

SHAKESPEARE'S TWELFTH NIGHT

Maria

Olivia's clever, daring young waiting-gentlewoman. Maria is remarkably similar to her antagonist, Malvolio, who harbours aspirations of rising in the world through marriage. But Maria succeeds where Malvolio fails—perhaps because she is a woman, but, more likely, because she is more in tune than Malvolio with the anarchic, topsyturvy spirit that animates the play. She is lively, likeable and relentlessly energetic.

MARIA

If you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourself into stitches, follow me. Yond gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian, that means to be saved by believing rightly, can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness. He's in yellow stockings.

SIR TOBY BELCH

And cross-gartered?

MARIA

Most villanously; like a pedant that keeps a school i' the church. I have dogged him, like his murderer. He does obey every point of the letter that I dropped to betray him: he does smile his face into more lines than is in the new map with the augmentation of the Indies: you have not seen such a thing as 'tis. I can hardly forbear hurling things at him. I know my lady will strike him: if she do, he'll smile and take't for a great favour.