

The Clever Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*

Portia: I pray you, tarry. Pause a day or two before you hazard, for in choosing wrong I lose your company (3.2.1-3).

The character of Portia in Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice* portrays a very strong and confident personality who has found a suitor of her liking, Bassanio. Before Portia is to be wedded, she must observe Bassanio as he must choose from three caskets, and only one will allow him to be with her. Despite Portia being bound by her father's rules she is anxious enough to warn him to be cautious and give him minor clues, in the hopes that he will choose correctly. Gold, silver, and lead are the caskets Bassanio has to choose between while seizing the spotlight of everyone's attention, especially Portia's because this choice he is making will change the course of her life forever. Knowing this, Bassanio lengthens the decision process while making his judgment of each casket sound interesting and using scholarly remarks to mention the flaws in each casket and what it represents. Portia is constrained by her dead father's will, but while she is candid, she yields to not only her father's wishes, but also the vast societal demands. Portia must make sure the man she marries must be trustworthy. In Act III, Scene II Portia really nails the serious factor of finding a suitor when she decides that she really wants Bassanio.

In Portia's speech above comes before Bassanio chooses from the caskets to win her heart, but only if the lead casket is chosen. In the lead casket he will find a portrait and a poem written by her congratulating him on the choosing. For example, as Bassanio decides on the casket he says, "Therefore, thou gaudy gold, Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee; Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge 'Tween man and man. But thou, thou meager lead, which rather threaten'st than dost promise aught, Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence; And here choose I. Joy be the consequence!"(3.2.101-7). Basically, Bassanio is putting on a show to make himself sound intelligent when really he is just trying to win her heart just so her money becomes his money. When Bassanio opens the lead casket he finds the portrait and the poem of which Portia has written to him, while the casket is open it sort of gives off this unfurnished look and feels empty. Bassanio can't help but to feel disappointed about the casket because it is what he expected it to be, but never the less he is happy he chose the right casket.

Later, after Bassanio chooses the lead casket winning Portia over as his wife to be married to, she presents to him a ring binding them together. As Portia presents the ring to Bassanio she says, "I give them with this ring, which when you part from, lose, or give away, let it presage the ruin of your love and be my vantage to exclaim on you."(3.2.171-4). Portia warns Bassanio that if that ring ever leaves his finger they are no longer two peas in a pod. In a sense it seems that her character is setting up the boundaries to Bassanio and her own relationship, to get rid of any trust issue right away. Later Salerio enters the scene bringing news in a letter written to Bassanio from Antonio saying he is in need of assistance and that his ships are lost and is in debt to Shylock who is out for his flesh. At this point Antonio owes Shylock money, but Antonio lends Shylock's money to Bassanio who is in need of it, basically causing Antonio to get himself into trouble, because he is under contract with Shylock resulting in a loan he is unable to pay back. Overall Portia encourages Bassanio to go save Antonio his friend and settle the debts of which are owed to Shylock, Portia says to Bassanio "You shall have gold to pay the petty debt twenty times over."(3.2.306-7). Portia is telling Bassanio not to worry about the 6,000 ducats when he only requested, "For me, three thousand ducats."(3.2.297). Because Portia is now his, he will have access to all of Portia's wealth when they are married and he will have control over

everything that she possess. At this point Portia must not leave her post until he returns with Antonio, and can only hope that the ring she has gave him never leaves his finger.

Portia's speech in Act III, Scene II really signifies Portia following her deceased father's will to marry the one she truly loves by controlling Bassanio's destined path allowing him to be with her. Part of the choice in marriage involves his full cooperation in deciding correctly the right casket, because if chosen wrong, Portia's Father's will will only be nothing but false and misleading to finding her true love. Therefore, because everything has worked to Portia's Father's will she is happy.