

ACT V, SCENE i

In moonlit Belmont, Jessica and Lorenzo compare themselves to famous lovers from classical literature, like Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Dido and Aeneas. The couple goes back and forth with endless declarations of love, when a messenger suddenly interrupts them. The messenger informs them that Portia will soon return from the monastery, and Lorenzo and Jessica prepare to greet the mistress of the house. Launcelot enters and announces that Bassanio will return to Belmont the next day. Lorenzo calls for music, and he and Jessica sit on a grassy bank beneath the stars. Lorenzo contemplates the music made by the movement of heavenly orbs, which mortal humans cannot hear while alive. The musicians arrive and begin to play, and Lorenzo decides that anyone who is not moved by music deserves the worst cruelties and betrayals.

Portia and Nerissa enter and hear the music before they reach the estate. Portia believes that the music is made more beautiful by the night, and the flickering candles lighting up her estate enchant her. She decides that the worth of things is determined largely by the context in which they are experienced. Lorenzo greets Portia, and she requests that he not mention her absence to her husband. Trumpets sound as Bassanio, Antonio, and Gratiano arrive. Portia greets Bassanio, who introduces her to Antonio, who reports in turn that he has been acquitted in the courts of Venice. Gratiano and Nerissa begin to argue over the ring with which he promised never to part. Nerissa chastises her husband not for hurting her feelings, but for breaking his own promise. Gratiano insists that he gave the ring to a lawyer's clerk as a fee, and Portia criticizes him for parting with so precious a gift, saying that her own husband would never have parted with his ring. Gratiano corrects her and reveals that Bassanio has, in fact, given his ring to the lawyer who saved Antonio. Portia declares that her husband's heart

is as empty as his finger, and she promises never to visit his bed until he produces the ring.

Bassanio pleads with Portia to understand that he gave the ring to a worthy man to whom he was indebted, but Portia dismisses his reasoning, saying it is more likely that Bassanio gave the ring to another woman. Portia vows to be equally unfaithful, threatening to offer the same worthy man anything she owns, including her body or her husband's bed. Antonio intercedes on behalf of Bassanio and Gratiano, asking the women to accept his soul should either Bassanio or Gratiano prove unfaithful again. Portia and Nerissa relent, giving each of their husbands a ring and suggesting that they exercise more care in keeping these rings. Bassanio and Gratiano recognize these as the same rings they gave to the lawyer and his clerk, and Portia and Nerissa claim that they lay with the gentlemen in order to get back the rings. Before either Bassanio or Gratiano can become too upset at being cuckolded, however, Portia reveals that she was the lawyer in Venice, and Nerissa her clerk. Antonio receives news that some of his ships have miraculously arrived in port, and Lorenzo is told that he will inherit Shylock's fortune. The company rejoices in its collective good fortune.