***The Merchant of Venice***

***Act 2 Scene 4***

***Summary and Analysis:***

***Summary:***

* Lorenzo, Graziano, Solanio, and Salerio all meet at a street in Venice to discuss a plot they've concocted that is not quite ready to be carried out.
* Lorenzo suggests that they slip away during dinnertime and disguise themselves, but Salerio points out that they don't have torchbearers (guys to carry their lights), and Solanio thinks the whole thing is a waste of time unless it's really carefully organized.
* Just then, Lancelot (young Gobbo) enters with Jessica's letter, which Lorenzo is excited to receive.
* Hearing that Lancelot is planning to invite Shylock to dine with Bassanio, Lorenzo tells Lancelot to secretly deliver a letter to Jessica.
* After Lancelot is gone, Lorenzo cryptically announces that he's found a torchbearer after all. (Don't worry. This little secret will be revealed.)
* So Lorenzo instructs everyone to meet up at Graziano's house later that evening. He is then left alone with Graziano to unfold the secret contents of Jessica's letter, which says (essentially) the following: "Dear Sweetie, Please steal me away from my father's house, sooner rather than later. Oh, and I've got some gold and manservants packed and ready to go."
* Lorenzo declares that any harm the girl comes to will be because she is the child of a "faithless Jew" and for no other reason...especially not her being a thief.
* Lorenzo hands the letter to Graziano to read and announces that Jessica will be his torchbearer.

***Brief Summary:***

Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino, and Solanio discuss the preparations for the masquerade party that evening and how they have no torchbearers. Launcelot enters and gives Lorenzo the letter, who excuses himself for a moment to read it. Launcelot exits to invite Shylock to dine with Bassanio that evening, while Salarino and Solanio exit to prepare for the party. Lorenzo tells Gratiano that the letter is from Jessica explaining how he is to help her run away from home that same night. Lorenzo tells Gratiano that if Shylock goes to Heaven, it will be because of Jessica. Lorenzo hands Gratiano the letter and tells him that Jessica will be his torchbearer for the masquerade.

The continued contempt of Shylock is again voiced by Lorenzo, who believes Jessica to be more virtuous by turning her back on her heritage and embracing Christianity due to her love of him. A play on words exists here, with Jessica becoming the torchbearer for Lorenzo, carrying a "torch" for the man she loves.

***Brief Analysis:***

Lorenzo makes plans with [Gratiano](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Gratiano), Salarino, and Solanio to "slink away in supper time" and disguise themselves to prepare for a masquerade at [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio)'s dinner. Launcelot delivers [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica)'s letter to Lorenzo, and Lorenzo sends him back to her with word that "[he] will not fail her." After Salarino and Solanio leave for the party, Lorenzo tells Gratiano that Jessica has told him how to get her away from her father's house and that she will be waiting, disguised as a page and carrying "what gold and jewels she is furnished with."

Lorenzo's friends support his pursuit of [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) and are happy to see he has received a letter from her. They will later assist him as he escapes with her from [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock)'s house. The decision to hold a masquerade as part of dinner mirrors the deception and disguise that will be necessary to carry out the elopement and also adds a touch of authenticity as such masquerades were part of Venetian culture. Even today masked celebrations remain a traditional part of the celebration of Carnival in Venice. Carnival is a Christian tradition that marks the week before Lent, the 40 days before the observance of Easter, which commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. During Lent strict Christians are supposed to give up eating meat, so Carnival—which draws its name from the Latin word for meat, *carnem*—is the last period during which Christians can eat meat for 40 days (in the United States these traditions of masked revelry are part of the celebration of Mardi Gras). While *this*masquerade is not definitively affiliated with Carnival, it does imply a connection to this Christian tradition and a contrast with Shylock's strict austerity seen in [Act 1, Scene 3](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-1-scene-3-summary/) and in [Act 2, Scene 5](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-2-scene-5-summary/).

***Critical Study:***

Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino, and Salanio discuss their plans for Bassanio's dinner party and masque that night. All of the preparations have not been made; for example, one of the things which they have neglected to do, and which must be done, is to hire young boys to act as torchbearers for the evening so that the gala party will be brightly lighted. This is to be a special evening, and all details must be considered.

While they are talking, Launcelot enters, on his way to invite Shylock to the party, and he delivers Jessica's letter to Lorenzo. Lorenzo reads it and sends Jessica a reply: "Tell gentle Jessica / I will not fail her; speak it privately." Lorenzo then tells his friends that he has found a torchbearer, and he confides to Gratiano that Jessica is going to disguise herself as a page tonight and elope with him; furthermore, she will escape with enough gold and jewels for a proper dowry. Lorenzo feels sure that Jessica, in a page's attire, can successfully disguise herself as a torchbearer for Bassanio's party and not be recognized.

The masque, which the characters discuss, never occurs; perhaps the play has been cut, or perhaps Shakespeare felt that there was simply not enough time for a masque. In any event, however, the anticipation of the masque causes the audience to envision it, and thus it suggests a youthful and romantic background to the Jessica-Lorenzo development ("Fair Jessica shall be my torchbearer"), a mood which is clearly antithetical to the self-denying and puritanical life of Shylock's household.

***Critical Analysis(Act 2 Scenes 1 to 4):***

On a street in Venice, Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino, and Solanio discuss the plan to unite Lorenzo with Jessica. Gratiano frets that they are not well prepared, but Lorenzo assures the men that they have enough time to gather the necessary disguises and torchbearers. As they talk, Launcelot enters bearing Jessica’s letter. Lorenzo recognizes the writing, lovingly exclaiming that the hand that penned the message is “whiter than the paper it writ on” (II.iv.13). Lorenzo bids Launcelot to return to Shylock’s house in order to assure Jessica, secretly, that Lorenzo will not let her down. Launcelot departs, and Lorenzo orders his friends to prepare for the night’s festivities. Salarino and Solanio leave, and Lorenzo relates to Gratiano that Jessica will escape from Shylock’s house by disguising herself as Lorenzo’s torchbearer. Lorenzo gives Gratiano the letter and asks Gratiano to read it, then leaves, excited for the evening’s outcome.

The elaborate excuse the prince of Morocco makes for his dark coloring serves to call attention to it and to his cultural difference from Portia and from Shakespeare’s audience. His extravagant praise of his own valor also makes him seem both less well-mannered and less attractive. Moreover, his assertion that the best virgins of his clime have loved him seems calculated to make him less, rather than more, attractive to Portia. Her response to his protestations is polite, even courtly, showing her good breeding and her virtuous acquiescence to her dead father’s wishes. But her words also clearly convey that she does not want to marry him.

The scene between the Gobbos is typical of Shakespeare, who frequently employs servants and members of the working class to provide slapstick interludes in both his comedies and tragedies. The Merchant of Venice does not derive all of its comic moments from the malapropisms and double entendres of this odd father-son pair, but the humor here is more crass and vulgar—so simple that it is hard to overlook and mistake. Seen in this light, we forgive things that might otherwise seem cruel to us, like Launcelot’s shabby treatment of his blind and doting father. This humor is comedy at its simplest, where laughs are derived not from quick wit but from confusion and foolery.

Although Shylock does not appear in these scenes, our view of him is further shaped by the opinions of those closest to him. Even though his servant and daughter do not like him, their descriptions of him inadvertently make him a more sympathetic figure in our eyes. Launcelot, we learn, is not abandoning his post because Shylock has proved to be a cruel or harsh master, but because he seems to fear contamination from being so close to a Jew. Interestingly, although he calls Shylock a devil, Launcelot points out that his desire to leave is a temptation more devilish still, and says his desire to stay is a product of his conscience, which is generally a guide of what is right. Jessica, too, voices no real complaint about her father, other than the tedium of life with him, but she seems eager to escape her Jewish heritage, which she sees as a stain on her honor. Jessica even brings the morality of her own actions into question when she calls her shame at being Shylock’s daughter a sin, and she feels enormous guilt at her own sentiments. Her desire to convert would undoubtedly have been applauded by Elizabethan audiences, but here it is expressed as a kind of young recklessness that borders on selfishness. The negative impression that Shylock has given us with his first appearance is somewhat counteracted by the words of those closest to him, who feel guilty even as they speak ill of him.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

On the street in Venice, [Gratiano](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters), [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters), [Salerio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) discuss Lorenzo's plan to elope with [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) that night, before the dinner at Bassanio's. They are interrupted when [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) enters, carrying Jessica's letter.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Unlike Portia, and her suitors who follow her father's legal dictates, by eloping Lorenzo and Jessica circumvent typical legal structures to get married.

***Summary Part 2:***

Reading the letter, [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) is overjoyed and remarks that [Jessica's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) "fair hand" is "whiter than the paper it writ on" (2.4.12). When [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) reports that he is headed back to his former master, [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock)'s, house, to invite Shylock to dinner on behalf of his new master, [Bassanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/bassanio), Lorenzo asks Launcelot to secretly bring Jessica the message that Lorenzo will not fail her. Launcelot agrees.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jews were typically depicted as darker than Europeans. Notice how Lorenzo describes Jessica, who will betray her father and fellow Jews, as white. He seems to believe that Jewishness is more an aspect of personality than biology.

***Summary part 3:***

Once [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) has left, [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and the others make plans to put on a fake "masque" (costumed show) as a cover to hide the elopement. [Salerio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) and [Solanio](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) exit, leaving Lorenzo and Gratiano alone. Lorenzo then tells Gratiano that [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters)'s letter contained instructions on how to help her escape from her father's house, where she has stolen gold and jewels from Shylock to take with them. Jessica, Lorenzo concludes, will flee with them tonight, costumed as his torchbearer.

***Analysis Part 3:***

It turns out that Jessica will not only abandon her father and avoid the traditional legal framework for getting married, she is also going to rob her father to provide herself and her husband with money. As in Bassanio's suit of Portia, romantic conquest and commercial gain are mingled. They all seem to think that stealing from a Jew is no big deal.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation1:***

LORENZO  
I must needs tell thee all. She hath directed  
How I shall take her from her father's house,  
What gold and jewels she is furnished with,  
What page's suit she hath in readiness. (2.4.33-36)

***Explanation 1:***

Lorenzo, like every other man in the play, conflates love with money. He's just praised Jessica for being beautiful, but what's important to tell his boys is that the girl is ready to go. She brings more than just her love, though; she's got her father's money, which seems as important to Lorenzo as the girl herself.