

Enter Nerissa and a Servitor.

**NERISSA**

Quick, quick, I pray thee, draw the curtain straight.  
The Prince of Arragon hath ta'en his oath  
And comes to his election presently.

Enter the Prince of Arragon, his train, and Portia.

**PORTIA**

Behold, there stand the caskets, noble prince.  
If you choose that wherein I am contained,  
Straight shall our nuptial rites be solemnized.  
But if you fail, without more speech, my lord,  
You must be gone from hence immediately.

**ARRAGON**

I am enjoined by oath to observe three things:  
First, never to unfold to anyone  
Which casket 'twas I chose; next, if I fail  
Of the right casket, never in my life  
To woo a maid in way of marriage;  
Lastly, if I do fail in fortune of my choice,  
Immediately to leave you, and be gone.

**PORTIA**

To these injunctions everyone doth swear  
That comes to hazard for my worthless self.

## **ARRAGON**

And so have I addressed me. Fortune now  
To my heart's hope! Gold, silver, and base lead.  
"Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he  
hath."

You shall look fairer ere I give or hazard.

What says the golden chest? Ha, let me see:

"Who chooseth me shall gain what many men  
desire."

What many men desire—that "many" may be  
meant

By the fool multitude that choose by show,  
Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach,  
Which pries not to th' interior, but like the martlet  
Builds in the weather on the outward wall,  
Even in the force and road of casualty.

I will not choose what many men desire,

Because I will not jump with common spirits

And rank me with the barbarous multitudes.

Why, then, to thee, thou silver treasure house.

Tell me once more what title thou dost bear.

"Who chooseth me shall get as much as he  
deserves."

And well said, too; for who shall go about

To cozen fortune and be honorable

Without the stamp of merit? Let none presume

To wear an undeservèd dignity.

O, that estates, degrees, and offices

Were not derived corruptly, and that clear honor

Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!  
How many then should cover that stand bare?  
How many be commanded that command?  
How much low peasantry would then be gleaned  
From the true seed of honor? And how much honor  
Picked from the chaff and ruin of the times,  
To be new varnished? Well, but to my choice.  
“Who chooseth me shall get as much as he  
deserves.”

I will assume desert. Give me a key for this,

He is given a key.

And instantly unlock my fortunes here.

He opens the silver casket.

### **PORTIA**

Too long a pause for that which you find there.

### **ARRAGON**

What's here? The portrait of a blinking idiot  
Presenting me a schedule! I will read it.—  
How much unlike art thou to Portia!  
How much unlike my hopes and my deservings.  
“Who chooseth me shall have as much as he  
deserves”?  
Did I deserve no more than a fool's head?  
Is that my prize? Are my deserts no better?

### **PORTIA**

To offend and judge are distinct offices

And of opposèd natures.

## **ARRAGON**

What is here?

The fire seven times tried this;  
Seven times tried that judgment is  
That did never choose amiss.  
Some there be that shadows kiss;  
Such have but a shadow's bliss.  
There be fools alive, iwis,  
Silvered o'er—and so was this.  
Take what wife you will to bed,  
I will ever be your head.  
So begone; you are sped.  
Still more fool I shall appear

By the time I linger here.

With one fool's head I came to woo,

But I go away with two.

Sweet, adieu. I'll keep my oath,

Patiently to bear my wrath.

He exits with his train.