

The Merchant of Venice abbreviated

Act 3, Scene 4

Deception

Situation: Portia has a plan to save Antonio, knowing that Antonio must soon appear in court and must defend himself against a formidable Shylock who is determined to extract “his pound of flesh.” Antonio’s life is at risk if, as guarantor for Bassanio, he fails to meet the terms of the 3000 ducat loan secured by his ships; his ships that may have been lost at sea.

PORTIA: Now, Balthazar, take this same letter in speed to Padua. See thou render this into my cousin’s hands, Doctor Bellario.

She gives him a paper.

PORTIA: Waste no time in words, but get thee gone. I shall be there before thee.

Balthazar exits.

PORTIA: Come on, Nerissa, I have work in hand that you yet know not of. We’ll see our husbands before they think of us.

NERISSA: Shall they see us?

Portia to Nerissa, No. 2

They shall, Nerissa, but dressed in such clothes
That they, so tricked, shall think each of us goes
With that we lack. I’ll bet thee, Nerissa,
When we are dressed as young men, I will prove
The prettier one, and better speak the
Voice change ‘tween man and boy, and quicker move
Two mincing steps into a manly stride,
And speak of frays, letting my dagger ride
At my side with a braver grace, and tell
Quaint lies how worthy ladies, seeking my
Love, which I cavalierly denied, fell
Sick and died; then I’ll repent, saying I
Was sorry I had killed them. My mind lacks
Not new tricks to play on these bragging jacks.

NERISSA: Why, shall we turn to men?

PORTIA: Fie, what a question’s that? I’ll tell thee all my whole device when I am in my coach.