**Merchant of Venice Summary**

**Merchant of Venice Summary provides a quick review of the play's plot including every important action in the play. Merchant of Venice Summary is divided by the five acts of the play and makes an ideal introduction before reading the original text.**

**Act I.**

The play famous for the expression "a pound of flesh" and the lines, "If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" begins in Venice with Antonio a wealthy merchant who is not happy since he is worried about his business enterprises, namely his ships at sea which could be at peril from rough seas or pirates.

Antonio's friend Bassanio owes Antonio money but unable to repay his debts, asks Antonio for more money so he may marry the wealthy and beautiful Portia and so pay back his friend. Antonio has no money to spare but tells Bassanio to use his good name to try to get a loan...

Meanwhile Portia laments that she has yet to find her special someone. She famously complains about the faults of all her past suitors and her late father's will which chooses her husband for her. Portia's father's will chooses Portia's husband by means of three caskets, one gold, one silver and one lead. A suitor must choose one of the three caskets, a picture of Portia being contained in the correct casket. When a suitor chooses a casket, he makes his worthiness to Portia clear, this devise ensuring that only the right man for Portia will marry his daughter. Though Portia does not like any of her past suitors, she does however, remember one man quite fondly, Bassanio...

Bassanio gets his loan of three thousand ducats from a Jewish merchant named Shylock. The price for not repaying the debt is high, namely a pound of flesh from Antonio, but Antonio is not worried. His ships (and wealth) come back a month before the debt is due...

**Act II.**

The Prince of Morocco is willing to take the challenge set by Portia's father for Portia's hand in marriage....

Meanwhile, Launcelot Gobbo, Shylock's servant has a problem; he hates his boss. Bassanio arrives and after some conversation, Launcelot becomes Bassanio's new servant. Jessica, Shylock's daughter plans to elope with Lorenzo against her father's wishes, were he to know. Jessica reveals her shame for her father.

Lorenzo explains to his friends Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino and Salanio, how they will help him help Jessica run away from her father.

Launcelot, Shylock's former servant delivers to Lorenzo a letter from Jessica explaining that Jessica will be waiting at her house for Lorenzo and friends and that she has taken some of her father's jewels and gold as well. The letter also explains that Jessica will be disguised as a boy to aid her escape...

Shylock bumps into Launcelot, learning that Bassanio's party which he will reluctantly be attending, will be a masque (masked ball). Shylock tells his daughter Jessica to stay at home and to do her best to ignore the Christian revelries, which Shylock despises.

Jessica escapes from her father's house to live a new life as a Christian and as the wife of Lorenzo. Jessica is embarrassed to be dressed as a boy. The masque (masked ball) is canceled and Lorenzo and Jessica are to sail with Bassanio instead of attending the masque...

The Moroccan Prince undergoes the three-casket challenge for Portia's hand in marriage, choosing the gold casket and losing. Salarino and Salanio comment that a ship has recently floundered, hoping it is not one of Antonio's. We learn that Lorenzo and Jessica escaped successfully from Shylock who was too late to prevent his daughter's escape. Shylock is furious at having lost his daughter, his gold and his precious jewels to a Christian and knows that Antonio was partially involved and swears revenge...

At Belmont, another suitor has arrived, The Prince of Arragon. Not blinded by the inscription on the gold casket which bears the phrase, "Who chooseth [chooses] me shall gain what many men desire" he instead chooses the silver casket which bears the inscription, "Who chooseth [chooses] me shall get as much as he deserves."

Opening the silver casket, he finds a "portrait of a blinking idiot" mocking him and presenting a schedule or letter to him which he reads and realizing he has lost, goes home in failure.

**Act III.**

Shylock makes it clear that he no longer wants repayment of Bassanio's debt of three thousand ducats. He would prefer his pound of flesh from Antonio instead since he now sees Antonio as the source of all his miseries and reaffirms his desire to make Antonio pay for this...

Bassanio arrives to court Portia who is reluctant to never see Bassanio again should he fail the casket challenge. Bassanio takes the challenge, choosing correctly. Bassanio will marry Portia and it is revealed that Gratiano, Bassanio's friend, has fallen in love with Nerissa, Portia's maid and so another marriage will also occur.

We learn from Salanio that Antonio has forfeited his debt to Shylock and now stands to lose a pound of his flesh and with it his life for helping Bassanio. Portia enthusiastically offers to pay Shylock Bassanio's debt twelvefold...

Antonio pleads to let him pay back Bassanio's debt but Shylock wants Antonio's pound of flesh and therefore his death instead...

Portia and Nerissa leave Belmont on a secret mission to save Antonio, disguising themselves as men. In a garden at Portia's house, Launcelot believes Jessica to be damned telling her to "hope that your father got you not, that you are not the Jew's daughter." Jessica replies that, "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian." Lorenzo arrives, engaging Launcelot in witty banter.

**Act IV.**

The Duke of Venice attempts to convince Shylock to let Antonio pay back Bassanio's debt. Shylock refuses, threatening the Duke that if he ignores their agreement, Venice will lose its credibility as a place for merchants... Portia, now disguised as a man, defends Antonio, winning his life, through the technicality defense that Shylock can take only a pound of flesh and no more, a clearly impossible task. Furthermore she argues that Shylock has conspired to murder, an offense that is punishable by asset confiscation and death. A compromise whereby Shylock must become Christian and give half his assets to Jessica when he dies is reached. Portia ensures that Shylock will sign a deed making the verdict binding. Gratiano meets Portia and gives her Bassanio's ring. Nerissa tells Portia she too will get the ring of her husband. Portia resigns herself to making both men regret their rash action.

**Act V.**

Portia and Nerissa arrive back at Belmont before Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano and their followers, all of whom are unaware that it was Portia and Nerissa who defended them in Venice. Nerissa and then Portia scold their husbands for giving away their wedding rings, an important symbol of their love and fidelity to their two wives. Much comedy ensues as the two men attempt to make excuses for this. Portia ends Bassanio's and Gratiano's suffering by producing a letter which explains their role in Venice. The two men are embarrassed that they could not even recognize their own wives...