives Shylock leave to begin his surgery, warning him that if "one drop of Christian blood" is shed, Shylock's "lands and goods" will be confiscated by "the state of Venice."

Shylock realizes that he has been foiled. Thus he says that he is now willing to take Bassanio's offer of three times the amount of the bond. Portia decides otherwise. Shylock shall have "nothing but the penalty" — "just a pound of flesh" — no more, no less. And if he takes even "in the estimation of a hair" more than a pound of flesh, he will die and all his goods will be confiscated. Gratiano jeers at the moneylender; now the tables are turned. Realizing that he is beaten at his own game, Shylock asks for only the amount of the bond — and Bassanio offers it — but Portia points out that all the court was witness to Shylock's refusing the money. Therefore, he can have "nothing but the forfeiture," which he can still take, but at his own peril. In addition, Portia reminds Shylock that one of the laws of Venice forbids an alien from directly or indirectly attempting "to seek the life of any citizen" of Venice. She tells Shylock that she has seen sufficient proof that Shylock seeks Antonio's life both directly and indirectly. Thus, she commands him to "beg mercy of the Duke." At this point, the duke speaks and pardons Shylock, sparing his life and adding that the penalty of the state's taking half of Shylock's goods will be reduced if Shylock evidences some "humbleness." Shylock is adamant at such a proposal: "Nay, take my life and all," he declares.

Following the duke's merciful example, Antonio says that he will take only half of Shylock's goods which are due to him (Shylock can have the other half) in trust in order to give them to Lorenzo (Shylock's son-in-law) upon Shylock's death, on two conditions: first, Shylock must become a Christian, and second, he must deed everything to Jessica and Lorenzo. Quietly, Shylock agrees to the settlement: "I am content," he says, and asks permission to leave the court.

The duke invites Portia to dinner, but she declines; she also declines Bassanio's offer of three thousand ducats as her legal fee. Both Antonio and Bassanio press Portia to take something; they are both exceedingly grateful for all she has done, and Portia finally agrees to take two tokens as a "remembrance." She asks for Bassanio's gloves, and she also asks for his ring. Bassanio pales; she can ask for anything, he says, but ask not for his ring. It was a present from his wife, who made him promise never to part with it. Portia pretends indignation: She wants "nothing else" but the ring; "methinks I have a mind to it." She tells Bassanio that he is only "liberal in offers." He is, in effect, asking her to *beg*for the ring — an insult. Turning, she leaves. Antonio pleads with his friend; surely the lawyer deserves the ring. At last, Bassanio yields and sends Gratiano after the lawyer to give him the ring. He then turns to Antonio and tells him that early the next morning they will "fly toward Belmont."

We now reach the dramatic high point of the play. In this scene, the matter of the "bond" reaches its crisis and its resolution: Shylock is defeated, Antonio is saved, and the lovers are free to return to Belmont; thus, Shakespeare gives us the happy ending which a romantic comedy requires.

In the introductory speeches by the duke and Antonio, we are reminded of the antithetical positions of the two adversaries. The Duke of Venice himself calls Shylock "an inhuman wretch, / Uncapable of pity," and Antonio characterizes himself as lost — "no lawful means" can save him. Sympathy surrounds Antonio, but dramatic sympathy is also structured around the solitary figure of Shylock. He is an intensely sympathetic figure here, alone in his solitude, surrounded on all sides by his enemies. This will be even more striking at the moment of his defeat.

By asking Shylock to show mercy toward Antonio, the duke provides Shylock with a final opportunity to restate his position and, dramatically, Shakespeare prolongs the suspense of whether or not Shylock will actually demand Antonio's life. Throughout this scene, Shylock is asked, both by the court and by his opponents, *why*he refuses to relent toward Antonio. In each case, his answers are themselves unanswerable; he "stands upon the law"; the law is a creation of those who are now asking him to break it. Shylock's principles are as good, and better, than his inquisitors; it is under *their*law that he has "sworn / To have the due and forfeit of my bond." However, Shylock goes beyond this and, in effect, he admits that his desire for revenge lies in the "lodged hate" that he bears toward Antonio. Although he professes to stand on the letter of the law, Shylock reveals quite clearly that his real motive has nothing to do with right or wrong, justice or injustice, but with his desire to destroy another human being — a Christian who has publicly scorned and spit upon him. This admission is important, since it figures later in Portia's plea, in her powerful "quality of mercy" speech.

Antonio knows that mercy is unlikely from Shylock, and Shakespeare tightens the tension of this scene by having Antonio beseech Bassanio to stop trying to win any sympathy from Shylock. It is no use; Shylock insists upon having justice carried out according to the law. Yet, while Shylock is demanding "justice," Shakespeare makes absolutely clear to the audience that Shylock's inhumanity, his obsession with revenge, is what motivates his demands. When Shylock says, "the pound of flesh . . . is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it," he is not speaking of "rights" anymore; he is demanding his enemy's blood.

Tension increases further when Nerissa (as the law clerk) is announced, and she presents the letter from Bellario to the duke. Tension increases almost unbearably as the duke reads the letter and Shylock pulls out his knife and begins to sharpen it on the sole of his shoe. It is an almost melodramatic touch, giving Shylock's inhumanity powerful, visible form. Shylock now seems in complete command, secure in the knowledge that, legally, he has bested everyone in the courtroom. He, an alien Jew, in a Christian community that has spurned him, has triumphed over prejudice and has won in a Venetian court because of the binding integrity of Venetian law.

When Portia is brought on in disguise, Shakespeare sustains the tension still longer by having her question the legality of the bond — Antonio may not have agreed formally or he may have agreed to another set of conditions. Her question "Do you confess the bond?" emphasizes once more that no avenue of escape is possible for Antonio. He answers that he agreed to the bond. The "quality of mercy" speech that follows is a last plea; seemingly, Portia sees no other hope for Antonio. Thus, she confirms the "decree established," and this gives her yet one moment more to think of some new strategy. In a moment of inspiration, she asks to see the bond; she inspects it, and she discerns a flaw: Antonio's *flesh*may be forfeit, but nothing has been stipulated concerning the letting of *blood.*Thus she, like Shylock, decides to stand on the absolute letter of Venetian law: Shylock may indeed claim "a pound of flesh, to be by him cut off / Nearest the merchant's heart." She can declare this, knowing full well that Shylock's knife will never touch Antonio. This explains her surprisingly legal coldness; Portia knows *exactly*what she is doing. At this point, however, the audience doesn't, and this, of course, adds to the tension of the scene.

Thus she proceeds with methodical legality — until the last moment, when she says, understatedly, "Tarry a little; there is something else," words which will reverse the whole situation. Now it can be demonstrated anew that Shylock remains merciless in order to justify the punishment which he finally receives. Portia's delay demonstrates this and shows us Shylock's insistence on the absolute letter of the law, for it will be in accordance with the law that Shylock will punish Antonio. When Portia orders Antonio to "lay bare your bosom," Shylock is able to quote from the bond; "So says the bond. . . . 'Nearest his heart'; those are the very words." And when Portia humanely asks Shylock to "have . . . some surgeon . . . to stop his wounds," Shylock is appalled at Portia's lack of legalese: "Is it so nominated in the bond? . . . I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond." Clearly, Portia is leading Shylock slowly into a trap which he has prepared for himself with his reply to her plea for mercy, "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law."

At this point, the dignity which Shylock possessed at the scene's beginning and the sympathy which Shakespeare evoked for him has now gone, as he exults over Antonio's approaching death. As an avenger of past wrongs by Antonio, Shylock gained some sympathy from the audience; now, whetting his knife and anticipating with relish the moment when he will be able to use it, he becomes a butcher and loses that sympathy. All of this is necessary for the total effect of the play; this is why Shakespeare wisely makes Portia delay final pronouncements and then ingeniously begin to reveal new interpretations of absolute justice. Shakespeare is manipulating, with genius, the sympathy of the audience.

Antonio's seemingly last speech at line 263 has a dignified nobility; he declares once more his love for Bassanio; he asks him neither to grieve nor repent. At this point, the situation is a potentially tragic one, and once more Shakespeare needs to remind his audience that this play is *not,*finally, tragic. He achieves this at the moment of greatest tension when he allows the drama to slacken for a moment, and we listen in on the little exchange between the disguised wives (Portia and Nerissa) as their husbands declare their love and loyalty for one another; we chuckle when we hear Portia and Nerissa comment on these "last" words between Antonio and Bassanio. The "judge" and the "clerk" agree that the *wives*of these two gentlemen would *not*be happy to hear their husbands exchange such avowals of ready sacrifice of lives for one another.

The turning point of this act and of the play occurs at line 304: "Tarry a little; there is something else." Obviously, Shylock has come toward Antonio and now stands with his knife raised to strike, while the group on stage stands transfixed. Portia's voice, still calm, cuts through the silence. With Portia's pronouncement that the law allows "no jot of blood," Shylock's case is lost. He is almost struck dumb; "Is that the law?" is all he can ask. He was absolutely certain that his trust in the law was inviolate. The law that he believed to be so solid crumbles before him, and he realizes that his case is now absolutely, irrevocably reversed.

The law goes on to condemn him, reversing his position so completely that he himself is threatened with death. Shylock's last appearance before us, in total defeat, can, in some cases, depending on the actor, win back some of the sympathy lost earlier in this scene. But he is given little to say in comment upon the judgment passed upon him. Here, silence is the most powerful kind of eloquence. One can hardly imagine his next-to-the-last line, "I am content," uttered in any other way than in almost a whisper. He has been defeated — he, a Jew — in a Venetian, Christian court of law, and as part of his punishment, he has had to agree to become a Christian. This is an ultimate punishment for so orthodox a Jew; he is so stunned that he *begs*his judges: "I pray you give me leave to go from hence: / I am not well. Send the deed after me, / And I will sign it." This is a masterstroke of simple, understated pathos. Now, Shylock has lost everything. He has shown us, however, how hate breeds hate, and Shakespeare has demonstrated how hate is finally, ultimately, defeated. Through Shylock's extreme behavior, Shakespeare dramatizes the way in which the laws of justice and property on which society is based can be, without charity and mercy and humanity, as ferocious as the law of any jungle. This, then, rather than the legal quibbles, is what is important in this scene. There is no denying that the rule of law is necessary. But law, when it is not tempered with *mercy,*is, as Shakespeare vividly shows us, both inhuman and destructive.

Since this is the central scene of the play and since it turns on our interpretation of Shylock, it follows that the way we see Shylock here determines the way we see the whole play. If he is played as a near-tragic figure, the conflict between mercy and justice is to some extent obscured. Shylock is left stripped of his daughter, his property, and his religion. That seems a harsh judgment; at times, it is difficult to see Shylock as anything but a figure of pathos. We tend to agree with the nineteenth-century writer Hazlitt, who wrote that "certainly our sympathies are oftener with him than with his enemies. He is honest in his vices; they are hypocrites in their virtues." On this point, we ought to recall three things. First, for the Elizabethan audience, Shylock was not just a "characterization"; he was the "villain" of a romantic comedy, and as such, he has to be punished. Second, Shylock's money, which he had hoarded for himself, is to go to Lorenzo and Jessica, two of the play's lovers. Love and hate are thematically opposed in this play, and since Shylock is slowly revealed to be the embodiment of hate, there is a satisfying kind of justice in his riches going to a pair of lovers. And third, the court's judgment that Shylock become a Christian would have pleased the Elizabethan audience immensely. They all genuinely believed that only a Christian could achieve salvation; they would see the court's decision as a chance for Shylock to achieve salvation. Thus the judgment was imposed, quite literally, for the good of Shylock's soul.

After Shylock's exit, the play, which has, at times, come near to tragedy, and which has had, because of Shylock, an element of pathos, reverts completely to the tone of a romantic comedy. The barrier to the true fulfillment of love has been removed. It remains only for us to return to Belmont for the closing act of the play; the threats and conflicts of this act are removed and are replaced by an atmosphere of love and concord.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) and [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio) appear before the Duke of Venice. Shylock demands fulfillment of the letter of their contract, and Antonio believes it is pointless to argue or try to reason with Shylock. The duke hopes Shylock will relent and show Antonio mercy at the last minute, but Shylock makes it clear he has no such plan. He says he wants the pound of flesh because it is "[his] humor," and he refuses when [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) offers him twice the sum of the original loan. Shylock compares his entitlement to Antonio's body to the way other Venetians feel entitled to do as they will with the bodies of their slaves and animals.

The duke calls Doctor Bellario from Padua and Balthazar, Doctor Bellario's colleague from Rome, who is actually [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia) in disguise. She first appeals to Shylock to show Antonio mercy because mercy is its own reward. She goes on to respond to Shylock's calls for justice by saying, "That in the course of justice none of us/Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy." Shylock remains unmoved, just as he remains unmoved by Bassanio's repeated offers to pay twice or 10 times the sum of the loan. Portia looks at the bond and urges Shylock to accept three times the amount of the loan. When he refuses again, Portia bids Antonio to prepare for Shylock's knife. She waits until Shylock approaches Antonio with the knife before stopping him and informing him that the bond allows him a pound of Antonio's flesh, but it does not allow him any drop of Antonio's blood. It is impossible for Shylock to take his pound of flesh without spilling blood, so Shylock is found guilty of conspiring to commit murder against a citizen of Venice. He could receive the death penalty for this crime, but the duke spares his life. The duke takes half Shylock's fortune for the state and gives the other half to Antonio. Antonio asks the court to drop the fine of half his goods to the state and says he will give his own half of Shylock's fortune to Lorenzo and [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) upon Shylock's death. He requires Shylock to leave any of his own possessions to Lorenzo and Jessica upon his death as well and that Shylock convert to Christianity. Shylock agrees to these terms and leaves the court.

After Shylock departs and Antonio is freed, he and Bassanio thank Portia—still believing her to be Balthazar—for her assistance. They insist on giving her some payment for her trouble, and she takes Bassanio's gloves. She then asks for his ring, the one she gave him when they were wed. Bassanio refuses to part with the ring, and she scolds him for not giving her the ring and takes her leave. Antonio then convinces Bassanio to send the ring to the legal scholar saying, "Let his deservings and my love withal/Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment." Bassanio sends [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano) to catch up with Portia and give her the ring.

[Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio)'s trial represents a confrontation between ideas that define the two religions at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice*. As presented in the play, Judaism is a religion focused on rules, following law, obedience, and justice in the form of punishment and atonement for wrongdoing. This reflects the Old Testament idea expressed in Exodus, Chapter 21: 23–25: "But if any harm follow, thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) represents this point of view. On the other hand, [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia), the duke, and others represent the Christian ideal of mercy and salvation even for those who do not deserve it. Portia says this directly in her speech to Shylock. She admits no one deserves mercy but says we show mercy because it is a human good. At the same time, there are at least two Christians present in the court who have no desire to show Shylock any mercy at all. [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano) tells Shylock if he were in charge, he would see Shylock hanged. A different moneylender might have shown Antonio mercy when asked; a different moneylender might never have asked for a pound of flesh as collateral.

For all the Venetians' attacks on Shylock for his trickery in the matter of his contract with Antonio, it is Portia whose trickery is most effective—and potentially deadly. She practices deception beyond the disguise she wears in the courtroom. After Shylock refuses to show mercy to Antonio, she goads him into moving to collect his pound of flesh. She urges him to sharpen his knife and move toward Antonio, even though she has read the bond and knows the loophole about spilling blood that she will invoke at the last minute. She does this to provide no doubt that Shylock is operating through malice and does intend to kill Antonio. In doing so she sets him up to lose the case and possibly receive a death sentence. Perhaps she suspects the duke will make an example of the mercy Shylock has refused to show, but she can't know that for certain. If she wanted Shylock to receive mercy, she might have warned him of the loophole in his contract. She might have warned him he would be subject to the death penalty if he pursued his present course. Her decision to entrap Shylock with his own contract seems based on a desire to punish his unwillingness to show mercy.

The themes of prejudice and mercy are most obvious in this scene. Shylock will not show mercy; he probably does not feel Christians have ever shown him any. But when Portia turns the tables, it first appears Antonio is willing to show mercy. Perhaps he has learned something from his experience. But, although he is happy for Shylock not to be condemned to death and asks that the state's half of Shylock's fortune be returned to Shylock for the duration of his life, he makes a demand that shows how deep his prejudice goes. Shylock must convert to Christianity, giving up the faith and customs that have formed the center of his life. Shylock agrees, but it is likely his agreement is only superficial. The audience cannot know what Shylock thinks of all this since he does not appear again in the play.

Portia's attempt to trick [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) into giving the ring she gave him to "Balthazar" appears designed to set him up for a later punishment for parting with his ring. It may be a punishment for Bassanio telling Antonio he would be willing to sacrifice his own wife to save Antonio's life. Portia is both clever and kind. Her ability to save Antonio when all the men around her have given up on doing so shows her wisdom is superior to that of all the other characters in *The Merchant of Venice*. Yet even Portia is not immune to the human desire for justice when she feels wronged by Bassanio.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

In Venice, the [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) opens [Antonio's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) trial by saying that he pities Antonio because [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) is an "inhuman wretch uncapable of pity" (4.1.3–4). The Duke has attempted to persuade Shylock to spare Antonio, but Shylock will not. Antonio replies that he is prepared to suffer Shylock's rage with quiet dignity.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The Duke's "inhuman wretch" remark is the first of many instances in this court scene in which Shylock will be described as a non-human. Antonio's gentleness is contrasted with Shylock's refusal to be swayed from enacting his revenge.

***Summary Part 2:***

The [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) summons [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) into court, and tells him that everyone believes that he means only to terrify [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) with this performance, and that, at the last minute, Shylock will show mercy, spare Antonio, and forgive his debt. "We all expect a gentle answer Jew!" (4.1.34) the Duke says.

***Analysis Part 2:***

A "gentile" is a non-Jew. The Duke's pun on "gentle Jew'" is an insistence by the Christian court that Shylock show what is believed to be the non-Jewish trait of Christian mercy.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) insists that he wants his "bond," and that if the [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) refuses him it will make a mockery of Venice and its entire justice system. Shylock refuses to explain why he wants a pound of flesh rather than money. He says that some men do not like pigs, some do not like cats, and that he does not have to explain himself any further than by saying that he hates Antonio.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Accused of being inhuman himself, Shylock now compares Antonio to various animals.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio), who is in the gathered crowd, tries to argue with [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock). But [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) interrupts, telling Bassanio it's no use: you might as well try to argue with a wolf as try to soften Shylock's hard "Jewish heart" (4.1.80). Bassanio offers Shylock twice the 3000 ducats that is owed to him. Shylock retorts that he wouldn't accept six times that amount.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Again, the Christians insult the Jews as animals. In the case of Shylock, it is true that his heart can't be softened. He wants revenge! But the Christians don't recognize that their own abuse and institutional prejudice fuel Shylock's rage.

***Summary part 5:***

The [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) asks how [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) can expect mercy if he himself doesn't show it. Shylock replies that he needs no mercy because he's done no wrong. He comments that the Venetians assembled have purchased slaves, asses, dogs, and mules; and just as those creatures belong to their owners, Antonio's pound of flesh belongs to Shylock, who has purchased it.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The Duke introduces "mercy" as an alternative to either "justice" or "revenge." Shylock, however, sticks by his claim that he has the law on his side: he has bought Antonio for money, just like other Venetians buy the flesh of animals and slaves.

***Summary part 6:***

The [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) announces that he has asked a wise lawyer, [Doctor Bellario](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia), to come and help judge the case. [Salerio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) reports that a messenger has come bearing letters from Bellario, and goes to get him. Privately, [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) urges Antonio to try to keep his spirits up, but [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) responds that he is like the "tainted wether" (castrated ram) in a flock of sheep and that Bassanio should aspire not to die for Antonio, but to live and write Antonio's epitaph.

***Analysis part 7:***

When Bassanio finally offers a self-sacrificing gesture, Antonio immediately overrides it. By referring to himself as a castrated ram, he casts doubt upon his sexual potency and his potential ability to marry or father children, further supporting the claim that he may be in love with Bassanio.

***Summary Part 8:***

[Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) enters, disguised as a lawyer's clerk. She presents a letter to the [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) from [Bellario](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia). Meanwhile, [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) wets his knife in anticipation of a verdict in his favor and [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) curses Shylock as an "inexecrable dog," whose "desires are "wolvish, bloody, starved and ravenous" (138). Shylock calmly replies that he has the law on his side.

***Analysis Part 8:***

After once again being insulted as an animal, Shylock insists that the law be carried out. As he sees it, he is doing no worse than the Christians do. Their laws restrict his life in countless ways, now his contract with Antonio restricts Antonio's life.

***Summary Part 9:***

The [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) reports that [Bellario](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) has recommended that the court hear the opinion of a young and learned lawyer, named [Balthazar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters), who has studied the case with Bellario and knows his opinion. [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) enters, disguised as Balthazar. The Duke greets her and asks whether she is familiar with the facts of the case. Portia replies that she is. "Which here is the merchant? And which the Jew?" (170), she asks. Antonio and Shylock come forth together.

***Analysis Part 9:***

When the play was first staged, the actor playing Shylock would have been costumed in a red wig with a prosthetic nose, looking nothing like the Venetian characters. In this context, Portia's question about who is the merchant and who is the Jew would probably be played as a joke. But in modern times, it reads as evidence of Antonio and Shylock's shared humanity.

***Summary Part 10:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) tells [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) that Venetian law is indeed on his side. Therefore, she begs him to show mercy, "an attribute to God himself" (4.1.191) that "seasons justice" (4.1.192). She repeats: rather than insisting upon justice, she says, Shylock should show mercy. Shylock rejects her request: "I crave the law" (4.1.202), he says, and insists upon having the pound of flesh.

***Analysis Part 10:***

Portia makes a stronger case for mercy as an alternative to either justice or revenge than the Duke did. But Shylock rejects what Portia has described as an attribute of the Christian god, insisting instead on a strict legal interpretation of his contract in order to get vengeance.

***Summary Part 11:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) asks if [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) has the money to repay [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock). [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) responds that he has offered up to ten times the sum of money owed, but Shylock refuses to accept it. Bassanio begs that in this case the law be bent to save Antonio's life. Portia responds that the law may not be bent: if she set the precedent that judges could create exceptions for particular cases, then chaos would ensue. Shylock praises Portia, comparing her to Daniel, the famous judge in the Hebrew Bible. Portia asks to see the contract. Shylock shows her. Portia again advises Shylock to take the money—three times the amount Shylock is owed—that Bassanio has offered him. Shylock refuses.

***Analysis Part 11:***

In running through the conditions and possibilities of the case, Portia echoes the suitors trying to figure out the riddle of the caskets. She is treating the law much like a riddle, as something to be interpreted. By citing Daniel as a Jewish forefather (who, incidentally was renamed Balthazar upon moving to Babylon), Shylock is basing his actions in a specifically Jewish set of beliefs and interpretations.

***Summary part 12:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) states that [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) is entitled to take a pound of flesh nearest [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio)'s heart. She begs him, once more, to be merciful. Shylock again refuses. Portia instructs Antonio to bear his chest for Shylock's knife and asks whether a scale is ready to weigh the pound of flesh. Shylock has brought scales. Portia recommends that they bring a surgeon on hand to try to save Antonio from bleeding to death after the cut has been made. Shylock refuses on the grounds that there is no such provision in their contract.

***Analysis Part 12:***

Portia, repeatedly calling for Shylock to show mercy, finds that each time he wants to insist on the most literal interpretation of the law. Antonio, meanwhile, instructed to bare himself to be cut open, begins to resemble a Christ-like figure or sacrificial lamb even more fully.

***Summary Part 13:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) asks [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) for any last words. Antonio tells [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) not to grieve, to send his best wishes to Portia, and to speak well of Antonio after his death. Bassanio and [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) respond that to save Antonio's life, they would willingly sacrifice their own lives and the lives of their wives. In their disguises as [Balthazar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and his clerk, Portia and [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) quip that it's a good thing Bassanio and Gratiano's wives aren't present as it's unlikely they would be pleased by such sentiments. Privately, in an aside, [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) comments in surprise at the nature of Christian husbands, who would so willingly allow their own wives to be killed. He wishes his daughter had taken a husband from "any of the stock of Barrabas (a Jewish bandit) ...rather than a Christian" (292–3). Then, aloud, Shylock demands the court stop wasting time. Portia agrees.

***Analysis Part 13:***

Antonio, Bassanio, and Gratiano, take their friendship and generosity to extraordinary, and, as Portia's quip points out, even ridiculous levels. Shylock's surprise at hearing these Christian men say that they are willing to sacrifice their wives increases the sense that, in some respects, he may deserve more sympathy than the Christian Venetians do. For instance, think of Shylock's tender sadness when he learned that Jessica had first stolen and then sold Leah's ring.

***Summary Part 14:***

But just as [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) is about to cut into [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio), [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) reminds Shylock that the contract doesn't grant him any drop of blood from Antonio's body: "the words expressly are 'a pound of flesh'" (303). She adds that if, in taking his pound of flesh, Shylock sheds "one drop of Christian blood" (4.1.306), then, following the law of Venice, all his lands and goods will be confiscated and given to the city.

***Analysis Part 14:***

Portia beats Shylock at his own game: she interprets the law even more literally than Shylock ever did, and in doing so she finds a loophole she can use to rescue Antonio.

***Summary part 15:***

[Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock), stunned, quickly backtracks, and decides to take [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio)'s prior offer of 9000 ducats. Bassanio is ready to accept, but [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) stops him. She says: Shylock wanted justice and he will have it. Shylock must take exactly a pound of flesh but without shedding any blood: if he takes any more or less, he will be put to death and all his property confiscated. Shylock asks if he really won't get back even his initial 3000 ducats. Portia replies that he will get nothing but exactly what the contract specified.

***Analysis Part 15:***

Shylock insisted that he wants the law, and Portia makes sure that he sticks exactly to the contract.

***Summary Part 16:***

[Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) says that he will give up his suit. But, Portia tells him that another Venetian law holds that if an "alien" (4.1.344) is proven to have sought the life of any "citizen" (4.1.346), that citizen has the right to take one half of the alien's property. The other half is confiscated and given to the state, while the alien's life lies at the mercy of the Duke. Therefore, she advises Shylock to beg for mercy from the Duke.

***Analysis Part 16:***

Now the tables have been turned on Shylock. He was advised to practice mercy but insisted on the law. Now he must beg for mercy rather than a strict interpretation of the law.

***Summary Part 17:***

Stepping in, the [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) declares that he will show [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) the "difference of our spirit" (4.1.364). He will spare Shylock's life, but Shylock must give half of his wealth to [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) and half to the state of Venice. [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) then asks Antonio to weigh in. Antonio says that the state should renounce its claim to its half of Shylock's property; Antonio will use his half during his life and grant it to [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) after his death. Shylock, for his part, must convert to Christianity and leave all his wealth to Lorenzo and Jessica.

***Analysis Part 17:***

Both the Duke and Antonio, lessen the force of Portia's law and show Shylock relative generosity. However, in forcing him to convert, they are stripping him of his identity as a Jew and forcing him to give up his occupation, because Christians may not practice usury. In other words, they reduce him to nothing more than the bare animal self he described in 1.3.

***Summary Part 18:***

When the [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) accepts these conditions, [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) mockingly demands: "Are you contended, Jew?" [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) concedes that he is. Portia tells the clerk to draw up a deed. Shylock says he feels unwell—they should send the deed after him and he will sign it. As he leaves, [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) snarls that he's lucky: if it were up to Gratiano, he would have been sent to the gallows, not to a baptism.

***Analysis Part 18:***

Having shown gracefulness throughout most of the scene, here Portia becomes a bit nastier, as she was when discussing her suitors with Nerissa. Gratiano, too, shows his typical bile. The gracious Christians suddenly seem less gracious.

***Summary Part 19:***

The [Duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) asks [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia), still disguised as [Balthazar](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters), to dinner. She declines on the grounds that she must get back to Padua. [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) and [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) also thank Portia. Bassanio tries give Portia the 3000 ducats he'd brought to pay off [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock), but Portia refuses. Bassanio insists that Portia take some gift as a token of thanks. Finally, Portia says she'll take Antonio's gloves and Bassanio's ring. Bassanio hesitates. He says the ring is worthless and he'll buy a more expensive one. Portia persists, and Bassanio admits that the ring is a gift from his wife that he has sworn not to give up. Portia responds that this is a convenient excuse and that as long as Bassanio's wife isn't crazy, she'll understand.

***Analysis Part 19:***

Here, the hospitality and friendly generosity that Act 1 suggested was typical among Venetian Christians, emerges again. Bassanio has already promised that he would sacrifice Portia to save Antonio. Now Portia puts Bassanio in a similar position, pitting his generosity against his love for her, by asking Bassanio to give up the ring he promised to keep in order to thank the person who saved Antonio's life.

***Summary Part 20:***

After [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) and [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) exit, [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) tells [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) that he should value Balthazar's efforts to save Antonio's life more than his wife's orders, and should give up the ring. Bassanio gives in. He sends [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) ahead with the ring and tells him to take it to Balthazar. Bassanio and Antonio head off to Antonio's house to rest for the night before returning to Belmont.

***Analysis Part 20:***

By giving away the ring—a symbol of Bassanio's fidelity to Portia and of female genitalia—and heading home with Antonio, for one final night together before his return to his bride and new home, Bassanio hints that he might share some of Antonio's apparent homoerotic desire.