



*Viola*

TWELFTH NIGHT ACT 2. SC. 4.

VIOLA

Viola was the daughter of one Sebastian, a Mesopotamian, and of  
 a noble lady. Growing with her twin-brother Sebastian, near the  
 city of Mesopotamia, a terrible storm arose, which wrecked the vessel,  
 and the crew reaching the shore. Viola was among the  
 survivors, and her brother's fate for a time remained unknown. A  
 stormy night, a violent tempest, in a stormy land,  
 the vessel was wrecked, and the crew, including  
 the brother, were scattered. Viola, however, was  
 saved, and she, with her attendant, reached the shore.  
 She was found by a fisherman, and he, taking her  
 for a boy, named her Cesario, and she, as such,  
 was brought to the court of the Duke of Illyria.

Sebastian had long been chamberlain to the Countess  
 of Illyria, a wealthy lady, who did not in the least reciprocate  
 his affection. On this, prepossessed with his pretty page,  
 the Duke, in his unhappy love affair, and eager  
 to deliver his tender messages to the lady,

sent to all others, reserved his hand  
 for the page, and she, as such, was  
 the only one who could deliver his  
 messages to the lady.



## VIOLA.

VIOLA was the daughter of one Sebastian, a Messalinian, and of gentle blood. Voyaging with her twin-brother Sebastian, near the coast of Illyria, a terrible storm arose, which wrecked the vessel, only a few of her crew reaching the shore. Viola was among the saved; but her brother's fate for a time remained unknown. A young and beautiful woman, without protection, in a strange land, she conceived the familiar idea of attiring herself as a page, to engage service in some noble family; and thus, through the influence of the captain of the wrecked vessel, she obtained admission, under the name of *Cesario*, into the household of Orsino, duke of Illyria.

This young nobleman had long been enamoured of the Countess Olivia, a noble and wealthy lady, who did not in the least reciprocate his preference. Orsino, prepossessed with his pretty page, made Viola his confidant in his unhappy love affair, and constituted it her chief duty to deliver his tender messages to the inaccessible countess.

Olivia, denying herself to all others, received the handsome boy, with whom, despite their unequal rank, she promptly fell in love, and, after a few interviews, confessed her passion for him.

Viola, dismayed by the false position into which her disguise had betrayed her, herself in love with the gallant duke, assured the countess, in reply, that *no woman* did, or ever should, possess her heart, and that she would never again approach her, even on her master's errand.

Sebastian, Viola's brother, had happily been saved from the wreck, by his friend Antonio. Walking one day past Olivia's house, he was violently assailed by that lady's uncle, Sir Toby Belch, who, from Sebastian's exact resemblance to his sister Viola, mistook him for *Cesario*, and accused him of a previous insult. The countess, informed of the altercation, hastened to the rescue of her beloved *Cesario*, and was deceived equally with her uncle. She conducted Sebastian into the house, and bestowed her hospitality with such fascinating grace that the lucky youth, though amazed at his reception, was charmed with her elegance and beauty. Olivia, delighted to find the disdainful *Cesario* suddenly metamorphosed into a lover, at once proposed that they should seal their vows before a priest who was then at hand; to which Sebastian, now deep in love, consented—and they were married.

The marvellous resemblance between Viola and Sebastian—

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons—

was shortly the occasion of another *contre-temps*: Antonio, Sebastian's preserver, mistook Viola for her brother, and, in the presence of the duke, accused her of base ingratitude, in ignoring him who had saved her life. But even while he was speaking, Olivia entered, and claimed Viola as her husband; this aroused the jealous rage of Orsino, who naturally inferred that his page had been playing him false; but the *éclaircissement* and the crowning mystification were simultaneously achieved by the entrance of Sebastian.

Hereupon, explanations, satisfactory to all: Olivia was nothing loth to retain the bridegroom she had chosen so hastily; and Orsino, always tenderly attached to his faithful page, found it by no means difficult, now that Olivia was forever lost to him, to transfer his affections to Viola, when she appeared before him in her proper character—a young and beautiful woman who adored him. And thus their misfortune proved indeed a “most happy wreck” to the twins—the one gaining thereby a gallant and noble husband, the other a beautiful and wealthy wife.

Viola, without possessing any of those brilliant qualities that compel our admiration in Portia, Rosalind, or Beatrice, endears herself to us by the ingenuousness, modesty, and tenderness of her character. Like Rosalind, Viola disguises herself as a page; but instead of assuming that “swashing and martial outside” which Rosalind affects, as part of her masculine attire, she is most discreetly disposed, permitting herself no word or gesture inconsistent with the nicest propriety; she changes nothing but her dress—she is Viola throughout. Each is in daily intercourse with the man she loves. With Orlando, Rosalind is saucy and coquettish; Viola manifests her self-sacrificing devotion to Orsino, by becoming his love-herald to the proud Olivia—wooing for her master from another the bliss which she longed to bestow only through herself.

Like Rosalind again, Viola is beloved by a woman; but the Countess Olivia differs as widely from the capricious shepherdess, Phebe, as the treatment which their infatuations severally receive: Rosalind mocks, and plays with, Phebe's preference, even while she repulses it; Viola's feminine reserve is shocked at the un-

wooded confession of Olivia's love. Yet how full of tender pity are her words, when first she suspects the hapless truth:

What means this lady?

Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her!  
She made good view of me—indeed, so much  
That sure, methought, her eyes had lost her tongue;  
For she did speak in starts, distractedly.  
She loves me, sure;

\* \* \* \* \*

If it be so, (as 'tis,)

Poor lady, she were better love a dream.  
Disguise, I see, thou art a wickedness,  
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.  
How easy is it for the proper-false  
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!  
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we;  
For such as we are made of, such we be.  
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly;  
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him;  
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me:  
What will become of this! As I am man,  
My state is desperate for my master's love;  
As I am woman—now alas the day!  
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?  
O Time, thou must untangle this, not I;  
It is too hard a knot for me to untie.

Of her person, her brother Sebastian says:

A lady, sir, though it was said she much resembled me,  
was yet of many accounted beautiful; but though I  
could not, with such estimable wonder, over far believe  
that, yet thus far I will boldly publish her—she bore a  
mind that envy could not but call fair.

The description by Malvolio, Olivia's steward, is characteristic:

Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for  
a boy; as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling

when 'tis almost an apple: 'tis with him e'en standing  
water, between boy and man. He is very well-favored,  
and he speaks very shrewishly; one would think his  
mother's milk were scarce out of him.

We have abundant evidence of the high-bred grace of her  
bearing, in the rapturous soliloquy of the Lady Olivia, even after  
due allowance has been made for the exaggeration of love:

What is your parentage?

*Above my fortunes; yet my state is well—*

*I am a gentleman.*—I'll be sworn thou art;

Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit,

Do give thee five-fold blazon.—Not too fast:—soft! soft!—

Unless the master were the man.—How now?

Even so quickly may one catch the plague?

Methinks I feel this youth's perfections,

With an invisible and subtle stealth,

To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.

A dialogue between Viola and the Duke Orsino affords us the  
clearest insight into the sweet pensiveness of her mind, intensified  
somewhat by hopeless devotion to her master:

*Vio.* But if she cannot love you, sir?

*Duke.* I cannot be so answer'd.

*Vio.* 'Sooth, but you must.

Say that some lady, as perhaps there is,

Hath for your love as great a pang of heart

As you have for Olivia: you cannot love her;

You tell her so. Must she not then be answer'd?

*Duke.* There is no woman's sides

Can bide the beating of so strong a passion

As love doth give my heart—no woman's heart

So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.

Alas! their love may be called appetite,—

No motion of the liver, but the palate,—

That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt;

But mine is all as hungry as the sea,  
And can digest as much. Make no compare  
Between that love a woman can bear me  
And that I owe Olivia.

*Vio.* Ay, but I know—

*Duke.* What dost thou know?

*Vio.* Too well what love women to men may owe:  
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.  
My father had a daughter lov'd a man—  
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,  
I should your lordship.

*Duke.* And what's her history?

*Vio.* A blank, my lord: She never told her love;  
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek. She pin'd in thought;  
And, with a green and yellow melancholy,  
She sat, like Patience on a monument,  
Smiling at grief. Was not this love, indeed?  
We men may say more, swear more; but, indeed,  
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove  
Much in our vows, but little in our love.

*Duke.* But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

*Vio.* I am all the daughters of my father's house,  
And all the brothers too;—and yet I know not.—  
Sir, shall I to this lady?

*Duke.* Ay! that's the theme.

To her in haste; give her this jewel; say  
My love can give no place, bide no denay.