

**ACT I SCENE 2**  
**ANSWERS TO CONTEXT QUESTIONS**

**Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:**

**(i)** What has Portia just said in response to which Nerissa speaks these words?

Portia has just said that she can neither choose the one she likes nor refuse the one she dislikes because the choice of her husband depend on the lottery of caskets devised according to her late father's will.

**(ii) Describe the lottery referred to in the extract**

**ANS:** The lottery refers to the choice of the right casket containing Portia's portrait from among the three caskets of gold, silver and lead. The suitor who will make the right choice as per the will of Portia's father will win her in marriage.

**(ii) Give the reactions of Portia as well as of Nerissa to the lottery.**

**ANS:** Initially, Portia appears to be anxious over the prospect of choosing her husband through a lottery devised according to her father's will. She feels sad as she can neither choose the one she likes nor refuse the one she dislike as, a her husband. But later on she accepts her fathers will. She says that she would remain a virgin like Diana unless she is won in marriage by some suitor fulfilling the conditions of her father's will. Nerissa's reaction to the lottery was positive. She calls Portia's father pious and asserts that good men do have inspirations at the time of death. She consoles Portia by saying that she will be chosen correctly by a person whom she truly loves.

**(iv) Give the meaning of "never be chosen by any rightly, but one who you shall rightly love."**

**ANS:** These lines mean that Portia will be chosen correctly by a person whom she truly loves.

**(v) Portia is melancholic in the beginning of the scene as it was the case with Antonio in the previous scene. What is the difference between Antonio' s melancholy and that of Portia?**

**ANS:** Portia's melancholy is the result of her anxiety over the prospect of her future husband while the cause of Antonio's melancholy is unknown.

**(vi) How does this scene show a mood of melancholy, anxiety and suspense?**

**ANS:** The scene shows a mood of melancholy, anxiety and suspense. The mood of melancholy and anxiety is due to tie prospect of Portia's future husband

to be decided by the lottery designed according to her deceased fathers will. This also creates an atmosphere of suspense. The conversation between Nerissa and Portia, Portia's comments on the suitors and Nerissa's reference to Bassanio as the best deserving a fair lady' increase the elements of anxiety and suspense in the scene.

**2.**

**(i) Where are Portia and Nerissa? What are they generally discussing about? In what mood is Portia in the scene?**

**ANS:** Portia and Nerissa are in a room in Portia's house at Belmont. They are discussing the lottery of caskets and about the suitors who have already come to try their luck. In this scene, Portia is in a mood of melancholy and anxiety.

**(ii) Who is the County Palatine? Why has he come to Belmont?**

**ANS:** County Palatine was the Count from Palatinate, the region on the west bank of the Rhine in Germany. He was a powerful lord who came to Belmont to win Portia's hand.

**(iii) Who is the first prince described by Portia? What does she say about him?**

**ANS:** The first prince described by Portia is the Neapolitan prince from Naples, Italy. Portia describes him as a dashing youngster and as wild as a young horse. He does nothing but talks of his horse. He further considers his ability to shoe a horse himself as a great accomplishment.

**(iv) Who is the weeping philosopher? In which context is he referred to in the extract?**

**ANS:** The weeping philosopher refers to Heracitus of Esphesus. He was a Greek philosopher who lamented the stupidity and folly of mankind and wept at everything in the world. Portia refers to him to describe County Palatine. She feels that since County Palatine is unusually gloomy in his young age, he will become a sad philosopher like Heraclitus when he grows old.

**(v) Give the meaning of:**

**(a) *An you will not have me, choose***

If you do not want me, choose anyone you wish

**(b) *A death's-head with a bone in his mouth***

'a skull with a bone in its mouth'. The emblem of a skull with two bones crossed underneath was usually known as "death's head".

**(vi) Give a character-sketch of the County Palatine.**

**ANS:** County Palatine is described as a gloomy and self-conceited person. He is always frowning as if to say that if Portia will not marry him. She may choose someone else. He is morose and sullen that even jovial stories don't make him laugh. He has an abrupt manner of speech and may become a sad philosopher like Heraclitus when he grows old.

**3.**

**(i) What has Portia said earlier about Neapolitan prince and his horse? Which characteristic is common between Monsieur Le Bon and the Count Palatine?**

**ANS:** Earlier Portia described the Neapolitan prince as wild as a young horse and so attached to his horse that he always spoke about the horse only. The Count Palatine and Le Bon share the common characteristic of frowning

**(ii) Give the meaning of:**

**(a) *he is every man in no man:*** He has every man's characteristics but no personality of his own.

**(b) *he falls straight a-capering:*** He starts to jump about. Monsieur Le Bon is so fickle-minded that if he hears a thrush sing, he starts to jump about.

**(iii) How does the French lord react to the singing of a thrush?**

When he hears the singing of a thrush, the French Lord starts jumping immediately.

**(iv) What would happen:**

**(a) if Portia were to marry the Count?**

It would be as if she were married to twenty husbands as he is never one man but twenty men by turns.

**(b) if he were to despise Portia?**

If he were to despise Portia, Portia would not be in the least angry and would forgive him.

**(c) if he were to love Portia passionately?**

Portia could never return his love since she could never possibly love twenty husbands.

**(v) Give any three negative qualities of the French lord, as described by Portia.**

**ANS:** Portia says that the French Lord is more attached to his horse than the Neapolitan Prince and excels Count Palatine in frowning. If he hears a thrush singing, he starts jumping immediately. Further, if he does not have anybody to fence with, he will take his own shadow as adversary.

**4.(i) How is the young baron's external appearance described in the passage?**

**What light does it throw on the national pattern of clothes of Englishmen?**

**ANS:** The baron's external appearance is described as odd and strange. He is oddly dressed and very odd in behaviour too. He wears an Italian jacket and breeches in the French fashion. He seems to have got his hat from Germany and his manners from everywhere. Englishmen of Shakespeare's days had fondness for the manners and clothes of foreigners.

**(ii) What shows that the English lord has poor knowledge of the European languages? Why does Portia find it difficult to interact with him?**

**ANS:** Portia's statement that the Englishman did not know Latin, French or Italian shows that he had very poor knowledge of European Languages. Portia found it difficult to converse with him as he did not know Latin, French or Italian and Portia's knowledge of English was very poor

**(iii) Give the meaning of:**

**(a) *He is a proper man's picture:*** He is handsome and fine-looking.

**(b) *How oddly he is suited!*** : He is dressed very strangely.

**(iv) What is referred to as 'a dumb show'? Why is the Baron said to be a "dumb-show"?**

**ANS:** The word dumb-show refers to a play in which all characters act without speaking. That is by gestures. A pantomime is a dumb-show. Here it means that the Englishman is unable to speak foreign languages and had to converse by means of signs as in a dumb-show.

**(v) Give a brief description of the Scottish Lord.**

**ANS:** The Scottish Lord is not impressive. Portia speaks about his cowardice in a sarcastic way by calling him kind-hearted as he did not return the Englishman's blow immediately.

**(vi) What type of contemporary relationship among England, Scotland and France is elected in the description of the Scottish Lord?**

**ANS:** The description of the Scottish Lord is a reference to the frequent alliances between the Scots and the French against England when Scotland was at war with England.

**5.**

**(i) How does the young German behave when he is sober and when he is drunk? If the worse happens to Portia which would compel her to marry him, what would she do then?**

**ANS:** When sober, the young German is less than a man in behaviour and when drunk he is no better than a beast. If the worse happens to Portia, she will manage to do without him.

**(ii) Give the meaning of:**

**(a) when he is worst, he is little better than a beast.**

When he is drunk, he is no better than a beast.

**(b) set a deep glass of Rhenish wine on the contrary casket.**

Place a tall goblet of Rhenish wine on the wrong casket.

**(iii) What plan does Portia make to prevent the young German from choosing the right casket?**

**ANS:** To prevent the young German from choosing the right casket, Portia instructed Nerissa to place a tall goblet of Rhenish wine on the wrong casket. Portia was sure that the German suitor will not be able to resist the temptation of his national drink even if the picture of the devil himself was within.

**(iv) Why is the young German referred to as a sponge?**

**ANS:** A sponge constantly absorbs water. Similarly, a drunkard, who constantly takes liquor is called a 'sponge'. Since the young German is a drunkard, Portia calls him a 'sponge'

**(V) After Portia's speech; what does Nerissa say to console her about the suitors?**

**ANS:** Nerissa tells Portia to set aside her fears concerning the suitors. She says that they have informed her of their decision to go back home and not to press their courtship further unless Portia's fathers decree concerning the caskets can be set aside and they may woo her in an ordinary way.

**6.**

**(i) What was Portia's father's will as far as Portia's marriage was concerned?**

**ANS:** Portia's father's will was that her marriage will be decided by the lottery of the three caskets. The suitor, who chooses the right casket containing Portia's picture will be her husband.

**(ii) Who is Sibylla and who is Diana? Why are they referred to in the context?**

**ANS:** In Ovid's metamorphoses, Sibyl was a prophetess. She was granted a wish by goddess Apollo that she would live for as many years as the grains of sand she held in her hand. She was the ageless old woman. Diana was the goddess of moon and hunting. She is known as the virgin goddess. They are referred to here to explain Portia's resolve to remain a virgin like Diana even if she lives to be as old as Sibyl of Cumae unless she is won in marriage by some suitor in the lottery of caskets.

**(iii) What does Nerissa say to introduce Bassanio? What were the feelings of Portia for Bassanio in this scene?**

**ANS:** To introduce Bassanio, Nerissa recalls the visit of a young Venetian along with the Marquis of Montferrat, when Portia's father was alive. He was a scholar and a soldier. In this scene, Portia's feelings for Bassanio are quite positive. She recalls his name and tells Nerissa that he fully deserves her praise. Her simple reply shows that she is already in love with Bassanio.

**(iv) In what sense can we say that the opening of the first two scenes of Act I give the plots of the play?**

**ANS:** The opening of the first two scenes of Act I gives the plots of the play. The two main plots of the play are the bond-story and the casket-story. The bond-story is initiated in Scene 1 while the casket-story is initiated in Scene 2 of Act I.

**(v) Name the six suitors given in this scene. Give two characteristics of each suitor described by Portia.**

The six suitors given in this scene are

**(i) The Neapolitan Prince from Naples, Italy**, was a dashing youngster, as wild as a horse. He always talked about his horse.

**(ii) The County Palatine** was always frowning and unusually gloomy.

**(iii) Monsieur Le Bon from France**, had the characteristic of every man and had no personality of his own.

**(iv) Mr. Falconbridge from England**, though handsome was strangely and unmannerly dressed and did not know Latin, French or Italian.

**(v) The Scottish Lord**, was a coward and did not repay the Englishman who gave him a blow.

**(vi) The Duke of Saxony** was a drunkard. He in his sober moments, behaved less than a man and when drunk no better than a beast