

SHAKESPEARE'S TWELFTH NIGHT

Malvolio

The steward—or head servant—in the household of Lady Olivia. Malvolio is pompous and self-righteous, and disapproves of drinking and singing. His priggishness and haughty attitude earn him the enmity of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria, who play a cruel trick on him, making him believe that Olivia is in love with him, that his affection for her is mutual. The letter that he picks up in this scene is part of this trick.

What employment have we here?

[Picks up a letter]

By my life, this is my lady's hand these be her
very C's, her U's and her T's and thus makes she her
great P's. It is, in contempt of question, her hand.

[Reads] '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?

[Reads] 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?

[Reads] 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.