***The Merchant of Venice* Plot Summary**

The four interwoven plots are:

1. The deal between Antonio, a merchant of Venice who makes his money from trading goods, and Shylock a Jewish moneylender. The deal goes wrong when a number of Antonio's ships sink and threaten him with ruin. Shylock is determined to earn the pound of Antonio's flesh that was promised him instead of interest when the loan was made.
2. The love between Portia and Bassanio.
3. The elopement of Shylock's Jewish daughter, Jessica, with the Christian Lorenzo.
4. A trick Portia plays on Bassanio to test his love for her.

**Act 1**

* Antonio - The Merchant of Venice - is sad, but his friends cannot discover why. All the ships in which his money is invested are at sea, but he claims this is not what is worrying him. His best friend, Bassanio, asks Antonio to lend him even more money than he already owes him, to help him win the hand of a rich and beautiful heiress, Portia. Antonio has not got any spare cash, but agrees to borrow money to help him.
* Portia complains about her father's will to her maid, Nerissa. The will says she can only marry the man who correctly guesses whether her portrait lies within a gold, silver or lead casket. The only man she has ever met whom she thinks worthy of praise is Bassanio.
* Antonio and Shylock arrange the details of the loan: Shylock will provide Bassanio with 3000 ducats, but instead of charging interest, Antonio will owe Shylock a pound of his own flesh if the money is not repaid within 3 months.

**Act 2**

* Two men try to win Portia’s hand in marriage: The Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon. They are both unsuccessful.
* Shylock's daughter, Jessica, runs off with the Lorenzo – she disguises herself as a boy to make it easier to run away and also takes a large amount of Shylock's wealth with her!
* Shylock's is in a rage when he discovers his missing treasure and his missing daughter.
* There is also news that a ship has been wrecked at sea - could it be Antonio's?

**Act 3**

* Antonio's friends laugh at Shylock over the loss of his daughter.
* Shylock wants revenge. When he hears that yet another of Antonio's ships has been lost, Shylock gleefully orders the arrest of Antonio.
* Bassanio arrives to win Portia’s hand in marriage. He selects the correct casket, much to Portia’s happiness.
* Antonio has sent Bassanio a letter telling him that all his ships have been lost. Portia sends Bassanio to Antonio straight away, with enough money to settle the debt to Shylock several times over.
* Antonio is in prison, he wants to see his best friend, Bassanio, once more before he dies. Shylock however is keen to have his pound of flesh.
* Lorenzo converts Jessica to Christianity.

**Act 4**

**The trial**

* Shylock refuses to be merciful to Bassanio: he sharpens his knife, preparing to cut away the pound of flesh.
* Portia enters, disguised as a lawyer called Balthazar. Shylock will not listen to Portia/Balthazar's arguments to be merciful either, so Portia/Balthazar grants him his wish: the bond must be honoured.
* At the last minute, Portia/Balthazar points out that the bond makes no mention of blood – so, if Shylock spills the smallest drop of Antonio's blood, his act is illegal. Shylock, realising he has been defeated, is left with nothing.
* Things become even worse for Shylock, because Portia/Balthazar says an ancient rule states that anyone who has attempted to kill a person from Venice should be executed and have their wealth confiscated. Shylock is granted his life, but it is ruled that his wealth should be split between Antonio and the state. Antonio requests that part of the money should go to Jessica. However, in a final humiliation, Antonio says that Shylock has to become a Christian.
* Antonio and Bassanio thank Portia/Balthazar for having saved Antonio's life. They offer money as a reward. Portia/Balthazar says she will only accept the ring that Bassanio is wearing (this is a test of his love as he had promised Portia he would never give it away.) Bassanio gives away the ring!

**Act 5**

* Jessica and Lorenzo talk of love.
* Portia reveals the joke she played on Bassanio with the ring.
* Antonio learns that three of his ships have been saved (so he is not ruined after all)
* Portia tells Jessica and Lorenzo that Shylock has given everything he has to them.