

Cast of Characters

1. **Shilok**, also known as Chi-Logos (age 50), a counting house clerk originally from Spain
2. **Leah**, a farmer's daughter, age 16 through 25
3. **Isabella** of Aragon and Castile, Queen of Unified Spain
 - [Jonah, age 5, son of Leah, nonspeaking, can be played by a life-size puppet]
4. **Jessica**, age 14-18, daughter of Leah
 - Portia, age 15, Daughter of Senator Belmont, (played by same actor as Leah)
5. **Tubal**, age 30-50, a merchant of luxuries
6. **Lorenzo**, 18, an Ethiopian sailor
7. **Chak-ru-choi**, age 10-14, a West Indian captive girl, known later as Ruth
 - Ghost of Casiguaya, Chak-ru-choi's mother (20's, played by same actor as Leah)
8. **Dionisio Belmonte**, 50-55, Count of Belmont and Trieste, a Senator in the Council of the Venetian Empire
9. **Beltranio**, 21-25, a Croatian stevedore, dockworker and trader, former captain in Venice' navy
10. **Bassanio**, 20-24, a soldier, gambler and horse trader, brother to Beltranio
11. **Belaccio**, 14-20, a soldier and wrestler, younger brother to Beltranio and Bassanio
12. **Barok**, Shilok at age 12, (played by a female)
 - Damaris, a nursemaid and cook, 30-40, played by same actor as Isabella
 - Schoolmaster, 25, teacher to Barok, played by same actor as Beltranio
 - Cardinal of Barcelona(?)40, played by same actor as Tubal

Act I

1. March 1516 . Shilok enters library with candle and discovers Jessica in nightgown.

SHILOK:

Jessica! why up so spare of dawn? Have you not slept, love?

JESSICA:

Father, I had a dream again of mother, coughing, coughing, coughing. Only this time it seemed she had words to say, and it only point to a jewelled ring. I sensed a great portent, never before but has she seemed so disturbed and urgent. She seems to bemoan the gating of our neighborhood and the declaring of a Curfew hour upon us..

SHILOK:

Our people have been walled in many times, and yet we endure. Come, sit close, my girl, and shake off the dark hours chill. Your hands are like ice. You mustn't leave your bed at night, for the canal vapors are at their most penetrating in darkness.

JESSICA:

I cannot shake off her painful face. Tell me the story of her happy days. How are you brought her to meet the Queen of Spain.

SHILOK:

Oh I, but remember no one but you may know this history, for--

JESSICA:

I know, I know. For your life depends on its secrecy.

SHILOK:

I do not jest my dear. A change of name is not enough to fail a history of flight. Promise to seal this tale, for your life and mine depend upon remaining hidden from the Spanish Queen.

JESSICA:

I swear on this lock of my mother's hair to ever hide this tale. Now begin.

SHILOK:

Leah had: the red hair of the Maccabees, and it would not stay tucked under her veil, great unruly waves of orange stubbornly curling towards her neck and mouth as if snakes were trying to sip the words from her lips. I met her in village in the far north of Spain I was visiting, and she begged me for a ride to the capital. Her father was a herder who tanned kidskin and vellum, and she sought to sell me his wares, to pay for her passage, but I would take no payment. Later I visited their farm to help her father record his tithing and saw the great tanning pits and dying faults he used great tanning pits and dyeing vats he used. All of us steep in the talents of two parents, and most of us favor either father or mother in our skills and chosen work. My father was a rabbi, so I was an early reader and writer of both Hebrew and Latin. But my Leah was blended of equal parts her father's skill in tanning skins, and her mother's hand with a needle. When first she came to Barcelona, she made slippers of goat skin slippers with her own small hands, struggling to pierce the hide using thimbles and needles and tendons. Then soon she gave the hard stitching over to hired boys, and began experimenting with brilliant colors, using her father's dye techniques and her own eye for Decor. The Moorish Women of Barcelona were the first to go mad for her jewel tone silks and Woolens. Being accustomed to shroud themselves in public, they delighted in dressing their children in the brightest hues instead. Richly embroidered caps adorned every Moorish boy. Their baby girls were carried like garish spring bouquets. Leah's wares adorned every child in the Arab quarter. And each Friday morning they came to gossip at her stalls, to advise each other which exact shade of rose-colored floss might best enhance Khadijah's black bodice; and which turquoise pocket patch could best house little Gamel's wooden toy coins. The Queen of Spain made discovered her talents, and for a time made my Leah, the official tailor of the Spanish Court, until Leah said, I need to lay off the tanning and the dyes, for I have a bun in the oven dear.

....

JESSICA:

And that bun was me?

SHILOK:

No, it was your brother Jonah. But before he was born, we left Spain. And that, my dear, is a story for another time.

JESSICA:

And you then came to Venice?

SHILOK:

Not Venice direct, no. At first, we lived in Malta. Five happy years we had there, we three. This painting of your mother was done in Malta. She started with hair as deep red as yours. But the Malta sun blanched it to the pale copper of a cookpot.

JESSICA:

How far is it to Malta? I should like to lighten my hair, like my Mother's!

SHILOK:

Malta is a storm-swept isle in the southern sea, halfway between Italy and Egypt. You cannot go on foot, my silly dear. Only in a deep drafted ship. Perhaps we shall someday return there, and I will show you our house in the hills. Tubal is often there for trading.

Tubal enters:

TUBAL:

Did I hear my name, good friend? I have been awaiting you in your office. For an early errand dispatches me. Could Morrow Jessica, forgive my intrusion.

SHILOK:

Jessica, dress yourself for Day. And could you tell Damaris to bring us coffee.

TUBAL:

I brought your cook fresh rolls to atone for my early bell. *(gives basket to Jessica)*

JESSICA:

Penance is for Christians, sir. have you turned away from the faith of Abraham?

TUBAL:

it was merely a jest, my girl. *(Jessica exits.)* She is out of sorts today.

SHILOK:

Her mother visits her in dreams of late, and disturbs her. It is only the ailing Leah she remembers. I pray the dreams will cease, but she was only five when her mother died. She remembers little before that.

TUBAL:

I shall bring some fine dress making stuff up later today. They've just come in from Istanbul. Perhaps that will lighten her mood. Now to my errand. I left a Gentile at the gate, with his daughter and a Blackamoor. Count Belmont is his name, but he is known as a toff in the Venetian Court. Hopes, and is likely, to be in the Senate chamber soon. He wishes to mortgage a note to you.

SHILOK:

Belmont, yes, I know of him. Go, bring him hither. And stay to hear his brief.

(Tubal exits.)

SHILOK:

(tidies his desk). Oh Leah, I pray you will guide your girl, and softened these nightly visits. How far we came together, leaving Spain to save our little family. Jessica is all that is left now. Help me to strengthen her, for you, for me, for your parents, for Jonah. She carries forward us all.

Tubal returns with count Belmont, Portia and Lorenzo.

TUBAL:

Count Alexander of Belmont and Trieste, may I present, Shilok of Malta and Crete: my dear friend and banker.

BELMONT:

It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance sir, and indeed a pleasure to enter these locked precincts. You people live in a matter not so different to our own.

SHILOK:

locked gates and curfews are no small inconvenience for one such as I, sir. The Ghetto District's rules require me to conduct all my business in daylight and thus shorten my productive hours.

BELMONT:

I'm told you charge a handsome fee for your services. Which I hope repays the discomfort. Allow me to present my daughter Porsche who might have brought to town to witness the Senate proceedings today. It shall be a day to be remembered if my project here succeeds.

SHILOK:

And who is this blackamoor?

BELMONT:

This is Lorenzo of Ethiopia, and ensign to a merchant of Trieste I know, who shall be much of service in the business I propose.

SHILOK:

Then welcome good Lorenzo, and let us tarry no more. Be seated good sirs. Tubal, help me clear this stool of books. (*Jessica enters with a coffee tray*). Ahh, Turkish coffee. Thank you, Jessica. Perhaps you could take this young lady and show her your music room? (*Jessica and Portia leave.*) Now let's begin. Tis a bitter cup at first, Count. But let me sweeten it for you with Demerara. Better? Sir Lorenzo, will you take some? Now let's have the matter out.

(Belmont motions to Lorenzo opens a portfolio and removes a parchment.)

BELMONT:

Three brothers I know of Trieste province, have desire to release my port. I have read hear the terms. We shall pay to me a tithe on each shipload, at quarter days, in gold. This some shall bring an estimated 500 Ducats per ship. Our port holds two ships at least, 300 days each year. It is a stormy port, and in a squall, they anchor in the deep Adriatic. So, we lose one day in six. 'Tis more clerking than I can do, a man of my age and a leg. But here's signers Beltranio, a captain of Albania, to undertake these duties. He is a sea captain who has lost his toes in battle, and is not fit for voyage. But all manner of goods and trading ports are known to him. He proposes to oversee Trieste port, from an office at the black swan in, they're facing and to collect my tithes.

Two younger brothers assist him, Bassanio and Bellaccio, And this ensign here shall too. Based on this expected gain, I wish you to buy the year's mortgage of me at two hundredths of the gain.

SHILOK:

In your flash of excitement sir, you have omitted to describe the risks. Who are these brothers three, and what is your surety? While this Blackamoore seems an able Lad, he is not proof enough of this venture. I must know more. Else for this risk, I must charge 50 hundredths on the gain.

BELMONT:

Much of the shipping is in wool, sheep and horses. These Albanians breed a good horse for the northern cities, and twice a year send 500 yearlings to Barcelona and French Bordeaux. The Queen of Spain, as you may know, he's determined to civilized Indies in the West. Cotton comes to us from Egypt, silks from Istanbul, and beer from the Palatine lambs is much beloved around the Mediterranean. It is this very well for diverse goods that confounds my ability to oversee and not miss a jot. Lorenzo knows how to secure goods within a tossing ship., to prevent loss in the voyage. And I have chose the Albanians as the lesser more loyal of two rival clans. My neighbors, the Orsini, desire to wrest control of the Trieste port from me, and my

own estate's people are intermarried with theirs, so I lack sheriffs enough to guard the port. If the Orsini dared, they could seize the port it would be to enrich their Habsburg cousins. But in my hands, managed by these Albanese brothers, to Venice comes the tithes. For you see, I desire this day to purchase a ducal seat in Venice Council Senate, with money you advance me on the mortgage of this lease.

TUBAL:

Ahhh, at last we have it out! Is there any more? 'Tis good physic that you drain it all and leave none inside to fester. Say on.

BELMONT:

Sir be serious –

SHILOK:

Tubal is sometimes a jester. I will question this Ethiop, and will further test your Albanians at each quarter tithes. Send them to me with each copied manifest, and I will await their takings. Nothing on trust, all on the books is my latest motto. Now tell me, Laurencio is it? when comest you, and how found you hither?

LORENZO:

I am a free Bourne Ethiopian from the upper Nile, called Omandi from birth. My father grew oranges and limes and sold them into Cairo on barges I steered, so the Cairenes called me L'Aurantio. When I was 13, I signed into a seagoing ship, bound only for Tyre and back. But the sailor's found out I was a deft look out in the Crow's nest, so they kept me on for Crete and the Cyclades isles, for a few years. In Corfu I signed onto a Venetian vessel, and now been between Venice and Trieste route these 2 or 3 years. I speak Ethiopian, Arabic, Greek and some Albanian, and the Lads in Trieste where I lodge is teaching me some German.

SHILOK:

Your Italian is not bad either, how old are you.

LORENZO:

I've lost the count of my younger years, but I estimate I have 17 or 19 years.

TUBAL:

You'll have to do numbers more exact than estimating, if you intend to serve these merchant men.

(Jessica and Olivia reenter.)

LORENZO:

Oh, I can sir! Test me on your abacus if you like.

Tubal presents abacus:

TUBAL:

38 minus 11. Add eight and nine and 4 1/2. Now give each man a share.

LORENZO:

If three men share, 16 each with half ducat left over. If four men share it's 12.

SHILOK:

And who keeps the half Ducat in your thinking?

LORENZO:

The house keeps remainders always, until they are enough to divide.

BELMONT:

Well what say you good Shilok? I am due at St. Peter's Square at the hour of 10. Can you accept my note or do I shop at elsewhere?

SHILOK:

It's not without risk, perhaps 15 per centum is fair.

BELMONT:

Fifteen! I'm told 2% is the lending rate in Giudecca.

SHILOK:

for short, surety loans it is two. But in this, there is more loss to bear should fortunes founder, or storms sunder your ships. You must come above two.

BELMONT:

all right. Five is more than double that.

TUBAL:

he never goes below eight on ships.

SHILOK:

Twelve, it divides nicely at the quarter year.

BELMONT:

Twelve would break me, and I could not buy the seat. Say Ten and make an end.

SHILOK:

Ten it shall be, but only because I like you. And I placed two further conditions. He writes. One. These Albanians must come to me at each quarter with your payment. I'd like to see with my own eyes where my money is employed. And two: raise you before the Senate, once you are sure and seated, the matter of our Ghetto district's curfew hour. An Empire if merchant dukes should not tax its citizens more than they can bear while also limiting their earnings. Remember well the strong gates you entered the ghetto through. Gates keep trouble in, and seal Opportunity out. Now sign the addendum here, if you please to take my money.

BELMONT

(signs). Good sir I bid you fair morning and will redeem this note a year from today. Come, Portia, we want to get you a good seat in the ladies gallery, if I am to be sworn A Senator.

(They exit.)

JESSICA:

Father, Cook read that girls palm and made her cry. She saw a false man, many deaths, and blindness.

SHILOK:

Pshaw! you should not encourage that witchery, Jessica. The daughter of a statesman begins life on a pedestal, when from which she may easily fall. Better to be the daughter of a rich man, so you will not so easily be toppled. I do hope Belmont sees his skin succeed. There's a game of chance he has not seen all sides of yet.

TUBAL:

An ambitious man indeed. To use the Albanese and Ethiops to make his way.

SHILOK:

And us Jews. He takes the measure of all man, I think. I shall enjoy our arrangement, and use it to get myself a look at Senate books. If each senator pays a quarter million for his seat, the Senate will need a banker before long, to manage its millions. Who Better than a Jew from the locked Ghetto, who is not a member of any of the rival Senate families?

TUBAL:

friend, I am often amazed at the hidden things you see, where surfaces and semblances are enough to story me. Come good Jessica, I shall carry this heavy tray to Cook for you. Was it your first glimpse of a blackamoor today?

JESSICA:

Nuncle, I was not born yesterday. I have spent many an afternoon in St. Mark's Piazza and seen men of many types and stripes.

TUBAL:

Stripes!?, by Jacob's tent, do tell! They exit.

2. Shlok's study, a few days later

Shlok sits at his desk writing. There is a knock on the door. He is deep in concentration and doesn't respond. A moment later there is a second knock. He grunts. A moment later Jessica enters.

JESSICA:

Father?

SHILOK:

(turns, startled, then gestures for quiet while finishing writing.) yes, my dear what is it?

JESSICA:

Your two friends from Trieste are here, asking to see you.

SHILOK:

Friends?

JESSICA:

The harbormaster and his boy, the Ethiopian. With a strong box.

SHILOK:

Oh yes, it must be the tithing. Lady day is it? Send them in. Did they come on horse?

JESSICA:

Methinks they brought the box by dog cart from the canal. 'Tis not an overly large box.

SHILOK:

all right my dearest. Thank you. Dispatch them to me.

(He turns back to his writing. Jessica does not leave).

JESSICA:

(after a moment) Father?

SHILOK:

yes, yes?

JESSICA:

I'm going this morning to be measured at the dressmaker for my new gowns.

SHILOK:

oh?

JESSICA:

yes, I've extended my skirts twice with border stuff, but it's not enough. I am three inches taller since Lady-Day last.

SHILOK:

(glancing at her) Indeed....

JESSICA:

Mrs. Melchior and Tabita go with me to the dressmaker, or rather, I with them.

SHILOK:

Have a nice time dear. Do they bring a daggerman?

JESSICA:

yes, their Joshua will walk before us. He is keen eyed for danger.

SHILOK:

Better take our footman too, Isaac, not the new youngster, to follow behind. ‘Tis the high shipping season, with many a foreign sailor afoot, and looking to mix with trouble.

JESSICA:

I will father (pause). There is one more thing father. You promised me three gold florins for dressing with. For my birthday.

SHILOK:

And you want it early eh?

JESSICA:

No Father, today IS the day.

SHILOK:

Abraham’s toils! So it is. Forgive me dearest! Take five florins instead, I meant no hurt to you.

JESSICA:

I know it Father, you were so engrossed in your work I almost went without asking you.

SHYLOCK:

Oh, ‘tis nothing, merely a policy draft on merchant taxation that Senator Belmont has asked my advice. He wishes to debate it next—

JESSICA:

Tis more than my brain can fathom I’m sure Father. Thank you for my florins.

SHYLOCK:

Now come kiss me daughter. (they embrace)

JESSICA:

And Father, mind you finish work early and dress for town. Uncle and Aunt Tubal come for the birthday dinner, then to take us to the Comedy. Uncle has got a special pass for the curfew gate for us.

SHILOK:

Ugh Cannot we go next week instead? This missive needs my evening.

JESSICA:

Oh Father, next week is the Carnavale, and you know you dislike walking amongst the mascheri. The middle and tussle one's robes you said.

SHYLOK:

Very well, tonight it is, in your honor dear. Now if I'm to finish early for you, I must see these visitors. Bid them come in to me, and then go enjoy your birthday outing.

Jessica leaves

SHYLOCK: (reading aloud)

“the Empire shall tax each merchant diversely, according to his trade.” Twill require many tables and lists of goods, alas. Beltranio enters

3. The next day

Jessica is in the parlor reading, when Shilok enters

JESSICA:

Father, how long you have been in the market this morning, I fear you have not eaten.

SHILOK:

(kissing her)

All is well with me daughter but prepare yourself for many visitors. I have just come from the pier, where I saw for myself what I had only heard rumored: a filthy child in rags living in a cage outdoors, on the open docks. Prepare yourself, I have paid some strong men to bring her here. They will be along momentarily.

JESSICA:

A child? But how comes such a child to be caged?

SHILOK: