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Shakespeare Creative Project

The Three Caskets From *The Merchant of Venice*

According to her father's will, Portia is not allowed to pick her own husband. Instead, the suitors must pick from three caskets, gold, silver, or lead. The one who picks the casket with Portia's portrait inside will be able to marry her. If the wrong casket is chosen, he must remain single, not reveal which casket he picked, and leave immediately.

The first suitor is the Prince of Morocco. He is very handsome, but also conceited. He picks the gold casket because the inscription reads: "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." When he opens it there is a skull and a scroll inside.

The scroll reads:

*"All that glisters is not gold—
Often have to heard that told
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs do worms infold.
Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs, in judgment old,
Your answer had not been enscrolled.
Fare you well, your suit is cold."*

The next suitor to arrive is The Prince of Arragon. He is also conceited, but is haughtier than The Prince of Morocco. The Prince of Arragon chooses the casket with the inscription: "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." He figures that if anyone deserves to have Portia, it is he. When he opens the casket, there is a picture of a grinning fool and a scroll that reads:

"The fire seven times tried this:

*Seven times tried that judgment is
That did never choose amis.
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."*

The Prince then leaves with the picture of the fool and says that he came to Belmont with one fool's head and left with two.

The last suitor is Bassanio. He and Portia have fallen in love and she claims that she would marry him, if it weren't for her promise to her father. He decides to choose the lead one because "paleness moves me more than eloquence." When he opens it, he finds a portrait of Portia and a scroll that reads:

*"You that chooseth not by the view
Chance as fair and choose as true,
Since this fortune falls to you,
Be content and seek no new,
If you be well pleased with this
And hold your fortune for your bliss,
Turn to where your lady is,
And claim her with a loving kiss."*

Portia is overjoyed and gives Bassanio a ring, warning him never to lose it or give it away.