

The Merchant of Venice

3.5

Enter Lancelot the clown, and Jessica

LANCELOT Yes, truly; for look you, the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children, therefore I promise you I fear you. I was always plain with you, and so now I speak my agitation of the matter, therefore be o' good cheer, for truly I think you are damned. There is but one hope in it that can do you any good, and that is but a kind of bastard hope, neither. 5

JESSICA And what hope is that, I pray thee?

LANCELOT Marry, you may partly hope that your father got you not, that you are not the Jew's daughter. 10

JESSICA That were a kind of bastard hope indeed. So the sins of my mother should be visited upon me.

LANCELOT Truly then, I fear you are damned both by father and mother. Thus, when I shun Scylla your father, I fall into Charybdis your mother. Well, you are gone both ways. 15

JESSICA I shall be saved by my husband. He hath made me a Christian.

LANCELOT Truly, the more to blame he! We were Christians enough before, e'en as many as could well live one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-eaters we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money. 20

Enter Lorenzo

JESSICA I'll tell my husband, Lancelot, what you say. Here he comes. 25

LORENZO I shall grow jealous of you shortly, Lancelot, if you thus get my wife into corners.

JESSICA Nay, you need not fear us, Lorenzo. Lancelot and I are out. He tells me flatly there's no mercy for me in heaven because I am a Jew's daughter, and he says you are no good member of the commonwealth, for in converting Jews to Christians you raise the price of pork. 30

LORENZO *(to Lancelot)* I shall answer that better to the 35
commonwealth than you can the getting up of the
Negro's belly. The Moor is with child by you, Lancelot.

LANCELOT It is much that the Moor should be more than
reason, but if she be less than an honest woman, she
is indeed more than I took her for. 40

LORENZO How every fool can play upon the word! I think
the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and
discourse grow commendable in none only but parrots.
Go in, sirrah, bid them prepare for dinner.

LANCELOT That is done, sir. They have all stomachs. 45

LORENZO Goodly Lord, what a wit-snapper are you! Then
bid them prepare dinner.

LANCELOT That is done too, sir; only 'cover' is the word.

LORENZO Will you cover then, sir?

LANCELOT Not so, sir, neither. I know my duty. 50

LORENZO Yet more quarrelling with occasion! Wilt thou
show the whole wealth of thy wit in an instant? I pray
thee understand a plain man in his plain meaning. Go
to thy fellows; bid them cover the table, serve in the
meat, and we will come in to dinner. 55

LANCELOT For the table, sir, it shall be served in. For the
meat, sir, it shall be covered. For your coming in to
dinner, sir, why, let it be as humours and conceits
shall govern.

Exit

LORENZO

O dear discretion, how his words are suited! 60

The fool hath planted in his memory

An army of good words, and I do know

A many fools that stand in better place,

Garnished like him, that for a tricky word

Defy the matter. How cheer'st thou, Jessica? 65

And now, good sweet, say thy opinion:

How dost thou like the Lord Bassanio's wife?

JESSICA

Past all expressing. It is very meet

The Lord Bassanio live an upright life,

For, having such a blessing in his lady, 70

He finds the joys of heaven here on earth,

And if on earth he do not merit it,
In reason he should never come to heaven.
Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match
And on the wager lay two earthly women,
And Portia one, there must be something else
Pawned with the other; for the poor rude world
Hath not her fellow.

75

LORENZO Even such a husband
Hast thou of me as she is for a wife.

JESSICA
Nay, but ask my opinion too of that!

80

LORENZO
I will anon. First let us go to dinner.

JESSICA
Nay, let me praise you while I have a stomach.

LORENZO
No, pray thee, let it serve for table-talk.
Then, howsome'er thou speak'st, 'mong other things
I shall digest it.

JESSICA Well, I'll set you forth.

85

Exeunt