

## ~~~~~ **Interpreting Taxing Statutes # 15 – Interpretation or Construction**

**When it comes to ascertaining the meaning of a text, there is no material distinction between 'construction' and 'interpretation'. These terms are interchangeable.<sup>1</sup>**

### SYNOPSIS

Interpretation

Interpretation v. Construction

The Merchant of Venice

### **Interpretation**

Interpretation is the determination of **legal meaning** of an enactment. Legal meaning is nothing extraordinary but the plain literal meaning combined with the legislative intention. Intention of the legislators may be gauged from the words of the enactment as well as from the elements extrinsic to those words. Thus, interpretation is the art or process of discovering and expounding the **intended signification of the language used**, that is, the meaning which the authors of the law designed it to convey to others.

An enactment is bound to be ambiguous no matter how much carefully it has been drafted. Rightly remarked by Max Radin:

"A statute is neither a literary text nor a divine revelation. Its effect is, therefore, neither an expression laid on immutable emotional over-tones nor a permanent creation of infallible wisdom. It is a statement of situation or rather a group of

---

<sup>1</sup> Bennion 2020 s 10.1

~~~~~  
possible events within a situation and as such it is essentially  
ambiguous.”<sup>2</sup>

With the passage of time and creativity of advocates, the legal texts become susceptible to ambiguities and vagueness. These susceptibilities engender doubts in the reasonable mind with respect to the intended signification of the language used. This necessitates the arbitrator to gaze the law through the spectacle of its author and derive its meaning what the author would have intended in the given case. This is the process of interpretation.

Such process, however, is prone to judicial abuse because an arbitrator may show judicial activism and entwine his personal bias into the law under the garb of public policy. The process of interpretation, therefore, must be exercised with caution and be limited to removal of ambiguities and vagueness only.

The interpreter may call to his aid all those external and historical material which are necessary for comprehension of the subject-matter and the words used by the Parliament but cannot encroach upon the legislative function of the Parliament by reading in some limitation which he thinks was probably intended but cannot be inferred from the words of the Act.<sup>3</sup>

### **Interpretation v. Construction**

The term ‘construction’ is alternatively used for the term ‘interpretation’, despite the academic differences in their nuances.<sup>4</sup> An example of the difference is being mentioned here, not for the purpose of highlighting the difference but to highlight

---

<sup>2</sup> Statutory Interpretation by Max Radin - 43 Har. L.R. 863 (868) – cited in CWT v Hashmatunnisa Begum SCC 1989 (Supp 2) 43 = 1989 INSC 14 Para 12

<sup>3</sup> Keshavnanda Bharti v State of Kerala SCC 1973 (4) 225

<sup>4</sup> CWT v Hashmatunnisa Begum SCC 1989 (Supp 2) 43 = 1989 INSC 14 Para 12

the combined meaning of interpretation and construction. As per Cooley:

Interpretation differs from construction in that the former is the art of finding out the true sense of any form of words; that is, the sense which their author is intended to convey; and of enabling other to derive from them the same idea which the author intended to convey. Construction, on the other hand, is the drawing of conclusions, respecting subjects that lie beyond the direct expression of the text from elements known from and given in the text; conclusions which are in **spirit** though not within the letter of the law.<sup>5</sup>

Bennion, after discussing different authorities, holds that there is no material distinction between them and are interchangeable.

Singh reinforces this argument by calling them synonymous.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Merchant of Venice**

Antonio, the merchant in “The Merchant of Venice”, secures a loan from Shylock for his friend Bassanio, who seeks to court Portia. Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, recalls past insults from Antonio and, instead of asking interest on the loan, asks instead—in what he calls a “merry sport”—that if the loan is not repaid, Antonio will owe a pound of his own flesh.

Bassanio sails to Belmont, where the wealthy heiress Portia is being courted by suitors from around the world. Her father’s will requires that the successful suitor solve a riddle involving chests of gold, silver, and lead. Where others have failed, Bassanio succeeds by selecting the right chest. Portia marries Bassanio; her waiting woman, Nerissa, marries his friend Gratiano.

<sup>5</sup> Constitutional Limitations, vol 1, p 97; referred to in Re Sea Custom Act 1963 SC 1760 = 1963 INSC 147 cited in Singh 2021 p 2.

<sup>6</sup> Singh 2021 p 2

~~~~~

Shylock's daughter, Jessica, has eloped with Bassanio's friend Lorenzo, taking her father's money with her. Shylock is devastated. When Antonio cannot repay the loan, Shylock demands the pound of flesh. When the news reaches Belmont, Bassanio returns to Venice. Portia and Nerissa also travel to Venice, disguised as a lawyer and his clerk. Portia uses the law to defeat Shylock and rescue Antonio.<sup>^7</sup>

In Act 4 Scene 1, in court at Venice, Shylock demands that the terms of his bond be fulfilled. Portia enters as a doctor of laws, with a letter of introduction from Dr. Bellario. She saves Antonio by determining that the bond allows Shylock no more than a pound of Antonio's flesh and not a drop of his blood. She also finds Shylock guilty of plotting the death of a Venetian and subject to the penalty of forfeiting his estate and suffering execution. Antonio intercedes with the Duke to reduce the penalty. A defeated Shylock agrees to the proposed terms. Bassanio offers the disguised Portia the three thousand ducats that he brought to give to Shylock, but Portia demands the ring that she herself gave Bassanio. When he refuses, she departs as if insulted. When Antonio asks Bassanio to give the ring, Bassanio sends Gratiano after her with it.<sup>^8</sup>

**Act 4 Scene 1** is relevant for getting the point of interpretation and so is being reproduced here in simple English:<sup>^9</sup>

The DUKE, the noblemen, ANTONIO, BASSANIO,  
GRATIANO, SALERIO, and others enter.

DUKE

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-merchant-of-venice/read/4/1/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-merchant-of-venice/read/4/1/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.litcharts.com/shakescleare/shakespeare-translations/the-merchant-of-venice/act-4-scene-1>

~~~~~

Well, is Antonio here?

ANTONIO

I'm here and ready, as you please.

DUKE

I am sorry for you. You have come here to face an adversary as stubborn as a rock, an inhuman wretch incapable of pity, completely empty of a single drop of mercy.

ANTONIO

I have heard that you have tried your hardest to change his rigid mind. But since he remains stubborn and there's nothing I can do legally to escape him, I will meet his anger with patience and suffer his tyranny and rage quietly.

DUKE

One of you men go and tell the Jew to come to the court.

SALERIO

He is waiting outside the door. Here he comes, my lord.

SHYLOCK enters.

DUKE

Make room, so that he can stand right in front of me. Shylock, everyone thinks—and I agree—that you're just putting on a show of such malice until the very last minute, and then you will at last show some mercy and remorse, something maybe even more shocking to see from you than your cruelty. It is widely thought that you will not only forget about the penalty, a pound of this poor merchant's flesh, but will even let some of the money go, touched by human gentleness and love, out of pity for the losses that recently have come to weigh upon Antonio, which were enough to ruin a royal merchant, enough to make even the stone-hearted feel bad for him, enough to make even the stubborn

~~~~~

~~~~~

Turks and Tartars, who aren't used to showing any courtesy, take pity on him. We all expect a gentle reply to this from you, Jew.

SHYLOCK

Your grace, I have told you what my intention is, and I have sworn by the holy Sabbath to take what is owed to me by our legal contract. If you deny me this rightful penalty, it will reflect poorly upon your city and its freedom. I'm sure you're going to ask me why I would choose to have a pound of flesh rather than the three thousand ducats I've been offered. I won't give you any answer other than to say I just feel like it. Is that enough of an answer? What if I had a rat in my house and I felt like paying ten thousand ducats to have it killed? Is that enough of an answer for you? Some men dislike pigs, others go crazy if they see a cat, and others can't help but urinate when they hear the bagpipes. People's likes and dislikes are fickle and depend on a person's mood. Now, as for your answer: just as a man who dislikes pigs, or who dislikes a harmless cat, or who can't help but embarrassingly urinate at the sound of bagpipes, has no real reason for this, so I can give no reason, and won't give one (aside from my long-standing hate and loathing for Antonio), for following through on our agreement. Is that enough of an answer for you?

BASSANIO

This is not a sufficient answer, you unfeeling man, to excuse your cruelty.

SHYLOCK

I don't have to please you with answers.

Do all men kill things they dislike?

SHYLOCK

Wouldn't everyone like to kill the things they hate?

BASSANIO

~~~~~

~~~~~

Not every act of wrongdoing must lead to hate.

SHYLOCK

What, would you let a snake sting you twice?

ANTONIO

[to BASSANIO] Please, are you trying to reason with the Jew? You might as well go stand on the beach and ask the tide not to come in as high as is its custom. You might as well ask the wolf why he makes the ewe cry by eating the lamb. You might as well forbid the mountain pines from swaying with their high tops and tell them to make no noise when gusts of wind blow through them. You might as well do anything impossible as try to soften his Jewish heart—is there anything harder than his heart? Therefore I ask you to make no more offers and use no more strategies to persuade him. Rather, let judgment be passed on me and let the Jew have his way without any more delay.

BASSANIO

[to SHYLOCK] Here's six thousand ducats instead of the three thousand for you.

SHYLOCK

I wouldn't take your offer if it were six times six thousand ducats. I would still take what is legally owed to me.

DUKE

How can you hope for mercy if you don't show it yourself?

SHYLOCK

Why should I worry about mercy when I've done nothing wrong? You have among you many purchased slaves that you use horribly like donkeys, dogs, or mules because you bought them. Should I tell you to free them and marry them to your heirs? Why do you make them sweat doing work? Why not let their beds be as soft as yours and let them eat the same fine foods as you? If I said that, you'd tell me that the slaves are yours. I

~~~~~

~~~~~

give you the same answer. I have bought the pound of flesh that I demand from him. It is mine and I will have it. If you deny me, your laws mean nothing and there's no power to legal agreements in Venice. What's your opinion of that? Tell me what your response is.

DUKE

I have the power to dismiss this court, unless Bellario, a learned doctor of law, comes here today. I have sent for him to decide about this case.

SALERIO

My lord, there's a messenger standing just outside with letters from Bellario. He's just arrived from Padua.

DUKE

Bring me the letter and call the messenger in.

BASSANIO

Cheer up, Antonio! Keep your courage, man! The Jew will have all my flesh, blood, and bones before I let him take one drop of blood from you on my account.

ANTONIO

I am like a diseased sheep in a flock, one who ought to die. The weakest fruit drops earliest to the ground. Let me drop like that fruit. The best thing you can do, Bassanio, is stay alive and write my epitaph.

NERISSA enters, disguised as a law clerk.

DUKE

Have you come from Padua, from Bellario?

NERISSA

Yes, from both, my lord. Bellario sends his greetings, your grace.

~~~~~



~~~~~

[NERISSA gives the DUKE a letter]

SHYLOCK sharpens a knife on the bottom of his shoe.

BASSANIO [To SHYLOCK]

Why are you sharpening your knife so eagerly?

SHYLOCK

To cut what is owed to me off of that bankrupt man over there.

GRATIANO

You should be sharpening your knife not on the sole of your shoe, harsh Jew, but on your hardened soul. But no blade, not even the executioner's axe, is half as sharp as your sharp envy. Can no prayers pierce your stubborn heart?

SHYLOCK

No, at least no prayers that you are smart enough to make.

GRATIANO

Oh, damn you, you relentless dog! I hope justice comes to you! You almost make me change my mind and agree with Pythagoras that the souls of animals enter the bodies of men. You have the spirit of a dog, of a wolf that was killed for killing a human, but even as it was being killed its soul left its body and entered you while you were in your mother's pregnant belly. Your desires are wolfish, bloody, starved, and ravenous.

SHYLOCK

Unless you can rip the official seal off my contract, all you're doing by speaking so loudly is hurting your own lungs. Take care of your mind, young man, or it will fall apart with time. I support the law.

DUKE

This letter from Bellario recommends a young and well-educated doctor of law to our court. Where is this man?

~~~~~

NERISSA

He is waiting nearby to hear whether you'll let him into the court.

DUKE

With all my heart, I'll let him in. Three or four of you go and courteously bring him here. In the meantime, the court will hear Bellario's letter.

[He reads the letter aloud] "Your grace should understand that at the time you are reading this I am very sick, but when your messenger came to me I happened to have a young lawyer from Rome visiting. His name is Balthazar. I told him about the controversial case between the Jew and Antonio the merchant. We consulted many law books together. He knows my opinion on the matter, which has been enriched by his own intelligence, which I can't speak of highly enough, and he brings my opinion to you in my place. I beg you, don't let his young age make you underestimate him. I have never seen a young man with so much wisdom. I hope you will welcome him graciously, and you will see how worthy of my recommendation he is."

PORTIA, disguised as the lawyer Balthazar, enters.

You all have heard what the educated Bellario has written. And I assume this is the lawyer coming now.

[To PORTIA, as Balthazar] Give me your hand. Have you come from old Bellario?

PORTIA

Yes, my lord.

DUKE

Welcome. Take your place here. Are you familiar with the different sides of the case facing the court right now?

PORTIA

~~~~~

I have been thoroughly informed about the case. Which one of these men is the merchant, and which is the Jew?

DUKE

Antonio and old Shylock, both of you come forward.

PORTIA

Is your name Shylock?

SHYLOCK

Shylock is my name.

PORTIA

You are pursuing a strange case, but there is nothing under Venetian law that can stop you from proceeding.

[To ANTONIO] You are at his mercy, aren't you?

ANTONIO

Yes, as Shylock says.

PORTIA

Do you confess that you have broken the agreement?

ANTONIO

I do.

PORTIA

Then the Jew must be merciful.

SHYLOCK

Why must I? Tell me why.

PORTIA

Mercy is not something that one is forced to practice. It falls easily like gentle rain from the sky. It is a doubly blessed thing: it blesses both the person showing mercy and the person

~~~~~

receiving mercy. Mercy is most admirable in the mightiest men. It looks better on a king than his crown. A king's scepter is a symbol of his earthly power, a source of awe and majesty, which makes people respect and fear him. But mercy is above the power of the scepter. It dwells in the hearts of kings. It is an attribute of God himself. And earthly power resembles God's power when justice is mixed with mercy. Therefore, Jew, although you are seeking justice, consider this: if God sought justice against all of us with no mercy, we would all go to hell. We pray to God for mercy, and that same prayer should teach us all to show mercy to others. This is what I have to say against your desire to seek justice and make the strict court of Venice carry out the merchant's punishment.

SHYLOCK

My deeds are my responsibility. I want the law to be upheld, the penalty, that which he must forfeit because of the loan.

PORTIA

Can he not pay the money back?

BASSANIO

Yes, here, I have the money for him in the court, even twice the sum. If that is not enough, I will pay ten times the sum of money, or else give up my hands, my head, my heart. If none of this is enough, then Shylock's malice overwhelms his honesty.

[To the DUKE] And I beg you, bend the law to your authority. Violate the law a little to do the right thing, and stop this cruel devil from getting what he wants.

PORTIA

He must not do that. No one in Venice is powerful enough to alter an agreed-upon decree. It would set a bad precedent, and many errors would be made by following it as an example. That cannot happen.

SHYLOCK

~~~~~

A Daniel is now judging, yes, a Daniel! I honor you, wise young judge.

PORTIA

Please, let me look at the agreement.

SHYLOCK

[He gives PORTIA a document] Here it is, most honorable lawyer, here it is.

PORTIA

Shylock, you are being offered three times the money you are owed.

SHYLOCK

An oath, an oath, I have made an oath by heaven. Should I backtrack on my oath and make my soul guilty of perjury? No, not even for all of Venice.

PORTIA

Well, the penalty must be paid! The Jew may lawfully claim a pound of flesh to be cut off from near the merchant's heart. Be merciful, Shylock. Take three times the money. Tell me to tear up the agreement.

SHYLOCK

You can tear it up after the debt has been paid. It seems that you are a worthy judge. You know the law. Your interpretation has been correct. I order you by the law, which you must obey, to go on and make judgment. By my soul I swear that nothing anyone can say can change my mind. I am here to get what is owed to me in the contract.

ANTONIO

With all my heart I ask the court to issue its judgment.

PORTIA

~~~~~

~~~~~

Well, then, this is it: you must prepare your chest for his knife.

SHYLOCK

What a noble judge! What an excellent young man!

PORTIA

The intent and purpose of the law relates to the penalty, which has been agreed upon in the contract.

SHYLOCK

That's very true. What a wise and just judge! You are wise beyond your years!

PORTIA

[To ANTONIO] Therefore, lay bare your chest.

SHYLOCK

Yes, his breast. That's what the contract says. Doesn't it, noble judge? "Near his heart"—those are the very words.

PORTIA

That's right. Do we have a scale here to weigh the flesh?

SHYLOCK

I have it ready.

PORTIA

Have some surgeon on call nearby, Shylock, to stop Antonio's wound so he doesn't bleed to death.

SHYLOCK

Is this spelled out in the contract?

PORTIA

It is not said explicitly, but so what? It would be good for you to do it out of charity.

~~~~~

SHYLOCK

I can't find it in the contract. It's not in the contract.

PORTIA

[To ANTONIO] You, merchant, do you have anything to say?

ANTONIO

Just a little. I am ready and well prepared. Give me your hand, Bassanio. Farewell. Don't grieve because I have fallen into this misfortune on your behalf, for even in this situation Fortune has shown herself to be kinder than she usually is. She usually makes a wretched man outlive his wealth, so that when he is old and has a wrinkled brow he looks on his own poverty. She at least cuts me off from this lingering misery. Speak well of me to your honorable wife. Tell her how I met my end. Tell her how I loved you. Speak well of me after I die. And after you tell her, let her be the judge as to whether you have ever had a loving friend. Only regret that you are losing a friend, and know that your friend does not regret paying your debt for you. If the Jew cuts deeply enough, I'll gladly pay the debt with my own heart.

BASSANIO

Antonio, I am married to a wife who is as dear to me as life itself. But I don't think as highly of life itself, my wife, and all the world as of your life. I would lose all of it—yes, I would sacrifice everything to this devil standing here—to rescue you.

PORTIA

Your wife wouldn't be too happy to hear that, if she were around to hear you make that offer.

GRATIANO

I have a wife, whom I swear I love. I wish she were dead and in heaven so that she could beg some holy power to come change this beastly Jew's mind.

NERISSA

~~~~~

It's a good thing you're making this wish behind her back. Such a wish would upset her.

SHYLOCK

[To himself] These men are such Christian husbands. I have a daughter and I wish a descendant of Barabbas had married her rather than a Christian! We're wasting time. Please, let's hear the court's sentence.

PORTIA

A pound of that merchant's flesh is yours. The court awards it, and the law gives it to you.

SHYLOCK

You are a most honest judge!

PORTIA

And you must cut this flesh off of his breast. The law allows it, and the court awards this to you.

SHYLOCK

Such a wise judge! The right sentence! Come, get ready.

PORTIA

Hold on a second. There's something else. This agreement doesn't give you any drop of blood. The literal words are "a pound of flesh." So take what is yours, take your pound of flesh, but if in cutting it off you shed one drop of Christian blood, your lands and goods will be confiscated by the state of Venice by the city's laws.

GRATIANO

What a just judge! Listen to her, Jew. Oh you wise judge!

SHYLOCK

Is that the law?

~~~~~



PORTIA

You'll see for yourself. Just as you are bent on absolute justice, rest assured that more justice than you want would be served for you.

GRATIANO

What a wise judge! Look, Jew, a wise judge!

SHYLOCK

I'll take this offer, then: I'll take three times the money and let this Christian man go.

BASSANIO

Here is the money.

PORTIA

Wait! The Jew will have all his justice. Wait, don't rush this. He will have nothing but the penalty he asked for.

GRATIANO

Oh, Jew! This is an upright judge, a wise judge!

PORTIA

So get ready to cut off the flesh. Don't shed any blood, and don't cut any more or less than exactly one pound of flesh. If you take more or less than a pound, even if it's just a twentieth lighter or heavier than the tiniest measure—in fact, if the scale is off by so much as a hair—you will be sentenced to death and all your goods will be confiscated.

GRATIANO

This is a second Daniel! A Daniel, Jew! Now I've got you, you unbeliever.

PORTIA

Why is the Jew waiting? Take what's owed to you.

~~~~~

SHYLOCK

Give me the money and let me go.

BASSANIO

I have it ready for you. Here it is.

PORTIA

He has refused the money in the open court. He will have only justice and the penalty owed to him.

GRATIANO

I'll say it again: he's a Daniel, a second Daniel! Thank you, Jew, for teaching me that phrase.

SHYLOCK

Will I not be given back even the original amount I lent?

PORTIA

You will have nothing but the penalty owed to you, which you can take at your own peril, Jew.

SHYLOCK

Well then, I hope the devil gets him for this! I won't stay here any longer to argue.

PORTIA

Wait, Jew. The law has another requirement of you. It is enacted in the laws of Venice that if a foreigner is proved to have directly or indirectly attempted to kill a citizen, the citizen against whom he plotted will take half of his goods. The other half is confiscated by the state. And the guilty man's life is in the hands of the Duke alone and his mercy. And I say that this law applies to you because it seems clear that you have contrived indirectly and directly against Antonio's life and now must face the danger I just elaborated on. On your knees, then, and beg for the Duke's mercy.

~~~~~

GRATIANO

Beg that you can have permission to hang yourself. But since your property is forfeited to the state, you don't even have enough to buy a rope to hang yourself with. Therefore you must be hanged at the state's expense.

DUKE

I pardon your life even before you ask, Shylock, so that you can see how different my spirit is from yours. Half of your wealth belongs to Antonio. The other half goes to the state, and this may be reduced to a simple fine if you show humility.

PORTIA

Yes, the money due to the state can be reduced, not the money due to Antonio.

SHYLOCK

No, take my life and everything. Don't pardon me. If you take the prop that holds up my house, you take my house, too. By taking the means by which I live, you'd be taking my life.

PORTIA

What mercy can you show him, Antonio?

GRATIANO

Give him rope for hanging, at no charge. Nothing else, for God's sake.

ANTONIO

If it pleases my lord the Duke and the rest of the court, I am content to give up the half of his goods owed to me, as long as he gives me the other half of his wealth so that I can invest it and, upon his death, give it to the gentleman that recently eloped with his daughter. And I want two more things: that he converts to Christianity, and that he makes a will here in this court in which

~~~~~

he leaves everything upon his death to his son-in-law Lorenzo  
and his daughter.

DUKE

He will do this, or else I will take back the pardon that I just  
pronounced here.

PORTIA

Are you content, Jew? What do you say to this?

SHYLOCK

I am content.

PORTIA

[To NERISSA] Clerk, draw up a will.

SHYLOCK

Please, give me permission to leave here. I am not well. Send the  
will after me, and I will sign it.

DUKE

Go, but do sign it.

GRATIANO

[To SHYLOCK] When you are Christened, you'll have two  
godfathers. If it were up to me, you'd have ten more, to make  
twelve judges to send you to the gallows instead of the baptismal  
fountain.

SHYLOCK exits.

DUKE

[To PORTIA] Sir, I invite you to come to my home for dinner  
with me.

PORTIA

~~~~~

~~~~~

I must humbly beg your pardon, your grace. I must leave tonight for Padua, and I really must be getting on my way now.

DUKE

I am sorry you don't have more free time to spend here. Antonio, thank this gentleman, for I think you owe him a lot.

The DUKE and his attendants exit.

BASSANIO

[To PORTIA] Most worthy gentleman, my friend and I have been acquitted of serious penalties because of your wisdom. In return for this, we gladly offer you the three thousand ducats we were going to pay to the Jew, for all your troubles.

ANTONIO

And we stand in your debt, and are always in your loving service.

PORTIA

Satisfaction is the best reward. And I am satisfied to have rescued you, so I feel rewarded enough. I didn't help you out of desire for payment. Please, recognize me when we meet again. I wish you well, and now I must leave.

BASSANIO

Dear sir, I must try to persuade you further. Take some remembrance of us as a gift, not payment. Grant me two things, please: don't refuse me, and pardon me for insisting.

PORTIA

You keep urging me and so I will yield.

[To ANTONIO] Give me your gloves. I'll wear them for your sake.

~~~~~

~~~~~

[To BASSANIO] And as a token of your gratitude I'll take your ring. Do not pull back your hand. I won't take anything else, and in your gratitude you shouldn't deny me this ring.

BASSANIO

This ring, good sir—oh, it's a trifle. It would be shameful to give you such a worthless little thing.

PORTIA

I want nothing else, only this. And now my mind is set on it.

BASSANIO

This ring is worth more than its monetary value. I will find out what is the best ring in all of Venice and give it to you. But please let me keep this one.

PORTIA

I see you make generous offers. First you told me to beg for something from you, and now you show me how a beggar is answered.

BASSANIO

Good sir, this ring was given to me by my wife and when she put it on my hand she made me swear never to sell it or give it away or lose it.

PORTIA

That's what many men say as an excuse not to give gifts away. And unless your wife is a crazy person, if she knows what I have done to deserve the ring she won't be mad forever at you for giving it to me. Anyway, peace be with you.

PORTIA and NERISSA exit.

ANTONIO

My lord Bassanio, let him have the ring. Let my love and the fact that he deserves it outweigh your wife's command.

~~~~~

~~~~~

BASSANIO

[He gives GRATIANO the ring] Go, Gratiano, run and catch up with him. Give him the ring, and, if you can, bring him to Antonio's house. Go, hurry.

GRATIANO exits.

Come on, you and I will go to the house now. And early in the morning we will both hurry to Belmont. Come on, Antonio.

BASSANIO and ANTONIO exit.

~~~~~