

Tales from Shakespeare

Book 2





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E-28, Sector-8, Noida-201 301 (UP)

Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999

Regd. Office: 576, Masjid Road, Jangpura, New Delhi-110 014

E-mail: info@madhubunbooks.com • Website: www.madhubunbooks.com

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TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE BOOK 2

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Preface

Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counsellors, and the most patient of teachers.

—Charles W Eliot

The **Madhubun Reading Club** series offers children an opportunity to enjoy reading stories that form a part of the classics of English literature crafted by great writers.

The importance of reading can be gauged by its inclusion as either part of the curriculum or as a co-curricular activity in schools and Boards across the country.

One of the main objectives of encouraging children to read, apart from language acquisition/development, is to help them grow into free-thinking, confident individuals capable of facing challenges in life and making the right decisions.

Salient Features

- **Selection** of stories and writers conform to those **recommended** by various Boards and schools
- Books have been **adapted** and abridged from **authentic texts** to make them suitable for various age groups
- Careful **grading** of language and vocabulary make for simple, easy reading
- Colourful, vibrant **illustrations** bring the stories alive in the reader's mind
- **Comprehension exercises** at the end of each book are designed to make it a pleasurable activity, and can be easily used for **grading** by the teacher
- An element of interest by way of extra information/web links on the **movie and theatre adaptations** of the books have been provided wherever appropriate, for further exploration.

Happy reading!

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Globe Theatre

The **Globe Theatre** was a theatre in London associated with William Shakespeare. It was built in 1599 by Shakespeare's playing company, the 'Lord Chamberlain's Men', and was destroyed by fire on June 29, 1613. A second Globe Theatre was built on the same site by June 1614 and closed in 1642.

A modern reconstruction of the Globe, named Shakespeare's Globe, opened in 1997—approximately 230 metres (750 ft) from the site of the original theatre.

Some Facts on the Globe Theatre

- **The Globe** was built in a similar style to the Colosseum in Rome, but on a smaller scale—other Elizabethan theatres followed this style of architecture and were called amphitheatres.
- **The Globe Theatre** was built with the material and timber 'stolen' from the first 'Theatre' in 1599 when William Shakespeare and the Chamberlain's Men were forced to leave because the owner, Giles Allen, refused to renew the lease. It only took six months to build!
- **Theatrical performances** proved to be so popular that in 1591, the growing popularity of theatres led to a law closing all theatres on Thursdays so that the bull and bear baiting industries would not be neglected.
- **Outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague** were so serious that the Globe Theatre was forced to close. The outbreaks and closures occurred in 1593, 1603 and 1608. In 1563, in London alone, over 20,000 people died of the deadly Bubonic Plague.
- **William Shakespeare** and his company built two Globe Theatres—on June 29, 1613, there was a fire at the original Globe and the theatre burnt to the ground within two hours. A new Globe was quickly re-built in 1614.
- **The motto** of the Globe theatre was *Totus mundus agit histrionem* (the whole world is a playhouse). The phrase was slightly re-worded in the William Shakespeare play, *As You Like It*—'All the world's a stage' which was performed at the Globe Theatre.
- **No women** were allowed to work as actors—female roles were taken by young lads who wore women's clothes and elaborate make-up. The lead content in the white make-up led to many early deaths of the boy actors.
- **Different coloured flags** were used to advertise the themes of plays which were to be performed at the Globe Theatre. A black flag indicated a tragedy, a white flag indicated a comedy and a red flag indicated a history.
- **The Globe Theatre** was demolished by the Puritans. On April 15, 1644, landowner Sir Matthew Brend demolished the playhouse and built tenement houses on the site.

For more information on the Globe Theatre, click on the following links:

<http://www.globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-history.htm>

<http://www.globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-shakespeare.htm>

1

The Merchant of Venice

The Main Characters

ANTONIO, the merchant of Venice

BASSANIO, his close friend

SHYLOCK, a jewish moneylender, hated by everyone

PORTIA, a rich heiress

JESSICA, Shylock's daughter

LORENZO, a young Venetian in love with Jessica

GRATIANO, a friend of Bassanio

NERISSA, Portia's lady-in-waiting

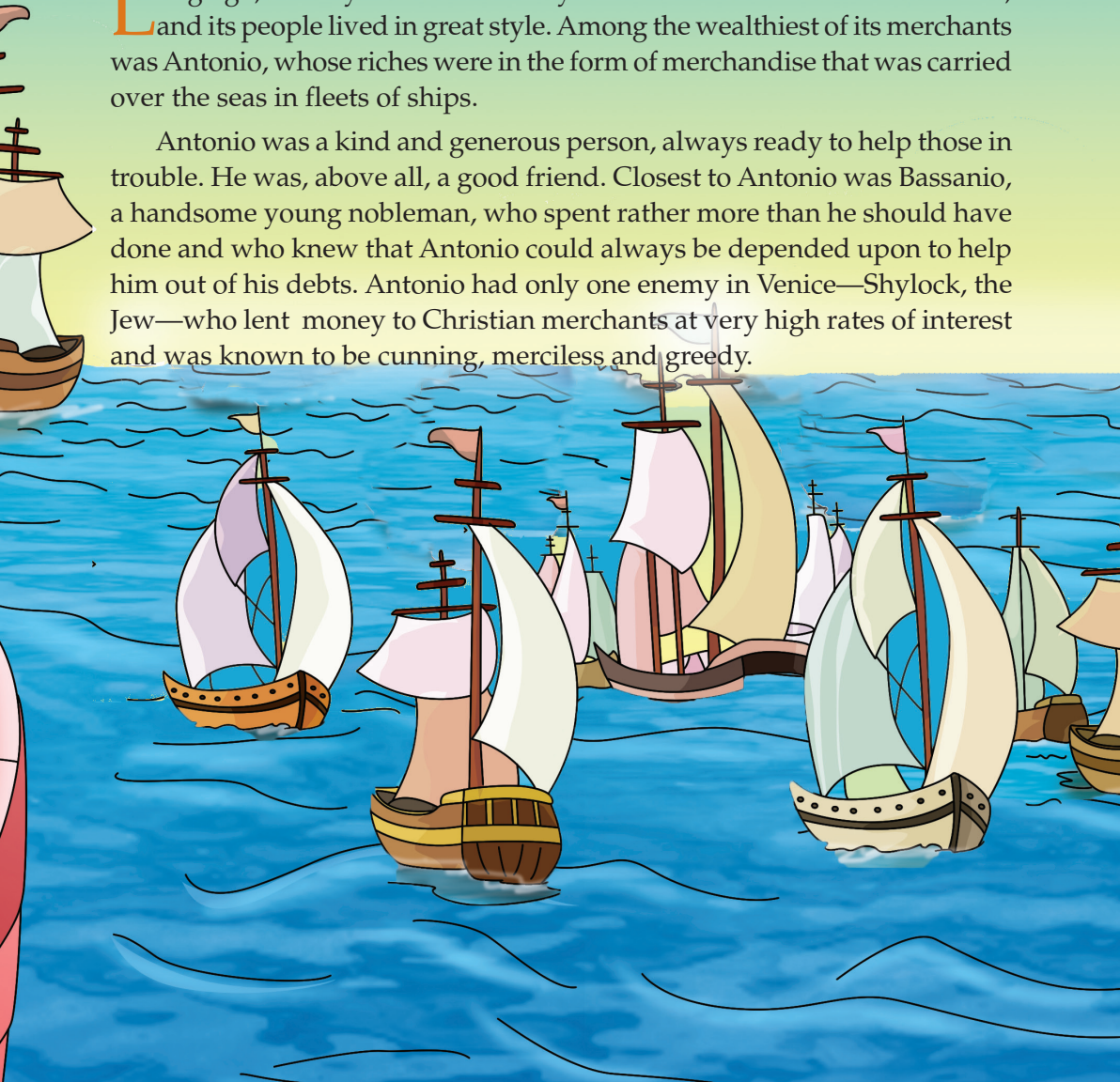
SALERIO, Antonio's friend



The Merchant of Venice

Long ago, the city of Venice in Italy was one of the richest in the world, and its people lived in great style. Among the wealthiest of its merchants was Antonio, whose riches were in the form of merchandise that was carried over the seas in fleets of ships.

Antonio was a kind and generous person, always ready to help those in trouble. He was, above all, a good friend. Closest to Antonio was Bassanio, a handsome young nobleman, who spent rather more than he should have done and who knew that Antonio could always be depended upon to help him out of his debts. Antonio had only one enemy in Venice—Shylock, the Jew—who lent money to Christian merchants at very high rates of interest and was known to be cunning, merciless and greedy.



BASSANIO SEEKS ANTONIO'S HELP

One day, Bassanio came to his friend with a request. 'There is a lady in Belmont,' he said, 'whom I wish to marry. Her name is Portia, and she is as beautiful as she is rich. But I dare not speak to her about my love for her, because I am poor. Rich and noble suitors surround her, men of wealth and rank, with whom I can hardly compete.

Antonio, if only I could be accepted at Belmont on an equal footing with these men, I am sure she would accept my proposal of marriage.'

'At present all my money is bound up in my ships which are at sea,' replied Antonio, 'but go into the city and see if on my credit you can get a loan from anyone. I too will do all I can to see if we can arrange enough money, so that you can journey to Belmont to marry the rich heiress.'

SHYLOCK

The moneylender to whom Bassanio applied for a loan was Shylock. When Bassanio asked him for three thousand ducats to be returned after three months, Shylock hesitated. Then he said,

Antonio is a good man.

'Have you heard anyone deny that?' demanded Bassanio, angrily.

'No, no. I merely mean that he is a good man to stand surety because he is rich,' Shylock said hastily. He added, 'I do not doubt that Antonio has wealth, but most of it is on the high seas, bound for Tripoli in North Africa; for the Indies, oceans away; for Mexico, in South America; for England and elsewhere. Ships have been known to sink, and to have been plundered by pirates. Still, I suppose that you are right and that Antonio is a safe man. Very well,' Shylock concluded, 'if he will sign a bond for the money, he may have it from me.'



At this point, Antonio appeared to confirm what his friend had said, but the moment Shylock saw Antonio, his hatred for the Christian merchant revived, and he wondered how he could plot to trap him. He hated Antonio for several reasons. By lending money without interest to those in need, Antonio brought down the rates of interest in Venice, and so damaged Shylock's business. Secondly, Antonio was a Christian, and he scarcely met

the Jew on the Rialto or Exchange, without calling him evil names like 'dog' and 'cur' and even spitting upon Shylock's long coat.

So he said, 'Antonio you have often flung abuses at me, called me 'dog' and 'cur', taunted me with charging high rates of interest, and dealing harshly with my debtors. All this I have borne patiently, for patience is the badge of the Jews. But now that you need my help, and have come to me for a favour, I might say: Can a dog lend money? Is it possible for a cur to have three thousand ducats?'

Antonio answered arrogantly, 'If you lend me money, do it as a matter of business, not as a favour. For I am your enemy, and will never be your friend. Drive as hard a bargain with me as you please, your money will be repaid at your rates of interest.'

'Why, look, how angry you get,' said Shylock, 'I would like to be friends with you and forget the insults you have thrown my way. To prove myself, I will lend you the money and will not take any interest on it either,' he offered.

THE POUND OF FLESH

This was unusual, and Antonio should have been on his guard. But Shylock seemed to be in high spirits as he went on, 'For sport, just as a matter of fun, let us make an agreement before a notary, that if you do not pay me back the money on a certain day, you will forfeit a pound of flesh that I may cut from any part of your body that I choose.'

'Faith! I will sign such a bond and still say that the Jew has kindness in him,' said Antonio.

But Bassanio was not at all happy with the terms of the bond, 'I will not let you sign the bond for me,' he protested loudly.

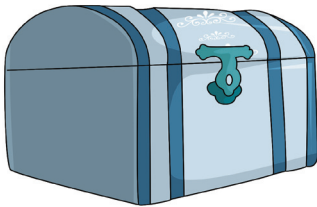
But Antonio laughed away his friend's fears. 'My ships will be home long before that date,' he said. 'You have nothing to worry about.' And he signed what Shylock described as a 'merry bond'.

THE THREE CASKETS

Meanwhile, Lady Portia was preparing to receive her suitors. She was rather spoilt, for she was given to poking fun at the many men who wished to marry her. However, she had reason to be sad about one thing—she could not marry as she chose. She was bound by the strange terms of her father's will. Behind the rich curtains of her splendid home at Belmont were three caskets, one of gold, one of silver and one of lead. Whoever came courting her, had to choose one of these, and abide by the conditions of Portia's father's will. If he chose the right casket, he got Portia; if he lost, he had to go away forever and never trouble her or any other woman again with a proposal of marriage.

Many suitors came to woo Portia, each more well known and richer than the other. Among them were the Prince of Morocco, the Neopolitan prince, a Scottish lord, noblemen from France, Italy and Germany. Portia liked no one and neither were they able to make the right choice, when confronted with the caskets.

The Prince of Morocco had read the inscriptions that guided those who chose the caskets. The gold one read: *Who chooses me shall gain what many men desire.*



On the silver casket the words inscribed were: *Who chooses me shall get as much as he deserves.*

And on the third, the leaden casket, the words were: *Who chooses me must give and hazard all he has.*



The Prince of Morocco had considered all three and decided to open the golden casket. He reasoned that as many men desired Portia, this must be the right one, but when he opened the casket, he found an empty skull. Portia was greatly relieved to see him go.

The Prince of Arragon, had chosen the silver casket because, in a self-important way, he thought that he deserved a great deal. But on lifting the lid, he found the portrait of a fool's head, and he knew that he had failed. Gloomily, he too went away. The only person among her suitors whom Portia had liked was Bassanio. They had met when her father was alive. Yet she could not marry him till he chose the right casket and earned her hand.

'Wait for a few days before you make your choice,' Portia told him, 'for if you guess wrongly, I must lose your company. I wish I could teach you to choose the right casket, but I have sworn to play fair, so I may not tell you.'

'Let me make my choice now,' replied Bassanio, 'the longer I wait, the more tortured I feel.'

'Tortured?' asked Portia.

'Yes, I am tortured by the fear that I may choose wrongly and lose you,' he answered.

'Very well,' she said, 'choose now.' Then she instructed her servants, 'Let everyone stand back as he chooses; let the music play.' Bassanio weighed the

captions on the gold and silver caskets and promptly set them aside. Then he read the inscription on the leaden casket; 'Who chooses me must give and hazard all he has.' Bassanio was in love with Portia and was ready to make sacrifices for the woman he loved. The inscription seemed to reflect his love for her. He placed his hand upon the leaden casket and lifted the lid, and there the lovely portrait of Portia met him to confirm that he had chosen wisely.

Both Portia and Bassanio were overjoyed and immediately began to make plans for their wedding. Bassanio's friend, Gratiano, who had accompanied him to Belmont, had earlier declared his love for Nerissa, Portia's lady-in-waiting. She had told him she would accept his proposal only if Bassanio and Portia were to get married. Now that this marriage had become a certainty, Gratiano once again asked for Nerissa's hand. She accepted him and it was decided that the two couples would be married at the same time.

NEWS FROM VENICE

Meanwhile, in Venice, Shylock's daughter, Jessica, had run away from her father's house. She was in love with Lorenzo and wished to marry him. But Shylock would not consent to her marriage as Lorenzo was a Christian and a friend of Antonio.

One night, gathering as much money and as many jewels as she could, Jessica had left her father's house and run away with Lorenzo. They had left Venice with the intention of getting married.

Shylock was beside himself with rage. He was, perhaps, more disturbed by the loss of his wealth, than by the loss of his daughter. Since Lorenzo was a friend of Antonio, Shylock's hatred for Antonio grew even stronger.

When Jessica and Lorenzo were running away from Venice, they met Salerio (friend of Antonio), who was going to Belmont with a letter. The letter was from Antonio and was meant for Bassanio. Salerio persuaded the two lovers to accompany him. On reaching Portia's house, Salerio immediately handed the letter to Bassanio.

ANTONIO IN TROUBLE

Portia watched Bassanio read the letter and turn pale. When she asked him the reason, he replied, 'Sweet Portia, here are some of the saddest words that were ever written. You may know, dear lady, for I have never hidden the truth from you, that I am a poor man. I have no money of my own. But things are even worse than that, for I am in debt to Antonio to the extent of

three thousand ducats. This money he borrowed for me so that I should be able to come here and woo you.'

Portia listened, but what she heard did not alter her feelings for Bassanio.



Antonio has now written to tell me that all his ships have been lost, that his creditors are asking for payment, and that his bond to the Jew stands forfeited. All that Antonio now asks is to see me before he dies. I must go to him.

Portia thus learnt of Antonio's bond to Shylock.

It is only three thousand ducats that he owes the Jew! If you marry me at once, all my wealth becomes yours and you can pay this debt several times over. You may then bring your friend home to me.

But Bassanio, who had always worried about the terms of the bond, told her that in all probability, the money would not satisfy Shylock. 'He is insisting,' said Bassanio, 'on the precise terms of his bond. He wants a pound of Antonio's flesh, nothing else. The Duke of Venice and all the most important men of the city have tried to reason with him, but he will not listen to them. He says that he must, and will, have justice, because his bond is legal.'

Portia was both clever and practical. She took Bassanio with her to the church and they were married. Now Bassanio was no longer a poor man, and he could go with all haste to Venice to see how he could help Antonio with the large amount of money that Portia had placed at his disposal.



THE TRIAL

When Bassanio reached Venice, the trial had already begun. Shylock showed no mercy even though the Duke asked him to have pity and forego the forfeiture.

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Author : Madhubun

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