



Olivia.

TWELFTH NIGHT, ACT I. SC. 2.

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OLIVIA.

The prominent events in the history of the Countess Olivia have already been noted in the chapter devoted to Viola. Celebrated for beauty—the charm of which is doubtless enhanced by the “quantity of dark locks” which she is mistress of—a “smooth, discreet, and staid bearing,” “surveying her house, commanding her followers,” with the majestic dignity of a lady accustomed from birth to command—she has nevertheless all the tenderness and softness of a woman.

Olivia’s personal aspects the violent and accomplished, deep-seated passion, a passion exactly suited to every particular to her station in life—to bestow her coveted favour on the obscure little page of her princely lover; and the very condescension implied in this eccentricity acquits her love for Viola of the charge of indelicacy. We regard her sudden fancy for the pretty boy as the unchecked whim of the moment; to use her own words, it was “that line of moon” which he so beautifully impressed; it has by no means warped the dignity of passion in our minds, nor do we deem it necessary to try to fit the rules and regulations applicable to the conduct of a noblewoman to her.

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OLIVIA.

THE prominent events in the history of the Countess Olivia have already been noted in the chapter devoted to Viola. Celebrated for beauty—the charm of which is doubtless enhanced by the “quantity of dirty lands” whereof she is mistress—of a “smooth, discreet, and stable bearing,” “swaying her house, commanding her followers,” with the innate dignity of a lady accustomed from birth to princely surroundings, she has nevertheless all the legitimate caprices of an imperious belle.

Olivia persistently rejects the violent suit of an accomplished, elegant nobleman—a *parti* exactly suited in every particular to her station in life—to bestow her coveted favors on the obscure little page of her princely lover; and the very condescension implied in this eccentricity acquits her love for Viola of the charge of indelicacy. We regard her sudden fancy for the pretty boy as the unchecked whim of the moment; to use her own words, it was “that time of moon” with her to be so impressed; it has by no means attained the dignity of passion in our minds, nor do we ever propose to try it by the rules and regulations applicable to cases of orthodox love-making.

Yet, for all that, it is serious enough; Juliet, herself, is not

more tenderly impatient, nor more suddenly involved, than our wilful countess.

In a propitious moment she imagines she finds *Cesario* responsive to her suit, and with a woman's quick appropriation of opportunity thus addresses him:

Blame not this haste of mine: If you mean well,
Now go with me, and with this holy man,
Into the chantry by. There, before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace.

And with what reckless abandon does she confess her love for the page:

O, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful
In the contempt and anger of his lip!
A murd'rous guilt shows not itself more soon
Than love that would seem hid. Love's night is noon.
Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honor, truth, and every thing,
I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit, nor reason, can my passion hide.

She continues to urge her hopeless suit with no less ardor and self-forgetfulness; thus prettily she puts aside the duke's love-making, to advance her own:

O, by your leave, I pray you:
I bade you never speak again of him;
But, would you undertake another suit,
I had rather hear you to solicit that
Than music from the spheres.

Vio.

Dear lady,——

Oli. Give me leave, I beseech you: I did send,
After the last enchantment you did here,

A ring in chase of you; so did I abuse
Myself, my servant—and, I fear me, you.
Under your hard construction must I sit,
To force that on you, in a shameful cunning,
Which you knew none of yours. What might you think?
Have you not set mine honor at the stake,
And baited it with all the unmuzzled thoughts
That tyrannous heart can think? To one of your receiving
Enough is shown; a cypress, not a bosom,
Hides my poor heart.

* * * * *
Here! wear this jewel for me; 'tis my picture.
Refuse it not; it hath no tongue to vex you;
And, I beseech you, come again to-morrow.
What shall you ask of me that I'll deny—
That honor, sav'd, may upon asking give?

As to her personal charms, Viola addresses her as "Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty," and says of her face:

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.
* * * * *
I see you what you are: you are too proud;
But, if you were the devil, you are fair.

Olivia acknowledges to *Cesario* her fault of unwomanly boldness; but the confession is plainly neither preceded nor followed by even a pretence of penitence; it is but one of the thousand coquettish tricks of a spoiled beauty to win back the respect which she feels she has justly forfeited:

I have said too much unto a heart of stone,
And laid my honor too unchary out;
There's something in me that reproves my fault;
But such a headstrong, potent fault it is,
That it but mocks reproof.