

The Merchant of Venice

2.2

Enter Lancelot the clown

LANCELOT Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at mine elbow and tempts me, saying to me 'Gobbo, Lancelot Gobbo, good Lancelot,' or 'good Gobbo,' or 'good Lancelot Gobbo±±use your legs, take the start, run away.' My 5 conscience says 'No, take heed, honest Lancelot, take heed, honest Gobbo,' or, as aforesaid, 'honest Lancelot Gobbo±±do not run, scorn running with thy heels.' Well, the most courageous fiend bids me pack. 'Via!' says the fiend; 'Away!' says the fiend. 'For the heavens, 10 rouse up a brave mind,' says the fiend, 'and run.' Well, my conscience hanging about the neck of my heart says very wisely to me, 'My honest friend Lancelot'±±being an honest man's son, or rather an honest woman's son, for indeed my father did something 15 smack, something grow to; he had a kind of taste±±well, my conscience says, 'Lancelot, budge not'; 'Budge!' says the fiend; 'Budge not', says my conscience. 'Conscience,' say I, 'you counsel well'; 'Fiend,' say I, 'you counsel well.' To be ruled by my 20 conscience I should stay with the Jew my master who, God bless the mark, is a kind of devil; and to run away from the Jew I should be ruled by the fiend who, saving your reverence, is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation; and in my conscience, 25 my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives the more friendly counsel. I will run, fiend. My heels are at your commandment. I will run.

Enter old Gobbo, [blind,] with a basket

GOBBO Master young man, you, I pray you, which is the 30 way to Master Jew's?

LANCELOT (*aside*) O heavens, this is my true-begotten father who, being more than sand-blind±±high-gravel-blind±±knows me not. I will try confusions with him.

GOBBO Master young gentleman, I pray you which is the 35
way to Master Jew's?

LANCELOT Turn up on your right hand at the next turning,
but at the next turning of all on your left, marry at
the very next turning, turn of no hand but turn down
indirectly to the Jew's house. 40

GOBBO By God's sonties, 'twill be a hard way to hit. Can
you tell me whether one Lancelot that dwells with him
dwell with him or no?

LANCELOT Talk you of young Master Lancelot? (*Aside*)
Mark me now, now will I raise the waters. (*To Gobbo*) 45
Talk you of young Master Lancelot?

GOBBO No master, sir, but a poor man's son. His father,
though I say't, is an honest exceeding poor man, and,
God be thanked, well to live.

LANCELOT Well, let his father be what a will, we talk of 50
young Master Lancelot.

GOBBO Your worship's friend, and Lancelot, sir.

LANCELOT But I pray you, *ergo* old man, *ergo* I beseech
you, talk you of young Master Lancelot?

GOBBO Of Lancelot, an't please your mastership. 55

LANCELOT *Ergo* Master Lancelot. Talk not of Master
Lancelot, father, for the young gentleman, according
to fates and destinies and such odd sayings±±the sisters
three and such branches of learning±±is indeed
deceased; or, as you would say in plain terms, gone to 60
heaven.

GOBBO Marry, God forbid! The boy was the very staff of
my age, my very prop.

LANCELOT [*aside*] Do I look like a cudgel or a hovel-post,
a staff or a prop? (*To Gobbo*) Do you know me, father? 65

GOBBO Alack the day, I know you not, young gentleman.
But I pray you tell me, is my boy±±God rest his soul±±
alive or dead?

LANCELOT Do you not know me, father?

GOBBO Alack, sir, I am sand-blind. I know you not. 70

LANCELOT Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes you might
fail of the knowing me. It is a wise father that knows
his own child. Well, old man, I will tell you news of
your son. (*Kneeling*) Give me your blessing. Truth will

come to light; murder cannot be hid long±±a man's 75
son may, but in the end truth will out.

GOBBO Pray you, sir, stand up. I am sure you are not
Lancelot, my boy.

LANCELOT Pray you, let's have no more fooling about it,
but give me your blessing. I am Lancelot, your boy 80
that was, your son that is, your child that shall be.

GOBBO I cannot think you are my son.

LANCELOT I know not what I shall think of that, but I am
Lancelot the Jew's man, and I am sure Margery your
wife is my mother. 85

GOBBO Her name is Margery indeed. I'll be sworn, if thou
be Lancelot thou art mine own flesh and blood.

He feels Lancelot's head

Lord worshipped might he be, what a beard hast thou
got! Thou hast got more hair on thy chin than Dobbin
my fill-horse has on his tail. 90

LANCELOT It should seem then that Dobbin's tail grows
backward. I am sure he had more hair of his tail than
I have of my face when I last saw him.

GOBBO Lord, how art thou changed! How dost thou and
thy master agree? I have brought him a present. How 95
'gree you now?

LANCELOT Well, well; but for mine own part, as I have
set up my rest to run away, so I will not rest till I have
run some ground. My master's a very Jew. Give him a
present?±±give him a halter! I am famished in his 100
service. You may tell every finger I have with my ribs.
Father, I am glad you are come. Give me your present
to one Master Bassanio, who indeed gives rare new
liveries. If I serve not him, I will run as far as God has
any ground. 105

Enter Bassanio with Leonardo and followers

O rare fortune! Here comes the man. To him, father,
for I am a Jew if I serve the Jew any longer.

BASSANIO *(to one of his men)* You may do so, but let it be
so hasted that supper be ready at the farthest by five
of the clock. See these letters delivered, put the liveries 110
to making, and desire Graziano to come anon to my
lodging.

Exit one

LANCELOT *(to Gobbo)* To him, father.

GOBBO *(to Bassanio)* God bless your worship.

BASSANIO Gramercy. Wouldst thou aught with me? 115

GOBBO Here's my son, sir, a poor boy±±

LANCELOT *(to Bassanio)* Not a poor boy, sir, but the rich
Jew's man that would, sir, as my father shall specify.

GOBBO *(to Bassiano)* He hath a great infection, sir, as one
would say, to serve±± 120

LANCELOT Indeed, the short and the long is, I serve the
Jew, and have a desire as my father shall specify.

GOBBO *(to Bassiano)* His master and he, saving your
worship's reverence, are scarce cater-cousins.

LANCELOT *(to Bassiano)* To be brief, the very truth is that 125
the Jew, having done me wrong, doth cause me, as my
father±±being, I hope, an old man±±shall frutify unto
you.

GOBBO *(to Bassiano)* I have here a dish of doves that I
would bestow upon your worship, and my suit is±± 130

LANCELOT *(to Bassiano)* In very brief, the suit is impertinent
to myself, as your worship shall know by this honest
old man; and though I say it, though old man, yet,
poor man, my father.

BASSANIO One speak for both. What would you? 135

LANCELOT Serve you, sir.

GOBBO *(to Bassiano)* That is the very defect of the matter,
sir.

BASSANIO *(to Lancelot)*

I know thee well. Thou hast obtained thy suit.
Shylock thy master spoke with me this day, 140
And hath preferred thee, if it be preferment
To leave a rich Jew's service to become
The follower of so poor a gentleman.

LANCELOT The old proverb is very well parted between
my master Shylock and you, sir: you have the grace 145
of God, sir, and he hath enough.

BASSANIO

Thou speak'st it well. *(To Gobbo)* Go, father, with thy son.
(To Lancelot) Take leave of thy old master and enquire
My lodging out. *(To one of his men)* Give him a livery

More guarded than his fellows'. See it done. 150

LANCELOT (to Gobbo) Father, in. I cannot get a service, no,
I have ne'er a tongue in my head±±well!

He looks at his palm

If any man in Italy have a fairer table which doth offer
to swear upon a book, I shall have good fortune. Go
to, here's a simple line of life, here's a small trifle of 155
wives±±alas, fifteen wives is nothing. Eleven widows
and nine maids is a simple coming-in for one man, and
then to scape drowning thrice, and to be in peril of my
life with the edge of a featherbed±±here are simple
scapes. Well, if Fortune be a woman, she's a good 160
wench for this gear. Father, come. I'll take my leave
of the Jew in the twinkling.

Exit with old Gobbo

BASSANIO

I pray thee, good Leonardo, think on this.
These things being bought and orderly bestowed,
Return in haste, for I do feast tonight 165
My best-esteemed acquaintance. Hie thee. Go.

LEONARDO

My best endeavours shall be done herein.

He begins to leave. Enter Graziano

GRAZIANO (to Leonardo)

Where's your master?

LEONARDO Yonder, sir, he walks.

Exit

GRAZIANO

Signor Bassanio.

BASSANIO Graziano.

GRAZIANO

I have a suit to you.

BASSANIO You have obtained it. 170

GRAZIANO

You must not deny me. I must go with you to
Belmont.

BASSANIO

Why then, you must. But hear thee, Graziano,
Thou art too wild, too rude and bold of voice±±
Parts that become thee happily enough,
And in such eyes as ours appear not faults; 175

But where thou art not known, why, there they show
Something too liberal. Pray thee, take pain
To allay with some cold drops of modesty
Thy skipping spirit, lest through thy wild behaviour
I be misconstrued in the place I go to, 180
And lose my hopes.

GRAZIANO Signor Bassanio, hear me.
If I do not put on a sober habit,
Talk with respect, and swear but now and then,
Wear prayer books in my pocket, look demurely±±
Nay more, while grace is saying hood mine eyes 185
Thus with my hat, and sigh, and say `Amen',
Use all the observance of civility,
Like one well studied in a sad ostent
To please his grandam, never trust me more.

BASSANIO Well, we shall see your bearing. 190

GRAZIANO
Nay, but I bar tonight. You shall not gauge me
By what we do tonight.

BASSANIO No, that were pity.
I would entreat you rather to put on
Your boldest suit of mirth, for we have friends
That purpose merriment. But fare you well. 195
I have some business.

GRAZIANO
And I must to Lorenzo and the rest.
But we will visit you at supper-time.
Exeunt severally