

**Act 1**

**PUBLIC HEALTH WARNING**

*Reading this story may cause dizziness, confusion and brain-ache. The Primary Shakespeare Company admits no liability for any of these side effects and, if you do experience them, please send your complaints to:*

William Shakespeare  
Left Hand Tomb  
Just in Front of the Altar  
Holy Trinity Church  
1 Old Town,  
Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6BG

*Please be aware that there may be a considerable delay before you receive a reply.*

*In the meantime, you are advised to swallow the following plot points:*

1. At the start of the play, Orsino, Duke of Illyria, has been in love with Olivia, a Countess, for a long time. She's not interested and is in mourning for the deaths of her father and brother.
2. There are two twins in this play: Viola and Sebastian. Though one is a man and the other a woman, apparently they look identical!
3. Also in love with Olivia is her servant, the very serious Malvolio.

That's all. Good luck.

**Scene 1**

Duke Orsino gazed out of the window and sighed. He was excellent at both sighing and gazing. His sighs were dramatic, and his gazes were noble. This particular sigh had been strikingly long and heavy. Anyone listening to it would have thought to themselves, 'Blimey, that is the sigh of someone in love!' And they would have been right. It had also been so loud that all the musicians in the room had stopped playing in shock.

Orsino now turned that noble gaze on them, adding a subtle hint of sadness to his expression.

"If music be the food of love, play on, give me excess of it!" he said, and returned to the window. Seconds later, he flung his arm out forcefully, accidentally catching the end of the violinist's nose.

"Enough, no more! 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before."

As the notes faded, Valentine, Orsino's servant, swept into the room, managing to tread on the violinist's foot. The hapless musician turned white and, trying to clutch nose, foot and violin all at the same time, slowly keeled over, before being carried out by the rest of his band.

Orsino was eager to have news of the beautiful Olivia, the subject of most of his sighing and gazing. Valentine's words were not encouraging.

“So please my lord, I might not be admitted.  
The element itself, till seven years’ heat,  
Shall not behold her face at ample view;  
All this to season a brother’s dead love.”

Many of us - me certainly, you perhaps - might have been put off by the news that our beloved was not only *not* keen to see us, but had also decided to spend seven years indoors thinking about their dead brother. Many - even most - of us, would have taken that as a message to give up and find someone else. Orsino was different. Lots of people thought him a fine fellow and liked him greatly. However, no one liked Orsino more than Orsino. So, he actually thought this was great news. If Olivia was able to love her brother - who was, let’s face it, dead – so much, how much more would she love the marvellous, magnificent and thoroughly alive Orsino? At some point she would *realise* this and then it was all going to be great... he should probably start inviting people to the wedding...

## Scene 2

They had had no chance. The storm had been too powerful: the waves like mountains, the wind tearing at the boat like a ravenous beast, pulling it to pieces. Now, those who had survived helped each other wearily out of the water. One amongst them, a young woman named Viola, searched desperately amongst those remaining faces, willing each one to be her brother’s. To no avail. At last, her shoulders slumped and she sat down on the sand, her clothes dripping seawater, her face wet with tears. She turned to the captain and the crew that were left.

“What country, friends, is this?” she asked.  
Helping her to her feet, the captain answered, “This is Illyria, lady.”  
She gripped his hand, staring fiercely at him.

“And what should I do in Illyria? My brother he is in Elysium.”  
Then, a flicker of hope crossed her face.

“Perchance he is not drown’d: what think you sailors?”

They all rushed to comfort and reassure her. One claimed to have seen her brother tie himself to the mast, another spoke of how powerfully Sebastian had swum through the waves. Viola thanked them - though, in truth, she was thanking them mostly for their kindness. Deep down, they all knew the chances of surviving in that sea were slim.

Viola shook herself, as if waking from a sleep. Though Death had come to claim her brother, Life did not care. There were problems to be solved: she was shipwrecked on a foreign shore, with no money, no friends and no family.

“Who governs here?” Viola wanted to know.

“Orsino,” the captain answered, “a noble duke, in nature as in name.”

Then he added what we already know, that Orsino was hopelessly in love with Olivia, who herself was in mourning for a dead father and... a dead brother.

“O that I served that lady!”

Not possible, said the captain; she will admit no one to her house. Well then, thought Viola, perhaps she would have to try and find work at the house of Orsino. As a Duke, he would employ only manservants; so, would the captain and crew help disguise her as a boy? In answer, one of the young sailors held out his coat.

### Scene 3

Unless he had been called Sir Drinky McLazy, Sir Toby Belch could hardly have been better named. Here was a man of whom it could be said that, at best, he enjoyed life - and that he often enjoyed it until two, three or even four o'clock in the morning - and at worst, that he was a drunken fool who did very little work. And how was he able to lead this lazy life? Because his niece, Olivia, provided him with food and lodging.

You might think that he had little to complain about. You'd be wrong. To Sir Toby, for whom partying was the whole point of existence, a house in mourning, where everyone dressed in black, spoke in whispers and wore a permanent expression of sadness was very much something to complain about.

“What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life.”

Maria, the maid, was quick to tell Sir Toby how, in her turn, Olivia took great exception to his anti-social hours - and his partying.

“That quaffing and drinking will undo you: I heard my lady talk of it yesterday; and of a foolish knight that you brought in one night here to be her wooer.”

There was a sharp intake of breath from a deeply offended Sir Toby.

“Who, Sir Andrew Aguecheek?”

“Ay, he.”

“He's as tall as any man in Illyria!”

“What's that to the purpose?”

“Why, he has three thousand ducats a year.”

“Ay, but he'll have but a year in all these ducats: he's a very fool and a prodigal.”

In an effort to persuade Maria what a fine man Sir Andrew was, and how excellent a husband he would make for Olivia, Sir Toby proceeded to list all his accomplishments. Unfortunately, he was facing one big problem: Olivia had already told Maria all about Sir Andrew. If what she had heard was true, she could safely say that the mop with which she was currently cleaning the kitchen had a bigger brain than Sir Andrew. As if to prove her point, Sir Andrew appeared, a broad smile wreathing his long face. Maria noted that her mop was also better looking.

“Sir Toby Belch! How now, Sir Toby Belch?”

“Sweet Sir Andrew!”

As the two proceeded to shake hands, hug, bump bellies, stick out their tongues and leap from foot to foot in some strange ritual greeting, Maria looked on witheringly. On reflection, she was actually underselling the mop; not only was it better looking and cleverer, it was also more useful and had the added virtue of not staying up all night drinking itself stupid with Sir Toby.

Sir Andrew noticed her expression.

“Fair lady, do you think you have fools in hand?”

Maria was quick to respond.

“Sir, I have not *you* by the hand.”

She turned on her heel and left. Sir Andrew sensed that he had, in some way - if only he could work it out - been insulted. He looked crestfallen. Sir Toby put an arm around him.

“O knight, when did I see thee so put down?”

Sir Andrew sighed. It wasn't just that Maria had made him look like a fool - he was quite used to that - it was more that he seemed to be getting nowhere in his quest to woo Olivia.

“Faith, I'll home to-morrow, Sir Toby: your niece will not be seen; or if she be, it's four to one she'll none of me: the Count himself here hard by woos her.”

Sir Toby, anxious to keep Sir Andrew - and his three thousand ducats a year - on side, was quick to reassure him.

“She'll none of the Count! I have heard her swear it. Tut, there's life in it, man.”

A miraculous change occurred. Sir Andrew leapt to his feet, his smile back in place, and started dancing round the room, kicking his legs out and showing off some extraordinary moves. Sir Toby was duly astonished.

“Wherefore are these things hid? Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto?”

Such marvellous dancing surely called for one thing - a PARTY!!

#### Scene 4

Orsino couldn't quite put his finger on it, but there was something a bit different about Cesario, his new man-servant... what was it, exactly? It was true that most of his other servants had big, manly beards, but if you had skin as soft and glowing as Cesario's why not show it off? And his walk was particularly masculine. Orsino had rarely seen anyone strut and swagger around quite as much. Cesario also seemed to be unusually good at listening - which was a plus; Orsino had noticed that, in the middle of some of his longer speeches about Olivia, his other servants, Valentine and Curio, would sometimes gaze off into the middle distance. Not so Cesario! He hung onto every word - gazing intently at Orsino. He seemed fascinated. What an excellent chap! Even though it had only been three days since he'd arrived in the house, Orsino already felt very close to him. In fact, now that he thought about it, Cesario was the perfect person for the task he had in mind.

"Cesario!"

"On your attendance, my lord, here."

Orsino proceeded to outline his plan: Cesario was to go to Olivia's house, and refuse to leave until he was let in. Once inside, he was to use all his persuasive powers:

"Unfold the passion of my love, surprise her with discourse of my dear faith - she will attend it better in thy youth."

Cesario looked uncertain.

"I think not so, my lord."

But Orsino was convinced. Cesario's beautiful lips, his high voice and the fact that he looked rather like a woman would be sure to make Olivia listen to him.

Viola broke out in a cold sweat. She'd thought she was doing quite well at being a man... she was particularly proud of her walk. Even Valentine and Curio seemed impressed; they'd certainly been staring at her marching up and down. She was clearly going to have to try harder.

What made this task particularly difficult was how she'd come to feel about Orsino over the last three days. He was, she thought, a thief - for he had stolen her heart. So, to go to Olivia and profess Orsino's love for *her* was torture. But she put on her best smile - and her deepest voice.

"I'll do my best to woo your lady."

As she left the chamber, she added in a whisper:

"Yet a barful strife! Who'er I woo, myself would be his wife."

**Scene 5**

Sir Toby had a point; Olivia's house could be quite a depressing place. The pictures were covered over, no music was heard, no one spoke much above a whisper and all were dressed in black. It was also, reflected Feste, a very difficult place in which to get a laugh. Which is a problem if you're a jester.

It didn't help that the pompous stuck up Malvolio was standing right next to Olivia.

"What think you of this fool, Malvolio?"

Olivia's steward looked scornfully at Feste.

"I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal."

Perhaps fortunately for Feste, at that moment Maria entered the room.

"Madam, there is at the gate a young gentleman much desires to speak with you."

Olivia was unimpressed.

"From the Count Orsino, is it? Go you, Malvolio. If it be a suit from the Count, I am sick or not at home."

Malvolio bowed and walked stiffly from the room, like a self-important heron.

Olivia turned to Maria.

"Take the fool away."

Feste was quick to respond.

"Do you not hear? Take away the lady."

Not bad, he thought - I've still got it. So, he was a little disappointed to be grabbed by Maria and, rather roughly, shoved out of the room.

Malvolio returned

"Madam, yond young fellow swears he will speak with you."

"Tell him, he shall not speak with me."

"Has been told so: and says he'll stand at your door like a sheriff's post, but he'll speak with you."

Olivia sighed heavily.

"Give me my veil: throw it o'er my face. We'll once more hear Orsino's embassy."

Cesario - Viola - entered. Or rather, she strode, swaggered and stamped her way in. To make absolutely sure that no one at Olivia's house would think her a woman, she struck a pose with her fists on her hips. Very manly, she thought.

But there was a problem. There were two women here: which one was Olivia? Neither spoke - not to greet, nor to introduce themselves. It was most odd. One was standing, one

seated wearing a veil. The standing one seemed to be enjoying the silence and Viola's discomfort. Viola had just decided to speak first when a voice came from behind the veil.

"Your Lord does know my mind, I cannot love him. Yet I suppose him virtuous, a gracious person. But yet I cannot love him: he might have took his answer long ago."

The voice was firm, determined, and gave no hope that here was someone inclined to change their mind. Perhaps Viola would have to return to Orsino having failed. But wait, she herself was curious. Who was this woman that inspired such love?

"Good madam, let me see your face."

"Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? But we will draw the curtain and show you the picture."

Olivia raised her veil. Her face had the kind of beauty which made others gasp and Viola saw why Orsino loved her so much. What agony, when she wanted him to love her! Her heart was almost bursting as she spoke.

"If I did love you in my master's flame, in your denial I would find no sense, I would not understand it."

Olivia visibly started at the tremor of emotion in Viola's voice. Who was this young man, so fair of face, so full of feeling? She wanted to know more.

"Why, what would you?"

"Make me a willow cabin at your gate,  
And call upon my soul within the house;  
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,  
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;  
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,  
And make the babbling gossip of the air  
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest  
Between the elements of air and earth,  
But you should pity me."

There was silence, as there had been before Viola arrived. But this was not the dead silence of mourning, more one that seemed to vibrate with possibility and feeling. Viola's words had come out in a torrent of love. Love, of course, for Orsino - but Olivia was not to know that.

She stared at Viola, who was breathing hard, her cheeks flushed. It was the same stare with which Viola herself looked at Orsino.

"Get you to your lord: I cannot love him: let him send no more, unless perchance, you come to me again, to tell me how he takes it. Fare you well."

As Viola, or should we say Cesario, left. Olivia clutched at her heart, her eyes shining. So lost in her thoughts was she that she failed to notice that the young man's swagger had completely vanished as he left the room.