

TWELFTH NIGHT | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*

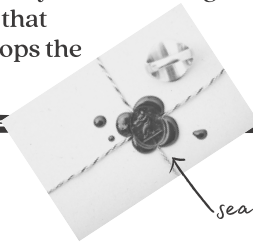


SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Malvolio is Olivia's steward—he manages her business and keeps her household running smoothly. He is not a fan of people having fun, which does not make him a popular character. Olivia's uncle, **Sir Toby Belch**, and his buddies, **Sir Andrew Aguecheek** and **Fabian**, are not fans of Malvolio. Neither is **Maria**, who works under Malvolio as a maid. Maria (pronounced "Mariah," like Ms. Carey!) comes up with a plan to mess with Malvolio: She writes a love letter in Olivia's handwriting—to Malvolio! In it, "Olivia" says she wants to marry Malvolio and suggests that he dress in yellow stockings with cross-garters. (Ha ha. It's a 1600s fashion joke. The only thing you need to know is that cross-garters are LAME!) Maria drops the letter for Malvolio to find it....

BONUS: does that "-volio" name sound familiar? Benvolio (from *Romeo & Juliet*) means "good will." Malvolio means "ill will." Ouch. Even his name is no fun.

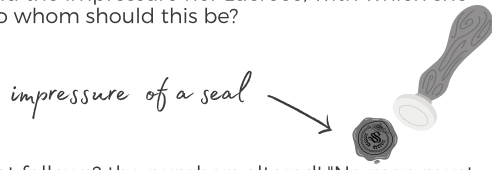


The Shakespeare

MALVOLIO
What employment have we here?

By my life, this is my lady's hand. It is, in contempt of question, her hand. ^[Taking up the letter]
"To the unknown beloved, this, and my good wishes:"—her very phrases! By your leave, wax. Soft! and the impressure her Lucrece, with which she uses to seal: 'tis my lady. To whom should this be?

*"Jove knows I love:
But who?
Lips, do not move;
No man must know."*



"No man must know." What follows? the numbers altered! "No man must know": if this should be thee, Malvolio?

*"I may command where I adore;
But silence, like a Lucrece knife,
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore:
M, O, A, I, doth sway my life."*



"M, O, A, I, doth sway my life." Nay, but first, let me see, let me see, let me see. *"I may command where I adore."* Why, she may command me: I serve her; she is my lady. Why, this is evident to any formal capacity; there is no obstruction in this: and the end,—what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me,—Softly! "M, O, A, I,"—"M,"—Malvolio; "M,"—why, that begins my name. "M,"—but then there is no consonancy in the sequel; that suffers under probation A should follow but "O" does. And then "I" comes behind. "M, O, A, I"; this simulation is not as the former: and yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name. Soft! here follows prose.

"If this fall into thy hand, revolve. In my stars I am above thee; but be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy Fates open their hands; let thy blood and spirit embrace them; and, to inure thyself to what thou art like to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh. Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants; let thy tongue tang arguments of state; put thyself into the trick of singularity: she thus advises thee that sighs for thee. Remember who commended thy yellow stockings, and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered: I say, remember. Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so; if not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of servants, and not worthy to touch Fortune's fingers. Farewell. She that would alter services with thee, THE FORTUNATE-UNHAPPY."

Daylight and champaign discovers not more: this is open. I will be proud. I will read politic authors, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-devise the very man. I do not now fool myself, to let imagination jade me: for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me. She did commend my yellow stockings of late, she did praise my leg being cross-gartered; and in this she manifests herself to my love, and with a kind of injunction drives me to these habits of her liking. I thank my stars I am happy. I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings, and cross-gartered, even with the swiftness of putting on. Jove and my stars be praised! Here is yet a postscript.

"Thou canst not choose but know who I am. If thou entertainest my love, let it appear in thy smiling; thy smiles become thee well; therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee."

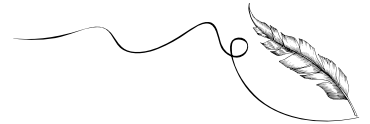
Jove, I thank thee: I will smile; I will do everything that thou wilt have me.

The Translation

MALVOLIO
What's this I see here?

My goodness, this is Olivia's handwriting. It is, without a doubt, her handwriting. ^[Picking up the letter]
"To my dear beloved who doesn't know I love him, I send you this letter with all my heart!"—That's exactly how she talks! Excuse me, sealing wax. Wait! This is the stamp my lady seals her letters with—it has a picture of Lucrece on it. This letter is from Olivia. Who is this written to?

*"God knows I love someone.
But who?
I can't let my lips say his name;
No man must know."*



"No man must know." What comes after that? Look, the meter changes in her poem. "No man must know." What if this someone were you, Malvolio?

*"I may order the one I love.
But silence, like a knife, cuts open my heart
With strokes that draw no blood.
M.O.A.I. rules my life."*



"M.O.A.I. rules my life." Hmm, let me see, let me see, let me see. *"I may command the one I love."* Well, she commands me. I'm her servant. She's my boss. Why, anyone can see what this means. There's no ambiguity here. But the end—what do those letters mean? If only I could somehow relate them to me! Hmm. M.O.A.I.—"M"—Malvolio. "M"—that's the first letter in my name. "M." But then the next letter isn't the same. "A" should be next, but instead "O" comes next. And then "I" comes at the end. "M.O.A.I." This code's not as easy to crack as the other one. But if I shake it up a little it'll work, because every one of those letters is in my name. But wait, there's some prose after her poem.

"If this letter falls into your hands, think carefully about what it says. By my birth I rank above you, but don't be afraid of my greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. Your fate awaits you. Accept it in body and spirit. To get used to the life you'll most likely be leading soon, get rid of your low-class trappings. Show some eagerness for the new upscale lifestyle that's waiting for you. Argue with a relative like a nobleman, and be rude to servants. Talk about politics and affairs of state, and act free and independent. The woman who advises you to do this loves you. Remember the woman who complimented you on your yellow stockings, and said she always wanted to see you with crisscrossing laces going up your legs—remember her. Go ahead. A happy new life is there if you want it. If you don't want it, just keep acting like a lowly servant who's not brave enough to grab the happiness there before him. Goodbye. Signed, she who would be your servant, THE FORTUNATE UNHAPPY."

This is as clear as sunlight in an open field. I'll do it, I'll be vain and proud, I'll read up on politics, I'll get rid of my lower-class friends, and I'll be the perfect man for her. I know I'm not fooling myself, or letting myself get carried away by my imagination, because every clue points to the fact that Lady Olivia loves me. She did compliment me on my yellow stockings recently, and she said she liked how the crisscross laces looked on my legs. That's her way of saying she loves me. Oh, I thank my lucky stars, I'm so happy. For her I'll be strange and condescending, and I'll put on my yellow stockings and crisscross laces right away. Thank God and my horoscope! Here's a postscript!

"You must have figured out who I am. If you love me, let me know by smiling at me. You're so attractive when you smile. Please smile whenever you're near me, my dearest darling."

Dear God, thank you! I'll do everything she wants me to do.





TWELFTH NIGHT | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

You can respond to these in any way you choose:

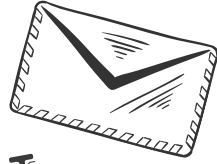
Write

ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

Draw

THINK ABOUT IT



... up to you!

SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

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There's a lot going on in this speech. Malvolio is just talking to himself, but in three different ways: reading the letter, figuring out what it means, and then deciding what to do. The first 4–5 lines contain all of them. How can you make the transitions between parts very clear? Now try it with the rest of the speech!

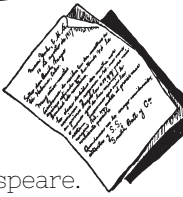
The poem in the letter is terrible. That's probably on purpose (it's Maria pretending to be Olivia, after all, not Shakespeare writing an actual love poem). But still, it's not super-convincing. Maybe you could help out... What would your version of that poem be?

*Some are born great
Some achieve greatness
And some have greatness thrust upon 'em*



This is one of the most famous lines in all of Shakespeare. People often quote it without knowing it's from the prank letter to Malvolio, or that it's from Twelfth Night, or even from Shakespeare!

Why do you think it's become so famous? Does it deserve to be famous? Can you think of a person who fits each description? Are there any other ways to become great?



So, we've presented Malvolio's speech on its own, but Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian are all hiding in the bushes, watching Malvolio and providing a running commentary to themselves—and the audience! Part of what makes this scene funny is the fact that Malvolio thinks he's alone, when in fact he's being observed.

Now that you know what else is going on, how would you want to stage this scene? Remember the three basic types of stages? Pick one, and think about how the scene would work.

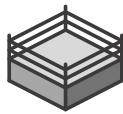
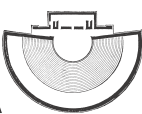
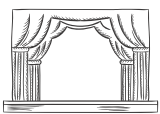
Where is Malvolio when he finds the letter? Where does he move as he reads and thinks? Where are Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian hiding, and what are they hiding behind? Do they move? Stay still?

Or come up with a few options! Or one option for each type of stage! Or twenty options! Whatever!

Proscenium

Thrust

In the round



Audience on 1 side.

Audience on 3 sides.

Audience on all sides.

Or go wild: Where would you stage this play **outside**? Where would you put the audience? How would you stage it? The possibilities are endless!

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Malvolio does everything he says. He struts around in front of Olivia, flirting with her while wearing yellow stockings and cross-garters (LAME!). The plotters—Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian—have a laugh. The prank worked!

But then things get a little bit dark. Olivia thinks that Malvolio is actually insane, but the others won't let it drop. They keep pranking Malvolio even after he loses his job and finds himself in a difficult situation. By the end of the play, it's not even funny anymore. Only Maria realizes that they have gone too far and stops.

How do you know when something isn't funny anymore? How do you know when to stop? What's the line between a funny prank and something that's potentially hurtful?

And: How does that information about the rest of the play change your understanding of this scene?