

# Merchant of Venice

## Act - 3

### Scene - 2

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#### Extract - 1

**1. Where does this scene take place? What is meant by the first line of the extract?**

**Answers:** This scene takes place in a room in Portia's house at Belmont. The first line refers to Portia's maidenly modesty according to which she has no other choice except to think, though she may not express her thoughts Portia says enough to convey to Bassanio that she loved him. She is doubtful whether Bassanio has understood what she has said and wanted to explain further. But then she is taken over by her maidenly modesty.

**2. What reason does Portia give at the end of her speech for speaking so long? What does this show about her feelings towards Bassanio?**

**Answer:** At the end of her speech, Portia says that she spoke at length to stretch the time and delay to the fullest extent Bassanio's act of choosing the caskets. This shows that she has feelings of love for Bassanio and does not want to lose him soon. In her speech, she repeats her wish to make him stay in Belmont for a month or two before he hazards the choice of the caskets.

**3. Why can't Portia teach Bassanio to choose the correct casket? If Bassanio were to make an incorrect choice what would Portia have wished?**

**Answer:** Portia cannot teach Bassanio to choose the correct casket as she has promised her father not to reveal the secret of the caskets to anyone. She would never break her pledged word. If Bassanio were to make an incorrect choice, Portia would have wished that she had broken her promise.

**4. Give the meaning of:**

**Beskrew your eyes,**

**They have o'erlookd me and divided me;**

**Answer:** The above lines mean, 'May your eyes be confounded. They have cast a spell on me and divided me'. Portia says that Bassanio's eyes have cast a spell on her and divided her for she no longer seems to be herself. She says that half of her belongs to him and the other half to her. Even if the latter half is hers, it would still be his. So she is entirely his.

**5. What light does the extract throw on the character of Portia as a daughter and as a lover?**

**Answer:** The extract shows that as a lover, Portia loves Bassanio and does not want to lose him and wants to detain him with her for a month or two. Also she wants to train him how to choose the right casket. She says that Bassanio's eyes have bewitched her and divided her.

She affirms that she is completely his. But as a dutiful daughter, she will never guide Bassanio to choose the right casket as it would break her promise to her father.

## **Extract - 2**

**1. Explain the meaning of 'he makes a swan-like end.' What contemporary belief about swans is expressed in the extract?**

**Answer:** There was a contemporary belief that the swan, which is usually mute, sang a beautiful song just before its death. The swan-song was sung only once. If Bassanio were 'to die', that is, to lose the love for Portia, by choosing the wrong casket, then his end will be accompanied by the fading music, like the swan that sings before it dies.

**2. Why does Portia Order music to be played while Bassanio makes the choice of caskets? To what does Portia compare the music, should Bassanio choose correctly?**

**Answer:** Portia calls for music first of all to calm the excitement in her own heart and her tension when Bassanio is choosing the casket. She further defends her action saying that if Bassanio fails he will bid him his last farewell in the midst of music and thus will be like the swan that sings before it dies. If Bassanio succeeds, the music will add to the festive atmosphere of the occasion, making everyone happy.

**3. How could Portia's eyes be a watery death-bed for Bassanio?**

**Answer:** Portia explains the condition if Bassanio fails to choose the right casket. In that case, he will have a swan-like end. Making the comparison more explicit, Portia says that her eyes with tears will be Bassanio's watery grave as the river is the grave for the dying swan.

**4. How would the music call the dreaming bridegroom to his marriage?**

**Answer:** If Bassanio is successful in the choice of caskets then the music also represents the sweet notes of music that awaken the dreaming bridegroom on the morning of his marriage and tells him that his wedding day has come. It refers to an old English custom of playing music under the windows of the bridegroom on the morning of the wedding day.

**5. In what way does Portia act as a romantic heroine in this scene?**

**Answer:** In this scene, Portia acts as a romantic heroine. Her maidenly modesty and bright wit is seen when she detains Bassanio a little longer while making his choice. She accomplishes the difficult task of revealing to Bassanio her affection for him. When Bassanio chooses correctly, she is happy and surrenders herself, her property and her servants to Bassanio. She also offers him a ring and makes him promise never to part with it.

## **Extract - 3**

**1. Who is Alcides? What is the 'virgin tribute'? How did Alcides save the virgin tribute?**

**Answer:** Alcides refers to young Hercules, son of Alcaeus. In Greek mythology, he is depicted as a strong and courageous youth. "Virgin Tribute" refers to Hesione, the unmarried daughter of the Trojan King. Hesione was tied to a rock on the sea-shore of Troy, expecting every moment to be devoured by the sea-monster. Hercules saved the 'Virgin Tribute' by killing

the sea monster and setting her free. Here Portia compares her tension and suspense while Bassanio makes his choice of caskets to the anxiety of Hesione, waiting for the sea monster's attack. She sees Bassanio as having more love than Alcides.

**2. In what way is Bassanio compared to young Alcides? Why does Portia here 'stand for sacrifice'?**

**Answer:** Portia compares Bassanio to Hercules by saying that Bassanio has as much digruty of bearing as Hercules had, but he goes with much more love than Hercules. Hercules did not go to save Hesione out of love but to get the horses offered as a reward. Here Portia compares herself to Hesione, who was offered as a sacrifice to a sea-monster. Similarly, if Bassanio chooses the wrong casket, she will fall into the clutches of an unworthy suitor.

**3. Give the meaning of:**

**(a) howling Troy:** the loud lamentations of the people of Troy at the sacrifice of Hesione

**(b) bleared visages:** means tear-stained faces. The reference is made to the Trojan women who had assembled on the beach with tear-stained faces to wait and watch the result of the encounter between the sea-monster and Hercules.

**(c) The issue of the exploit:** It means the outcome of the rescue operation. It refers to the outcome of the encounter between Hercules and the sea-monster.

**4. What are 'The rest aloof' referred to in the extract? Who are the Dardanian wives? What were the wives doing in the scene when Alcides was saving the virgin tribute?**

**Answer:** 'The rest aloof' referred to in the extract are people in the room like Nerissa, Gratiano and others whom Portia compares to Trojan women Dardanian wives are Trojan women. Dardanus was the mythical ancestor of the Trojans, who were called Dardanians. The Trojan women had assembled on the beach with tear-stained faces to wait and watch the result of the encounter between Hercules and the sea monster

**5. Why does Portia say, 'Go, Hercules'? What will she be doing at the same time?**

**Answer:** Portia asks Bassanio, 'Go Hercules' because in her opinion the similarity between Bassanio and Hercules is complete and perfect. Portia tells Bassanio to go ahead and choose the casket. While he is choosing she will be watching the test with much more anxiety than he, who has to make the choice. She says that if he lives, that is, he succeeds, she lives. If he fails, it is death for her.

**Extract - 4**

**1. Which theme in the play is highlighted in the above extract? How is it highlighted?**

**Answer:** In the above extract, the theme of appearance and reality is highlighted Bassanio, commenting on the caskets says that a pretty exterior may often hide a rotten interior. The multitude is always led astray by decorations and adornments of various kinds. He is highlighting this theme by providing the examples of lawyers, religious heresies and cases of cowards, who assume outward signs of valour.

**2. How can vice assume the external show of virtue?**

**Answer:** Bassanio says that every wrong has some appearance of virtue. He explains it through the example of a lawyer. In a law-suit, possession of a pleasing voice and attractive presence in a lawyer, entirely hide any appearance of wrong in the cause he pleads. The ornament of the voice gives an unsound plea, the false appearance of a good reality. Similarly religious heresies can be glossed over if a preacher makes them appear as true and just.

### **3. What are 'stairs of sand'? To what are these stairs compared?**

**Answer:** 'Stairs of sand' refer to a stairway made of shifting sand. Such a stairway is unreliable and gives way beneath the footstep it should support. These stairs are compared to cowards, who cultivate beards to give them the appearance of great warriors like Hercules and Mars. The manly appearance is cultivated only to deceive the world into thinking that they are formidable.

### **4. Who is Hercules and who is frowning Mars? What are they, with their beards known for?**

**Answer:** Hercules was a great hero in Greek mythology and Mars was the Roman god of war. Hercules and Mars are referred to here because they, with their beards, stand for strength, manliness and bravery.

### **5. Give the meaning of the following:**

**has livers white as milk:** The Elizabethans looked upon the liver as the seat of courage. A brave man's liver was said to be red with blood. Cowards were spoken of as having white livers.

## **Extract – 5**

### **1. Explain how is beauty purchased by weight? How does it make the wearers lightest? (Give the two meanings of the word: lightest.)**

**Answer:** Bassanio says that if we take the case of beauty we find that an imitation of it is easily obtainable and may be brought in the market. The cosmetics which enhance beauty can be bought by weight in a chemist's shop. These bring about a marvellous change in the appearance of women.

The word lightest is punned on. Bassanio means that the addition of cosmetics makes a woman light that is fair coloured. The other meaning of 'lightest is to be frivolous and fickle-minded.

### **2. What is referred to as "crisped snaky golden locks"? Who wears them and who is their actual owner?**

**Answer:** Crisped snaky golden locks' refer to false hair that women wear. Bassanio says that the shining golden tresses whose ringlets are tossed about by the playful breeze, seen on the head of a woman, appear to be real. Actually it is false hair and originally it belonged to a dead woman, who is lying in the grave.

### **3. What is referred to as 'the dowry of a second head'? Who has bred this head? Where is the head now?**

**Answer:** 'The dowry of a second head' refers to the false hair (wig) worn by a woman, that appear to be real but actually is a gift from some dead woman, i.e. it originally belonged to a dead woman who is lying in the grave. Shakespeare refers to the popular custom of wearing wigs among the Elizabethan women.

**4. Why does Bassanio say that Ornament is but the guiled shore to a most dangerous sea?**

**Answer:** Bassanio says that outward adornment is always deceptive. It is like the attractive but treacherous sea-shore that leads people into perilous waters.

**5. Give any two examples from Bassanio's speech to show that appearances are deceptive.**

**Answer:** Bassanio asserts that appearances are deceptive. Two examples he mentions are: First, the shining, golden false hair that some women wear. Though they look real, they belong to a dead person. The second example is that of a lovely scarf that hides the ugly face of an Indian beauty. This is deceptive as people expect to see something better than an Indian beauty when the scarf is removed.

## **Extract - 6**

**1. Where was the gentle scroll? Give the summary of what was written on the scroll.**

**Answer:** The gentle scroll was in the lead casket. On the scroll it was written that since he has not chosen by mere outward appearances, he may be fortunate and make his choice as wisely as he has done. Since this fortune has come to him, he should be satisfied and seek nothing more for his happiness. If he is pleased with his luck and feels that fate has brought him happiness, he should go to his beloved and claim her as his own with a loving kiss.

**2. What prize had the speaker won? Give the reasons which led to the winning of the prize.**

**Answer:** The speaker has won Portia. The speaker chose the correct casket, i.e. lead casket containing Portia's portrait. Its simple looks impressed Bassanio more than the protestations of gold and silver. Besides, the inscription on the casket stated that the man who chooses it must give and hazard his whole being which means his true love.

**3. What was the speaker asked to give and to receive?**

**Answer:** The speaker was asked to go to the lady and claim her as his own with a loving kiss and receive a kiss from her.

**4. Give the meaning of:**

**(a) universal shout:** loud applause of joy. This refers to the clamour of the crowd at Bassanio's choice of the right casket.

**(b) Giddy in spirit:** overwhelmed with joy. This speaks of the bewildered state of mind of Bassanio after his choice of the lead casket.

**5. To whom does the speaker compare himself? In what way does he compare himself?**

**Answer:** The speaker compares himself to the one who is striving to win some contest, like one of two prize-fighters. He compares himself as someone who wins a prize in the contest.

**6. Why is the speaker doubtful whether what he sees is true?**

**Answer:** Bassanio is at the height of his joy after choosing the correct casket. He hears a loud applause from the people standing there. He is so bewildered by the outcome of making the correct choice, that he is not sure if the applause is for him or not. He asks Portia to confirm it and sanction it by returning his kiss.

**Extract - 7**

**1. Which possessions of hers, does Portia transfers to Bassanio after he chose the correct casket?**

**Answer:** After Bassanio chooses the correct casket, Portia transfers her mansion, her servants, herself and all her possessions to him.

**2. Mention three of the wishes of Portia which express her desire to excel in everything.**

**Answer:** Portia, for the sake of Bassanio wishes that she were sixty times better than herself, a thousand times more beautiful and ten thousand times Wealthier. These wishes express her desire to excel in everything for the sake of Bassanio.

**3. On what condition does she give the ring to Bassanio? How does the ring become a part of the main plot in the story?**

**Answer:** As a token of her love to Bassanio, Portia gives him a ring. She warns him that if he parts with the ring or loses it or gives it away, that will be a sign that his love for her is dead and give her the right to reproach him. The ring becomes a part of the main plot of the story as it starts the ring episode we come across later in the play.

**4. Give the meaning of:**

**Let it presage the ruin of your love,  
And be my vantage to exclaim on you**

**Answer:** These lines mean: "Let that be a sign that your love for me is dead and it will give an opportunity for me to accuse you for that." Here Portia asserts that if Bassanio loses the ring she has given him, it will show the loss of his love for her and will give her the right to reproach him.

**5. After Portia's speech, what does Bassanio say in his excitement? What assurance does he give to her about the ring?**

**Answer:** After Portia's speech, Bassanio is overpowered with emotion and he tells Portia that her love and goodness has made him speechless. Regarding the ring, Bassanio promises Portia that when the ring leaves his finger, his spirit will flee and his life will leave him. He will part with the ring only at his death.

**Extract - 8**

**1. Give the context in which Gratiano speaks these words. What good wishes does he give to Bassanio?**

**Answer:** After Bassanio's successful selection of the right casket and after the speeches of Portia and Bassanio Nerissa greets them and wishes them great joy. Thereafter Gratiano speaks these words. Gratiano wishes Portia and Bassanio that all the joy and happiness they desire may be showered upon them.

**2. What request does Gratiano make to Bassanio?**

**Answer:** Gratiano requests Bassanio to grant him a special favour - that is, to permit him to allow him to marry at the same time of the marriage ceremony of Portia and Bassanio.

**3. What condition does Bassanio put regarding Gratiano's request?**

**Answer:** Bassanio gives his consent most heartily, provided Gratiano can get a wife.

**4. Explain how Gratiano's fortune too 'stood upon the caskets'?**

**Answer:** While Bassanio wooed Lady Portia, Gratiano wooed her lady-in-waiting Nerissa. However, the promise that Gratiano received from Nerissa was that Nerissa would love Gratiano provided that Bassanio had the good fortune of winning the love of Portia by selecting the right casket. Thus, Gratiano's fortune too stood on the caskets.

**5. How has Gratiano-Nerissa episode added humour to the story in this scene?**

**Answer:** Gratiano Nerissa episode has added humour to the story. The romance and marriage of Nerissa and Gratiano strengthen the old belief that characters in association with nobility are themselves ennobled. Gratiano experienced the joy of love in the company of Bassanio. Nerissa being educated by her mistress Portia, was able to win a gentleman's love. Gratiano, with a keen sense of humour arouses much mirth and laughter in the scene.

## **Extract - 9**

**1. Where does the scene take place? Who brings the letter from Antonio to Bassanio?**

**Answer:** This scene takes place in a room in Portia's house at Belmont, Salerio brings the letter from Antonio to Bassanio.

**2. How does Portia conclude that there is some bad news in the letter? What could be the bad news according to Portia?**

**Answer:** Portia concludes that there is some bad news in the letter because as soon as Bassanio reads the letter, his face turns pale and he becomes greatly agitated. According to Portia, the bad news in the letter must be about the loss of someone loved by Bassanio.

**3. What right does Portia now have to know from Bassanio the contents of the letter?**

**Answer:** Portia begs of Bassanio to tell her the cause of his sorrow as she and Bassanio are one, and she ought to share in everything that happens to him. Hence, she asks Bassanio to tell her what news that letter has brought.

**4. Briefly state what Bassanio told Portia about the bond and the destruction of Antonio's cargo ships.**

**Answer:** Bassanio tells Portia that the letter contains some of the most unwelcome news. He tells Portia that he is deeply indebted to a kind friend. This friend for his sake agreed to hand with his worst enemy, a man who hates him. He did this solely to supply Bassanio with the needed to come to Belmont. Bassanio looks upon Antonio's letter as if it is his body and the cruel words of the letter as wounds from which blood is gushing out. He then tells that all the ships of Antonio have been wrecked on the dangerous rocks.

**5. What did Salerio say about Shylock's insistence on the forfeiture of Antonio's bond?**

**Answer:** Salerio says that even if Antonio had sufficient money to pay off his debt, Shylock will not accept the payment. Shylock threatens to take legal action against the city's governance and call in question the equality of rights of foreigners with the citizens of Venice, if they refuse Shylock justice by bringing Antonio to trial. Twenty merchants, the Duke and the noblemen of the highest rank in Venice, have tried to persuade Shylock to be reasonable, but without any success. Shylock holds stubbornly to his malicious purpose of exacting the full penalty for the forfeiture of the bond.

**Extract - 10**

**1. Who are Tubal and Chus? What did Jessica hear Shylock say to Tubal and Chus about the bond?**

**Answer:** Tubal and Chus are two Jewish friends of Shylock. When Jessica was at home, she had heard Shylock swearing to Tubal and Chus that he will have the penalty carried out and that a pound of Antonio's flesh would give him more pleasure than to be paid the debt twenty times over.

**2. What would the Duke, law and influential citizens do to prevent Shylock from taking his cruel forfeiture?**

**Answer:** The Duke, law and influential citizens would use all their powers of persuasion to prevent Shylock from taking his cruel forfeiture.

**3. What is the danger if the forfeiture is denied to Shylock as per the terms of the bond?**

**Answer:** If the forfeiture is denied to Shylock as per the terms of the bond, there was the danger of Shylock taking legal action against the city's governors and call in question the equality of rights of foreigners with the citizens of Venice. Thus, there was the danger of Shylock bringing discredit to the business in Venice.

**4. What does Portia offer to do in terms of payment to Shylock in cash?**

**Answer:** In terms of payment to Shylock in cash, Portia offers to pay him double the amount. Then she says to give him double of six thousand and then three times of that. Later she says that she will give him enough gold to pay the debt twenty times over.

**5. What does Antonio's letter state about his last wish?**

**Answer:** Since the payment of the penalty means his death, Antonio's last wish is to see Bassanio before he dies. He says that it will cancel all bonds and obligations between Bassanio and him. However, he adds that Bassanio should do as he wishes and should not pay any attention to Antonio's welfare.

## **Extract - 11**

### **1. What were Portia's secret plans in sending Bassanio to Venice?**

**Answer:** Portia gives money to Bassanio and sends him to rescue Antonio. She makes a plan to disguise herself as a lawyer and Nerissa as her assistant and then go to Venice to rescue Antonio from the clutches of Shylock.

### **2. Give the meaning of:**

- (a) 'call me wife': make me your wife, get married to me.  
(b) 'With and unique soul': with a disturbed, grief stricken mind.

### **3. What is Bassanio supposed to do as far as Antonio's forfeiture of the bond is concerned?**

**Answer:** Bassanio was supposed to go to Venice and offer double the amount of bond to Shylock and cancel the bond. If he did not agree to that Bassanio is to offer him, double of six thousand ducats or three times that amount or even twenty times the bond amount.

### **4. What would Portia and Nerissa supposed to be doing in Belmont after their husbands leave for Venice? What did they really do?**

**Answer:** Portia and Nerissa were to stay in Belmont as spinsters or widows after their husbands leave for Venice. But in fact they did not do so. Portia and Nerissa went to Venice in disguise of a lawyer and her assistant, respectively and played a constructive role in saving Antonio from the clutches of Shylock.

### **5. How important is this scene for the forward movement of the storyline?**

**Answer:** This scene is important for the forward movement of the storyline. It completes the casket story and brings it in direct contact with other stories- the bond story, Jessica-Lorenzo love story and the ring story. The ring story begins in this scene. The bond story is revealed through Antonio's letter and Bassanio's return to Venice.

### **6. After the choice of the casket by Bassanio, Portia takes over the leadership in the play. What are your views on this statement?**

**Answer:** It is true that after the choice of the casket by Bassanio, Portia takes over leadership in the play. When Antonio is in trouble, she offers Bassanio twenty times the bond amount to save Antonio. She herself dons the guise of a lawyer and using a perfect blend of mercy and justice saves Antonio.

from The Merchant of Venice Act III Scene 2