

# The merchant of venice by william shakespeare

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Recently, the world celebrated the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Though he is long dead, Shakespeare's works are still with us, including the popular play, *The Merchant of Venice*, which is classified as a tragi-comedy. Shakespeare's themes include love, appearance vs reality, and friendship. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the friendship between the rich merchant Antonio and Bassanio is central to the development of the plot.

In Shakespeare's work, Antonio is the definition of a true friend. His unconditional generosity, great sacrifice, and support for Bassanio's happiness make him the epitome of an ideal friend. First of all, Antonio is willing to give Bassanio whatever help he requests. While Bassanio tries to explain why he needs another loan, Antonio declines to hear Bassanio's reasons because he intends to lend Bassanio the money regardless. Antonio says, " You know me well, and herein spend but time to wind about my love with circumstance; and out of doubt you do me now more wrong in making question of my uttermost than if you had made waste of all I have. Then do but say to me what I should do that in your knowledge may by me be done, and I am prest unto it; therefore speak" [5].

For Antonio, it is insulting that Bassanio thinks he might need to justify his need for money. Antonio would rather that Bassanio just ask. Antonio not only trusts his friend, but also is happy to provide his friend with whatever he needs. Therefore, he says, " I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it, and if it stands as you yourself still do within the eye of honour, be assur'd my purse, my person, my extremest means lie all unlock'd to your occasions"

[6]. Antonio is anxious because Bassanio is in trouble. Therefore, his money, personal support and anything he has are ready to help Bassanio;  
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unfortunately, Antonio currently has no cash because he has invested it all in his ships.

Therefore, he makes the decision to borrow: “ Neither have I money nor commodity to raise a present sum; therefore go forth, try what my credit can in Venice do, that shall be rack’d even to the uttermost to furnish thee to Belmont to fair Portia” [7]. Antonio lets Bassanio borrow the 3000 ducats on his own credit and Antonio does not care if the loan will stretch his credit to the limit because his aim is to get Bassanio enough money to go to Belmont and meet the woman of his dreams. A true friend, Antonio offers all that he has to Bassanio. In addition, Antonio is willing to sacrifice his life for Bassanio, for he signs a bond which will give Shylock a pound of his flesh if he does not repay the loan on time. Unfortunately, Antonio’s ships do not arrive, and Shylock is eager to cut out a pound of Antonio’s flesh.

Antonio faces reality and tells Bassanio, “ You cannot better be employ’d, Bassanio, then to live still and write mine epitaph” [70]. Antonio only wants Bassanio to enjoy his life before his death, and he shows his courage to Bassanio by saying, “ I am arm’d and well prepar’d. Give me your hand, Bassanio. Fare you well...for if the Jew do cut but deep enough, I’ll pay it instantly with all my heart” [77]. Antonio shows that he is ready to die for his dearest friend Bassanio; he is fulfilled because he is prepared to sacrifice for Bassanio willingly, with “ all his heart”. However, Bassanio is regretful and Antonio wants to ease Bassanio’s sense of guilt, so he says, “ Repent but you that you shall lose your friend and he repents not that he pays your debt” [77].

At this point, Antonio does not want Bassanio to feel bad that Antonio will die. He hopes that Bassanio can continue on in his life with his fair wife. Above all, Antonio wants his best friend to be happy. Just as the first rumors arrive that Antonio's ships were lost at the sea, Antonio also has to relinquish a pound of flesh closest to his heart. At the time, Bassanio is working on winning Portia as his wife. Antonio informs Bassanio, " For the Jew's bond which he hath of me, let it not enter in your mind of love as shall conveniently become you there" [41].

Antonio tells Bassanio to focus on Portia and not to be worried about Antonio even though Antonio may be in a serious trouble. When rumor becomes the truth, Bassanio is in Belmont with Portia. Antonio sends a letter to Bassanio, writing, " Notwithstanding, use your pleasure; if your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter" [59]. Antonio's last wish is to see Bassanio one last time. However, Antonio does not want to interrupt the romance between Bassanio and Portia, so he lets Bassanio decide whether to come or not. At the end, when Antonio's life is spared, he admits that he pressured Bassanio to quit his ring to the young lawyer that saved his life.

He admits, " I once did lend my body for his wealth, which but for him that had your husband's ring had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again, my soul upon the forfeit, that your lord will nevermore break faith advisedly" [97]. Antonio does his best to end Portia and Bassanio's argument, so that their happy honeymoon, which has been interrupted, can resume. Antonio, as an exemplary friend, is described as selfless, determined, and

considerate. In real life, we should learn how to be a true friend from Antonio's example.

Friendship was important during Shakespeare's time, and remains so today, and a true friend values a friend's happiness above his own.