

## A judgement

Antonio was a good young merchant of Venice. He was very kind and rich. Shylock, the Jew, was a stingy man who lent money to Christian merchants at great interest. They hated each other, but one day Antonio was forced by circumstances to ask Shylock to lend him three thousand ducats to help his friend Bassanio, who was going to get married.

Shylock, pretending kindness, said he would lend the money, and take no interest. On one condition: Antonio should go with him to a lawyer, and there sign in merry sport a bond, on which was written that if he did not repay the money by a certain day, he would lose a pound of flesh, to be cut off from any part of his body that Shylock pleased. Antonio agreed because in a few days his ships would come back with many times the value of the money.

So Bassanio could marry Portia, the woman he loved. Unfortunately, due to a violent storm, all Antonio's ships were lost and he wasn't able to have the money to pay Shylock at the appropriate date.

When Bassanio told Portia the whole story about how he had got the money for his marriage, a secret that he had kept so far, she made a plan to save Antonio.

Dressed as a lawyer, she went to the court as Antonio's defender. Nobody was able to realize that the unknown attorney was a woman, so disguised she was.

When the trial started, she addressed herself to Shylock saying that by the Venetian law he had the right to have what was promised in the bond. Then she tried to convince him that he could be merciful and forget the terms of the bond.

Nervously, Shylock said, "By my soul, I swear, there is no power in the tongue of man to change me. I have a bond and I'll do everything according to this bond."

He wanted to cut off the pound of flesh near Antonio's heart and was sharpening a long knife with great eagerness.

"A pound of Antonio's flesh is yours. The law allows it, and the court gives it. According to the terms of the bond you may cut this flesh from off Antonio's breast," said Portia.

Then he sharpened his long knife again, and looking eagerly to Antonio, he said, "Come, prepare!" But Portia interrupted him by saying, "Wait a little, Jew. There is something else, this bond here gives you no drop of blood. The words are; a pound of flesh! If you shed one drop of Christian blood, your land and goods will be by law confiscated and given to the state of Venice."

Portia's argument saved Antonio's life. And all the audience admired the wonderful wisdom of the young lawyer.

(adapted from **The Merchant of Venice**. Lamb's tales from Shakespeare, Charles and Mary Lamb, Longman, 1980.)

## Vocabulary

**Stingy** – not generous; greedy

**Interest** – a percentage charged for a loan

**Ducats** – gold coins used in various parts of Europe

**Kindness** – benevolence; goodness

**Bond** – contract; agreement

**Pound** – 454 grams

**Flesh** – meat; the soft part of a person's or animal's body between the bones and the skin human muscles; tissues; fat

**Attorney** – lawyer, advocate

**Disguised** – camouflaged, masked

**Eagerness** – anxiousness; impatience

**Goods** – commodities; personal properties