ACT 1

SCENE 1: ORSINO’S PALACE.

[Enter a Musician, playing music.]*

ORSINO

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken and so die.**

[He hears something in the music that moves him.]
That strain again, it had a dying fall.
O, it came o’er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odor.

[The music no longer pleases him.]

Enough, no more,
’Tis not so sweet now as it was before.

[The Musician exits. At the same time, VALENTINE enters, closing an umbrella as he enters.]

ORSINO [urgently]
How now? What news from her?

VALENTINE
So please my lord, I might not be admitted,
But from her handmaid do return this answer:
Till seven years pass, she will veilèd walk
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine—all this to season
* The Musician might play, for example, a sad melody on a guitar. If no musician is available, appropriate recorded music can be played, such as “Lachrimae Pavan,” a lute song by the English Renaissance composer John Dowland.

**surfeiting** [pronounced *SUR-fit-ing*]: causing someone to want no more of something as a result of having had too much of it (a *surfeit* is an excessive amount of something)

**If music feeds feelings of love, says Orsino, then give me too much, so that I will get sick of it and feel no more hunger for love (specifically, feelings of love for Olivia, who has not returned Orsino’s love).**

**strain**: here refers to a specific bit of the music’s melody
**it had a dying fall**: the melody lowered in a sad-sounding way
**o’er** [pronounced *ore*]: over

**Stealing and giving odor**: A breeze blowing over the violets would take their scent and then spread it around, thus “stealing and giving” the flowers’ perfume.

**How now?**: an expression that can have various meanings, such as: What’s going on? What’s the situation?

**might not be admitted**: was not allowed to enter

**handmaid**: a female servant

**veilèd** [pronounced as two syllables: *veil-ed*]: with her head and face covered by a veil. Because Olivia is in mourning for her dead brother, she wears a mourning veil, usually made of black lace or some other thin fabric.

**chamber**: room

**brine**: salt water
A brother’s dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting in her sad remembrance.*

**ORSINO [his disappointment turning to enthusiasm]**
O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love when her sweet mind and heart
Are all supplied and filled with one self king!**

[Exit ORSINO, followed by VALENTINE.]

[FESTE enters as observer and commentator, apart from
the action, directly addressing the audience.]

**FESTE**
So, Lady Olivia has sworn to keep her face veiled and
mourn her brother for seven years—which you might
think would discourage Orsino. But no—our romantic
Duke thinks that if Olivia feels such love for a brother,
then someday she will feel even more for Orsino as
her husband.

Now we leave Orsino’s palace. Not far away, on the
coast of this land, are two survivors of the shipwreck,
Viola and the ship’s Captain.

[Exit.]
* Valentine reports that Olivia will walk daily around her room and cry salty tears that hurt her eyes in order to preserve her love for her dead brother and keep alive her memories of him.

** Orsino imagines that Olivia’s love for her brother will be replaced by her even greater love for himself. When saying “one self king,” the actor playing Orsino might pat himself on the chest.
SCENE 2. THE SEA-COAST.

[Enter VIOLA, shivering, and the CAPTAIN.]

VIOLA
What country, friend, is this?

CAPTAIN
This is Illyria, lady.

VIOLA
And what should I do in Illyria?
My brother, he is in Elysium.
Perchance he is not drowned. What think you, sailor?

CAPTAIN
True, madam, for after our ship did split,
When you and those poor number saved with you
Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother
Bind himself to a strong mast upon the sea,
Where I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
So long as I could see.

VIOLA
O my poor brother!
Mine own escape doth give me yet some hope.
[She looks around at the unfamiliar landscape.]
Knowst* thou this country?

CAPTAIN
Ay, madam, well, for I was bred and born
Not three hours’ travel from this very place.

VIOLA
Who governs here?
Elysium: Viola uses a poetical term from mythology to refer to heaven. (In mythology, Elysium is the blessed realm of the dead.)

perchance: perhaps

driving: driven by wind and waves
mast: on a ship, a pole for holding sails and ropes

* Shakespeare’s language uses some old forms of verbs that go with “thee” and “thou” (which are old forms of “you”). Your ear will recognize our modern-day verbs in these old forms, including knowst (know), canst (can), wast (was), hadst (had), dost (do), didst (did), and seest (see).

Ay [pronounced eye]: yes
CAPTAIN
A noble duke, Orsino.

VIOLA
Orsino—I have heard my father name him.
He was a bachelor then.

CAPTAIN
And so is now. For but a month ago
He did seek the love of fair Olivia.

VIOLA
What’s she?

CAPTAIN
A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count
That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her
In the protection of his son, her brother,
Who shortly also died, for whose dear love,
They say, she hath abjured the company
And sight of men.

VIOLA
O that I served that lady!

CAPTAIN
That were hard to do,
Because she will see no one, not even the Duke.

VIOLA
There is a fair behavior in thee, Captain.
I prithee,
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For some disguise. I’ll serve this duke.
Thou shalt present me as a page boy to him, for I can sing
And speak to him in many sorts of music
That will allow me very worth his service.
**fair**: attractive; lovely

**maid**: maiden; unmarried young woman

**count**: a high-ranking nobleman

**some twelvemonth since**: about twelve months ago

**abjured**: rejected

**served**: were employed as an attendant to

**fair**: honest and upright

**prithee**: a form of “pray thee,” meaning “ask you, beg you”

**page boy**: a young male assistant who runs errands, takes messages, and helps out in other ways