

The Merchant of Venice abbreviated

Act 1, Scene 2

Grief

Situation: Portia's recently deceased father left a "cold decree" through his will, a decree that required that the man who wishes to marry his daughter must make the correct choice when choosing among three small chests, one of gold, one of silver and one of lead. Portia, being quite the talented young lady, is understandably depressed over the thought of having to follow her father's demands left through his will.

Portia and her waiting-gentlewoman, Nerissa, enter.

Portia to Nerissa, No. 1

Nerissa, my body is aweary
Of this world. If to do were as easy
As to know what were good to do, the cur
Would be kind, and the home of a poor man
A prince's palace. I can easier
Teach twenty what were good to be done than
To be one of the twenty to follow
My teaching. Emotion's laws are hollow,
Watching a hot temper leap over a
Cold decree; such is the madness of youth
To skip o'er good counsel. 'Tis not the way
To choose a husband, Nerissa, in sooth.
O, me, the word "choose." The cold will is done,
Where I cannot choose one, nor refuse none.

NERISSA: Your father was very 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 chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who 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, say their names, and I will describe them, and according to my description level at my affection.