***Act V Scene I***

***Analysis:***

***Synopsis:***

Lorenzo and Jessica are spending a romantic night in Belmont comparing themselves to famous lovers like Thisbee and Pyramus, Dido and Aenaeus, and Jason and Medea. A messenger interrupts them to tell the pair that Portia and Nerissa will be returning from the monastery soon. As the duo prepares to greet her, Launcelot enters, telling them that Bassanio will return the next day.

Portia and Nerissa arrive, and they are greeted by Lorenzo and Jessica. Portia makes them promise not to tell her husband that they ever left. Bassanio enters and happily greets his wife. Bassanio introduces her to Antonio, telling her that he has been acquitted by the court in Venice. The two overhear Nerissa and Gratiano arguing over the ring that he gave away to the clerk in Venice. Portia reprimands him and tells him that her husband would never part with her ring. Yet Gratiano tells her that he would not have given away his ring, but for the fact that Bassanio gave his to the young lawyer who freed Antonio.

Portia rails against Bassanio for having no heart, and she vows to never visit his bed again unless he gets the ring back. Bassanio begs for Portia to understand that he gave the ring to the lawyer for saving Antonio's life. Yet Portia tells him that he probably gave it to another woman and is just using the lawyer as an excuse. Antonio intercedes, telling Portia that she can have his soul if Bassanio ever betrays her again. Portia and Nerissa then relent and tell the men of all the events. Portia also offers Antonio a letter letting him know that all of his ships have arrived safely in port and tells Lorenzo that he is now heir to Shylock's wealth.

As typical of comedy, the last scene of the play is a joyous one. It ends with the women toying with their husbands and showing off their continued intellectual superiority. The women even get Antonio to believe in their deception, though in the previous act he dismissed the wife's love as below what Bassanio should show to him, he now relents and offers up his soul to preserve it.

Though it is supposed to be a happy ending, we wonder at the future of the pairings. Lorenzo and Jessica compare themselves to some of the most tragic figures in literary history. None of the couples they mentioned ended happily. Also, Portia and Nerissa's intelligence seem so much more advanced than their husbands, we wonder if their futures will be as pleasant as they are in the moment.

***Summary:***

* Lorenzo and Jessica are still at Belmont gazing at the night sky. They list off a bunch of things (from Greek mythology) that happened on nights like this, including Troilus weeping over Cressida, Thisby running away from a lion, Dido waiting for her lover, Medea gathering herbs for Jason, and, in one twisted love story, Jessica running away from her father to Lorenzo. Jessica teases that Lorenzo swore his love for her but was full of lies, and Lorenzo jokes that she is slandering their love, but he forgives her for it.
* They're interrupted by the approach of a messenger, who says that Portia is on her way home to Belmont that night. Oddly, she keeps stopping to pray along the roadside at holy crosses. Jessica and Lorenzo declare they should go in a prep the house for Portia to welcome her home.
* They're interrupted when Lancelot enters the scene and plays at his usual idiocy.
* The clown finally tells Lorenzo that he's gotten a message announcing that Bassanio will be home before morning.
* Lorenzo and Jessica hang out, listening to music and stargazing.
* Lorenzo says he really should rush inside and prepare, but instead he elects to stay outside and listen to some music. He speaks sweetly to Jessica about the power of music and how she should never trust someone who isn't moved by it.
* Lorenzo and Jessica speak some more about the power of music, but the scene shifts to Portia and Nerissa, who are also philosophizing about music. Portia sees a candle in her house and marvels at how far its little light shines.
* The two women then discuss some philosophical thoughts, like how a candle is bright until you compare it to the moon; and how music, seeming sweet during the day, is even sweeter at night when everything's quiet and you can hear it better. (These are two separate thoughts: the first is that comparisons are needed to understand an object's worth, and the second is that context has a lot to do with judgment.)
* Lorenzo then hears Portia's voice and they all greet each other. Portia quickly reminds everyone that she and Nerissa were off praying for their husbands' wellbeing. Hearing from Lorenzo that the two men are on their way home that same night, Portia tells Nerissa to make sure all the servants make no mention of her and Nerissa's absence. She instructs Lorenzo and Jessica to do the same. Just then, we hear the trumpet announcing Bassanio's approach, and Lorenzo promises that his and Jessica's lips are sealed.
* Bassanio then enters with Antonio, Graziano, and others in tow. There's much ado as Bassanio introduces Antonio to Portia, who welcomes him graciously. On the side, Graziano can be heard having a little squabble with Nerissa. He insists he gave "it" (her ring) away to the judge's clerk (and thus not a woman). Graziano says he hopes the judge's clerk is gelded (castrated) like a horse since Nerissa is so bothered by his decision to give the ring away.
* Portia turns her attention to their quarrel, and Graziano says Nerissa's only fussing about a little ring. Nerissa, of course, points out that the ring isn't the issue—it's that Graziano had sworn to take the ring to his grave. (We're sensing a theme here about oaths and promises and the like.) Even if he didn't care about her, at least he should have respected his oath.
* Graziano, however, keeps insisting that he gave the ring to the young boy who begged for it as a fee for his service.
* Portia backs up Nerissa, pointing out that she also gave her husband a ring on the same promise that he'd keep it forever, and of course he wouldn't ever, ever think of giving it away, right?
* Poor Bassanio, naturally, is shaking in his boots. So much so that he thinks maybe he should just cut off his left hand and swears he lost it defending the ring.
* Portia says she won't "come in [Bassanio's] bed" until she sees the ring. (But she has the ring.) Nerissa makes the same threat to Graziano. Bassanio tries to cover his bottom, saying Portia would be more forgiving if she knew the circumstances under which he gave the ring away.
* Portia responds that if he had known how worthy she was, he wouldn't have given it away at all.
* There's some squabbling about whether the ring was given to a woman, and Bassanio tries to explain the whole thing: the 3,000 ducats, the civil doctor (lawyer), the seeming ungratefulness, etc.
* Portia then says if the doctor ever comes around her house, she'll come around his house—if you catch our drift.
* Nerissa chimes in that she'd sleep with the doctor's clerk, but Graziano is not okay with that.
* Antonio cuts off all the quarreling. Having just barely escaped Shylock's knife, he's ready to risk his life again as a guarantee that Bassanio will, from this moment on, be faithful to Portia. Portia, hearing this, hands Antonio her ring to give to Bassanio, who must swear to keep it.
* Bassanio is shocked to get the same ring back, saying something like "Wow! I gave this to the doctor!"
* Then Portia's all "Awesome! I slept with the doctor!" Nerissa hands her ring back to Graziano, too, adding casually that she slept with the doctor's clerk.
* While Graziano laments that he's been made a cuckold (a husband who's been cheated on) before he even deserved it, Portia clears everything up. She hands over another letter from the mysterious Doctor Bellario, who has written that Portia was the doctor at Shylock's trial and Nerissa the clerk. Further, Portia has somehow gotten a letter for Antonio announcing that three of his ships randomly have made it safely (and richly) to harbor.
* Antonio says "I am dumb" (speechless).
* Then everyone makes up. Bassanio says the doctor can sleep with his wife anytime, since the doctor is his wife. Antonio praises Portia for "giving him his life and living." And Nerissa gives Lorenzo the good news that he and Jessica will get all of Shylock's inheritance.
* Portia adds that she'll explain everything further once they've all settled in. Graziano closes the play wondering, since it's so close to morning, whether he can sleep with Nerissa now or whether he has to wait until tomorrow night.
* The End!

***Critical Study:***

It is a moonlight night at Belmont, and Lorenzo and Jessica are on the avenue leading to Portia's house. In the still evening air, the newlyweds are jokingly comparing this night to nights when other lovers — Troilus, Thisbe, Dido, and Medea — all committed romantic acts of love and daring. Lorenzo reminds Jessica that this night is very much like the night when he "stole" Jessica away, and she reminds him that on just such a night as this, Lorenzo swore his vows of love to her. She boasts that she could surpass him in producing other examples of other lovers, but she hears someone approaching. It is Stephano, who brings them news that Portia, accompanied by Nerissa, will arrive "before break of day." Launcelot then comes in, dancing and "hooloaing" and "sollaing" that his master Bassanio will arrive before morning, and he exits.

Lorenzo asks Stephano to have the musicians come outdoors and play. Silently, Portia and Nerissa enter and pause to listen. Portia remarks that music heard at night "sounds much sweeter than by day." Lorenzo hears Portia's voice and recognizes it immediately. He welcomes her home, and Portia gives orders that no one is to mention her absence. Then, as dawn is about to break, a trumpet announces the arrival of Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano, and their followers.

Portia and Bassanio immediately exchange loving greetings, and Bassanio introduces his friend Antonio, who is graciously welcomed. Their conversation, however, is interrupted by a quarrel between Nerissa and Gratiano over the wedding ring which she gave him, and which he now confesses to have given to a "judge's clerk," a half-grown youth no taller than Nerissa. Portia tells Gratiano that he was at fault to give away his "wife's first gift." She is confident that Bassanio would never, for any reason, part with the ring which she gave him. Angrily, Gratiano tells her that Bassanio did indeed give away his wedding ring; in fact, he gave it to the "judge that begg'd it," just as he, Bassanio, gave his ring to the judge's clerk. Both wives pretend shock and anger, and they vow never to sleep with their husbands until they see their wedding rings again. Bassanio pleads in vain that he gave his ring for good reason to the lawyer who saved Antonio's life. Well, says Portia, since you have been so generous to him, if that lawyer comes here, "I'll have [him] for my bedfellow." "And," adds Nerissa,"I his clerk."

Antonio is terribly disturbed as he witnesses Portia's fury; he feels that he is "the unhappy subject of these quarrels." Bassanio then swears that if Portia will forgive him this time, he will never break a promise to her again. Antonio speaks up and offers his soul as forfeit, as before he offered his body, in support of Bassanio. Portia accepts Antonio's soul as security for Bassanio's word. "Give him this [ring]," she tells Antonio, "and bid him keep it better than the other." In amazement, Bassanio recognizes it as the same ring which he gave the lawyer. Nerissa then returns Gratiano's ring to her husband, who receives it in similar amazement.

Portia then explains that it was she who was the lawyer Balthasar at the trial of Antonio, and Nerissa was her clerk; they have just returned from Venice. For Antonio, she has a letter containing good news — three of Antonio's ships have safely come into port. Antonio reads the letter himself and is ecstatic: "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living," he says. Nerissa then presents Shylock's deed to Lorenzo and Jessica, bequeathing them all of his possessions.

"It is almost morning," Portia observes, and it will take time to explain how all these things happened. "Let us go in," she says, and she and Nerissa will answer all questions.

Act IV was given over almost entirely to the threat posed to the romantic love theme and was dominated by the figure of Shylock. In the play's last act, consisting of only this scene, we return to Belmont — the world of comedy and romance. The opening dialogue between Lorenzo and Jessica reestablishes the atmosphere of harmony.

Lorenzo's opening words call upon us to imagine that the lovers are surrounded by night and moonlight, "when the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees." Their dialogue is used to create the general atmosphere of love and night and moonlight, thus establishing the tone of the scene. Lorenzo introduces the theme of love and moonlight with two speeches of great beauty. In the early lines of the act (55-65), he introduces the idea that music is the "music of the spheres." This was a popular Elizabethan notion, according to which the revolution of each planet around the earth produced a sound, and the combination of all the individual sounds of the planets made a "divine harmony."

Lorenzo's next speech also concerns music. Having summoned Portia's own personal musicians, he signals them to play, and he elaborates on the nature of music to Jessica. Significantly, music is very often an important element in Shakespeare's plays, both as a theatrical device and also as a general criterion of character. Those characters who dislike music are invariably incomplete or distorted human beings. Here, Lorenzo underlines the idea that "the man that hath no music in himself . . . Let no such man be trusted."

The arrival of Portia and Nerissa, and then of Bassanio, Gratiano, and Antonio, sets in motion the final movement of the play: the denouement of the "ring story." Shakespeare has been quietly preparing us for this story as far back as Act III, Scene 2, when Portia presented her ring to Bassanio, "Which when you part from, lose, or give away, / Let be my vantage to exclaim upon you." The audience, of course, has been anticipating this development since the first scene of Act IV, when Antonio prevailed upon Bassanio to give the ring to "the young doctor of Rome."

After Bassanio, Antonio, and Portia converse sweetly together, Nerissa begins to take Gratiano to task, and their words suggest the beginning of a fairly violent disagreement. When Gratiano says, "By yonder moon, I swear you do me wrong," he invokes an air of injured innocence. One of the comic elements in what follows lies in the righteous confusion into which Bassanio and Gratiano are thrown. While they admit to having, for what seemed — at that particular time — to be the best of reasons, they did indeed part with their wedding rings. But they cannot understand their wives' furious accusations that they gave them to other women. Of course, in the comedies of ancient Greece and even in today's comedies, the sight of a man wrongly accused by his wife, yet totally unable to defend himself, is sure-fire comedy, and it is given a thorough workout here. As Nerissa berates Gratiano, Portia delivers her speech, with pious confidence, to the effect that her husband would never, on any account, part with the wedding ring which she gave him. Almost unconsciously, we wince in sympathy with Bassanio when he turns aside and says: "Why I were best to cut my left hand off / And swear I lost the ring defending it."

The element of the comedy here lies in the irony of many of the lines — that is, the knowledge which the two women have and the knowledge which the audience has and the knowledge which the two husbands do not have. This produces some lines which sound horrifyingly improper to the two husbands but are quite literally true. Portia says, for example, of the "doctor" to whom Bassanio gave the ring, that if he comes "near my house . . . I'll not deny him anything I have, / No, not my body nor my husband's bed. . . . I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow." To which Nerissa adds, sassily, "And I his clerk." And further, when they return the rings, Portia is able to affirm, "For by this ring the doctor lay with me," to which infidelity Nerissa is again able to add, the "doctor's clerk." By this time Bassanio and Gratiano have been teased enough, and the end of the scene is a succession of revelations: first, the true identity of the lawyer and his clerk, then of Antonio's good fortune, and finally, of Lorenzo and Jessica's inheritance.

Ending the comedy with the ring story serves two purposes. In the first place, Bassanio and Gratiano discover who Antonio's true saviors were. Second, and more important, there is always the threat of anticlimax at the end of a romantic comedy, when all the loose ends are tied up and the lovers are all reunited; suddenly, the "sweet talk" can become unbearably insipid. This is uniquely, usually, not the case with Shakespeare. He had a keen sense of the bawdy, and here he tempers his romantic scene with salty comedy in order to suggest that these lovers are very human lovers; their marriages will have their misunderstandings, but all this can be overcome with the aid of love and with another ingredient, a good sense of humor.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) and Lorenzo enjoy the moonlight in Belmont and compare the night—and themselves—with doomed lovers from classical myths. A messenger arrives to tell them [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia) and [Nerissa](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Nerissa) will return before daybreak. Shortly thereafter, Launcelot arrives to say [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) and [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano) will arrive before morning as well. Jessica and Lorenzo move to prepare for their arrival.

Portia and Nerissa hesitate outside the house, enjoying the music Stephano is playing within. Portia sends Nerissa inside with instructions to the servants not to mention their absence. Lorenzo hears them talking and welcomes them home. Bassanio and Gratiano arrive shortly afterward with [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio). Portia greets Antonio warmly as Nerissa and Gratiano argue about the lost ring. Portia scolds Gratiano for parting with Nerissa's ring, and Bassanio considers telling Portia he lost the ring defending it. Before Bassanio can tell his story, Gratiano announces Bassanio gave his ring away to the legal scholar, and Portia promises not to sleep with Bassanio again until the ring is returned. Bassanio tries to plead his case, but Portia claims to suspect "some woman had the ring." Antonio intercedes, saying he is the cause of these troubles, and apologizes. Portia gives Antonio a ring to give to Bassanio, and Bassanio sees it is the same ring as before. Portia claims she got it from the legal scholar when she slept with him. Nerissa claims to have gotten Gratiano's ring by sleeping with the scholar's clerk. Gratiano and Bassanio are dumbfounded. But Portia knows how they disguised themselves and her role in Antonio's trial. She also gives Antonio a message containing the news that three of his ships were not lost and have "richly" returned to Venice. They all enjoy the joke and make amends. Portia also gives Lorenzo [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock)'s deed, which leaves Lorenzo his property after his death. The household happily retires to bed before the sun rises.

[Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) and Lorenzo quietly enjoying one another's company, making jokes about the features their love story shares with the doomed couples of legend, provides a sharp contrast with the drama that unfolds between the other newlyweds in Belmont. Jessica and Lorenzo have overcome tremendous obstacles to be together; they have—to paraphrase the lead casket's inscription from Act 2, Scene 7—given all and hazarded everything for their love. Neither of them questions the others' loyalty, nor do they rely on symbols or objects as proof of their bond. The bond between them just *is*, and they value one another above all else.

[Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia)'s marriage to [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio) and [Nerissa](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Nerissa)'s to [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano) lack the simple affection visible between Jessica and Lorenzo. Bassanio and Gratiano *do* have divided devotion. If their rings are meant to symbolize the bond they have with their wives, they were wrong to give those rings away to men they believed to be strangers. Bassanio gives away his ring in [Act 4, Scene 1](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-4-scene-1-summary/) because on some level he does value [Antonio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Antonio)'s opinion and love over Portia's. In fairness to Antonio, Bassanio knows Antonio has sacrificed more for him than Portia has, and their relationship has a much longer history. But in fact, Portia has made similar sacrifices for Bassanio and Antonio. She offered Bassanio her whole fortune to save his friend's life. She then took the risk of disguising herself as a man and lying about her identity to the Duke of Venice to ensure Antonio's safety because she did not want her husband to lose his friend. If she had been caught in this deception, she would surely have faced punishment herself. Bassanio does not understand these truths until Portia reveals her identity as the young doctor of law who saved Antonio.

Antonio also makes a final sacrifice on Bassanio's behalf. Seeing that his involvement in Bassanio's life has divided Bassanio's loyalty and created strife in his marriage, Antonio tells Portia that the lost ring is his fault. She still holds Bassanio solely responsible, as she should, but Antonio swears his soul to helping preserve the integrity of Bassanio's marriage. To him this oath is more significant than the sacrifice of his body, and it represents a profound change in the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio. They may remain friends, but Antonio will no longer be first in Bassanio's loyalty. Antonio knows the love he bears Bassanio—whether that love is romantic or not—must evolve now that his friend is married.

***Significance:***

By the end of Act IV, Shakespeare has resolved the play’s two primary plots: the casket game has delivered to Portia her rightful suitor, and the threat presented by Shylock has been eliminated. Structurally, this resolution makes The Merchant of Venice atypical of Shakespeare’s comedies, which usually feature a wedding as a means of dispelling evils from and restoring rightness to the world. Here, however, the lovers are already wed, and the aftertaste of Shylock’s trial is rather bitter, especially to modern audiences. In order to sweeten his story, returning us to the unmistakable province of comedy, Shakespeare launches a third plot involving the exchange of the rings. Perhaps Shakespeare recognized the ambivalence with which we would greet Shylock’s demise and felt the need to reassert simple joy over the dark dramas of Venice. Life in blissful Belmont depends upon it.

Many critics have noted that the character of Shylock necessitates this rather forced return to the comedic. As one of Shakespeare’s most powerful and memorable creations, Shylock looms large over the play, and though he is not seen again after exiting the court, he remains lodged in our memory. In order for the lovers to enjoy a typically unadulterated happy ending, the angry, potentially victimized specter of Shylock must first be exorcised from the stage. The ring game is Shakespeare’s means of reasserting levity. Many critics consider Shylock a character who “ran away” from the playwright. Shylock may have started out as a familiar character: a two-dimensional villain in the red fright wig that European Jews were once required to wear. However, he emerges as an extremely intelligent man who has suffered profound mistreatment. Shakespeare provides Shylock with motivation for his malice, which raises Shylock above the level of evildoing bogeyman and makes his passions, no matter how terrible, at least comprehensible. For this reason, few modern audiences cheer when the Venetian court destroys Shylock. Our response to the Jew’s demise is likely to be much more complicated and ambivalent. The lovers’ exchange of the rings helps reposition the play as a comedy.

In devising the game in which Bassanio sacrifices his wedding ring, Portia once again proves herself cleverer and more competent than any of the men with whom she shares the stage. The ring game tests the boundaries of the homoerotic relationship between Antonio and Bassanio, for Antonio claims that his friend’s love for him should “[b]e valued ‘gainst your wife’s commandment” (IV.i.447). Bassanio’s willingness to part with the ring might signal a form of infidelity to his wife, but we feel little anxiety over it. Once Shylock makes his way offstage, the mood of the play is decidedly light. In other words, boundaries are tested, but they are not crossed. As the comedy genre demands, whatever wrongs have been committed will be forgiven summarily. When, at the end of Act IV, scene ii, Portia tells Nerissa that “we shall have old swearing / That they did give the rings away to men. / But we’ll outface them, and outswear them too,” we anticipate a frolicsome display of Portia’s wit, not an untimely and costly battle of irreconcilable differences (IV.ii.15–17).

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) lounge in moonlit Belmont. Trying to outdo each other, they flirt, comparing themselves to famous lovers of classical legend: Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, and Medea and Jason.

***Analysis Part 1:***

While the setting seems idyllic and full of love, if you read between the lines the references actually suggest the perils of love: things end badly for each of the couples named.

***Summary Part 2:***

A messenger enters with news that [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) will be back before daybreak from the monastery. He asks to know whether [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) has returned yet. [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) says that they have received no word for him. [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) enters, with news that Bassanio will be back before morning. Lorenzo tells the servants to prepare for Portia's arrival, and to bring out music for [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and him to enjoy in the meantime. While they listen, and Lorenzo rhapsodizes about the beauty of the night and the music of the spheres (music generated by the movement of the stars), which, he says, can tame even wild beasts.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The rush of messengers begins the reconciliation and conclusion scene that will end with the marriages of the major characters. Lorenzo's commentary on the stars and the music of the spheres indicates that be believes that the universe is beautiful and ordered by a divine law, and suggests that the dark forces of anger and brutality, which Shylock represents, have been tamed.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) and [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) approach Belmont, and Portia admires the candlelit beauty of the estate, saying: "How far that little candle throws his beams! / So shines a good deed in a naughty world" (5.1.89–90) As the music dies down, [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) recognizes Portia's voice and welcomes her home. She asks whether [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) and [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) have yet returned. Lorenzo replies that they have not, but that a messenger has come to announce that they are coming soon. Portia sends Nerissa into the house to instruct the servants not to give any sign of their having been absent. She tells Lorenzo and [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) that they, too, must keep this secret to themselves for the time being.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Portia's comment about the beauty of her estate in the moonlight seems to be the exact opposite of Lorenzo's. While Lorenzo sees the world as naturally good, Portia sees it as naturally "naughty." Once she reaches the castle, Portia begins to coordinate the last stages of her dramatic trick involving the rings, reminiscent of how she coordinated the casket-picking scene and the scene in the courtroom.

***Summary Part 4:***

At that moment, [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio), [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio), and Gratiano enter. [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) welcomes Bassanio home; Bassanio introduces Antonio and asks her to "give welcome" to the friend to whom he is "so infinitely bound" (5.1.133–5). Welcoming Antonio, Portia jokes that she hopes Bassanio is only metaphorically bound to him because, last she has heard, Antonio was bound to his friend by a very dangerous contract indeed.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Now that Antonio's trial is over, Portia's hospitality renews the bonds of friendship between the Christian Venetians. Portia word play regarding the word "bound" references the theme of reading and interpretation that dominated the casket and courtroom scenes.

***Summary Part 5:***

Nearby, [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) begin to argue over Gratiano's missing ring. Gratiano swears to Nerissa that he gave the ring to a judge's clerk. [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) asks what's wrong. Gratiano replies that his wife is overreacting. Nerissa insists that it is not the value of the ring but the fact that he broke his oath to keep it that upsets her. Portia joins in reprimanding Gratiano; she says, she gave her love such a ring as well, and made him swear never to part with it, and she is sure he never would. Gratiano blurts out in protest that [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) did give his ring away, to a judge who had earned it, and asked for it.

***Analysis part 5:***

This final trick draws attention to the dimension of exchanging gifts, a kind of economy that lies beneath supposedly spontaneous love (of the kind that Jessica and Lorenzo were talking about at the beginning of this scene). As in other scenes of interpretation, Shakespeare draws the process of discovery out for dramatic effect.

***Summary Part 6:***

[Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) admits it is true. [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) pretends to be furious. She swears that she will never go to bed with Bassanio until she sees the ring. Despairing, Bassanio tries to defend himself and beg Portia's forgiveness, but Portia stays firm. She insists that she will give everything she has, including her body, to the man who has the ring. [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) vows to [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) that she will do the same. Bassanio continues to plead for forgiveness. He says, if Portia will only forgive him this once, he will never again break an oath with her. [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) supports Bassanio, saying that he will be bound for his friend once more, and offer his soul as collateral because he is so certain that Bassanio will never again deliberately betray Portia.

***Analysis Part 6:***

The ring subplot really starts to take shape. The women's lie that they slept with the judge and law clerk to regain the rings makes the sexual connotations about rings (as symbols of female genitalia) more explicit. And once again, when Bassanio is in trouble, Antonio offers everything to help him. This time Antonio offers his soul in exchange for Bassanio's happiness, echoing his earlier deal with Shylock in which he offered his body in exchange for Bassanio's happiness.

***Summary Part 7:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) accepts the deal. She hands [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) the ring, which she pretends is a different ring, and tells him to give it to [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio) and to tell Bassanio not to lose it. When he sees the ring, Bassanio is stunned to see that it's the same one he gave to the lawyer! Portia explains that she got it from that very lawyer by sleeping with him, and asks for her husband's pardon. [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) does the same, explaining to [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) that she got her ring back by sleeping with the clerk the previous night. But before the shocked husbands can get too angry, Portia interrupts. She hands over a letter from [Bellario](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) in Padua, explaining that Portia was the lawyer who appeared in the Venice courtroom, and Nerissa the clerk. She calls upon [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) to testify to the fact that she has only just returned. He does.

***Analysis Part 7:***

As in the casket scene, and the court scene, Portia once again coordinates and manages the other characters so that they end up interpreting things the way she wants them to. This time, she gets Bassanio and Gratiano to believe that their failure to keep their oaths resulted in their wives' infidelity. However, after having her fun, Portia starts to wrap things up, neatly reinstating the customary boundaries of legal marriage—faithfulness, fidelity, and so on.

***Summary Part 8:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) also has a letter for [Antonio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/antonio) with even better news: three of his ships have suddenly come to harbor, full of riches. Then, Portia tells [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) that her clerk—[Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters)—has good news for him as well. Nerissa reports: she has a deed from [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock), leaving all of his property to Lorenzo and [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) when he dies.

***Analysis Part 8:***

To modern audiences, the Christian characters' delight at just how fully they have plundered the ruined Shylock may seem a bit distasteful in this otherwise happy scene. It reflects how strongly their prejudices persist.

***Summary Part 9:***

Finally [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) encourages everyone to go into the house to hear the full explanation of all these events. [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) jokes that he is not sure whether [Nerissa](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) wants to go to bed for two hours, or stay up and wait for the next night: he himself cannot wait to sleep with the doctor's clerk. For "while I live," he finishes, "I'll fear no other thing / So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's ring" (5.1.306–7).

***Analysis Part 9:***

By ending on Gratiano's crude sexual joke (the ring as a symbol for the vagina), the play hits a comic final note but also calls into question how admirable the "good" characters in this play really are. How are their glee at destroying Shylock and their crude sexual jokes any better than Shylock's love of money and thirst for revenge?