

Kids Love Shakespeare's TWELFTH NIGHT - Quick Summary for Kids

This story takes place in Illyria, Italy. The main character is named Viola. Before the play begins there is a terrible storm and Viola and her twin brother, Sebastian, are in a shipwreck. Both Viola and Sebastian believe their twin died in the storm.

At the beginning of the play Viola is afraid to live alone in the world as a woman so she decides to disguise herself as a young man. She calls herself Cesario. Viola goes to the Duke of Illyria, Orsino, to look for work as a musician. She soon finds out that Orsino is sick with love for Lady Olivia. Olivia will not return his love. Viola offers to visit Olivia and woo her for the Duke. Orsino happily agrees to Viola's plan.

Lady Olivia is very difficult to meet in person. Many men are trying to win her hand in marriage but none have been successful. Olivia's brother just died and she is in mourning. She refuses to see anyone. Viola is lucky, however, because Olivia is curious to meet the pretty young boy at her gate. Olivia lets Viola in and soon falls in love with her because she thinks Viola is a young man named Cesario. Viola doesn't know what to do. She cannot tell anyone that she is really a woman!

While Olivia is falling in love with Viola (Cesario), there is a bit of mischief going on among the people of her estate. Her uncle, Sir Toby Belch, is always drinking wine and causing trouble. Sir Toby, his friend Sir Andrew, and the fool Feste, come home late one evening, and are scolded by Malvolio, one of Olivia's servants, for being so loud and disrespectful. Malvolio isn't very nice to anyone and doesn't have a sense of humor. Sir Toby, Feste, Sir Andrew, and Olivia's serving woman Maria decide to play a cruel trick on him. They will make Malvolio believe Olivia loves him. Olivia will think he's gone mad.

Meanwhile, Viola is falling in love with her master Duke Orsino. Of course, Duke Orsino doesn't know that Viola loves him. He thinks she is a young man named Cesario. When they talk about Olivia, Duke Orsino asks Viola if she knows what it's like to be in love with a woman. Viola tries to give him hints that she really loves him. She says the woman she is in love with has his same color eyes and hair and is the same age. The Duke doesn't understand her hints. Viola is stuck in a love triangle!

In a different part of Illyria, Sebastian and his friend Antonio are looking for Viola. Sebastian is afraid she drowned in the storm. Antonio wants to help him but is afraid of being arrested by Duke Orsino's soldiers. He is an enemy of the Duke. Antonio and Sebastian go their separate ways. Antonio finds Viola but he doesn't recognize her because she is dressed as a young man. He thinks she is Sebastian and he becomes very mad because he thinks Sebastian is pretending not to know him. That's when the Duke's soldiers arrest Antonio.

Eventually everyone starts confusing Sebastian and Viola (who is dressed as Cesario). They are twins after all, and look a lot alike when they are both dressed as men. Olivia ends up marrying Sebastian when she really wanted to marry Viola (Cesario). The Duke gets very mad because he thinks Viola (Cesario) married the woman he loves. Finally, Sebastian and Viola find each other again, and Viola shows the rest of the world that she is truly a woman.

Now that they know she is a woman, Olivia and Duke Orsino understand why Viola (Cesario) had been acting so strange. Olivia understands why Viola (Cesario) wouldn't return her love, and the Duke understands Viola's (Cesario's) strange hints. Olivia is happy to be married to Sebastian and the Duke admits to loving Viola and they, too, are married. It is a happy ending for almost everyone. Poor Malvolio learns that it was all a trick and that Olivia doesn't really love him.