

GRATIANO: With pleasure.

NERISSA [*to Portia*]: Sir, could I speak to you? [*whispering*] I'll see if I can get my husband's ring. *He* promised to keep *his* for ever, too.

PORTIA [*whispering*]: You will, I promise you. Then we'll have great fun hearing how they gave the rings away! Now, go. You know where to find me.

NERISSA [*to Gratiano*]: Come, sir, will you show me to this house?

[*Nerissa and Gratiano leave. Portia follows.*]

## Act 5 The Rings

*Scene 1 Belmont – a tree-lined path by moonlight, outside Portia's house.*

[*Lorenzo and Jessica enter, hand in hand.*]

LORENZO [*dreamily*]: The moon is shining brightly. On nights like this, when the sweet wind gently kisses the trees without a sound, great heroes of the past dreamt of their loves. And on a night like this, Jessica ran away from her father and escaped from Venice with her love as far as Belmont.

JESSICA [*playfully*]: On a night like this, Lorenzo spoke great words of love, but none of them were true.

LORENZO [*playfully*]: And on a night like this, pretty Jessica made fun of her love, but he forgave her.

JESSICA: I'd continue this conversation if we were alone, but I can hear somebody's footsteps.

[*Stephano arrives.*]

LORENZO: Who comes so fast in the silence of the night?

STEPHANO: A friend.

LORENZO: A friend? What friend? What's your name?

STEPHANO: Stephano is my name, and I am bringing news that my mistress will be here at Belmont before sunrise. She is in no hurry. Whenever she sees a church, she stops and asks God for a happy marriage.

LORENZO: Who is with her?

STEPHANO: Only her servant. But please tell me, has my master returned yet?

LORENZO: He has not, and we have heard no news of him. [*to Jessica*] But let's go inside, Jessica, and prepare a big welcome for the mistress of the house.

[*Launcelot runs in.*]

LAUNCELOT [*loudly*]: News! News! Hello? News!

LORENZO: Who is calling?

LAUNCELOT [*unable to see Lorenzo in the darkness*]: Have you seen

Master Lorenzo? News! News!

LORENZO [*impatiently*]: Stop shouting, man! Come here.

LAUNCELOT [*confused*]: Where? Where?

LORENZO [*loudly*]: Here!

LAUNCELOT [*not recognising Lorenzo*]: Tell him there's good news from my master. He will be here before morning.

[*Launcelot leaves*]

LORENZO [*to Jessica*]: Sweet lady, let's go in and wait for their arrival. [*pausing*] But why should we go in? [*to Stephano*] My friend Stephano, tell them inside the house about your mistress's arrival, then bring out your musicians. [*Stephano leaves*]. How sweetly the moonlight is sleeping on the grass. Let's sit here and listen to the music. Soft peacefulness and the night sing beautifully together. Sit, Jessica. [*pointing to the sky*] Look how the floor of heaven is shining with stars. Even the smallest of them makes the loveliest music in our hearts. But while our hearts are imprisoned in the muddy clothing of our flesh, we cannot hear it. [*The musicians arrive and the moon disappears behind a cloud*]. [*to the musicians*] Come, wake the moon with your gentle instruments. And with your sweetest touches, reach your mistress's ear and guide her home with music.

[*The musicians start playing*].

JESSICA: Sweet music always makes me quiet.

LORENZO: That's because it touches your soul. Young horses jump and play together madly and noisily, which is natural behaviour for all young things. But if, by chance, they hear the sound of a bell or any music touches their ears, they stop. You can see them

standing perfectly still, their wild eyes softened by the sweet power of music. A man with no music in his heart is a man who can be disloyal, dishonest and greedy. His heart is as shadowy as night and his feelings are as dark as the road to hell. Never trust a man like that. Listen to the music.

[*Portia and Nerissa arrive and stop a short distance from Lorenzo and Jessica*].

PORCIA [*pointing ahead*]: Look – that's the torch burning in my hall. You can see the light of its flame from so far away. In the same way, a good act shines in a bad world.

NERISSA: When the moon was shining, we couldn't see the torchlight.

PORCIA: Smaller lights always disappear when a greater light shines. An ordinary man in royal clothes shines as brightly as a king until a real king arrives. Then the ordinary man's importance empties itself, like a small river, into the ocean. [*surprised*] But listen! Music!

NERISSA: They are the musicians of your house, madam.

PORCIA: Music sounds much sweeter at night than by day.

NERISSA: Silence gives it that magic, madam.

PORCIA: If a songbird of the night sang with all the other birds by day, it would not sound so special. Habit deafens us to so many beautiful things. [*The moon appears from behind the cloud*]. [*to the musicians*] Enough!

[*The music stops*]

LORENZO: That's Portia's voice, if I'm not mistaken. [*standing up*]

Dear lady, welcome home.

PORCIA: We've been asking God for our future husbands' safe, quick return. Are they back yet?

LORENZO: Not yet, madam. But a messenger came earlier to say that they were coming.

PORTIA [*to Nerissa*]: Go inside, Nerissa. Tell my servants not to say anything about our absence. [*to Lorenzo and Jessica*] And you mustn't say anything either.

[*There is the sound of voices in the distance.*]

LORENZO: The men are here; I can hear their voices. Don't worry, madam. We won't say anything.

[*Bassanio, Antonio and Gratiano arrive.*]

PORTIA [*to Bassanio*]: Welcome home, my lord.

BASSANIO: Thank you, madam. Please welcome my friend. [*Introducing Antonio*] This is Antonio, my dearest friend.

PORTIA: Sir, you're very welcome to our house. But words cannot show you how welcome you are, so I will make no long speeches.

GRATIANO [*who has been arguing quietly with Nerissa, now speaks loudly*]: I promise by the moon above that you're wrong about me! Honestly, I gave it to the judge's clerk.

PORTIA [*laughing*]: Ha-ha. An argument already! What's the matter?

GRATIANO: It's about a circle of gold, a silly ring that she gave me. There were some words on it, like the words of a simple poem:

'Love me, and never leave me.'

NERISSA [*angrily, but enjoying herself*]: What do you know about poems? You promised that you'd wear it until the hour you died. Even after death, you said, it would never leave your finger. How could you be so careless? A judge's clerk! I expect he isn't even old enough to have a beard!

GRATIANO: He will have one, if he grows to be a man.

NERISSA [*laughing with disbelief*]: Oh, yes, if a woman lives to be a man!

GRATIANO [*holding up a hand*]: With this hand, I gave it to a young man, a kind of boy, a short boy no taller than yourself – the judge's clerk. He was a silly boy, and he asked me for it as payment. I couldn't refuse him.

PORTIA [*to Gratiano*]: You were wrong to be so careless with your



'I promise by the moon above that you're wrong about me.'

wife's first gift. Promises put it on your finger and trust made it part of your flesh. I gave *my* love a ring and made him promise to keep it for ever. [*looking at Bassanio*] And here he stands. I trust him completely – all the money in the world couldn't make him take it from his finger. Honestly, Gratiano, you've been too unkind to your wife and caused her too much pain. In her place, I'd be mad with anger.

BASSANIO [*quietly to himself*]: It would be better to cut my left hand off. Then I could say that I lost the ring defending it.

GRATIANO: My lord Bassanio gave *his* ring to the judge. The judge asked for it, and he deserved it, too. And then the boy, his clerk, who worked very hard, asked for mine. They wouldn't accept anything else – only the two rings.

PORZIA [*to Bassanio*]: What ring did *you* give, my lord? I hope it wasn't the one you received from me.

BASSANIO: If I could lie to hide my mistake, I would. [*holding out his hand*] But you can see that my finger has no ring on it. It's gone.

PORZIA [*appering angry, but enjoying herself*]: Is there nothing true at all in your dishonest heart? I'll never come to your bed until I see the ring!

NERISSA [*to Gratiano*]: And I'll never come to *yours* until I see *mine* again!

BASSANIO: Sweet Portia, you don't understand who I gave the ring to or why. You don't realize how unwillingly I gave it when I had no choice. If you did, you wouldn't be so angry with me.

PORZIA: And *you* don't understand the true meaning of the ring. You don't realize half the qualities of the woman who gave it to you. If you did, you'd understand how wrong it was to give it away. You say that you gave the ring unwillingly? What kind of man would accept as a gift something so precious to its owner? No, Nerissa has taught me what to believe. Without a doubt, you gave it to a woman!

BASSANIO [*shocked*]: I promise you, madam! No woman has it. I gave it to a doctor of law, who refused three thousand ducats and asked for

the ring. I refused him at first and sent him away unhappy; although he'd saved my dear friend's life. What should I say, dear lady? I had to send it after him. Embarrassment and politeness gave me no choice. I couldn't allow myself to be so ungrateful. Forgive me, good lady! But I believe that, in my position, you'd do exactly the same.

PORZIA: I warn you never to let that doctor come near my house. I loved that ring and you promised to keep it, but now *he* has it. Therefore, I'll become as free with my gifts as you have been, and I won't refuse him anything. No, not my body or my husband's bed. I shall meet him, I'm sure of it. So I advise you never to leave me alone at night. Watch me carefully. If you don't, I warn you that I have a precious gift to give. I'll let that doctor share my bed.

NERISSA [*to Gratiano*]: And his clerk can share mine. So I advise you strongly never to leave me alone.

GRATIANO: If I see him near you, I'll break the young man's pen!

ANTONIO [*upset by the arguing*]: I am the unhappy reason for these arguments.

PORZIA [*warmly*]: Sir, do not be upset. You are still very welcome.

BASSANIO: Portia, forgive me for my actions, although I could do nothing else. In front of these good friends, I promise you, even as I see myself twice in your two lovely eyes ...

PORZIA [*to the others, interrupting Bassanio*]: Did you hear that? In my eyes he sees himself twice. One Bassanio in each eye. [*to Bassanio*] If *both* of you promise me, I *might* believe you.

BASSANIO [*urgently*]: Please, listen to me. Forgive me for this mistake, and I promise that I'll never break another promise.

ANTONIO [*to Portia*]: Recently I guaranteed my life to help your husband. I would be dead now without the help of the man who has your husband's ring. Now I am ready to make another guarantee. I promise on my *soul* that your husband will never be disloyal to you again.

PORZIA: I accept your guarantee. [*giving Antonio a ring*] Give him this. Tell him to be more careful with it than he was with the last one.

ANTONIO [*taking the ring and giving it to Bassanio*]: Here, Bassanio. Promise to keep this ring.

BASSANIO [*shocked*]: But it's the same one that I gave to the doctor!

PORZIA: I got it from him. Forgive me, Bassanio. He gave it to me because I allowed him to share my bed.

NERISSA [*to Gratiano*]: And forgive me, my gentle Gratiano. [*giving Gratiano his ring*] The judge's clerk gave me *this* because I allowed him to share *mine*.

GRATIANO [*lapses*]: This is like rebuilding roads in summer when there's nothing wrong with them. Have our wives taken lovers before their husbands even deserved it?

PORZIA: There's no need to use language like that. You're both in shock. [*giving Bassanio a letter*] Here's a letter from Doctor Bellario in Padua. Read it when you have time. It says that Portia was the doctor of law, and Nerissa was her clerk. Lorenzo here is our witness. He knows we left for Venice at the same time as you and have only just returned. I haven't even gone inside the house yet. [*to Antonio*] Antonio, I have better news for you than you expect. [*giving Antonio a letter*] Read this letter and you'll learn that three of your ships succeeded in their business and have safely returned. I won't tell you how I managed to get this letter.

ANTONIO [*surprised*]: I'm speechless!

BASSANIO [*to Portia, with disbelief*]: Were you the doctor and I didn't recognize you?

GRATIANO [*to Nerissa, shocked*]: Were you the clerk who intends to be my wife's lover?

NERISSA [*laughing*]: Yes, but it will never happen — because he isn't really a man!

BASSANIO [*smiling at Portia*]: Sweet Doctor, you can share your bed with me. When I'm away, you can sleep with my wife.

ANTONIO [*to Portia*]: Sweet lady, you have given me my life in more ways than one. [*holding up the letter*] It says here that my ships have safely returned.

PORZIA [*to Lorenzo*]: And Lorenzo, my clerk has some good news for you, too.

NERISSA: Yes, and I won't charge him for it. [*giving Lorenzo a document*] Here is a gift for you and Jessica from her father. After his death, you will receive all his money and property.

LORENZO [*surprised*]: Dear ladies, this is food from heaven for hungry people.

PORZIA: It's almost morning. I'm sure you want to hear more about these events. Let's continue this conversation inside. We promise to answer all your questions honestly.

GRATIANO: I agree. And my first question for Nerissa is this: does she want to wait until tomorrow night, or does she want to go to bed now, only two hours before sunrise?

But for me, while I live, the most important thing is to keep safely forever Nerissa's ring.

[*Everybody goes into the house.*]

## WORD LIST

- beggar** (n) a person who asks strangers for money in the street
- clerk** (n) someone who works at a desk in an office
- debt** (n) borrowed money that you must pay back
- destiny** (n) the power that controls your future
- devil** (n) God's most powerful enemy, according to some religions
- duke** (n) a man with a high position, just below a prince
- flesh** (n) the soft part of the body between the skin and the bones
- fortune** (n) good luck; a very large amount of money
- guarantee** (n/v) a written promise that something will be done
- honour** (an agreement) (v) to do what you have agreed to do
- interest** (n) money that is charged or paid for money that was lent
- justice** (n) fair treatment of people, in legal or social terms
- lead** (n) a heavy soft grey metal
- loan** (n) money that is lent
- mask** (n) something that covers your face in order to hide it
- master** (n) the male employer of a servant
- merchant** (n) a person who buys and sells things in large quantities
- mistress** (n) the female employer of a servant
- monkey** (n) an animal that uses its hands and tail to climb trees
- owe** (v) to have to repay money that you have borrowed
- pork** (n) the meat of a pig
- precious** (adj) very important to you because it is special or rare
- profit** (n/v) the money you get when you sell something for more than it cost you
- revenge** (n) your punishment for someone who has harmed you
- rope** (n) very strong, thick string
- scales** (n) equipment for weighing things
- soul** (n) the part of you that continues to exist after your death
- torch** (n) a long stick that is burnt at one end for light
- trust** (n/v) belief that someone will not lie to you or harm you
- villain** (n) a bad person