Summary Act 1

SCENE 1- The first scene takes place on a street in Venice

Antonio, a merchant, expresses unhappiness. His friends Salerio and Salanio find out what is wrong and ask if he is worried about his ships, or in love. It appears that he has no basis for his unhappiness and Salerio suggests that he could choose to be happier. They then see Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano coming up the street. Salerio and Salanio leave Antonio to his other friends. Gratiano advises Antonio to cheer up. Bassanio, who has known Antonio for some time and has borrowed money from them in the past, tells the group of a rich lady he hopes to marry. He suggests that if he could marry Portia all his money problems would be over. Antonio is willing to help his friend with traveling money but he is short on cash and will need to borrow money.

SCENE 2- This scene takes place in Belmont in room in Portia's house

Portia complains of weariness and her companion, Nerissa, advises her to appreciate what she has. They discuss Portia's fathers will, which outlines the terms for Portia's marriage options. Her suitors must choose the correct casket, a jewelry box, from three choices. They can choose from gold, silver, or lead, and the correct box contains a picture of Portia. Portia makes fun of her current suitors. Nerissa suggest that if the drunk German chooses the correct box Portia should refuse him anyway. Nerissa mentions Bassanio and Portia shows interest in him coming to Belmont. Nerissa reveals that the other suitors have decided to leave because of the provision in the will that forces a rejected suitor to never marry. A messenger comes in to tell them of five more suitors that have arrived. Portia expresses disinterest in marring a Prince of Morocco who has a dark complexion.

SCENE 3 Scene three takes place in a public place in Venice.

Bassanio and Shylock, the Jew, are discussing the terms of a loan for three thousand ducats. Despite reservations due to Antonio's ships being out at sea, Shylock agrees to a three month loan with Antonio as the guarantor. Shylock wants to speak with Antonio, but refuses to eat lunch with them. As a Jew, Shylock can do business with Christians but cannot socialize with them.

Antonio arrives and while Bassanio goes to speak with him, Shylock talks about how he dislikes Antonio because he is a Christian and lends out money for free. Shylock questions Antonio's desire to borrow money and uses an analogy in scripture to justify his usury practices. They go back and forth for some time trading insults. Shylock suggests easy terms in a show of supposed friendship. Shylock offers to lend the money interest free but if Antonio is not able to pay, Shylock will take a pound of his flesh. Bassanio does not like these terms but Antonio agrees saying that his ships will easily arrive in time to pay the loan. Shylock agrees to get the three thousand ducats and meet Antonio at the notary.

Summary Act 2

SCENE 1 - Act 2 begins in Belmont at Portia's house with the Prince of Morocco, Portia, Nerissa, and others in attendance. Morocco shows pride in his complexion, and requests that Portia approve of his offer of marriage. Portia replies that the choice is not her but the man must choose the correct box. The Prince is happy to take that chance, even after Portia warns him that if he chooses incorrectly he must never ask for another women's hand in marriage again.

SCENE 2 -This scene takes us back to a street on Venice. Present are Launcelot, Shylock's servant and then old Gobbo enters the scene.

The scene opens with Launcelot trying to decide if he should run away from his master Shylock. His conscience tells him to stay while his "fiend" side tells him to run. He decides to run because Shylock is like a devil.

An old man walks to Launcelot looking for directions to Shylock's house. Launcelot lets us know this is his father and he does not recognize him due to impaired sight. He first tries to trick Gobbo by giving him confusing directions. Then Launcelot tells Gobbo that his son has died. Finally, he lets Gobbo know that indeed he is Launcelot and he plans to run away from Shylock.

Bassanio, Leonardo, and some followers come onto the scene. Bassanio is giving directions to a servant regarding a party he is holding. Launcelot and Gobbo approach Bassanio to ask for employment. It takes awhile to get the message out as both Launcelot and Gobbo have trouble getting their message out. Finally the request gets through and Launcelot gets the job and leaves to celebrate.

Gratiano enters the scene and asks Leonardo where to find Bassanio. Leonardo gives him that information and then leaves the scene. Gratiano requests to accompany Bassanio to Belmont. Bassanio grants the request but only after Gratiano promises to behave himself.

SCENE 3- We are still in Venice, but have moved to Shylock's house with Jessica and Launcelot.

Jessica says goodbye to Launcelot as he leaves to begin employment with Bassanio. She asks him to deliver a message to Lorenzo. After Launcelot leaves, Jessica reveals that she is ashamed of her father and plans to become a Christian and marry Lorenzo.

SCENE 4- This scene is still in Venice and back on a street. Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino, and Salanio walk onto the scene.

Lorenzo and his friends are discussing Lorenzo plans to elope with Jessica. Shylock will be attending Bassanio's feast and so will not be at home. Launcelot comes in with Jessica's letter which details how Lorenzo should take her from Shylock's house and she will be dressed as a page wearing her gold and jewelry.

SCENE 5- This scene opens in front of Shylock's house with Launcelot and Shylock.

Shylock has been told that Launcelot is leaving to work for Bassanio. Shylock calls to Jessica and lets her know that he will be going to dinner at Bassanio's and she must stay home and keep the house locked. As Launcelot leaves he quietly tells Jessica to watch out for Lorenzo this evening. Shylock leaves reminding Jessica again to lock the doors while he is gone.

SCENE 6- We are still on a street near Shylock's house now with Gratiano and Salerio. Gratiano and Salerio are waiting for Lorenzo outside Shylock's house. Lorenzo shows up a bit late and Jessica calls down asking who is there. Lorenzo proclaims his love for Jessica and she throws down a jewelry casket. She is embarrassed to be dressed as a boy but comes down. As they leave Antonio comes up looking for Gratiano. The wind has turned and so the ship must leave immediately and the party has been canceled. Gratiano is eager to leave and they all set off.

SCENE 7- This scene is back in Belmont, Portia and the Prince of Morocco enters a room in Portia's house.

Portia is asking the Prince to make his choice of caskets. He studies the inscriptions on each and how he will know if he chooses correctly. Portia lets him know that her picture will be in one of the caskets. The three inscriptions are: gold-"Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire;" silver "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves;" and lead "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." The Prince decides to open the gold because all desire Portia and she is worth the gold. He finds a scroll in the golden casket that reminds him that "all that glitters is not gold." He leaves and Portia is happy to see him go.

SCENE 8- This scene takes place in Venice on a street and opens with Salerio and Salanio conversing about Shylock.

They are making fun of Shylock's discovery of the disappearance of his daughter Jessica. Shylock had been in the streets crying about his missing money and daughter. Salerio and Salanio become concerned that Shylocks anger will be taken out on Antonio and hope that his ships all come in safely.

SCENE 9- Back at Portia's house in Belmont Nerissa with a Servitor as the Prince of Arragon, Portia, and their trains arrive.

Portia explains the choice of the caskets to the Prince. He readily accepts the terms and chooses the silver because he feels that he deserves Portia. Inside the silver box is a picture of a fool's head and a note calling him a fool. The prince leaves and Portia questions the wisdom of her suitors. A servant enters looking for Portia. He announces the arrival of a messenger for another suitor. Nerissa is hopeful that the Venetian suitor is Bassanio.

Summary Act 3

SCENE 1- Act 3 begins on a street in Venice with Salanio and Salarino. Salanio and Salarino are concerned by news that Antonio has lost a ship. Shylock comes on the scene and Salanio and Salarino ask of news among the merchants. Shylock can only talk of his daughter's betrayal. They express the opinion that she is very different from her father and it was time for Jessica to leave. They then question Shylock directly about the news of Antonio's ship. Shylock states that he will need to remember his bond. Salanio and Salarino ask what good Antonio's flesh will do Shylock to which Shylock answers it will serve the purpose of revenge. A servant comes by looking for Salanio and Salarino to ask them to come to Antonio's house. Tubal, another Jew comes to talk to Shylock. Salanio, Salarino and the servant leave. Shylock asks about any news of his daughter. Tubal has heard talk of Jessica but has not seen her. Shylock laments about the jewels she took with her. Tubal has news that Antonio's ship has wrecked along with news about Jessica spending 80 ducats and trading a ring for a monkey. Shylock asks Tubal to find the services of an officer to arrest Antonio the moment the loan is due.

SCENE 2- This scene takes us back to Belmont with Bassanio, Portia, Gratiano, Nerissa, and other attendants.

Portia asks Bassanio to wait a few days before choosing so she can spend time with him in case he chooses the wrong casket. Bassanio decides to choose immediately. Well he is deciding a song plays in the background speaking of where love lies, is it in the heart or in the head? He chooses the lead box as that one has the least showing outward. The lead box contains Portia's picture and a note that praises him for choosing not by outward appearances. Portia gives Bassanio a ring which Bassanio promises to wear always. Nerissa and Gratiano surprise the couple by announcing that they have fallen in love and also will marry. Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salerio enter the house. Salerio has a letter from Antonio for Bassanio. The letter bears the news that all of Antonio's ships have been lost and that Shylock is insisting that the bond be carried out. Antonio is sure he will die and asks that Bassanio be there at his death. Portia insists that her money is Bassanio's now and that they can save Antonio after the wedding.

SCENE 3- Back in Venice, Shylock, Salarino, and Antonio are speaking with a Gaoler.

Shylock insists that he will not show Antonio mercy. Antonio asks Shylock to hear him speak but Shylock refuses and leaves the scene. Salarino expresses hope that the duke will offer a reprieve. Antonio states that the duke must follow the letter of the law and uphold the bond. Antonio's only hope is that Bassanio will be present to see the bond paid.

SCENE 4- Back at Belmont Portia, Nerissa, Lorenzo, Jessica, and Balthasar are speaking in a room in Portia's house.

Lorenzo tells Portia of the goodness of Antonio. Portia asks Lorenzo and Jessica to manage her property in the absence of her husband and Gratiano. Portia and Nerissa tell the other couple, that they plan on staying at a monastery until their husbands return. Lorenzo and Jessica accept this offer and bid goodbye to Portia and Nerissa. Portia then asks Balthazar to go to her cousin Doctor Ballario with a letter and then take the items that Ballario gives him to the ferry that leaves for Venice. Once Balthasar leaves Portia tells Nerissa more of her plan. Portia states that they will soon see their husbands who will not recognize them because they will be dressed as young men. Portia promises to tell Nerissa the rest of plan on the way to the ferry.

SCENE 5- This scene is still in Belmont in a garden with Launcelot and Jessica.

Launcelot is teasing Jessica about being a Jew's daughter saying that he hopes the Jew is not truly her father. Jessica states she will be saved by her Christian husband. Launcelot jokes that the price of pork will increase due to the conversions. Lorenzo enters the garden and teases Launcelot about being alone with his wife. They trade teasing back and forward before finally Lorenzo gets to the point that dinner needs to be served. After Launcelot leaves, Lorenzo and Jessica praise Portia.

Summary Act 4

SCENE 1- Act 4 opens in a court room in Venice with the Duke, Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano, Salerio, and others present.

The Duke expresses sympathy for a having an enemy that is as empty of mercy as Shylock. Antonio states that as the law is on Shylocks side he is ready to pay the price. The Duke requests that Shylock enter the court room. The Duke strongly requests Shylock to relent. Shylock refuses and gives no excuse for his unwillingness to bend on the terms of h their agreement. He states that he will not accept payment but wants Antonio's flesh because he hates him. Bassanio asks if all men are so cruel to kill the things they do not love. Antonio tells Bassanio that it is a waste of time to argue with Shylock, and that no logic will soften his heart. Bassanio offers six thousand ducats and Shylock refuses. Shylock draws on the fact that Christians have slaves to explain his point that he "owns" Antonio's flesh and he shall have it. The Duke states he will dismiss the court unless the Doctor Bellario comes to decide the case. Just then a messenger from Bellario arrives. As they wait for the messenger Bassanio attempts to cheer up Antonio saying that he will die before he lets Shylock have Antonio's flesh.

Nerissa enters dressed as a lawyer's clerk. Nerissa states that she comes from Bellario with a letter from the doctor. The letter requests that the Duke allow a young doctor of law to attend the case. The Duke readily agrees. Portia enters dressed as a doctor of law. She attempts to get Shylock to relent. She portrays mercy as an attribute of a king and God. Shylock still refuses. Bassanio offers money twice more as Shylock states he will only be satisfied with flesh. Portia finally states that Antonio must make ready to have the flesh removed. She asks Shylock to allow a surgeon to come to stop the blood. Shylock refuses this mercy as it is not written in the bond. Antonio asks Bassanio to tell his new wife of him. At the last minute Portia tells Shylock that while he may have the flesh he cannot have a drop of blood as it is not written into the bond. Shylock realizes he cannot have his flesh and so states he will take the money. Portia tells him that because he has already refused it Shylock can only have the flesh. In fact, she states, he cannot even have the principal, and cannot leave because he has attempted to murder a Venetian citizen. The price of Shylock's crime is death and the loss of his estate. The estate should go half to Antonio and half to the city of Venice. The Duke spares Shylock's life but he must still forfeit his estate. Antonio states that he should give half his money to his daughter and her Christian husband upon his death. Additionally, Shylock must become a Christian. Shylock agrees but states he is too ill to sign the papers at that time and requests the papers be sent to him. Shylock leaves. The Duke invites the doctor of law to have dinner with him, but Portia states she must return home immediately. The Duke leaves.

Bassanio offers the "judge" the three thousand ducats that were to go to Shylock but is refused. Bassanio insists that the judge should take something and Portia takes Antonio's gloves and asks Bassanio for his ring. Bassanio refuses stating that it was a gift from his wife. Portia leaves saying that Bassanio's wife would have said she deserved the ring.

Antonio convinces Bassanio that he should have given the judge the ring and so Bassanio takes it off and asks Gratiano to take the ring to the judge.

SCENE 2- During this scene Portia and Nerissa are in a street in Venice.

Portia is sending Nerissa into Shylock's house to deliver the papers he promised to sign. Gratiano catches up to them to deliver the ring and invites them to dinner. Portia refuses stating she must bring the clerk to Shylock's house. Nerissa thinks it would be fun to trick Gratiano out of his ring as well.

Summary Act 5

SCENE 1- Act 5 opens on an avenue in Belmont near Portia's house with Lorenzo and Jessica.

Lorenzo and Jessica are waiting for Portia to return. Lorenzo comments about the beautiful evening, and how it how it is so perfect a night for historical lovers and for themselves. Stephano enters the scene. He states he is a friend and carries a message that Portia will be back by dawn. Launcelot walks onto the scene with the news that Bassanio will also arrive before dawn. Lorenzo asks Stephano to go into the house and request the musicians to come out to play. Lorenzo makes a speech about the beauty and power of music. Portia and Nerissa come to the house as the music plays. Lorenzo greats Portia and welcomes her home. Portia asks if Bassanio and Gratiano have returned yet. She requests that no one tell them that Portia and Nerissa left the house during their absence. A trumpet sounds informing them that Bassanio is near. Bassanio, Gratiano, and Antonio enter the scene. Bassanio introduces Portia to Antonio. Nerissa notes the absence of Gratiano's ring. Bassanio also admits to giving away his ring to the judge. The women state their intentions to sleep with the men that have their rings. After much teasing the women admit their deceits and tell the story of dressing up as the judge and his clerk. Portia gives Antonio the news that his ships are safe. Nerissa gives Lorenzo and Jessica the dead promising Shylocks wealth to them after his death. It is almost morning time and the group goes inside. The play ends with Gratiano joking about going to bed the doctor's clerk.