

# **Merchant of Venice: Alternative Storylines**

**By Phillip W. Weiss**

- 1. Shylock is an undercover police officer and a front for the Venetian police investigating the activities of nasty rich people engaged in black-market money laundering operations meant to avoid paying tax.**
- 2. Jessica is married to a rabbi but discovers by accident that she was actually adopted by Shylock and is in fact Antonio's biological daughter.**
- 3. Portia marries the Moroccan and starts a turf war with Shylock and Antonio for control of black-market banking operations in Venice.**
- 4. Lancelot discovers that he is the illegitimate son of Shylock and battles with Jessica for control of Shylock's loansharking operation. Matters are further complicated by Shylock speaking only Hebrew and being able to communicate with only one other person in all of Venice, namely Portia, who is a brilliant linguist and becomes the de facto head of the Shylock organization. Antonio reveals that he is Shylock's half-brother, and therefore Jewish too, and that their actual names are Yankel and Favel Rosenbaum, and that their late father was the Grand Rebbe of Minsk who was chased out of town not by the Christians but by the Jews over allegations of embezzlement and having had carnal knowledge with several barnyard animals of either gender, including a jenny named Silke who left Minsk with the Rebbe and whose whereabouts are currently unknown, although it is rumored that she is pulling a plow on a peasant's farm**

outside of Padua. Silke was reputed to be the fairest jenny in all of White Russia. As for the Rebbe, he was known to be something of a fop and fancied himself as a boyar to the great amusement of the actual boyars who would often mockingly refer to him as Ivan the Terrible, a reference to the legendary Russian czar, and as the “man of ten-thousand jokes,” a reference to the Rebbe’s uncanny talent for delivering stinging one-liners on any topic. Numerous witnesses have attested to the Rebbe’s merciless delivery, and when he was in high gear no one was spared. Of course, to the Jewish community, the Rebbe was an embarrassment, not only because of his amorous interactions with other peoples’ animals, which, although distasteful, could be tolerated, but because the Rebbe never met a kopeck he thought was not his. The same predilection applied to young, pretty women too, especially if they were married and *zaftig*. As for the Rebbe’s wife, Shylock’s mother, she mysteriously disappeared when a circus came to Minsk, and it is rumored that she is now a bearded lady and lives in Bialystok with an Englishman named Herbert who converted to Judaism so as to maintain peace in their household. They also have a servant, a Tartar named Baboo, who screams at the top of his lungs whenever the name Ivan the Terrible is mentioned, which is another reason why the Rebbe had to leave since, as mentioned before, the Rebbe was often called that name. As for the Rebbe’s dealings with the Cossacks, that is another story. It is said that the Rebbe served as a major-general in the czar’s army, under the name of Baron Hubert von

Hemelstein und Wachbaum von Hamburger mit Saurkraut ausgefährlich gebraten unter der Himmel mit der Frauen und der Mannern, but these rumors are unconfirmed.

5. At the trial, Lancelot reveals that he is in fact an esteemed medical doctor who earned his M.D. at Maimonides University in Jerusalem and has perfected a procedure for performing surgery without loss of blood and wants to demonstrate the procedure on Antonio in court.
6. Shylock, suffering from organic brain syndrome caused by the consumption of huge amounts of alcohol, is not really Jewish but is in fact an ordained Catholic priest and the long-lost rector of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and close personal friend and drinking partner of the famous Notre Dame hunchback, Quasimodo, who became insane with grief when his benefactor and fellow alcoholic disappeared. Upon learning of this, Portia, who is a natural-born social worker as well as the richest woman in all of Europe, arranges for Shylock and Quasimodo to be reunited and to live at Belmont which she converts into an adult home for people with social and substance abuse issues. Her other residents include Lancelot and the Moroccan (who is actually a Jewish butcher named Shlomo who doesn't have a penny to his name) plus two wanderers, a brother-sister duo named Malcolm and Millie, who show up out of nowhere and need a place to stay. Millie later befriends Jessica who in turn develops a crush on Malcolm who in turn asks Shylock for permission

to marry Jessica; Shylock happily grants permission and wants to perform a Jewish marriage, the organic brain syndrome causing him to forget that neither he nor Jessica are Jewish. When the Church learns that Shylock has been found and has a daughter, they summon him to the Inquisition. The Inquisition takes one look at Shylock, deems him beyond all hope for redemption, and as punishment tells him that he is in fact Jewish and a rabbi too, and directs him to become a moneylender who can loan money only to Christians with no collateral and no intention of repaying. At this point, Portia intercedes and bankrolls Shylock's operation and becomes the most powerful female crime figure in Europe while at the same time maintaining the facade of a humble do-gooder motivated only by good intentions. By this time, to humor Shylock, Portia purchases a store front, and converts it into a synagogue where Shylock can act out his Jewish fantasy. Shylock conducts services on Sunday (Shylock cannot figure out why), performs various sacraments, totally confusing the congregation, and, to the amazement and consternation of all in attendance, even performs a Bar Mitzvah for a boy whose face is hidden behind a mask, with Portia, disguised as a Jewish cantor, reading the Torah and leading the service. In fact, the only Hebrew words Shylock knows are "kosher" and "mazel-tov," which he repeats incessantly at the most inappropriate times. Soon after, Shylock discovers that he is not circumcised and goes to Antonio, who, Shylock is told, is a medical doctor, asking for advice on circumcision since he cannot go around being an uncircumcised Jew.

Antonio mentions something about cutting a pound of flesh and hints that maybe that's the solution to Shylock's problem, and tells Shylock that it is a special medical procedure he has to perform on himself. Then Portia confronts Shylock and, in a climactic scene, tells him he is not Jewish and to stop pestering people about getting a circumcision, and to stop saying mazel-tov to everybody and declaring their food kosher, and that if he continues with this charade she is going to close down the synagogue, evict him from Belmont, and send him and Quasimodo back to Paris where Shylock is wanted for embezzlement of Church funds. At this point the play ends, leaving the audience to wonder: Does Portia evict Shylock and Quasimodo? Does Shylock follow Antonio's medical advice? And what is the identity of the mysterious Bar Mitzvah boy?