

Before he died, Portia's father set up a challenge in his will. In order to win the right to marry her, a man must choose from among three chests the one that contains Portia's portrait. In this excerpt, the Prince of Morocco has come to take the challenge. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

from THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
by William Shakespeare

[2.7.] *The hall of Portia's house at Belmont; PORTIA enters, with the Prince of MOROCCO, and their trains¹*

Portia. Go, draw aside the curtains, and discover
The several caskets² to this noble prince.

5 *Servants draw back the curtains and reveal a table and three caskets thereon*
Now make your choice. [Morocco examines the caskets

Morocco. The first, of gold, who this inscription bears:
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'
The second, silver, which this promise carries:
10 '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 hazard³ all he hath.'
How shall I know if I do choose the right?

Portia. The one of them contains my picture, prince.

15 If you choose that, then I am yours withal.

Morocco. Some god direct my judgement! Let me see,
I will survey th'inscriptions back again.
What says this leaden casket?
'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.'

20 Must give—for what? for lead? hazard for lead?
This casket threatens. Men that hazard all
Do it in hope of fair advantages:
A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross.⁴
I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead.

25 What says the silver with her virgin hue?
'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.'
As much as he deserves! Pause there, Morocco,
And weigh thy value with an even hand.
If thou be'st rated by thy estimation,

¹ *trains* — attendants

² *caskets* — chests

³ *hazard* — risk

⁴ *dross* — worthless substance

- 30 Thou dost deserve enough—and yet enough
May not extend so far as to the lady:
And yet to be afeard of my deserving
Were but a weak disabling of myself.
As much as I deserve! Why, that's the lady.
- 35 I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes,
In graces, and in qualities of breeding:
But more than these, in love I do deserve.
What if I strayed no further, but chose here?
Let's see once more this saying graved in gold:
- 40 'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'
Why, that's the lady—all the world desires her.
From the four corners of the earth they come,
To kiss this shrine, this mortal-breathing saint.
The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds
- 45 Of wide Arabia are as throughfares now
For princes to come view fair Portia.
The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
Spets in the face of heaven, is no bar
To stop the foreign spirits, but they come,
- 50 As o'er a brook, to see fair Portia.
One of these three contains her heavenly picture.
Is't like that lead contains her? 'Twere damnation
To think so base a thought—it were too gross
To rib her cerecloth⁵ in the obscure grave.
- 55 Or shall I think in silver she's immured,⁶
Being ten times undervalued to tried gold?
O sinful thought! Never so rich a gem
Was set in worse than gold. They have in England
A coin that bears the figure of an angel
- 60 Stampéd in gold, but that's insculped⁷ upon;
But here an angel in a golden bed
Lies all within. . . . Deliver me the key:
Here do I choose, and thrive I as I may!
- Portia. There, take it, prince, and if my form
lie there,
- 65 Then I am yours. [he unlocks the golden casket
Morocco. O hell! what have we here?

⁵ cerecloth — cloth used for wrapping the dead

⁶ immured — confined

⁷ insculped — inscribed

A carrion Death,⁸ within whose empty eye
There is a written scroll! I'll read the writing.

70 ‘All that glisters is not gold,
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold,
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs do worms infold.
75 Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs, in judgement old,
Your answer had not been inscrolled—
Fare you well, your suit is cold.’
Cold, indeed, and labour lost.
80 Then, farewell heat, and welcome frost.

Portia, adieu! I have too grieved a heart
To take a tedious leave: thus losers part.

[he departs with his retinue⁹

Portia. A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go.

⁸ *carrion Death* — dead and decaying flesh

⁹ *retinue* — attendants