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Background

Orsino, Duke of Illyria, loves the Countess Olivia—but she will have nothing to do with him. Orsino sends his page Cesario (the disguised Viola, who has fallen in love with him) to plead his cause. Olivia falls in love with Cesario.

Viola's twin brother Sebastian (whom she believes has drowned in a shipwreck) arrives in Illyria. Olivia mistakes Sebastian for his disguised sister, and Sebastian falls in love with Olivia. More complications follow before identities are revealed and the story is brought to a happy end.



— Cast of Characters —



ORSINO: Duke of Illyria

SEBASTIAN: a young gentleman, Viola's brother

ANTONIO: a sea captain, friend of Sebastian

A SEA CAPTAIN: friend of Viola

VALENTINE and **CURIO:** gentlemen

SIR TOBY BELCH: Olivia's uncle

SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK: Sir Toby's friend

OLIVIA: a rich countess

VIOLA: Sebastian's sister; later disguised as Cesario

MARIA: Olivia's gentlewoman in waiting

MALVOLIO: Olivia's steward

FABIAN: Olivia's servant

FESTE: Olivia's jester

LORDS, A PRIEST, SAILORS, OFFICERS, MUSICIANS, and OTHERS





ACT 1

Summary

As Duke Orsino of Illyria moons over Olivia, Viola arrives in the town after being rescued from a shipwreck that presumably took the life of her twin brother Sebastian. In order to support herself, she disguises herself as a man and finds work as a page in the duke's household. There, she quickly becomes the duke's favorite servant and is sent to declare Orsino's love to Olivia.

Meanwhile, in the beautiful noblewoman Olivia's household, Sir Toby Belch, her uncle, brings Sir Andrew Aguecheek—a fellow drinker and brawler—to Olivia's court to try to win his niece's love. Recognizing that Aguecheek is a fool, Maria, Olivia's gentlewoman-in-waiting, joins Toby in flattering and encouraging Sir





Andrew as a joke. Olivia is not amused by either man's drunken prattle. Feste, Olivia's fool, makes jokes to lighten Olivia's mood while Malvolio, the stuffy steward of the household, objects to Feste's presumptuous attempts at humor.

Maria announces that Olivia has a visitor at the gate, but she refuses to see anyone until Malvolio tells her that Cesario is very handsome. Olivia tells Cesario that she will never love Orsino. She is so attracted to Cesario, however, that she sends Malvolio after him with a ring she pretends that Cesario left with her.



Scene 1

An apartment in the duke's palace in Illyria. The **duke**, **Curio**, and **lords** enter. Musicians play.

DUKE: If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me too much of it. By gorging,
The appetite may sicken and so die.
(Listening briefly) Enough! No more!
It's not as sweet now as it was before.
Oh, spirit of love! How alive and fresh you are!
In spite of being as deep as the sea,
Nothing precious comes to you without
Losing some of its value even in a minute!
Love has such variety that nothing can
Equal its extravagance.

CURIO: Will you go hunt, my lord?

DUKE: Hunt what, Curio?

CURIO: The hart.

DUKE *(placing his hand on his heart)*: Why,
That is what I'm doing. When my eyes first
Saw Olivia, I thought she purified the air.
That instant I was turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fierce and cruel hounds,
Have chased me ever since.





(Valentine enters.)

DUKE: Well? What news from her?

VALENTINE: My lord, I was not invited in.

Through her maid, the answer is this:
For seven summers, not even the sun
Will see her face. Like a nun, she will wear
A veil, weeping salt tears around her room,
To honor her dead brother's love, which
She wishes to keep fresh in sad memory.

DUKE: Oh, she who has such a tender heart
To pay this debt of love for a mere brother!
How will she love when Cupid's arrow
Strikes her heart?
Lead the way to sweet beds of flowers!
Love thoughts are richer under the bowers.

(All exit.)



Scene 2

The seacoast. **Viola, captain, and sailors** enter.

VIOLA: What country is this, friends?

CAPTAIN: This is Illyria, lady.

VIOLA: What am I doing in Illyria?

My brother is in heaven. But maybe
He is not drowned. What do you think?

CAPTAIN: Luckily, you yourself were saved.

VIOLA: Oh, my poor brother!

Maybe he was saved, too.

CAPTAIN: True, madam. After our ship split,
When we were clinging to the drifting boat,
I saw your brother tie himself to a mast.
He was riding the waves
As long as I could keep him in sight.

VIOLA (giving him money): For saying that,
Here's gold. My own escape gives me hope
That he escaped, too.
Do you know this country?

CAPTAIN: Yes. I was born and raised here.





VIOLA: Who governs here?

CAPTAIN: A noble duke named Orsino.

VIOLA: Orsino! My father spoke of him.
He was a bachelor then.

CAPTAIN: And he still is—or was till recently.
A month ago, when I left, I heard rumors
That he sought the love of fair Olivia.

VIOLA: Who's she?

CAPTAIN: A virtuous maiden, the daughter of
A count who died a year ago. He left her in
The protection of his son, her brother,
Who died soon after that. For his dear love,
They say, she has given up the company
And even sight of men!

VIOLA: I wish I served that lady and could
Stay out of the public eye until I found out
Better what my situation is!

CAPTAIN: That will not be easy. She will not
Consider any pleas—not even the duke's.

VIOLA: You seem like a good man, Captain.
Will you—I'll pay you well—help me
Disguise who I am? I want to serve this duke.

You can present me as a young man to him.
It will be worth your trouble. I can sing, and
I can speak to him in many musical ways.
This will make me an attractive employee.
Whatever happens, time will tell.
Just be silent, will you? Well?

CAPTAIN: If silent I am unable to be,
Then may my eyes no longer see!

VIOLA: Thank you. (*She gestures.*) After you . . .
(They exit.)

