

Grace Drury

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Shakespeare

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Malvolio's Justice

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a witty tale full of romance, deception, and comedy. Olivia, the main character, is attached to the hip of her steward, Malvolio. Malvolio, known for his strict authority, is an enemy to many of the characters living in Olivia's household. They'd prefer to have their messy amusement without Malvolio scolding them. Four of the characters decide to get their revenge on him and play a nasty trick on him, ultimately resulting in his bad ending. They wrote him a fake love letter from Olivia that makes him "prove his love to her" by doing silly and inappropriate things. They also put him in a dark dungeon to convince him that he is mad. Malvolio did not deserve the bad treatment he received from Feste, Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew. He is loyal, mature, and Feste, Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew are not people with bad reputations. He is extremely loyal to Olivia and always has her back.

Malvolio always defends Olivia and her honor. In the beginning of the play, specifically scene 5 in act 1, Feste the Fool tells Olivia that her deceased brother is in hell and not heaven. Olivia lets Malvolio respond for her and he says, "Yes, and shall do till the pangs of death shake him. Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better Fool." Malvolio stands up for Olivia and her deceased brother. He makes fun of the fool and states his disdain for him. He protects Olivia from the fool and his insensitive comment. He also displays his loyalty in other ways.

Malvolio is so loyal to Olivia because he also knows her very well. In Act 2, Scene 5, the four characters that dislike Malvolio set the fake letter from Olivia down on the ground where he will come across it. Once he notices the letter, he immediately notices it is “Olivia’s” handwriting. He states, “By my life, this is my lady’s hand! These be her very c’s, her u’s, and her t’s, and thus she makes her great P’s. It is in contempt of question her hand.” Malvolio knows Olivia so well that he immediately recognizes her handwriting. There is no doubt that he is extremely loyal to Olivia and pays attention to her. He also defends her when she is not around.

Malvolio knows Olivia very well. He knows her handwriting, but he also knows who she does and doesn’t like. For example, one late night in Olivia’s household in act 2, scene 3, Feste, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew are being drunk and loud and are scolded by Malvolio. Sir Toby tries to be rude and shoo him away, but Malvolio hits him with some brutal honesty. “Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbors you as her kinsman, she’s nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house; if not, an it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell.” He explains to Sir Toby that if he wasn’t related to Olivia, she would not tolerate his bad behavior. Malvolio clearly knows who Olivia tolerates and doesn’t tolerate and how she truly feels about the members in her house. He is loyal to her, defends her, and pays attention to her thoughts and feelings.

Malvolio has to deal with a lot of foolish people throughout the play, but he always remains mature. In Act 1, Scene 5, when Feste the Fool is making bad comments about Olivia’s brother and Malvolio, he asks Olivia why she keeps him around. “I marvel your Ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal. I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he’s out of his guard already. Unless you laugh and

minister occasion to him, he is gagged. I protest I take these wise men that crow so at these set kind of Fools no better than the Fools' zanies." Although Feste is around to make people laugh, Malvolio sees through him and believes that he is not even worth keeping around. Other people may be able to tolerate his buffoon-like behavior, but Malvolio does not. He also keeps the other foolish characters in check.

Malvolio respects Olivia and her wishes. In Act 2, Scene 3, he scolds Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, and Feste for being drunk and loud at late hours of the night. "My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do you make an ale-house of my lady's house, that you squeak out your coziars' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?" Malvolio tries to be mature and asks them to be respectful of the people trying to sleep in the house. It is also not their house, so they are being even more disrespectful by openly being loud and rambunctious. Even when the four characters try to make an open fool out of Malvolio, he remains mature.

In Act 4, Scene 2, Feste the Fool pretends to be a priest for Malvolio. Malvolio is locked in a dungeon by the four characters and they try to make him think he is mad. He says, "Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here in hideous darkness." Even at the climax of the prank they execute on Malvolio, he recognizes he has been done wrong and that he is not mad. He tries to explain to the priest his innocence and that he is truly not crazy, without using any harsh words or mean insults. He is always mature even when the other characters are acting very immature.

The people playing the trick on Malvolio are not good people and do not have good reputations. Feste the Fool insults Malvolio consistently, even when he is not around. In Act 2,

Scene 3, he says, "I did impetuous thy gratillity, for Malvolio's nose is no whipstock" He tells Sir Andrew and Sir Toby that Malvolio's nose is long. This comment is unnecessary and rude, even when Malvolio has done nothing to him. Malvolio has only defended Olivia and scolded Feste for his inappropriate behavior. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew have the worst reputation of all four of the characters.

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are only liked by Feste and Maria. Olivia, Sir Toby's niece, has a great disdain for him. She states, "He speaks nothing but madman" in Act 1, Scene 5. She is not a fan of him or his behavior. Sir Andrew is also very unliked. His own co-conspirator, Maria says, "Ay, but he'll have but a year in all these ducats. He's a very fool and a prodigal." She thinks he is a fool. Not only are they drunk messes, but they are also fools and everyone knows it. Although Malvolio has a lot of important and positive moments and commentary, he has a few flaws as well.

Some may argue that Malvolio did deserve the trick played on him. He has a lot of positive traits, but he is somewhat of a cocky man. In Act 2, Scene 5, he states, "Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she uses me with a more exalted respect than anyone else that follows her. What should I think on 't?" He believes that Maria is in love with him because of his obvious good looks. Although he is cocky, it still does not mean the treatment he received was just. His cockiness never hurt or negatively impacted anyone. It does not justify what the four characters did to him. He is only guilty of self-love.

Malvolio did not commit any crimes or misdemeanors. His most loyal patron, Olivia, is ultimately the one who releases him because she knows he is not mad. In response to the unjust treatment he received, he vows revenge on those who played the trick on him. He storms off at

the very end of the play, while everyone else gets to celebrate. He is the only character to not receive a happy ending. Malvolio did not deserve the punishment inflicted on him. He is faithful to Olivia, always mature, and has a better reputation than those who executed the trick on him. Malvolio is a great, dynamic character that deserved his revenge and justice.