

## Jessica

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica absconds with her father's money and uses it to elope with a penniless Christian named Lorenzo. Her father has been her shame, but now her source of liberation, and so inadvertently facilitates her flight from repression. On her own now, losing authentic identification outside the stone walls, choices have to be made where to go and how to be. Jessica exchanges her clothes easily for better ones.

“Who are you? Tell me for more certainty”

Antonia's name is Roman in origin, though neither she nor her father read Latin or Italian. Her name means “priceless”.

Smiling now, but with lips pursed, Antonia looked at herself in the mirror. “Hi, hello,” she mouths silently, greeting herself inside her father's home. With her index finger she traced a curving line under each eye. She had been to the swimming pool that morning and still had blood-shot eyes from the chlorine, her ears hummed and blotted out stirrings of the surrounding apartment.

“You're the one who lives here,” she said this aloud now pointing her finger at her reflection, meaning herself, her body, not this place owned by her father. Frankfurt.

“I'm going to dinner, would you like to join?” Antonia's father interrupted from another room. “No, thank you” she replied, she wasn't up to going out again; she'd rather stay in and read. Antonia wanted to avoid the inevitable squabble that might arise from his insistence that she not order more than she can eat. “I'm not terribly hungry,” he would say, leaving the statement unresolved. The old man craned his neck from side to side in demonstration of both their demeanors. This seemed to Antonia a subtle cruelty, a gruff transaction. Her father likes to disengage the conversation with a gesture or movement, a way of leave-taking without the struggle over who gets the last word. Their conversations had taken on the form of question and answer; austere, and yet as they padded around the apartment or hurried through busy avenues, they also exhibited a resignation: this is who we are, now, to one another. Before her father appeared, Antonia slipped into his jacket breast and secreted a 20 Euro note, sliding it into her back pocket. She encountered her visage now, stone faced, no, unmoved. She'd take it on the train home; she'd keep it for later as an unexpected gratuity.

The wooden mirror was large, heavy, hanging from a wire thread on the wall. Her face was still and dry, marked from travel, from dehydration, from swimming, from worn-down patterns peeking out from inside. “And?” she proffered. The city was on her skin, the money was flat against her backside, she'd forgotten to wash her hands.

Antonia remembered being out in the world with her father as a child. He was tall and demanding—he darted around people in the street, in the supermarket. Antonia would shift and gallop to keep up. He would weave through public space, speaking loudly, “Excuse me miss”, he would say as he grasped a middle-aged woman's shoulders and moved her out of his path. Speeding from place to place; groceries, papers, stamps, a videocassette, the wind would snap back the wild tufts of hair that extended from the spots above his temples. He whooped and chortled at the phrasings of billboard advertisements. He was preposterously stingy. He often spoke to young Antonia with the fattening “we”, although only he was calling the shots. All of these characteristic markings had settled under the surface of his sixth decade. He was single, Antonia was now not, and she had by all appearances a rich life.

Her father's possessions: the thread-worn antique sofa—handed down from his own father, the upright piano, the collection of jazz LPs—“substantial”, he would continuously work into discussions. A narrow bookshelf held paperback novels, *Love in the Time of Cholera* with its smutty illustrated jacket, *Lieben in Zeiten der Cholera*, *L'Amour Aux Temps Du Cholera*—he had purchased multiple translations because he didn't understand the original Spanish, and because he so coveted the novel's communal voice, or more likely its romantic love.

Next to the mirror hung a small oil painting of a sailboat on rough seas. Its frame was imposing around the small canvas, and its wooden axes funneled the eye towards the foaming green water. Grass-flecked beach, spreading out to roiling water, her father treads toward her across the woolly sand in his worn-out sandals. He's bought a battered hotdog for them to share. Antonia feels overwhelmed by her choice, by her detachment from place but her attachment to these things. She moved to the kitchen instead. Walking back from the museum earlier, Antonia was caught by her reflection in storefront window. She was so unexpectedly there in that moment, bag swinging to a lull, her body had attached to this place without her knowledge.