

Act 2 The Three Boxes

Scene 1 Belmont — a large room for receiving guests in Portia's house

[Portia is with Nerissa and other servants. Music plays, and the Prince of Morocco, a dark-skinned man dressed in white, enters with four followers.]

MOROCCO: Do not dislike me because of my skin. It is only the dark paint of the burning sun. Bring me the most beautiful young woman of the north, where the sun is too weak to destroy the ice. Let me prove to you the redness of my blood. My lady, my face has put fear into the hearts of the brave, but it has also been loved by the most beautiful young women of my country. I would not change my colour, except to steal your heart, my gentle queen.

PORTIA [with bored politeness]: My destiny does not allow me to follow my heart's desire. But if I were not limited by my father's wishes, you would have as much chance of winning my heart as any of the others.

MOROCCO: Even for that, I thank you. Please, therefore, lead me to the boxes to try my fortune. If this were a test of skill or bravery, I would be certain to win. But in a test of luck like this, a servant could easily beat a king. With blind fortune leading me, I might easily lose what a lesser man might win. Then I would die of sadness.

PORTIA: You must take your chance. But I warn you never to speak to me again of marriage if you choose incorrectly. If you cannot promise that, you must not choose at all.

MOROCCO: I give you my promise. Come, bring me to my destiny.

[They leave to the sound of music.]

[Launcelot Gobbo enters alone.]

LAUNCELOT: [shaking his head, confused by a difficult problem]: My heart is telling me to run away from this money-lender, my master. It whispers to me all the time: 'Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, use your legs, be brave and run away!' But the voice of duty says, 'No, honest Launcelot, don't run away.' It advises me to stay with my master, although he's a villain. [thoughtfully] But if he's a villain, the voice of duty is unkind to tell me to stay with him. [smiling as he makes a decision] My heart's advice is much friendlier — I'll run!

[Old Gobbo enters with a basket.]

GOBBO: Please, sir, which is the way to Master Shylock's?

LAUNCELOT [quietly to himself]: It's my father! He doesn't recognize me because he's blind. [smiling playfully] I'll confuse him. [to Gobbo] Take the first right, then the first left, right again, then straight on towards his house.

GOBBO [confused]: Oh, that's too complicated! Can you tell me whether a man called Launcelot lives there with him?

LAUNCELOT [quietly to himself]: This will be fun! [to Gobbo] Do you mean young Master Launcelot?

GOBBO: No, sir. I'm talking about a poor man's son. His father is an honest, very poor man, although not too poor, thank God.

LAUNCELOT: Whoever his father is, we're talking about young Master Launcelot.

GOBBO: His name is Launcelot, it's true.

LAUNCELOT: You mean Master Launcelot?

GOBBO: Yes, Launcelot.

LAUNCELOT: So you do mean Master Launcelot. Well, old man, please don't talk about Master Launcelot. I've heard that he's dead. He's gone to heaven.

GOBBO [*upself*]: Oh no! The boy was everything to me.

LAUNCELOT [*moving towards the old man and speaking quietly*]: Do you know me, Father?

GOBBO [*moving backwards, afraid*]: I don't know you, young gentleman! But please tell me, is my boy alive or dead?

LAUNCELOT: Don't you recognize me, Father?

GOBBO: Sir, I'm blind! I don't know you.

LAUNCELOT: Even if you could see, you might not recognize me. It's a wise father that knows his own child. Well, old man, I'll tell you news of your son. [*going down on his knees*] Put your hand on your son's head. In the end, we'll always discover what's true.

GOBBO [*angrily*]: Please sir, stand up. I'm sure you're not Launcelot, my boy.

LAUNCELOT [*urgently*]: Stop this foolishness and put your hand on your son's head. I'm Launcelot, your son.

GOBBO: I can't believe it.

LAUNCELOT: I am Launcelot, the money-lender's servant. And I'm sure that Margery, your wife, is my mother.

GOBBO [*thoughtfully*]: It's true, her name is Margery. If you're truly Launcelot, then you're my own flesh and blood. [*touching Launcelot's beard*] But what a big beard you've got! You have more hair on your chin than my horse has on its tail. My God, how you've changed! How is life with your master? [*showing Launcelot the basket*] Look, I've brought him a present.

LAUNCELOT [*amused*]: Give him a present? It would be better to give him a rope to hang himself instead! He always keeps me hungry. [*lifting his shirt*] Look, you can count every bone in my body. [*excitedly holding his father's shoulders*] Father, I'm glad you've come. Give your present to Master Bassanio instead. At least *he* dresses his servants well. If I can't serve him, I'll run away as far as I can. [*noticing someone arriving*] Oh, I'm in luck. Here he comes now! Speak to him, Father. I can't work for Shylock another day.

[*Bassanio enters with two servants.*]

BASSANIO [*to the first servant*]: Be quick. Dinner mustn't be later than five o'clock. [*giving him some letters*] Deliver these letters, prepare the clothes and ask Gratiano to come to my house as soon as possible.

[*The first servant leaves.*]

LAUNCELOT [*pushing his father towards Bassanio*]: Speak to him, Father! GOBBO [*nervously to Bassanio*]: God be with you, sir.

BASSANIO [*surprised*]: And with you. But what do you want?

GOBBO: Here's my son, sir, a poor boy ...

LAUNCELOT [*interrupting*]: Not a poor boy, sir, but the rich money-lender's servant who would, as my father will explain ...

GOBBO [*interrupting*]: He has a great desire, sir, to serve ...

LAUNCELOT [*interrupting*]: Because the money-lender is unkind to me ...

GOBBO [*interrupting and holding out his basket*]: I have some fresh chicken for you ...

BASSANIO [*confused*]: One of you speak for both. [*to Launcelot*] What do you want?

LAUNCELOT: To serve you, sir.

BASSANIO [*surprised*]: Are you sure you want to leave a rich man's service to become the follower of a poor gentleman like me?

LAUNCELOT: He has enough money, sir, but you have goodness in you. BASSANIO [*pleased*]: You speak well. [*to Gobbo*] Go, father, with your son. [*to Launcelot*] Leave your old master and go to my house. [*to the second servant*] Dress him well, more colourfully than the others.

LAUNCELOT [*excitedly to his father*]: So, people thought I'd never get a good job, did they? They thought I didn't have a tongue in my head? [*looking at his hand*] If any man in Italy has a luckier hand than me, I'd be surprised! Look, here's a perfect life line. [*Gobbo looks at his son's hand but cannot see anything, of course.*] And this line

tells me about my wives. Fifteen? Is that all? A man like me could easily manage twenty! [to his father] Well, if Fortune is a woman, she's been wonderful to me. Come, Father, let's go. I'll leave the greedy old money-lender immediately.

[Launcelot leaves with Old Gobbo.]

BASSANIO [to his second servant]: When everything's arranged, hurry back. I'm having dinner tonight with my best friend.

SECOND SERVANT: It will be done.

[Gratiano enters as the second servant is leaving.]

GRATIANO [to the servant]: Where's your master?

SECOND SERVANT [pointing to Bassanio]: Over there, sir. [He leaves.]

GRATIANO: Bassanio!

BASSANIO [smiling]: Gratiano!

GRATIANO: I have something to ask you.

BASSANIO: Whatever it is, I agree.

GRATIANO: I must go with you to Belmont.

BASSANIO: Then you must. But listen, Gratiano: you're too noisy and badly-behaved. There's nothing wrong with that in *our* eyes. But other people may think you're strange. So try to behave more politely when we go to Belmont. If you don't, I'll be misunderstood and lose all chance of success with the lady.

GRATIANO: I'll wear plain clothes, talk politely and only use a little bad language. I'll carry religious books in my pockets and look shyly at the ground. I'll even cover my face with a hat when thanks are given to God before a meal. If I don't, never trust me again.

BASSANIO [doubtfully]: We shall see.

GRATIANO: But not tonight. You can't judge me by what I do tonight.

BASSANIO [laughing]: No, you must enjoy yourself because we have friends who deserve a lot of fun. [suddenly serious] But go now, because I have some business.

GRATIANO: I'll see you for dinner.

[They leave.]

Scene 3 Venice — a living room in Shylock's house. The furniture is expensive, but the room is dark and dusty.

[Jessica and Launcelot enter.]

JESSICA: I'm sorry that you're leaving my father. Our house is hell but you've made life much more interesting with your cheerful jokes. But goodbye [giving him a coin] — here's a ducat for you. And Launcelot, soon at dinner you'll see Lorenzo, your new master's guest. [giving him a letter] Give him this letter — do it secretly. So, goodbye. I wouldn't want my father to see me talking to you.

LAUNCELOT [with tears in his eyes]: Goodbye! Tears show what my tongue cannot say. Most beautiful lady, sweetest Jew! If a Christian did not win your heart, I would be surprised. But goodbye again. These foolish tears embarrass me. [He leaves.]

JESSICA: Goodbye, good Launcelot. [turning sadly] Oh, why am I ashamed to be my father's child? Although I share his blood, my behaviour is completely different. Oh, Lorenzo, if you keep your promise, this problem will be solved. I shall become a Christian and your loving wife. [She leaves.]

Scene 4 Venice — a street

[Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salerio and Solanio enter.]

LORENZO: No, we'll leave quietly during dinner, put on our masks and return an hour later.

GRATIANO [worried]: We haven't prepared this very well.

SALERIO: We haven't discussed who'll carry the torches yet.

SOLANIO: It's a terrible idea. In my opinion, it's best not to do it.

LORENZO It's only four o'clock. We still have two hours. [*Launcelot enters with a letter.*] Friend Launcelot, what's the news?

LAUNCELOT [*bending forward, holding out the letter with both hands*]: If you open this letter, sir, you may find something important.

LORENZO [*taking the letter, reading the front and smiling*]: I know the writing. It's by a lovely hand, whiter than the paper it's written on.

GRATIANO [*smiling at Solanio and Salerio*]: A message of love!

LAUNCELOT [*politely moving away*]: With your permission, sir.

LORENZO: Where are you going?

LAUNCELOT: To ask my old master, the Jew, to have dinner tonight with my new master, the Christian.

LORENZO: One minute – take this. [*giving Launcelot a coin*] Tell gentle Jessica, in private, that I'll keep my promise. [*Launcelot takes the money and leaves.*] [*to Salerio and Solanio*] Go, gentlemen, will you prepare for our masked party tonight? I already know who'll carry my torch. Meet me and Gratiano at Gratiano's house in an hour's time.

[*Salerio and Solanio leave.*]

GRATIANO: Was that a letter from Jessica?

LORENZO: I need to tell you everything. She's explained how I'll take her from her father's house tonight. She'll also bring some gold and jewels with her and she'll be dressed in boy's clothes. If her father ever goes to heaven, it will be because of his gentle daughter. [*giving Gratiano the letter and hurrying away*] Quickly, come with me. Read this as we go. Jessica will carry my torch tonight.

[*Lorenzo and Gratiano leave.*]

Scene 5 *In front of Shylock's house*

[*Shylock and Launcelot enter.*]

SHYLOCK [*with a voice of warning*]: Well, you'll soon see the difference between old Shylock and Bassanio ... [*calling*] Jessica! [*to Launcelot*]

You won't eat as well as you did with me. [*calling again*] Jessica!

[*Jessica enters.*]

JESSICA: Did you call? What do you want?

SHYLOCK: I've been invited to supper, Jessica. [*giving her some keys*] Here are my keys. [*looking annoyed*] But why am I going? They don't like me. They're only pretending to be friendly. [*smiling bitterly*] But although I hate Christians, I can still take their food. [*to Jessica*] Jessica, my girl, take care of the house. [*pausing, changing his mind again*] I really don't feel like going. I know something bad's going to happen because I dreamt about money bags last night.

LAUNCELOT: You must go, sir. My young master is expecting you. And they have planned something for the masked party tonight.

SHYLOCK [*surprised*]: What? A masked party? [*angrily to Jessica*] Listen to me, Jessica. Lock all the doors. And when you hear their awful music in the street, stay away from the window. I don't want you to look at silly Christians with masked faces. Shut all the house's ears – I mean, my windows. The sound of this shallow foolishness will not enter my serious house. [*to Launcelot*] I'm really not in the mood for this tonight, but I will go. You go ahead of me. Tell them that I am coming.

LAUNCELOT: I will, sir. [*whispering to Jessica*] Madam, look out of the window for this: there will be a Christian who deserves to catch your eye. [*He leaves.*]

SHYLOCK [*annoyed*]: What did the fool just say to you?

JESSICA [*nervously*]: His words were 'Goodbye, madam', nothing else.

SHYLOCK [*relaxing*]: The silly man's kind enough, but he eats too much, is slow to learn, and is lazier than an old cat. Now he can help his new master to waste his borrowed money. Well, Jessica, go in. I'll probably be back soon. Remember, lock the doors after you and shut all the windows. [*He leaves.*]

JESSICA [*quietly angry*]: Goodbye. And if things go according to plan, soon I'll have no father, and you'll have no daughter. [*She leaves.*]

Scene 6 Later, in front of Shylock's house

[Gratiano and Salerio are standing outside the house, wearing masks.]

SALERIO: Lorenzo's late.

GRATIANO: That's strange, because lovers are usually early.

SALERIO: The birds of love fly ten times faster to a new love than to an old one.

GRATIANO: That's true. Things are usually chased with more desire than they're enjoyed.

[Lorenzo arrives, wearing a mask.]

LORENZO: Sweet friends, I'm sorry for the delay, but I've had important business. When you want to steal your future wives, I'll be happy to wait as long for you. [looking at the house] This is where my lady's father lives. [calling] Hello! Is anybody there?

[Jessica, wearing boy's clothes, opens an upstairs window.]

JESSICA: Who are you? Tell me, although I'm sure I recognize your voice.

LORENZO: Lorenzo, your love.

JESSICA: Lorenzo, you know that my love is true. But who else knows about my love for you?

LORENZO: Only heaven and you.

JESSICA [holding out a small box]: Here, catch this box. It's valuable. [She throws the box down to Lorenzo.] I'm glad that it's dark because you can't see me. I'm ashamed of my clothes. But love is blind, and lovers never recognize the silly things they do.

LORENZO: Come down, because you must be my torch carrier.

JESSICA: What? Must I hold a light to my embarrassment?

LORENZO: You look sweet even dressed as a boy. But come now, it's getting late and Bassanio's waiting for us.

JESSICA: I'll lock the doors, bring some more ducats, and be with you immediately. [She closes the window.]

LORENZO [to Gratiano and Salerio]: Oh, I love her with all my heart!



'Here, catch this box.'

She's wise, if I judge her correctly. And beautiful, if my eyes are clear. [Jessica leaves the house.] [to Jessica] Are you ready? [to Gratiano and Salerio] Gentlemen, let's go. Our masked friends are waiting for us.

[Lorenzo leaves with Jessica and Salerio. Gratiano bends to tie up his shoe. Antonio arrives. He is not wearing a mask.]

ANTONIO [to Gratiano]: Who's there?

GRATIANO [standing up]: Antonio?

ANTONIO: Gratiano! Where are all the others? It's nine o'clock and everybody's waiting for you. There'll be no masked party tonight. The wind has changed, and Bassanio will soon be on his ship. I've sent twenty people out looking for you.

GRATIANO [taking off his mask and smiling]: I'm glad. Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to sail away tonight.

[Antonio and Gratiano leave.]

Scene 7 Belmont – another room in Portia's house. There is a large curtain hiding a table in the middle of the room.

[Portia, the Prince of Morocco and their servants enter to the sound of music.]

PORTIA [to one of her servants]: Pull the curtain open and show the Prince the three boxes. [The servant opens the curtain. There are three boxes on a table.] [to the Prince of Morocco] Now make your choice.

MOROCCO [looking at the first box]: This first box is made of gold, and the writing says, [reading] 'This box will give men whatever they desire.' [looking at the second box] The second is made of silver, and it says, [reading] 'This box will give men whatever they deserve.' [looking at the third box] This one is only made of lead, and it has this warning: [reading] 'A man might lose everything if he chooses this box.' [to Portia] How shall I know if I have chosen correctly? PORTIA: One of them contains my picture, Prince. If you choose that, then I am yours.

MOROCCO: Let God guide my decision. [looking thoughtfully at the third box] This box says that I might lose everything. But why should I lose everything just for a box of lead? [looking at the second box] This one says that I will get what I deserve. In my opinion, I deserve a lot, but it may not be enough to win the lady. Let's see once more this box of gold. [reading again] 'This box will give what many men desire.' [smiling] Yes, that's the lady! All the world desires her. From the four corners of the earth they come to kiss her feet. Such a beautiful jewel can never be found in anything less than gold. [to Portia] Give me the key. This is the box I choose.

PORTIA [giving him the key]: There, take it, Prince. And if my picture is in the box, then I am yours.

[The Prince of Morocco opens the box.]

MOROCCO [unhappily]: Oh! What have we here? The bones of a dead man's head, and in one of its empty eyes there is a message.

[reading the message]

'Not all shining things are gold;

Often you have heard that told.

Many men from many lands

Want to have me in their hands.

But under every golden stone

There is just a pile of bones.

To wise men, this is no surprise.

Your love has failed, my friend. Goodbye.'

[sadly to Portia] There is too much sadness in my heart for a long goodbye. I will go immediately.

[The Prince of Morocco leaves with his servants to the sound of music.]

PORTIA [bored]: Another quick goodbye. [to one of her servants] Close the curtain. Let's hope all the others like him choose gold, too.

[The servant closes the curtain. Portia and her servants leave.]

Scene 8 A street in Venice

[*Salerio and Solanio enter.*]

SALERIO: I saw Bassanio sail away. Gratiano went with him, but Lorenzo stayed here. He was seen in a small boat with Jessica, and Shylock's heard the news.

SOLANIO [*laughing*]: I've never heard anyone as confused or angry as the old money-lender. He was shouting in the streets: 'My daughter! Oh, my ducat! Oh, my daughter! She's run away with a Christian! I want justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter! Two bags of ducats, stolen from me by my daughter! And two precious jewels! Where's the law! Find the girl! She has my jewels and my ducats!'

SALERIO [*laughing too*]: All the boys in Venice are following him, shouting about his jewels, his daughter and his ducats.

SOLANIO [*seriously*]: Antonio must be careful. If he doesn't return his loan on time, he'll pay for this.

SALERIO [*worried*]: That's true. A Frenchman told me yesterday about a ship from our country that had sunk in the sea between England and France. I hope that it isn't Antonio's.

SOLANIO: You should tell Antonio what you've heard. But do it gently – you don't want to upset him.

SALERIO: Antonio's the kindest man in the world. I saw him say goodbye to Bassanio. Bassanio promised to hurry home, but he answered, 'Don't ruin your business because of me. Stay there as long as you like. And don't think about my agreement with the money-lender. Be happy, and think only about love.' There were tears in his eyes when he said goodbye to Bassanio.

SOLANIO: Let's go and find him. With all his problems, he'll need some cheerful company.

[*Salerio and Solanio leave.*]

Scene 9 Belmont – the same room in Portia's house as in Scene 7

[*Nerissa comes in with a servant.*]

NERISSA: Quickly! Pull the curtain straight. The Prince of Arragon will be here very soon.

[*Portia arrives with the Prince of Arragon and his servants to the sound of music.*]

PORTIA [*pointing to the curtain*]: There are the three boxes, my lord. If you choose the box with my picture in it, we shall be married immediately. But if you fail, my lord, you must leave without delay, without a word.

ARRAGON: I have promised to do three things: first, I will never tell anyone which box I choose. Next, if I fail, I will never ask another woman to marry me. Lastly, if I fail, I will leave immediately without complaint.

PORTIA: Everybody makes the same promises.

ARRAGON: Let fortune guide me to my heart's desire! [*A servant opens the curtain. The Prince of Arragon walks to the table and looks at the three boxes.*] Gold, silver and ordinary lead. [*He reads the writing on the lead box.*] 'A man might lose everything if he chooses this box.' [*Shaking his head*] You will have to look more attractive than that before I choose you. [*Looking at the next box*] What does the golden box say? [*Reading*] 'This box will give what many men desire.' [*Repeating thoughtfully*] 'What many men desire ...' That 'many' may mean the silly crowds who judge everything by appearance. They only learn what their foolish eyes teach them and never look beyond that. I will not choose what many men desire, because I am different from other people. I do not belong with their shallow-minded crowds. [*Looking at the third box*] So, to you, the box of silver. Let me see what your message says. [*Reading*] 'This box will give men whatever they deserve.' [*Smiling*] That is well said. Too many people are given land, power and money without

earning them. How many forgotten people would be suddenly admired if success went to the ones who deserve it? How many commanders would be commanded? How many poor people would become lords? Yes, this is my choice. 'This box will give men whatever they deserve.' I will have my reward. Give me the key for this and let me unlock my fortune.

[A servant gives the Prince of Arragon the key. He opens the silver box and stares into it in shocked silence.]

PORTIA [quietly to herself]: You don't need to pause for as long as that!

ARRAGON [with shocked disbelief]: What's here? A picture of an ugly fool with a message for me! I will read it. Oh, how unlike Portia you are! How unlike my hopes and dreams! 'This box will give men whatever they deserve.' Did I deserve no more than a fool's head? Is this my prize? Is this the only reward that I deserve?

PORTIA: You cannot defend yourself and judge yourself at the same time.

ARRAGON: What does it say? [reading]

'Many fools alive are dressed

In silver, it is true.

So find another wife, my friend.

My head belongs to you.'

I shall look even more like a fool if I stay here any longer. I came here with one fool's head, and I am leaving with two. [to Portia] Goodbye. I shall keep my promise. I will suffer my misfortune with patience.

[Arragon leaves with his servants.]

PORTIA: The flame of the torch has burnt another bird's wings. Oh, these fools! When they choose, they are only wise enough to lose.

NERISSA: The old words are true. Destiny decides whether we find love or death.

PORTIA: Close the curtain, Nerissa.

[A messenger arrives.]

MESSENGER [excitedly]: Madam, a young man from Venice has arrived at your gate. He has brought expensive gifts from his master, who will arrive here soon. Oh, an April day was never so sweet ...

PORTIA [unenthusiastically]: That's enough, please. I'm half-afraid you'll tell me next that he's a member of your family! [to Nerissa]

Come, Nerissa. Let's see who the God of Love has sent me now.

NERISSA [looking up, holding her hands together]: Oh, please let it be Bassanio!

[Portia and Nerissa leave.]