The Merchant of Venice opens with Bassanio, who needs traveling money to court the heiress Portia, asking his friend Antonio, a Venetian merchant, for the funds. Because Antonio's assets are all at sea, he approaches Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, for a loan. Because Antonio has insulted him in the past, Shylock demands that Antonio surrender a pound of flesh should he default on the loan. Antonio agrees, and Bassanio leaves for Portia's home. The will left by Portia's father requires that her suitors must choose the correct casket among three, and consent, in the event of failure, to remaining forever unmarried. Two suitors choose the wrong casket, but Bassanio selects the casket with Portia's portrait and thus wins her hand. Antonio's luck is poor compared to Bassanio's: two of his ships sink, the others are lost at sea, and he cannot repay the loan. Shylock is determined to exact the penalty, particularly as his daughter Jessica has just run away to marry Bassanio's friend Lorenzo and has taken much of his money with her. Bassanio rushes back to aid Antonio and Portia follows, disguised as a lawyer. Bassanio offers Shylock the double the amount of the loan, but he refuses. Portia enters the courtroom in her disguise and rules that Shylock cannot take the pound of flesh unless it is without shedding a drop of blood. Further, because Shylock's obvious intent was to kill Antonio, he must forfeit his fortune and convert to Christianity. Bassanio offers to pay Portia, whom he does not recognize; she demands the ring that she gave him. When Bassanio returns to Portia, she shows him the ring, revealing herself to be Antonio's savior.

This second quarto of *The Merchant of Venice* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red sheep with gilt tooling, which