

**William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (1600).<sup>1</sup>**

Act IV, Scene I.

SCENE I. Venice. A court of justice.

(Enter the DUKE, the Magnificoes, ANTONIO, BASSANIO, GRATIANO, SALERIO, and others)

DUKE

What, is Antonio here?

ANTONIO

Ready, so please your grace.

DUKE

I am sorry for thee: thou art come to answer  
A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch  
uncapable of pity, void and empty  
From any dram of mercy.

ANTONIO

I have heard  
Your grace hath ta'en great pains to qualify  
His rigorous course; but since he stands obdurate  
And that no lawful means can carry me  
Out of his envy's reach, I do oppose  
My patience to his fury, and am arm'd  
To suffer, with a quietness of spirit,  
The very tyranny and rage of his.

DUKE

Go one, and call the Jew into the court.

SALERIO

He is ready at the door: he comes, my lord.

(Enter SHYLOCK)

DUKE

Make room, and let him stand before our face.  
Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,  
That thou but lead'st this fashion of thy malice  
To the last hour of act; and then 'tis thought  
Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange  
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty;  
And where thou now exact'st the penalty,

---

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, The Folger Shakespeare Library (1992).

Which is a pound of this poor merchant's flesh,  
Thou wilt not only loose the forfeiture,  
But, touch'd with human gentleness and love,  
Forgive a moiety of the principal;  
Glancing an eye of pity on his losses,  
That have of late so huddled on his back,  
Enow to press a royal merchant down  
And pluck commiseration of his state  
From brassy bosoms and rough hearts of flint,  
From stubborn Turks and Tartars, never train'd  
To offices of tender courtesy.  
We all expect a gentle answer, Jew.

SHYLOCK

I have possess'd your grace of what I purpose;  
And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn  
To have the due and forfeit of my bond:  
If you deny it, let the danger light  
Upon your charter and your city's freedom.  
You'll ask me, why I rather choose to have  
A weight of carrion flesh than to receive  
Three thousand ducats: I'll not answer that:  
But, say, it is my humour: is it answer'd?  
What if my house be troubled with a rat  
And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats  
To have it baned? What, are you answer'd yet?  
Some men there are love not a gaping pig;  
Some, that are mad if they behold a cat;  
And others, when the bagpipe sings i' the nose,  
Cannot contain their urine: for affection,  
Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood  
Of what it likes or loathes. Now, for your answer:  
As there is no firm reason to be render'd,  
Why he cannot abide a gaping pig;  
Why he, a harmless necessary cat;  
Why he, a woollen bagpipe; but of force  
Must yield to such inevitable shame  
As to offend, himself being offended;  
So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing  
I bear Antonio, that I follow thus  
A losing suit against him. Are you answer'd?

BASSANIO

This is no answer, thou unfeeling man,  
To excuse the current of thy cruelty.

SHYLOCK

I am not bound to please thee with my answers.

BASSANIO

Do all men kill the things they do not love?

SHYLOCK

Hates any man the thing he would not kill?

BASSANIO

Every offence is not a hate at first.

SHYLOCK

What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?

ANTONIO

I pray you, think you question with the Jew:  
You may as well go stand upon the beach  
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;  
You may as well use question with the wolf  
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;  
You may as well forbid the mountain pines  
To wag their high tops and to make no noise,  
When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;  
You may as well do anything most hard,  
As seek to soften that--than which what's harder?--  
His Jewish heart: therefore, I do beseech you,  
Make no more offers, use no farther means,  
But with all brief and plain conveniency  
Let me have judgment and the Jew his will.

BASSANIO

For thy three thousand ducats here is six.

SHYLOCK

What judgment shall I dread, doing  
Were in six parts and every part a ducat,  
I would not draw them; I would have my bond.

DUKE

How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?

SHYLOCK

What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?  
You have among you many a purchased slave,  
Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,  
You use in abject and in slavish parts,  
Because you bought them: shall I say to you,  
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?  
Why sweat they under burthens? let their beds  
Be made as soft as yours and let their palates  
Be season'd with such viands? You will answer  
'The slaves are ours:' so do I answer you:  
The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,  
Is dearly bought; 'tis mine and I will have it.  
If you deny me, fie upon your law!  
There is no force in the decrees of Venice.  
I stand for judgment: answer; shall I have it?

DUKE

Upon my power I may dismiss this court,  
Unless Bellario, a learned doctor,  
Whom I have sent for to determine this,  
Come here to-day.

SALERIO

My lord, here stays without  
A messenger with letters from the doctor,  
New come from Padua.

DUKE

Bring us the letter; call the messenger.

BASSANIO

Good cheer, Antonio! What, man, courage yet!  
The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones and all,  
Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood!

ANTONIO

I am a tainted wether of the flock,  
Meetest for death: the weakest kind of fruit  
Drops earliest to the ground; and so let me  
You cannot better be employ'd, Bassanio,  
Than to live still and write mine epitaph.

*(Enter NERISSA, dressed like a lawyer's clerk)*

DUKE

Came you from Padua, from Bellario?

NERISSA

From both, my lord. Bellario greets your grace.

*(Presenting a letter)*

BASSANIO

Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?

SHYLOCK

To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there.

GRATIANO

Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew,  
Thou makest thy knife keen; but no metal can,  
No, not the hangman's axe, bear half the keenness  
Of thy sharp envy. Can no prayers pierce thee?

SHYLOCK

No, none that thou hast wit enough to make.

GRATIANO

O, be thou damn'd, execrable dog!  
And for thy life let justice be accused.  
Thou almost makest me waver in my faith  
To hold opinion with Pythagoras,  
That souls of animals infuse themselves  
Into the trunks of men: thy currish spirit  
Govern'd a wolf, who, hang'd for human slaughter,  
Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,  
And, whilst thou lay'st in thy unhallow'd dam,  
Infused itself in thee; for thy desires  
Are wolvisish, bloody, starved and ravenous.

SHYLOCK

Till thou canst rail the seal from off my bond,  
Thou but offend'st thy lungs to speak so loud:  
Repair thy wit, good youth, or it will fall  
To cureless ruin. I stand here for law.

DUKE

This letter from Bellario doth commend  
A young and learned doctor to our court.  
Where is he?

NERISSA

He attendeth here hard by,  
To know your answer, whether you'll admit him.

DUKE

With all my heart. Some three or four of you  
Go give him courteous conduct to this place.  
Meantime the court shall hear Bellario's letter.

CLERK

*(Reads)*

Your grace shall understand that at the receipt of your letter I am very sick: but in the instant that your messenger came, in loving visitation was with me a young doctor of Rome; his name is Balthasar. I acquainted him with the cause in controversy between the Jew and Antonio the merchant: we turned o'er many books together: he is furnished with my opinion; which, bettered with his own learning, the greatness whereof I cannot enough commend, comes with him, at my importunity, to fill up your grace's request in my stead. I beseech you, let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation; for I never knew so young a body with so old a head. I leave him to your gracious acceptance, whose trial shall better publish his commendation.

DUKE

You hear the learn'd Bellario, what he writes:  
And here, I take it, is the doctor come.

*(Enter PORTIA, dressed like a doctor of laws)*

Give me your hand. Come you from old Bellario?

PORTIA

I did, my lord.

DUKE

You are welcome: take your place.  
Are you acquainted with the difference  
That holds this present question in the court?

PORTIA

I am informed thoroughly of the cause.  
Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?

DUKE

Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.

PORTIA

Is your name Shylock?

SHYLOCK

Shylock is my name.

PORTIA

Of a strange nature is the suit you follow;  
Yet in such rule that the Venetian law  
Cannot impugn you as you do proceed.  
You stand within his danger, do you not?

ANTONIO

Ay, so he says.

PORTIA

Do you confess the bond?

ANTONIO

I do.

PORTIA

Then must the Jew be merciful.

SHYLOCK

On what compulsion must I? tell me that.

PORTIA

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown;  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,  
It is an attribute to God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That, in the course of justice, none of us  
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much  
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;  
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice  
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.

SHYLOCK

My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,  
The penalty and forfeit of my bond.

PORTIA

Is he not able to discharge the money?

BASSANIO

Yes, here I tender it for him in the court;  
Yea, twice the sum: if that will not suffice,  
I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er,  
On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart:  
If this will not suffice, it must appear  
That malice bears down truth. And I beseech you,  
Wrest once the law to your authority:  
To do a great right, do a little wrong,  
And curb this cruel devil of his will.

PORTIA

It must not be; there is no power in Venice  
Can alter a decree established:  
'Twill be recorded for a precedent,  
And many an error by the same example  
Will rush into the state: it cannot be.

SHYLOCK

A Daniel come to judgment! yea, a Daniel!  
O wise young judge, how I do honour thee!

PORTIA

I pray you, let me look upon the bond.

SHYLOCK

Here 'tis, most reverend doctor, here it is.

PORTIA

Shylock, there's thrice thy money offer'd thee.

SHYLOCK

An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven:  
Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?  
No, not for Venice.

PORTIA

Why, this bond is forfeit;  
And lawfully by this the Jew may claim  
A pound of flesh, to be by him cut off  
Nearest the merchant's heart. Be merciful:  
Take thrice thy money; bid me tear the bond.

SHYLOCK

When it is paid according to the tenor.  
It doth appear you are a worthy judge;  
You know the law, your exposition  
Hath been most sound: I charge you by the law,  
Whereof you are a well-deserving pillar,  
Proceed to judgment: by my soul I swear  
There is no power in the tongue of man  
To alter me: I stay here on my bond.

ANTONIO

Most heartily I do beseech the court  
To give the judgment.

PORTIA

Why then, thus it is:  
You must prepare your bosom for his knife.

SHYLOCK

O noble judge! O excellent young man!

PORTIA

For the intent and purpose of the law  
Hath full relation to the penalty,  
Which here appeareth due upon the bond.

SHYLOCK

'Tis very true: O wise and upright judge!  
How much more elder art thou than thy looks!

PORTIA

Therefore lay bare your bosom.

SHYLOCK

Ay, his breast!  
So says the bond: doth it not, noble judge?  
'Nearest his heart:' those are the very words.

PORTIA

It is so. Are there balance here to weigh  
The flesh?

SHYLOCK

I have them ready.

PORTIA

Have by some surgeon, Shylock, on your charge,  
To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death.

SHYLOCK

Is it so nominated in the bond?

PORTIA

It is not so express'd: but what of that?  
'Twere good you do so much for charity.

SHYLOCK

I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond.

PORTIA

You, merchant, have you any thing to say?

ANTONIO

But little: I am arm'd and well prepared.  
Give me your hand, Bassanio: fare you well!  
Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;  
For herein Fortune shows herself more kind  
Than is her custom: it is still her use  
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,  
To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow  
An age of poverty; from which lingering penance  
Of such misery doth she cut me off.  
Commend me to your honourable wife:  
Tell her the process of Antonio's end;  
Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;  
And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge  
Whether Bassanio had not once a love.  
Repent but you that you shall lose your friend,  
And he repents not that he pays your debt;  
For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,  
I'll pay it presently with all my heart.

BASSANIO

Antonio, I am married to a wife  
Which is as dear to me as life itself;  
But life itself, my wife, and all the world,  
Are not with me esteem'd above thy life:  
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all  
Here to this devil, to deliver you.

PORTIA

Your wife would give you little thanks for that,  
If she were by, to hear you make the offer.

GRATIANO

I have a wife, whom, I protest, I love:  
I would she were in heaven, so she could  
Entreat some power to change this currish Jew.

NERISSA

'Tis well you offer it behind her back;  
The wish would make else an unquiet house.

SHYLOCK

These be the Christian husbands. I have a daughter;  
Would any of the stock of Barrabas  
Had been her husband rather than a Christian!

*(Aside)*

We trifle time: I pray thee, pursue sentence.

PORTIA

A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine:  
The court awards it, and the law doth give it.

SHYLOCK

Most rightful judge!

PORTIA

And you must cut this flesh from off his breast:  
The law allows it, and the court awards it.

SHYLOCK

Most learned judge! A sentence! Come, prepare!

PORTIA

Tarry a little; there is something else.  
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;  
The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh:'  
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;  
But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed  
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods  
Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate  
Unto the state of Venice.

GRATIANO

O upright judge! Mark, Jew: O learned judge!

SHYLOCK

Is that the law?

PORTIA

Thyself shalt see the act:  
For, as thou urgest justice, be assured  
Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest.

GRATIANO

O learned judge! Mark, Jew: a learned judge!

SHYLOCK

I take this offer, then; pay the bond thrice  
And let the Christian go.

BASSANIO

Here is the money.

PORTIA

Soft!  
The Jew shall have all justice; soft! no haste:  
He shall have nothing but the penalty.

GRATIANO

O Jew! an upright judge, a learned judge!

PORTIA

Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh.  
Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more  
But just a pound of flesh: if thou cut'st more  
Or less than a just pound, be it but so much  
As makes it light or heavy in the substance,  
Or the division of the twentieth part  
Of one poor scruple, nay, if the scale do turn  
But in the estimation of a hair,  
Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate.

GRATIANO

A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew!  
Now, infidel, I have you on the hip.

PORTIA

Why doth the Jew pause? take thy forfeiture.

SHYLOCK

Give me my principal, and let me go.

BASSANIO

I have it ready for thee; here it is.

PORTIA

He hath refused it in the open court:  
He shall have merely justice and his bond.

GRATIANO

A Daniel, still say I, a second Daniel!  
I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.

SHYLOCK

Shall I not have barely my principal?

PORTIA

Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture,  
To be so taken at thy peril, Jew.

SHYLOCK

Why, then the devil give him good of it!  
I'll stay no longer question.

PORTIA

Tarry, Jew:  
The law hath yet another hold on you.  
It is enacted in the laws of Venice,  
If it be proved against an alien  
That by direct or indirect attempts  
He seek the life of any citizen,  
The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive  
Shall seize one half his goods; the other half  
Comes to the privy coffer of the state;  
And the offender's life lies in the mercy  
Of the duke only, 'gainst all other voice.  
In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st;  
For it appears, by manifest proceeding,  
That indirectly and directly too  
Thou hast contrived against the very life  
Of the defendant; and thou hast incurr'd  
The danger formerly by me rehearsed.  
Down therefore and beg mercy of the duke.

GRATIANO

Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself!  
And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,  
Thou hast not left the value of a cord;  
Therefore thou must be hang'd at the state's charge.

DUKE

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirits,  
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it:  
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;  
The other half comes to the general state,  
Which humbleness may drive unto a fine.

PORTIA

Ay, for the state, not for Antonio.

SHYLOCK

Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that:  
You take my house when you do take the prop  
That doth sustain my house; you take my life  
When you do take the means whereby I live.

PORTIA

What mercy can you render him, Antonio?

GRATIANO

A halter gratis; nothing else, for God's sake!

ANTONIO

So please my lord the duke and all the court  
To quit the fine for one half of his goods,  
I am content; so he will let me have  
The other half in use, to render it,  
Upon his death, unto the gentleman  
That lately stole his daughter:  
Two things provided more, that, for this favour,  
He presently become a Christian;  
The other, that he do record a gift,  
Here in the court, of all he dies possess'd,  
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.

DUKE

He shall do this, or else I do recant  
The pardon that I late pronounced here.

PORTIA

Art thou contented, Jew? what dost thou say?

SHYLOCK

I am content.

PORTIA

Clerk, draw a deed of gift.

SHYLOCK

I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;  
I am not well: send the deed after me,  
And I will sign it.

DUKE

Get thee gone, but do it.

*(Exeunt)*