

The Merchant of Venice

2.1

[Flourish of cornetts.] Enter the Prince of Morocco, a tawny Moor all in white, and three or four followers accordingly, with Portia, Nerissa, and their train

MOROCCO (to Portia)

Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.
Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles, 5
And let us make incision for your love
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine
Hath feared the valiant. By my love I swear,
The best regarded virgins of our clime 10
Have loved it too. I would not change this hue
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.

PORTIA

In terms of choice I am not solely led
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes.
Besides, the lott'ry of my destiny 15
Bars me the right of voluntary choosing.
But if my father had not scanted me,
And hedged me by his wit to yield myself
His wife who wins me by that means I told you,
Yourself, renowned Prince, then stood as fair 20
As any comer I have looked on yet
For my affection.

MOROCCO Even for that I thank you.

Therefore I pray you lead me to the caskets
To try my fortune. By this scimitar,
That slew the Sophy and a Persian prince 25
That won three fields of Sultan Suleiman,
I would o'erstare the sternest eyes that look,
Outbrave the heart most daring on the earth,
Pluck the young sucking cubs from the she-bear,

Yea, mock the lion when a roars for prey, 30
To win the lady. But alas the while,
If Hercules and Lichas play at dice
Which is the better man, the greater throw
May turn by fortune from the weaker hand.
So is Alcides beaten by his rage, 35
And so may I, blind Fortune leading me,
Miss that which one unworthier may attain,
And die with grieving.

PORTIA You must take your chance,
And either not attempt to choose at all,
Or swear before you choose, if you choose wrong 40
Never to speak to lady afterward
In way of marriage. Therefore be advised.

MOROCCO
Nor will not. Come, bring me unto my chance.

PORTIA
First, forward to the temple. After dinner
Your hazard shall be made.

MOROCCO Good fortune then, 45
To make me blest or curseÁd'st among men.
[Flourish of cornetts.] Exeunt