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978-1-108-00593-7 - The Merchant of Venice, Volume 21

William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

[I. I.] *A quay in Venice**ANTONIO, SALERIO, and SOLANIO approach,
talking together*

Antonio. In sooth I know not why I am so sad,
It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn:

And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself.

Salerio. Your mind is tossing on the ocean,
There, where your argosies with portly sail—
Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood, 10
Or as it were the pageants of the sea—
Do overpeer the petty traffickers,
That curtsy to them, do them reverence,
As they fly by them with their woven wings.

Solanio. Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth,
The better part of my affections would
Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still
Plucking the grass to know where sits the wind,
Piring in maps for ports and piers and roads:
And every object that might make me fear 20
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt,
Would make me sad.

Salerio. My wind, cooling my broth,
Would blow me to an ague when I thought
What harm a wind too great might do at sea.
I should not see the sandy hour-glass run
But I should think of shallows and of flats,

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4 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE I.I.27

And see my wealthy Andrew docked in sand,
 Vailing her high-top lower than her ribs
 To kiss her burial...Should I go to church

- 30 And see the holy edifice of stone,
 And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
 Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
 Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
 Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
 And, in a word, but even now worth this,
 And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought
 To think on this, and shall I lack the thought
 That such a thing bechanced would make me sad?
 But tell not me—I know Antonio

- 40 Is sad to think upon his merchandise.

Antonio. Believe me, no—I thank my fortune for it—
 My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
 Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate
 Upon the fortune of this present year:
 Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.

Solanio. Why then you are in love.

Antonio.

Fie, fie!

- Solanio.* Not in love neither? then let us say you are sad
 Because you are not merry; and 'twere as easy
 For you to laugh and leap, and say you are merry,
 50 Because you are not sad. Now, by two-headed Janus,
 Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time:
 Some that will evermore peep through their eyes,
 And laugh like parrots at a bag-piper;
 And other of such vinegar aspect,
 That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile,
 Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable....

BASSANIO, LORENZO, and GRATIANO are seen approaching

Here comes Bassanio, your most noble kinsman,

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1.1.58 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 5

Gratiano, and Lorenzo...Fare ye well,
We leave you now with better company.

Salerio. I would have stayed till I had made you merry, 60
If worthier friends had not prevented me.

Antonio. Your worth is very dear in my regard.
I take it your own business calls on you,
And you embrace th'occasion to depart.

Salerio. Good morrow, my good lords.

Bassanio [*coming up*]. Good signiors both, when shall
we laugh? say when?

You grow exceeding strange: must it be so?

Salerio. We'll make our leisures to attend on yours.

[*Salerio and Solanio bow and depart*]

Lorenzo. My Lord Bassanio, since you have
found Antonio,

We two will leave you, but at dinner-time 70
I pray you have in mind where we must meet.

Bassanio. I will not fail you.

Gratiano. You look not well, Signior Antonio,
You have too much respect upon the world:
They lose it that do buy it with much care,
Believe me you are marvellously changed.

Antonio. I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano—
A stage, where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one.

Gratiano. Let me play the fool,
With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come, 80
And let my liver rather heat with wine,
Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
Sleep when he wakes? and creep into the jaundice
By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio—
I love thee, and it is my love that speaks—

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6 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE I.I.88

- There are a sort of men whose visages
 Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,
 90 And do a wilful stillness entertain,
 With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
 Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit,
 As who should say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
 And when I ope my lips let no dog bark'....
 O, my Antonio, I do know of these
 That therefore only are reputed wise
 For saying nothing...when, I am very sure,
 If they should speak, would almost damn those ears
 Which, hearing them, would call their brothers fools.
 100 I'll tell thee more of this another time.
 But fish not with this melancholy bait
 For this fool gudgeon, this opinion...
 Come, good Lorenzo. Fare ye well awhile,
 I'll end my exhortation after dinner.
Lorenzo. Well, we will leave you then till dinner-time.
 I must be one of these same dumb wise men,
 For Gratiano never lets me speak.
Gratiano. Well, keep me company but two years mo,
 Thou shalt not know the sound of thine own tongue.
 110 *Antonio.* Fare you well. I'll grow a talker for
 this gear.
Gratiano. Thanks, i'faith—for silence is only
 commendable
 In a neat's tongue dried, and a maid not vendible.
 [*Gratiano and Lorenzo go off laughing, arm-in-arm*
Antonio. Is that any thing now?
Bassanio. Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing,
 more than any man in all Venice. His reasons are as
 two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you
 shall seek all day ere you find them, and when you
 have them they are not worth the search.

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I.I.II9 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 7

Antonio. Well, tell me now what lady is the same
To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage, 120
That you to-day promised to tell me of?

Bassanio. 'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,
How much I have disabled mine estate,
By something showing a more swelling port
Than my faint means would grant continuance:
Nor do I now make moan to be abridged
From such a noble rate, but my chief care
Is to come fairly off from the great debts
Wherein my time, something too prodigal,
Hath left me gaged. To you, Antonio, 130
I owe the most in money and in love,
And from your love I have a warranty
To unburthen all my plots and purposes
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

Antonio. I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it,
And if it stand, as you yourself still do,
Within the eye of honour, be assured,
My purse, my person, my extremest means,
Lie all unlocked to your occasions.

Bassanio. In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft, 140
I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
The self-same way, with more advised watch,
To find the other forth, and by adventuring both,
I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof,
Because what follows is pure innocence....
I owe you much, and, like a wilful youth,
That which I owe is lost—but if you please
To shoot another arrow that self way
Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
As I will watch the aim, or to find both, 150
Or bring your latter hazard back again,
And thankfully rest debtor for the first.

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8 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE I.I.153

Antonio. You know me well, and herein spend but time
 To wind about my love with circumstance,
 And out of doubt you do me now more wrong
 In making question of my uttermost
 Than if you had made waste of all I have:
 Then do but say to me what I should do
 That in your knowledge may by me be done,
 160 And I am prest unto it: therefore, speak.

Bassanio. In Belmont is a lady richly left,
 And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,
 Of wondrous virtues—sometimes from her eyes
 I did receive fair speechless messages.
 Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
 To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia;
 Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
 For the four winds blow in from every coast
 Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
 170 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,
 And many Jasons come in quest of her.
 O my Antonio, had I but the means
 To hold a rival place with one of them,
 I have a mind presages me such thrift,
 That I should questionless be fortunate.

Antonio. Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea,
 Neither have I money nor commodity
 To raise a present sum, therefore go forth,
 180 Try what my credit can in Venice do—
 That shall be racked, even to the uttermost,
 To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia.
 Go, presently inquire, and so will I,
 Where money is, and I no question make
 To have it of my trust or for my sake.

[*they go*]

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1.2.1 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 9

[1.2.] *The hall of Portia's house at Belmont; at the back a gallery and beneath it the entrance to an alcove concealed by a curtain*

PORTIA and her waiting-woman NERISSA

Portia. By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world.

Nerissa. You would be, sweet madam, if your miseries were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are: and yet for aught I see, they are as sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing; it is no mean happiness therefore to be seated in the mean—superfluity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer.

Portia. Good sentences, and well pronounced.

Nerissa. They would be better if well followed. 10

Portia. If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching...The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree—such a hare is madness the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple...But this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. 20
O me, the word 'choose'! I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike—so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father... Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?

Nerissa. Your father was ever virtuous, and holy men at their death have good inspirations, therefore the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning

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10 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 1.2.30

30 chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly, but one whom you shall rightly love. But what warmth is there in your affection towards any of these princely suitors that are already come?

Portia. I pray thee over-name them, and as thou namest them, I will describe them, and according to my description level at my affection.

Nerissa. First there is the Neapolitan prince.

Portia. Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself:
40 I am much afraid my lady his mother played false with a smith.

Nerissa. Then is there the County Palatine.

Portia. He doth nothing but frown, as who should say, 'An you will not have me, choose!' He hears merry tales, and smiles not. I fear he will prove the weeping philosopher when he grows old, being so full of unmannerly sadness in his youth. I had rather be married to a death's-head with a bone in his mouth
50 than to either of these: God defend me from these two!

Nerissa. How say you by the French lord, Monsieur Le Bon?

Portia. God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man—In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker, but he! why, he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan's, a better bad habit of frowning than the Count Palatine—he is every man in no man—if a throstle sing, he falls straight a cap'ring—he will fence with his own shadow. If I should marry him, I should marry twenty
60 husbands. If he would despise me I would forgive him, for if he love me to madness, I shall never requite him.

Nerissa. What say you then to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

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1.2.64 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 11

Portia. You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him: he hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man's picture, but, alas! who can converse with a dumb-show? How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, 70 his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour every where.

Nerissa. What think you of the Scottish lord, his neighbour?

Portia. That he hath a neighbourly charity in him, for he borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman, and swore he would pay him again when he was able: I think the Frenchman became his surety, and sealed under for another.

Nerissa. How like you the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew? 80

Portia. Very vilely in the morning when he is sober, and most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk: when he is best, he is a little worse than a man, and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast. An the worst fall that ever fell, I hope I shall make shift to go without him.

Nerissa. If he should offer to choose, and choose the right casket, you should refuse to perform your father's will, if you should refuse to accept him.

Portia. Therefore, for fear of the worst, I pray thee 90 set a deep glass of rhenish wine on the contrary casket, for if the devil be within, and that temptation without, I know he will choose it. I will do any thing, Nerissa, ere I will be married to a sponge.

Nerissa. You need not fear, lady, the having any of these lords—they have acquainted me with their determinations, which is indeed to return to their home, and

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12 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 1.2.98

to trouble you with no more suit, unless you may be
won by some other sort than your father's imposition
100 depending on the caskets.

Portia. If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as
chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of
my father's will. I am glad this parcel of wooers are
so reasonable, for there is not one among them but I
dote on his very absence: and I pray God grant them
a fair departure.

Nerissa. Do you not remember, lady, in your father's
time, a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier, that came
hither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat?

110 *Portia.* Yes, yes, it was Bassanio, as I think so was
he called.

Nerissa. True, madam, he, of all the men that ever
my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving
a fair lady.

Portia. I remember him well, and I remember him
worthy of thy praise.

A servant enters

How now! what news?

Servant. The four strangers seek for you, madam, to
take their leave: and there is a forerunner come from
120 a fifth, the Prince of Morocco, who brings word the
prince his master will be here to-night.

Portia. If I could bid the fifth welcome with so good
heart as I can bid the other four farewell, I should be
glad of his approach: if he have the condition of a saint,
and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should
shrive me than wive me.

Come, Nerissa. Sirrah, go before:

Whiles we shut the gate upon one wooer, another
knocks at the door. *[they go out]*