

The Merchant of Venice

1.2

Enter Portia with Nerissa, her waiting-woman

PORTIA By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world.

NERISSA You would be, sweet madam, if your miseries were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are; and yet, for aught I see, they are as sick that 5
surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing. It is no mean happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean. Superfluity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer.

PORTIA Good sentences, and well pronounced. 10

NERISSA They would be better if well followed.

PORTIA If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions. I can easier teach twenty what 15
were good to be done than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree. Such a hare is madness, the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel, the cripple. But this reasoning 20
is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. O me, the word `choose'! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one nor refuse 25
none?

NERISSA Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations; therefore the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses 30
you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love. But what warmth is there in your affection towards any of these princely suitors that are already come?

PORTIA I pray thee overname them, and as thou namest 35

them I will describe them; and according to my description, level at my affection.

NERISSA First there is the Neapolitan prince.

PORTIA Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation 40 to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. I am much afeard my lady his mother played false with a smith.

NERISSA Then is there the County Palatine.

PORTIA He doth nothing but frown, as who should say 45 'An you will not have me, choose'. He hears merry tales and smiles not. I fear he will prove the weeping philosopher when he grows old, being so full of unmannerly sadness in his youth. I had rather be married to a death's-head with a bone in his mouth 50 than to either of these. God defend me from these two!

NERISSA How say you by the French lord, Monsieur le Bon?

PORTIA God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man. In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker, but 55 he±±why, he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan's, a better bad habit of frowning than the Count Palatine. He is every man in no man. If a throstle sing, he falls straight a-cap'ring. He will fence with his own shadow. If I should marry him, I should marry twenty husbands. 60 If he would despise me, I would forgive him, for if he love me to madness, I shall never requite him.

NERISSA What say you then to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

PORTIA You know I say nothing to him, for he under- 65 stands not me, nor I him. He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man's picture, but alas, who can converse with a dumb show? How oddly he is 70 suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere.

NERISSA What think you of the Scottish lord, his neighbour?

PORTIA That he hath a neighbourly charity in him, for he borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman and swore he would pay him again when he was able. I think the Frenchman became his surety, and sealed under for another. 80

NERISSA How like you the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew?

PORTIA Very vilely in the morning when he is sober, and most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk. When he is best he is a little worse than a man, and when 85 he is worst he is little better than a beast. An the worst fall that ever fell, I hope I shall make shift to go without him.

NERISSA If he should offer to choose, and choose the right casket, you should refuse to perform your father's will 90 if you should refuse to accept him.

PORTIA Therefore, for fear of the worst, I pray thee set a deep glass of Rhenish wine on the contrary casket; for if the devil be within and that temptation without, I know he will choose it. I will do anything, Nerissa, ere 95 I will be married to a sponge.

NERISSA You need not fear, lady, the having any of these lords. They have acquainted me with their determinations, which is indeed to return to their home and to trouble you with no more suit unless you may be 100 won by some other sort than your father's imposition depending on the caskets.

PORTIA If I live to be as old as Sibylla I will die as chaste as Diana unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will. I am glad this parcel of wooers are so 105 reasonable, for there is not one among them but I dote on his very absence; and I pray God grant them a fair departure.

NERISSA Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time, a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier, that came 110 hither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat?

PORTIA Yes, yes, it was Bassanio±±as I think, so was he called.

NERISSA True, madam. He of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon was the best deserving a fair 115

lady.

PORTIA I remember him well, and I remember him worthy
of thy praise.

Enter a Servingman

How now, what news?

SERVINGMAN The four strangers seek for you, madam, to 120
take their leave, and there is a forerunner come from
a fifth, the Prince of Morocco, who brings word the
Prince his master will be here tonight.

PORTIA If I could bid the fifth welcome with so good heart
as I can bid the other four farewell, I should be glad 125
of his approach. If he have the condition of a saint and
the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive
me than wive me.

Come, Nerissa. *(To the Servingman)* Sirrah, go before.
Whiles we shut the gate upon one wooer, 130
Another knocks at the door.

Exeunt