

In Portia's Kitchen

In the world of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, MARIO/MARIA, a kitchen boy or girl, is preparing food at a big kitchen table spread with utensils and vegetables. The house belongs to the heiress Portia, but she is away from home and her friends Lorenzo and Jessica are staying in the house. The servant is unhappy about this situation – and especially about Jessica's pet monkey.

MARIO/MARIA: Ever since Lord Lorenzo came with his new wife Jessica this household has not been the same... *(Goes to the fireplace and pours a jug of water into a pot, then tosses in the vegetables)* She flounces up to the best guest chamber and says "her husband is now in charge" and she "will mistress the lot of us!" *(Returning to the table to continue chopping vegetables)* So what happens? One of those tinkers from down south turns up outside with his tray of ribbons an' such, playing a tune on his flute and with a dancing monkey at his heel... And what does she do? Rushes out... all excited... and begs the tinker to sell his monkey to her... Now he's not about to part with the creature easily as he sees his chance to get a good price... He hangs out saying "No! no!" to the coins she has in her pocket... And then she rushes back in here to her chamber and gets this casket... and off she runs after the tinker offering him a ring... when he sees it his nasty little tinker eyes light up and he takes the ring and hands over the monkey... Lady Jessica is as pleased as punch... But I'm not I can tell you...

What does she do with this monkey each morning? She ties the creature to the lemon tree that grows in our courtyard... and that rope tied around his waist is so long he can jump up at that window *(pointing)* ... and come in here...and what does that nasty little creature do? ... He sneers and laughs at me in a devilish way and tosses all my pots and pans around... And he makes a bee-line for the candied fruits and stuffs them in his mouth... Oh! I hate the little monster... What he does not eat he throws on the floor... You should have seen the place when he discovered where the eggs

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are kept... our Steward has asked Lady Jessica to shorten the rope, but she laughs and says "monkeys need to jump around"... Jump around! I'd like to jump on him! We can't wait for our Lady Portia to return... She will get things back to normal... Oh! There's that creature... *(The monkey appears at the window)* Don't you come in here you little devil... *(Getting a broom to frighten the monkey with)* ... Get back into the yard... *(Brandishing the broom)* Go on! In the yard where you belong. *(Drops the broom and screams as the monkey jumps on to his/her shoulder)* Ah! Oh! Help! ... Get off me! ... get off you horrible creature *(Falling to the floor)* ... Oh Lord! Save me... save me... *(Struggling with the monkey)*

by Jeffrey Grenfell-Hill