

Twelfth Night abbreviated

Act 1, Scene 1

Infatuation

Situation: Shakespeare quickly sets the play's central theme: Orsino, the duke of Illyria, has fallen head-over-heels for the beautiful Lady Olivia. But to Orsino's dismay, Olivia has declared that she will shun the company of men for seven years. Orsino, a young man in love, offers us the classic line as the play begins: "If music be the food of love, play on."

Orsino to himself

My desires have ever since pursued me
When Olivia mine eyes first did see.
O, if music be the food of love, play
On; give it to me in excess and I'll
Sicken my appetite and so die. May
That sweet strain that came over my ear while
I dreamed on remain. No, let it stop. It
Not so sweet as it was before. Spirit
Of love, though quick and fresh it art, with a
Condition as great as the sea, doth not
Enter here, though valid, rather doth weigh
On the pursuer, weakening me. Ought
Love not take me to sweet beds of flowers?
Love thoughts lie rich when covered with bowers.

Valentine, a servant to Orsino, enters.

ORSINO: How now, what news from her?

VALENTINE: So please my lord, her handmaid do return this answer: She shall not behold her face at ample view, but like a cloistress she will veiled walk to season a brother's dead love.

ORSINO: O, that she hath a heart to pay this debt of love but to a brother.