

The Merchant of Venice abbreviated

Act 2, Scene 7

Introspection

Situation: A disheartened Portia leads the eager Prince of Morocco to the three caskets, letting him know that “one of them contains my picture.” He chooses the wrong small chest, however, and is dismissed, as the terms of her father’s will require, causing Portia to feel a little better.

PORTIA: Now make your choice.

MOROCCO: This first, of gold, who this inscription bears, “Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire”; the second, silver, which this promise carries, “Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves”; this third, dull lead, with warning all as blunt, “Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.” How shall I know if I do choose the right?

PORTIA: The one of them contains my picture, prince. If you choose that, then I am yours withal.

Morocco to himself, No. 1

What says this leaden casket? “Who doth choose
Me must give all and risk that he might lose
All he hath.” Must give? For lead? This casket
Threatens. Those men that hazard all do it
In hope of fair advantage. I’ll not set
This key for lead. What says this silver kit?
“Who doth choose me shall get as much as he
Deserves.” Thou deserves enough, if thou be
Rated by thy own estimation, but
That may not reach to the lady to win.
I do in love most deserve her, but what
If there’s more? Let’s see this saying graved in
Gold. “Who doth choose me shall gain what many
Men desire.” Would that not be the lady?

MOROCCO: All the world desires her.

Morocco to himself, No. 2

Men come from the four corners of the earth
To be near this mortal, breathing saint, worth
More than gold. The wilds of Arabia
And the eastern deserts are as throughfares
For princes to come view this fair Portia.
The great ocean, whose ambitious head tears
At the seams of heaven, is no barrier
To men, who come as o’er a brook to her.

**One of these three contains her heavenly
Picture. It too base to think the one wooed
Contained in lead. Dare think in silver she
Is immured, being ten times less valued
Than gold? Never has a story been told
Where such a gem was set in worse than gold.**

MOROCCO: Deliver me the key. Here do I choose, and thrive I as I may.

PORTIA: There, take it, prince.

She hands him the key.

PORTIA: And if my form lie there, then I am yours.

Morocco opens the gold casket.