

MERCHANT OF VENICE

ACT II Scene 4

EXTRACT 1.

Q: Why do Lorenzo and his friends plan to disguise themselves at dinner time? How well are they prepared for the disguise?

(i) Lorenzo and his friends plan to disguise themselves at dinner time since they were organising a masquerade for Bassanio's dinner party. During Elizabethan times the masque was an amateur dramatic practice usually performed in private houses. The players wore masks and costumes and took part in a torch procession, playing musical instruments. They were not fully prepared for the disguise.

Q: Who is supposed to be the torch-bearer? What is the actual purpose of having a torch-bearer in the scene?

ii) Jessica, disguised as a boy, is supposed to be the torch-bearer. The actual purpose of having a torch-bearer in the scene is to facilitate the elopement of Jessica with Lorenzo.

Q: Whose letter does Launcelot bring? Why is it an important confidential letter? How does Lorenzo guess whose letter it is?

(iii) Bassanio is giving the dinner party. Launcelot invites Shylock for the dinner party.

Q: Who is giving the dinner party? Whom does Launcelot invite for dinner?

(iv) The dinner party facilitates the elopement of Jessica with Lorenzo. Jessica is free to leave her house as her father is away at Bassanio's dinner party. Lorenzo and his friends organize a masquerade for Bassanio's dinner party. Jessica joins them as a torch-bearer dressed as a boy and elopes with Lorenzo.

Q: Describe briefly how the dinner party facilitates the elopement of Jessica with Lorenzo.

(v) Launcelot brings the letter of Jessica. It is an important confidential letter as it contained Jessica's plan to elope with Lorenzo. On receiving the letter Lorenzo guesses whose letter it is after looking at the handwriting. He declares that the handwriting is familiar to him and the letter is written by a lovely, fair and beautiful hand.

EXTRACT 2.

Q: What information has Jessica given to Lorenzo regarding her elopement?

(i) Jessica informs Lorenzo about the arrangements she had made to elope with him. She will leave her fathers' house with money and jewellery, disguised in the uniform of a page-boy.

Q: According to Lorenzo, how could the Jew go to heaven? How can you conclude that Lorenzo has a high opinion of Jessica?

ii) According to Lorenzo, the Jew, Shylock could go to heaven only because of his sweet and gentle daughter. We can conclude that Lorenzo has a high opinion of Jessica since he feels that if at all

Shylock ever goes to heaven it will be because of her. He prays that no misfortune ever comes to her except for being Shylock's daughter.

Q: What does Lorenzo wish for Jessica? According to him, how could misfortune come to Jessica?

iii) Lorenzo wishes that no misfortune ever happens to Jessica, for being the daughter of a non-believing Jew. She has no stain of sin in her unless her birth is regarded as a sin.

Q: Give an example of racial discrimination hinted at in the extract.

iv) Reference to Shylock as a "faithless Jew" is an example of racial discrimination hinted at in the extract. Christians believed that faithless Jews won't go to heaven.

Q: Describe the atmosphere of activity and pre-occupation prevailing in this short scene.

(v) An atmosphere of activity and pre-occupation prevails in this scene. Activities include preparations for the masquerade and Jessica's elopement. Pre-occupation regarding the dinner party dominates the scene. Even Shylock is invited for the party. Launcelot acts as a messenger in this scene. He delivers Jessica's letter to Lorenzo and Lorenzo's reply to Jessica. He invites Shylock for Bassanio's party on Bassanio's behalf.