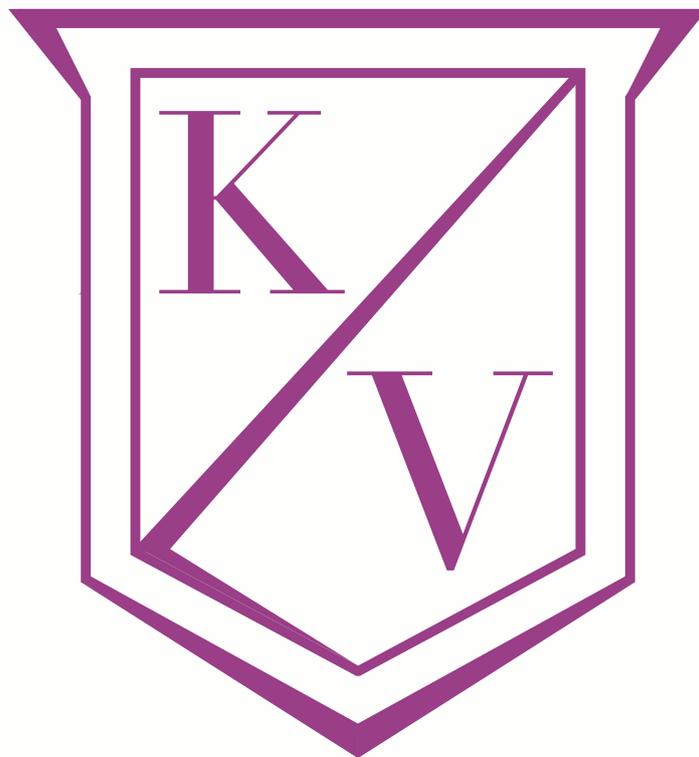


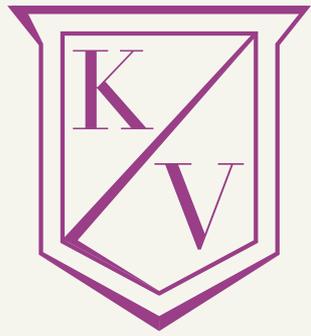
# Knightly Virtues



The Merchant of Venice

Learning About the Virtues  
of Gratitude and Self-Discipline

Heroes Who Inspire



# THE STORY

The Merchant of Venice

Story retold by the Jubilee Centre for  
Character and Virtues

One afternoon in the city of Venice, two gentlemen stood together on a bridge over a canal. The older man, Antonio, was a successful merchant. His companion was his friend Bassanio. Antonio had just told Bassanio a scandalous piece of gossip, but Bassanio did not seem interested.

‘What’s wrong, Bassanio?’ said Antonio. ‘You have hardly spoken a word to me’.

Bassanio peered down at the canal.

‘Last year, I visited the town of Belmont. I had dinner there with a man who had a beautiful daughter, named Portia’, he said.

‘She was wise, witty ---’

‘And you fell in love with her?’ interrupted Antonio.

Bassanio blushed. ‘I’ve been thinking about her ever since’, he confessed.

‘Two days ago, I learned that Portia’s father had died, leaving her all his fortune. She is one of the richest women in Italy.’

Antonio slapped his friend on the back.

‘Then go to Belmont and woo her!’ he urged.

‘Rich suitors are flocking to propose to Portia, even princes from foreign lands!’ groaned Bassanio. ‘What chance would I stand against them? I can’t even afford a new suit of clothes’.

‘How much money do you need to woo Portia in style?’ Antonio asked.

‘Three thousand ducats’, replied Bassanio.

Antonio lowered his voice, so that the passers by would not hear him.

‘If I had the money, I would lend it to you’, he said.

‘But at the moment, all my money is invested in four ships that are voyaging around the world. When they return to Venice, I’ll be a wealthy man again, but until then...’

‘So you can’t help me?’ Bassanio cried in despair.

‘My reputation is still good,’ said Antonio. ‘Find a moneylender who will loan you three thousand ducats, and I will sign a bond promising to repay him.’

Bassanio beamed. ‘You are the best friend a man could have!’ he declared.

While Bassanio and Antonio were talking on the bridge in Venice, in Belmont the lovely Portia paced to and fro across a richly furnished room. Her serving maid, Nerissa, watched from a chair in the corner. In the centre of the room was an oak table, and on it were three caskets -- one made of gold, another of silver, and the third made of lead.

Suddenly, Portia stopped pacing and stamped her foot. ‘This is so unfair!’ she grumbled, ‘I’m

an intelligent, educated woman, but can I choose a husband for myself? Oh no! The man who marries me must select one of these silly caskets. If he picks the right one, I have to be his wife.'

'That was one of the conditions of your father's will, Miss,' said Nerissa. 'If you hadn't agreed to it, you wouldn't have inherited his money.'

A far-off look came into Nerissa's eyes. 'I know who I'd pick as a husband for you,' she said.

'Who?' demanded Portia.

'That Venetian gentleman who came to dinner last summer,' Nerissa cooed.

A faint redness crept into Portia's cheeks. 'His name was Bassanio, wasn't it?' she said.

'So it was,' exclaimed Nerissa. 'There was something special about him, and if you ask me, he thought you were special too, Miss.'

Portia's cheeks turned a deeper red. 'Nonsense!' she said. 'Bassanio has probably forgotten all about me!'

As the sun set over Venice, Bassanio strolled around a public square, discussing business with Shylock the moneylender, who was a thin man with a long beard. Shylock had a sharp mind, but often pretended to be slow-witted, to mislead his clients. He frowned at Bassanio and said, 'Let me be clear about this. You want to borrow three thousand ducats?'

'I do' said Bassanio.

'And your friend, the merchant Antonio, will sign a bond guaranteeing he will pay back the money within three months?'

Bassanio nodded. 'He will, look, here comes Antonio now. He'll tell you himself'. Shylock narrowed his eyes. He and Antonio detested each other, though both men now made a show of being polite.

'Well, Shylock,' said Antonio. 'Will you lend Bassanio the money?'

'I am considering it,' Shylock replied. 'It surprises me that you're willing to sign a bond.' 'Normally, I wouldn't,' agreed Antonio. 'But this money is for my friend, so I am making an exception. Will you give him the money, or not?'

Shylock spoke quietly, but sparks of rage glowed in his eyes. 'Antonio you have often criticised the way I do business, but I have never complained,' he said. 'Today, you are asking for my help.'

'We don't like each other,' Antonio said frankly. 'Imagine the pleasure it will give you to make me pay a penalty, if I cannot repay you.'

Shylock laughed, as if he had thought of a joke. 'Speaking of the penalty, I think it would be amusing if the lawyer who draws up the bond writes that if you do not pay me by such-and-

such a date, you will let me cut off a pound of your flesh, from the place nearest your heart. Agree to that, and your friend shall have his money', he said.

Bassanio clutched Antonio's arm. 'No, Antonio!' he gasped. 'Let's find another moneylender.'

Antonio sensed that Shylock was testing him. If he refused Shylock's terms, the moneylender would spread the word that Antonio was a coward.

'Just as you wish,' Antonio said.

'No!' said Bassanio. 'What if something happens to your ships?'

'Don't worry,' Antonio said. 'They are due back in Venice a month before the repayment date.'

Neither Antonio nor Bassanio noticed Shylock's gloating smile.

In Belmont, Portia led the Prince of Morocco into the room where the caskets were kept. The prince was a handsome man. He stared at the caskets, picked up the one made of lead, and read the words inscribed on it. '*If you chose me, you must risk all that you have.*'

The prince put down the casket. 'Risk all that I have for lead?' he snorted. 'I will risk nothing for a common metal. What is the inscription on the silver casket? *If you choose me, you will get as much as you deserve.*' The prince laughed. 'This could be the right casket. I deserve the best, and Lady Portia would be the best wife for me. But I'll wait until I have read the inscription on the gold casket. *If you choose me you will get what many men desire.* This must be the one. Many men want to marry Lady Portia, and a prize like her must be in a casket made from the most precious metal of all!'

The prince lifted the lid off the gold casket, and cried out in dismay. Inside was a human skull, with a small roll of parchment in one of its eye sockets. The prince unrolled the parchment, and read:

*All that glistens is not gold  
As you often have been told  
You have chosen outward show  
So now say farewell, and go.*

Without another word, the prince left the room, and Portia breathed a sigh of relief. The next afternoon in Belmont, the Prince of Aragon took his turn at choosing between Portia's three caskets. He stroked his beard and spoke his thoughts aloud. 'Lead is too crude for my taste,' he said, 'and gold is too obvious. I choose the silver casket.'

The prince opened the casket, and found a miniature painting of a man dressed as a jester. With the painting was a parchment scroll, which read:

*This picture makes it plain to see  
That you have chosen foolishly  
Though you are strong, your mind is weak  
And you are not the one I seek.*

The prince bowed to Portia. 'I will not make an even bigger fool of myself by staying any longer, My Lady,' he said, and left.

The next moment, Nerissa burst into the room. 'You'll never guess who I met in town, Miss!' she jabbered. 'Bassanio! He's on his way here to ask you to marry him. Isn't it romantic?'

Portia felt as excited as Nerissa, but kept her feelings hidden. 'Romantic or not, he will have to take the test like all the other suitors,' she said, solemnly.

Bassanio and Portia were delighted to meet again. Portia explained the peculiar conditions of her father's will. Bassanio admitted that he was poor, and described how and why Antonio had borrowed money from Shylock.

Finally, Bassanio said, 'Show me the caskets. Let me choose.'

Portia was afraid. If Bassanio chose wrongly, she would lose him forever.

'Wait a few days!' she begged.

'I can't bear to,' said Bassanio. 'I have to know if we're to spend our lives together, or apart.'

Portia led Bassanio to the room where the caskets were kept, and he examined them. 'Evil often disguises itself,' he said. 'In court, a guilty man hides his crime behind a clever argument. Cowardly soldiers mask their fear by pretending to be brave. But this lead casket doesn't seem to be hiding anything.'

With shaking hands, Bassanio opened the casket. Inside was a portrait of Portia, and a scroll that read:

*You have not chosen with your eyes  
But with your heart, and you are wise.  
Turn now to where the lady is  
And claim her with a loving kiss.*

Portia was overjoyed that Bassanio had passed the test. She took a ring from her finger and gave it to Bassanio, saying, 'I give you this ring: never part with it as long as you love me'.

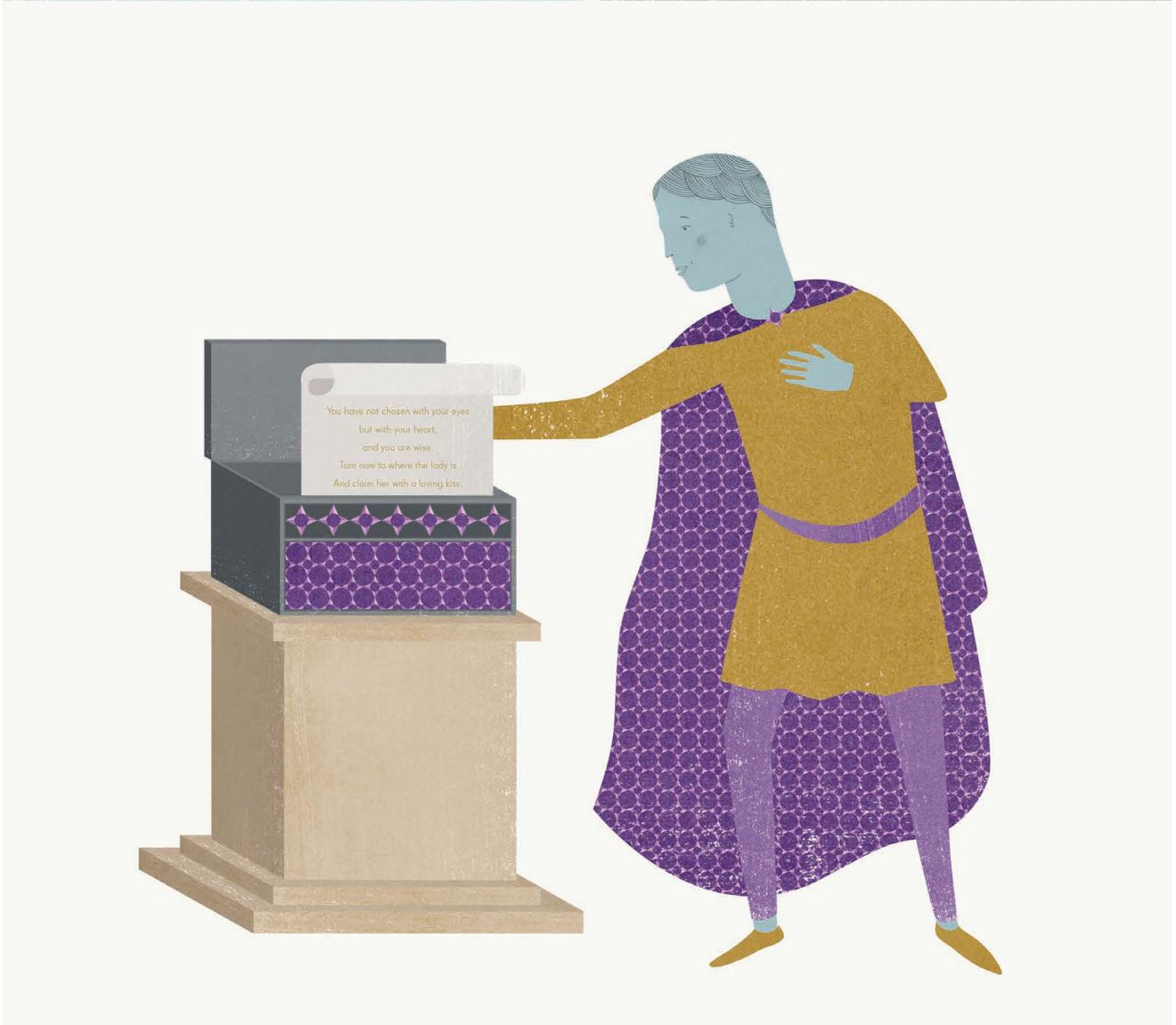
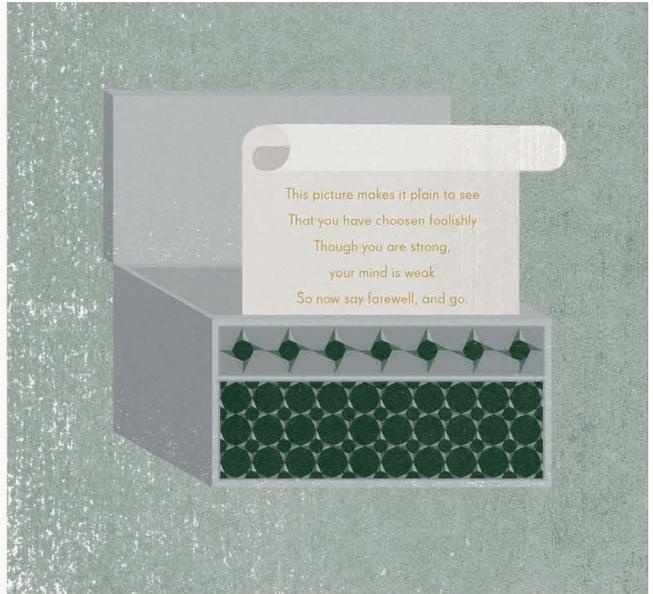
'It will leave my finger, only if I am dead,' Bassanio replied.

So, Bassanio and Portia were married, and were blissfully happy. Portia's servant Nerissa also married Bassanio's servant Gratiano. As the weeks turned into months, Bassanio almost forgot about his previous life. Then, one morning at breakfast, he received a letter from Venice. As he read the letter, he gasped in horror.

'Is it bad news?' enquired Portia.

'The worst!' Bassanio said. 'Antonio's ships have been lost at sea. Shylock has had him thrown into prison, and says that Antonio must keep his bond.'

# The Merchant of Venice — The Story



'Give Shylock his three thousand ducats!' exclaimed Portia. 'Give him six thousand if he wants.'

'Shylock's gentle daughter Jessica has also run off and married someone Shylock doesn't approve of. She took money from her father's cash boxes. The shock has hardened Shylock's heart,' Bassanio said.

'He insists on his pound of flesh. Antonio goes on trial in a few days.'

'We owe him our happiness,' said Portia. 'You must go and see him at once.'

While Bassanio was packing for his trip, Portia called Nerissa, and told her about Antonio. 'I'm going to help him!' announced Portia. 'My cousin, Dr Bellario, taught me a lot about law when I first tried to understand father's will. I will call on him, ask him for a letter of introduction to the Duke of Venice, and discuss Antonio's case. Then you and I are off to Venice; disguised as lawyers!'

On the day of Antonio's trial, all of Venice seemed to be packed into the courtroom. The Duke of Venice sat in the judge's chair, with Shylock to his left, and Antonio and Bassanio to his right.

The Duke signalled for silence and said, 'Where is the lawyer Balthazar, sent by Dr. Bellario to defend Antonio?'

Portia and Nerissa stood up, and bowed. They were wearing lawyers' robes, and Portia had glued on a false beard. 'Here I am, My Lord!' she said in a deep voice.

'You may begin!' declared the Duke. Portia turned to Shylock. 'Will you give up the bond if Antonio returned the three thousand ducats he borrowed from you?' she asked.

'I would not give it up for sixty thousand ducats!' Shylock hissed.

'Antonio,' Portia said, 'Were you tricked into signing the bond?'

'No,' replied Antonio.

Portia shrugged. 'Then the bond is legal, but Shylock must be merciful,' she said.

'Merciful?' hooted Shylock. 'Why must I be merciful?'

'Because mercy brings blessings, both to those who receive it, and those who give it,' Portia told him.

'I don't want to be blessed!' grunted Shylock. 'I want justice to be done!'

'Show me the bond!' said Portia.

The clerk of the court handed her a parchment, which she read quickly. 'The moneylender is right,' she said. 'The law is on his side. Antonio, unfasten your shirt, and prepare to die.'

'Give me your hand, Bassanio!' whispered Antonio. 'Goodbye, my friend!'

Shylock produced a dagger, and began to sharpen it on a small stone.

'Take care where you cut, Shylock,' Portia advised.

'Why?' snapped Shylock.

'According to the bond, you can cut off a pound of Antonio's flesh from the place closest to his heart, but there is no mention of blood.' Portia said. 'Shed one drop of his blood, and the state of Venice will confiscate everything you own.'

Shylock knew that he had been outwitted. He glowered at Portia.

'Give me my three thousand ducats!' he snarled.

'You have already refused the money in open court,' Portia pointed out.

The Duke spoke severely to Shylock.

'According to the laws of Venice,' he said, 'if someone plots to take another's life, half his property will be confiscated by the state, and the other half will be given to his intended victim.'

Shylock's face turned pale. 'I have lost everything,' he whimpered. 'You may as well sentence me to death.'

'Will you show Shylock any mercy, Antonio?' said Portia.

Antonio looked at Shylock, and saw not a loathed enemy, but a broken old man. 'I wish to end the hatred between us,' he said. 'Let Shylock keep my half of his property.'

The Duke stood up. 'The case is closed,' he said. 'All are free to go.'

The crowd in the courtroom cheered, and chanted Antonio's name.

Bassanio forced his way through the throng, and caught Portia by the arm. 'Master Balthazar. You have saved my friend's life!' he gushed. 'I swear I will give you anything you ask for.'

Portia smiled. 'Then I will have your gold ring,' she said. Bassanio's face fell. 'That is my wedding ring!' she said. 'I swore to my wife that I would always keep it safe.'

'And you swore to me that you would give me anything I asked for,' said Portia. 'Your wife is married to a man who thinks nothing of breaking promises.'

'Dear Bassanio,' said Antonio, 'let him have the ring; let my love and the great service he has done for me, be valued against your wife's displeasure'

Reluctantly, Bassanio removed the ring, and presented it to Portia. 'When she learns how much I owe you, my wife will understand why I gave you my wedding ring.'

Nerissa, acting as Balthazar's clerk, who had also given her husband Gratiano a ring, begged it from him and he also gave it her. And Portia and Nerissa laughed together, to think how,

when they got home, they would taunt their husbands about giving away their rings.

When Bassanio got home to tell Portia the good news about Antonio's escape from Shylock, they perceived Nerissa and Gratiano quarrelling in a corner of the room.

'A quarrel already?' said Portia. 'What is the matter?'

Gratiano replied. 'Lady, it is about a paltry gift ring that Nerissa gave me.'

'I know you gave it to a woman,' shrieked Nerissa.

'No,' replied Gratiano. 'I gave it to a clerk of the young counsellor that by his wise pleading saved Antonio's life.'

Portia now said, 'You were wrong, Gratiano, to part with your wife's gift. I gave my Lord Bassanio a ring, and I am sure that he would not part with it for all the world.'

Gratiano, trying to excuse his fault, now said, 'My Lord Bassanio also gave away his ring to the counsellor.'

Portia, hearing this, appeared very angry and reproached Bassanio for giving away her ring, and also said she believed he had given it to some other woman.

Bassanio, greatly upset, protested 'No, by my honour, no woman had it, but the lawyer who saved Antonio. Pardon me, good lady: had you been there, I think you would have begged me to give the ring to repay the good doctor.'

Antonio, now arriving, said 'Ah: I am the unhappy cause of these quarrels. But please forgive him. But for him to whom Bassanio gave the ring, I should now have been dead. Your Lord will never more break faith with you.'

'Then you shall be his surety,' said Portia; 'give him this ring, and bid him keep it better than the last'.

When Bassanio looked at this ring, he was astounded to discover that it was the one had given away, and he found to his wonder and delight that the wise Portia was the young 'counsellor' who had saved Antonio's life.

Then Portia again welcomed Antonio, and gave him letters that contained news of Antonio's ships, which had not been lost at sea, but had arrived safely in Venice's harbour. So all recent misfortunes were now forgotten in the light of Antonio's good fortune, laughter at the comical adventure of the rings and at the husbands who did not even recognise their own wives.

## The Merchant of Venice — Glossary

### The Characters

Antonio	The Merchant of Venice
Bassanio	A Gentleman and good friend of Antonio; marries Portia
Shylock	A Jewish moneylender
Portia	A wealthy heiress; marries Bassanio
Nerissa	Portia's servant; marries Gratiano
Gratiano	Bassanio's servant; marries Nerissa

### The Story

Bond	an agreement between two people, one person has money and the other person wants to borrow money, a bond is agreement that the person who borrows the money will pay it back at a certain time.
Casket	a pretty, small box, also often called a jewellery box.
Ducats	gold coins that were used for buying and selling across most countries in Europe.
Jester	a person who acts like a fool, someone who is a joker. They often wear a cap with bells on and brightly coloured outfits.
Merchant	a person who trades goods (for example food or spices) that (s)he did not make, normally (s)he sells goods to another country. Similar to a shopkeeper.
Merciful	forgiving someone when it is in a person's power to punish or cause harm.
Misfortune	bad luck.
Paltry	something with little value.
Penalty	a fine for doing something wrong or not doing something.
Rich suitor	a rich man who wants to marry a woman.
Slow-witted	someone who is slow to understand what is going on around them.
Surety	a person who accepts responsibility if another person fails to pay a debt
Taunt	something that is said to make somebody angry or upset on purpose
Throng	a large crowd of people