

The Merchant of Venice abbreviated

Act 2, Scene 9

Observation

Situation: The Prince of Arragon arrives in Belmont, hoping to win Portia's hand. He is there, as was the Prince of Morocco, hoping to meet the terms of her father's will. Impatient as he is, he quickly decides to peruse the three chests.

ARRAGON: I am enjoined by oath to observe three things: First, never to unfold to anyone which casket 'twas I chose; next, if I fail of the right casket, never in my life to woo a maid in way of marriage; lastly, if I do fail in fortune of my choice, immediately to leave you, and be gone.

PORTIA: To these injunctions everyone doth swear that comes to hazard for my worthless self.

ARRAGON: And so have I addressed me.

Arragon to Portia

Fortune now to my heart's hope. Let's look at
Base lead. "Must give and hazard all!" If that
Means risk all, thou shall look fairer ere I
Choose lead. What says the golden chest? Let me
See: "What many men desire!" They choose by
Show, the barbarous multitudes that see
Not more than the fond eye doth teach, prying
Not into the interior. Willing
I not to jump with them. Let's to that, then,
Thou silver treasure house. "As much as he
Deserves." Well said, for who should trick fortune
Without the stamp of merit? Dignity
Deserves honor; the true seed of honor
Is gained by the merit of the wearer.

ARRAGON: Well, but to my choice. "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." I will assume that I deserve the best. Give me a key for this.

He is given a key. He opens the silver casket.

ARRAGON: The portrait of a blinking idiot. Did I deserve no more than a fool's head? Is that my prize? Are my deserts no better?