



Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*- An Irreverent Plot Synopsis



In Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*, twins Viola and Sebastian are separated during a harrowing shipwreck. Viola is saved by the ship's captain but believes that her brother was likely drowned. Having lost everything and fearing for her safety traveling alone in the unknown country of Illyria, Viola decides to disguise herself as a boy named Cesario and gets a job in Duke Orsino's household.

Orsino, consumed with love for the Countess Olivia, sends his servants every day to woo her. But Olivia consistently turns them away. She is mourning the death of her own brother (and vows to stay in mourning for seven years). Olivia's household isn't a very happy place lately. The others living there have grown tired of mourning and miss joy and laughter. The fool, Feste the fool, ran away long ago. Olivia's serving woman Maria and her steward Malvolio aren't getting along at all. Things are tense...

Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch, brings another suitor to the house to try to win Olivia's hand. Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a rather ridiculous man, is known for being wealthy (and gullible and witless). Toby and Andrew spend the days drinking and making merry, but Toby only uses Andrew's money to pay for the parties. Needless to say, Olivia is not interested in getting to know Sir Andrew.

Malvolio longs to be in the upper class and doesn't approve of the others in Olivia's house. He is not very nice to Maria, Toby, or Andrew. When the fool returns, a plot is hatched to play a prank on Malvolio. Maria writes a love letter to him in Countess Olivia's handwriting giving him some very wacky instructions on how to behave if he returns her love. The results are a bit wild and out of hand. (You'll see!)

In a continued and relentless effort to win over Olivia, Orsino sends Cesario (secretly Viola) to her with messages professing his love. When Olivia lays eyes on the duke's new serving man, she falls madly in love with him. So, there's a big, messy love triangle, because Duke Orsino is in love with Countess Olivia who is in love with the duke's page Cesario (who is really Viola who is - you'll never guess- secretly in love with Orsino).

Meanwhile, in another part of town, Viola's long-lost twin Sebastian arrives on shore with Antonio, a pirate who saved him from drowning in the shipwreck (He's alive!!!). Sebastian is heartbroken because he believes his sister Viola drowned. Antonio cares very much for Sebastian and asks to remain with him as his friend and servant. This is tricky, however, because Antonio is a wanted criminal in Orsino's court for getting into pirate mischief a few years ago. He gives Sebastian money to go sightseeing and then goes to hide out at the tavern.

In other plotlines, Malvolio is completely convinced that the trick letter is real, and he begins acting and dressing very strangely because he thinks Olivia wants him to. Maria convinces Olivia that he has gone mad, and Olivia commands Sir Toby to take care of him. Sir Toby has him locked in a dark prison cell and sends Feste in disguise as a priest to continue to mess with him. Malvolio begs the fool to bring him paper to write Olivia a letter.

While Sebastian wanders the city, everyone he encounters thinks he is Cesario. This causes a lot of confusion! Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, and Maria are looking for Cesario to challenge him to a duel (another prank, but this time, Sir Andrew isn't in on it!). Olivia, seeing Sebastian and thinking he is Cesario, asks him to marry her, and he (confused but attracted) immediately agrees. Antonio, thinking Viola is Sebastian, saves her from the duel and immediately gets arrested. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew attack Sebastian (thinking he is Cesario) and immediately get their butts kicked.

In the final scene, all roads collide! Sebastian and Viola reunite, Cesario is unmasked, Malvolio pleads his case, the pranksters get caught, the couples all get together, and, as in most Shakespearean comedies, we end with a song! *Twelfth Night* has twisty love triangles, dangerous shipwrecks, sword-fighting pirates, songs and stratagems, and yellow stockings... Join in all the wild adventures in Illyria!