

The Merchant of Venice

Act II, sc. 7 (line 13)

MOROCCO

Some god direct my judgment! Let me see;

I will survey the inscriptions back again.

What says this leaden casket?

'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.'

Must give: for what? for lead? hazard for lead?

This casket threatens. Men that hazard all

Do it in hope of fair advantages:

A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross;

I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead.

What says the silver with her virgin hue?

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

As much as he deserves! Pause there, Morocco,

And weigh thy value with an even hand:

If thou be'st rated by thy estimation,

Thou dost deserve enough; and yet enough

May not extend so far as to the lady:

And yet to be afraid of my deserving

Were but a weak disabling of myself.

As much as I deserve! Why, that's the lady:

I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes,

In graces and in qualities of breeding;

But more than these, in love I do deserve.
What if I stray'd no further, but chose here?
Let's see once more this saying graved in gold
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'
Why, that's the lady; all the world desires her;
From the four corners of the earth they come,
To kiss this shrine, this mortal-breathing saint:
The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds
Of wide Arabia are as thoroughfares now
For princes to come view fair Portia:
The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar
To stop the foreign spirits, but they come,
As o'er a brook, to see fair Portia.
One of these three contains her heavenly picture.
Is't like that lead contains her? 'Twere damnation
To think so base a thought: it were too gross
To rib her cerecloth in the obscure grave.
Or shall I think in silver she's immured,
Being ten times undervalued to tried gold?
O sinful thought! Never so rich a gem
Was set in worse than gold. They have in England
A coin that bears the figure of an angel
Stamped in gold, but that's insculp'd upon;

But here an angel in a golden bed

Lies all within. Deliver me the key:

Here do I choose, and thrive I as I may!