

Act II, scene i – lines 1 - 45

Flourish of cornets. Enter the Prince of Morocco, a tawny Moor all in white, and three or four followers accordingly; with Portia, Nerissa and their train

5 **Morocco:** Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun,
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.
Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,
And let us make incision for your love,
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine
Hath fear'd the valiant: by my love I swear
10 The best-regarded virgins of our clime
Have loved it too: I would not change this hue,
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.

15 **Portia:** In terms of choice I am not solely led
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes;
Besides, the lottery of my destiny
Bars me the right of voluntary choosing:
But if my father had not scanted me
And hedged me by his wit, to yield myself
20 His wife who wins me by that means I told you,
Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair
As any comer I have look'd on yet
For my affection.

25 **Morocco:** Even for that I thank you:
Therefore, I pray you, lead me to the caskets
To try my fortune. By this scimitar
That slew the Sophy and a Persian prince
That won three fields of Sultan Solymán,
I would outstare the sternest eyes that look,
30 Outbrave the heart most daring on the earth,
Pluck the young sucking cubs from the she-bear,
Yea, mock the lion when he roars for prey,
To win thee, lady. But, alas the while!
If Hercules and Lichas play at dice
Which is the better man, the greater throw
35 May turn by fortune from the weaker hand:
So is Alcides beaten by his page;
And so may I, blind fortune leading me,
Miss that which one unworthier may attain,
And die with grieving.

40 **Portia:** You must take your chance,
And either not attempt to choose at all
Or swear before you choose, if you choose wrong
Never to speak to lady afterward
In way of marriage: therefore be advised.

Morocco: Nor will not. Come, bring me unto my chance.

45 **Portia:** First, forward to the temple: after dinner
Your hazard shall be made.

Morocco: Good fortune then!
To make me blest or curs'd 'st among men.

Cornets, and exeunt

Comment [KH1]: Ostentatious displays of wealth, note the women are in second place, suggest the idea that Morocco is more concerned with outward show

Comment [KH2]: Imperatives from Morocco suggesting the power imbalance between men and women and also his arrogance. Repeated three times in a commanding and demanding tone which also seems out of place in a 'romantic' situation

Comment [KH3]: Despite requesting Portia to ignore his appearance Morocco mentions appearances and the superficial throughout his speech, its appearance in his opening line suggests his obsession

Comment [KH4]: The first four pronouns in the speech are all concerned with Morocco suggesting his own conceit and vanity. Portia is only referred to 4 times in comparison to the 11 references to Morocco. In particular the ownership implied by the final 'my gentle queen'

Comment [KH5]: The first superlative to appear in the speech these suggest again Morocco's obsession with outward show and being the best

Comment [KH6]: Note the treatment of women as objects to be stolen, relating to the Golden Fleece allusion made by Bassanio and also the idea that men can determine who wins a woman's love by incision – not she is given no say in who she marries

Comment [KH7]: Phrases suggesting control and limitations are contrasted with the choice. Ironically, however, it may be that in this situation, the casket task actually gives Portia freedom / an excuse to decline the man she does not want

Comment [KH8]: Possibly interpreted in two ways – that she has no freedom to marry who she chooses but also that she does not judge with eyes, or by appearance alone. The gentle mocking tone of 'nice' suggests her superiority to other women

Comment [KH9]: Portia's use of personal pronouns again suggest her power and self possession and the foregrounding of my affection in the final line suggests that love is in her power to bestow

Comment [KH10]: In comparison to imperatives which often start Morocco's lines Portia's lines often start with linking phrases, as if she is constructing a careful logical argument – strong woman

Comment [KH11]: The gentle irony of this is apparent to the audience who have just seen Portia ridicule all her previous suitors as well. The humour is emphasised by the mocking tone of 'renowned' and the fact that she doesn't judge by looks at all – this all suggests power and control

Comment [KH12]: Morocco's misunderstanding of the humour exacerbates his ridiculous state

Comment [KH13]: Notice again the implied arrogance in the classical reference and in the comparison of himself to Hercules

Comment [KH14]: A common Shakespearean theme – that we have no control over our destiny, however in this case perhaps undermining Morocco further still as he believes that the only he might not win Portia is through bad luck

Comment [KH15]: Morocco's short answer and childish impatience further undermine him

Comment [KH16]: Portia's speeches have a succinct power. Her lines are short and precise. This is the first imperative she has uttered in contrast to Morocco and this is the one that is obeyed. The confident modal verb shall