

LOVE'S LABOURS

By Jacquie Penrose

CHARACTERS:

Vincenzio
Isabella
Hero
Clovis
Orsino
Viola

SETTING:

The terrace of a rural boutique hotel, created from a venerable farmhouse, somewhere that could be Tuscany, at a time that could be now.

Scene One

Clovis and Hero are relaxing in the quiet time before the new guests arrive, sharing headphones. Audience hear 'Let's Face the Music and Dance'. Last few bars, sound changes to spill from the headphones. Song ends

Clovis: What an old-fashioned thing you are.

Hero: Oh but it's lovely. So – melancholy. Singing away the troubles ahead.

Clovis: Old-fashioned and melancholy.

Hero: Not really. There's still moonlight and music.

Clovis: And work to do.

Hero: Ah yes.

Pause

Clovis: Honeymooners, aren't they? The new guests?

Hero: First anniversary. Both of them. Same day. Amazing coincidence.

Clovis: Amazing.

Hero: It's mine too.

Clovis: Even more amazing.

Comfortable pause

Got anything planned for them?

Hero: Oh I don't know. Maybe a bit of special dinner. Candlelight, champagne. That sort of thing.

Clovis: Well you're in charge.

Hero: No you are.

Clovis: You are. Beatrice said.

Hero: Well yes she *said*, I know she said, but it's you really. You run the place.

Clovis: You get the glory, I get the work.

Hero: It's a family thing.

Clovis: I'm family. Just about.

Hero: Anyway you're so good at it. You should get your own place. I don't know why you put up with us.

Clovis: Trying to get rid of me? You'd never cope.

Hero: You'd never leave.

Clovis: That's true enough.

Pause

Hero: We could get them to dress up.

Clovis: Who?

Hero: The honeymooners. Fancy dress party. To go with the music and moonlight

Clovis: You used to love doing that.

Hero: Well maybe we'd better meet them first. They may not be the playful type. And speaking of guests, as you say, work to do. Being in charge and all. No, don't trouble yourself, you just relax. I'll struggle on.

Exit Hero.

Clovis: *(To audience)* In fact we have met them before. Probably. The young woman who has just left is Hero – you may recognise the name. The guests who will shortly be arriving – you may have met them too, if you are a follower of Shakespeare, met them played by other actors, in different costumes, in different settings. For four hundred years, time and again their stories have wound to their conclusions, to their happy endings, to sudden weddings, feasts and dancing. Hero and Claudio are united – after near tragedy; all confusion resolved, Viola gets her Orsino, and, back in his rightful place of power, Duke Vincenzo claims Isabella for his bride. And now, we are supposing, they are all here, beyond the happy endings. By an amazing coincidence.

And me? No one. Or, while we are supposing, a distant cousin, only too happy to be part of the story, to be the one who sets the scene. Picture it if you will. Behind me is a lovely rustic building of mellow, ancient stone. It's been many things over the centuries but now, I imagine, it is a delightful boutique hotel set amid luscious rolling country. Down there to my right, a curving avenue of cypresses, lining the drive that leads to the house. Beyond, the pale green gold of ripening wheat. To the left, the darker green of a tree-lined gully, where a stream runs in spring.

Hero is busy making sure the rooms are ready for our guests, keeping an eye on the staff. This is a very select hotel, now called, why not, the B and B. That's for Beatrice and Benedick, who own it, and, by another astonishing coincidence, are celebrating an anniversary of their own with a romantic trip away for two, leaving Beatrice's cousin Hero in charge of the guests.

But the story is already moving on. The guests have duly arrived, they have settled in, rejoicing or finding fault with their surroundings, according to character, and it is now morning. A fine, peaceful morning – there are bees in the lavender and a lark over the fields.

Laughter from the house

No doubt our guests are as happy as the lark. Breakfast is under way, and Orsino has ordered coffee on the terrace.

Enter Orsino and Viola, still laughing

Viola: Oh this is wonderful! Just look. It's perfect.

Clovis: Your coffee will be here in a jiffy, sir.

Orsino: Thank you, Clovis. It is Clovis, isn't it?

Clovis: Yes sir.

Exit Clovis, returns shortly with coffee

Orsino: So, my darling, are we going to sit here all day in the sunshine admiring this spectacular view, or go out and explore? There are horses available apparently.

Viola: As long as whatever it is is with you I'm happy.

Orsino: That's very sweet.

Enter Vincenzo and Isabella.

Vincenzo: *(To Isabella)*. I have a few calls to make, I have no intention of letting things slide in my absence, and then we will go on that excursion. Does that suit you?
(To Orsino and Viola) Good morning.

Orsino: Good morning.

Viola: Lovely day, isn't it?

Enter Hero

Hero: Good morning, good morning, forgive the intrusion, just wanted to make sure you are all acquainted. Isabella and Vincenzo – forgive me – a bit of a house rule of Beatrice's, first names only, no titles –

Orsino: I rarely use it.

Hero: - relaxed luxury she likes to call it –

Vincenzio: I prefer Don Vincenzo. If you don't mind.

Hero: Of course. An exception to every rule. So – *Don* Vincenzo and Isabella? This is Orsino and Viola, who arrived quite late last night. And amazing coincidence, it's their wedding anniversary too. Isn't that amazing? And even more amazing, it's ours too, our first, well my husband's off with his regiment at the moment but I'm sure we'll celebrate later. So I'm sort of in charge, although really it's Clovis that runs the place. But Beatrice asked me, while Claudio's away. That's my husband, Claudio. /So do ask us if you need anything.

/Isabella: I had a brother called Claudio. //Have.

/Hero: That's amazing, isn't that amazing?

/Viola: You lost a brother?

Hero: Well listen to me running on. I must leave you to enjoy the morning. There are maps and guides on the hall table, just help yourself. Anything we can help you with, just ask. We can make you a picnic lunch if you that's what you'd like. Well – enjoy your day.

Exit Hero

Vincenzio: Charming.

Orsino: Pleased to meet you both.

Viola: Have you been here long?

Vincenzio: Arrived yesterday evening, in time for a passably good dinner. Wine list rather disappointing though I thought.

Orsino: Breakfast was very good. First rate bacon. Local stock apparently.

Vincenzio: Well if you will excuse me, I have some important business to attend to. Isabella, my love, wait for me here would you? Then we will be off. Good morning to you.

He goes. Pause

Viola: Is that to somewhere nice, your excursion?

Isabella: There's a church nearby, apparently. Architecturally worth a visit. Apparently.

Viola: That'll be nice. So it's your anniversary too. Congratulations.

Isabella: Thank you. And likewise for you.

Orsino: Thank you. *(Pause)* Well, darling, have you decided what you would like to do with the day?

Viola: How about we go riding? Explore while it's still cool. It must be beautiful round here.

Orsino: That sounds good. And I'm told there's a concert in the village later.

Viola: Then put our feet up until dinner. Could be the perfect day.

Orsino: I'll go talk to Clovis about the horses. Leave you two to get acquainted. Good to meet you, Isabella.

Isabella: And you.

Exit Orsino. Awkward pause

Viola: So it's been a year for you too?

Isabella: Yes. Seems like forever.

Viola: Hard to imagine anything different now.

Isabella: I'm not sure...

Viola: Forgive my curiosity – I couldn't help noticing – you mentioned a brother -

Isabella: Yes I have a brother.

Viola: But the way you said – as if – you'd lost him somehow. I'm only saying because you see I thought I'd lost a brother, only I hadn't, he was alive after all but I still remember the grief of losing him and I wondered.... I'm sorry, I'm intruding.

Isabella: Not at all. It's fine. I'm glad it ended happily for you. And yes there was – but it's not something I want to talk about just yet.

Viola: I'm sorry.

Isabella: Don't be.

Enter Orsino

Orsino: Clovis is sorting out a couple of horses for us. Do you ride, Isabella?

Isabella: My husband does but I don't. I expect we'll be taking the car.

Viola: I'd better go and change then. I enjoyed our – talk, Isabella. I'm sorry if –

Isabella: No, please. Enjoy your ride. Maybe later?

Viola: I'd like that.

She goes as Clovis enters

Clovis: The horses are ready in the yard when you are sir. Would you like the groom to accompany you?

Orsino: No thank you, we'll take a map and explore. Unless of course you yourself were free to –

Clovis: I have work to do here sir, I'm afraid.

Orsino: Of course. Just as an expert in the area I thought... Well I'd best be off to change as well. Mustn't keep the little lady waiting.

Clovis: Enjoy the day, sir.

Orsino: Thank you, I will.

Exit Orsino

Clovis: Is there anything I can get you, madam, while you're waiting?

Isabella: No, I'm fine, thank you.

Clovis collects the coffee things.

Vincenzio: *(From indoors)* Isabella!

She waits a moment, eyes closed, one hand on the crucifix around her neck, before rising to leave.

Clovis: *(To audience)* Our couples are off to enjoy the pleasures of the countryside, each in their own fashion, no doubt relishing each other's company. The day will pass. It will soon be evening. They will enjoy an excellent dinner, made with only the finest local ingredients – and the wine list, by the way, is in fact first rate. Later they may want to enjoy the cool of the evening on the terrace.

Lights change - June twilight.

Scene Two

Music is playing softly from the house. Hero enters with a tray of candles or similar and distributes them round the terrace.

Hero: Fetch the rest of these, would you please?

He does so, returning with more and helping to distribute

Was it me or did you detect a bit of an atmosphere this evening?

- Clovis:** I mind my own business, me.
- Hero:** No you don't. You've a nose a yard long.
- Clovis:** Well since you mention it I did detect a certain chill. The frosty don was especially frosty.
- Hero:** Insisting on his title like that.
- Clovis:** Why do you suppose he does that?
- Hero:** And his poor wife. Do you want my theory? The title thing? It's a clan. The family capo. All the serious 'business'. And look where he comes from.
- Clovis:** You have an over-active imagination.
- Hero:** Doesn't make me wrong though. *(She contemplates the lights and the view)* It's very beautiful, isn't it?
- Clovis:** Very.
- Hero:** Romantic enough for an anniversary celebration.
- Pause*
- Clovis:** Have you heard from him?
- Hero:** Not for a day or two. The regiment keeps him very busy. And these are difficult times. He'll ring soon, you'll see.
- Pause*
- Clovis:** He's a fool, your Claudio.
- Hero:** Don't, Clovis. No sympathy, please.
- Clovis:** Well you know you can –
- Hero:** Let's leave it, please. We have guests to attend to.
- Orsino enters*
- Orsino:** Wonderful dinner, Hero.
- Hero:** Thank you. I'll tell the chef.
- Hero exits*
- Orsino:** Ah Clovis. I was hoping I might run into you. I wanted to thank you for providing such a splendid ride this morning. You keep fine horses.
- Clovis:** Well not me, sir.

Orsino: Nevertheless, you've been most helpful. I must say this really is a lovely spot. And in this light especially.

Clovis: Yes it is lovely.

Orsino: You're very lucky to be.... Have you been here long?

Clovis: All my life. I was born here.

Orsino: Really? That's very interesting.

Clovis: Well not here in this house. In the village.

Orsino: And are you - part of the family?

Clovis: Distantly.

Orsino: You've never wanted to move away?

Clovis: No, why would I? I like it here.

Enter Viola, who stands watching them

Orsino: It's just – you could go places, a good looking young man like you, there'd be no shortage –

Clovis: As I said, I like it here.

Orsino: And why wouldn't you. It's idyllic. I didn't mean to imply.... I'm sorry, am I keeping you?

Clovis: Of course not. Can I get you anything? A brandy perhaps?

Orsino: No thank you, I'm fine.

Clovis goes

Clovis? On second thoughts, a brandy would be most welcome. Oh there you are darling. One for you?

Viola: No thanks.

Exit Clovis

Chatting up the servants? You're good at that.

Orsino: Hardly a servant. He's one of the family.

Viola: Well that's alright then.

Pause while Clovis returns with the brandy and leaves

Orsino: Is something the matter?

Viola: No, nothing. Should there be?

Orsino: You seem – annoyed.

Viola: No, not really. *(Pause)* Of course not, not tonight. It's our anniversary tomorrow.

Orsino: And I can't tell you how happy that makes me, darling.

Viola: Really?

Orsino: Really.

He kisses her. Pause

Viola: What were you talking to Clovis about just now?

Orsino: Clovis? When?

Viola: Just now.

Orsino: Oh. Nothing.

Viola: You were very 'tête-à-tête' to be talking about nothing.

Orsino: I was just thanking him for arranging our ride this morning. He's been the perfect host. You seem to want to make something of it.

Viola: I don't. *(He kisses her again)* Of course not. I'm sorry.

Enter Don Vincnezio and Isabella

Vincenzio: For too fine a night to waste indoors. Our fellow celebrants. Mind if we join you?

Orsino: Of course not.

Vincenzio: That looks like a brandy you've got there. Good idea. I say! *(Snaps fingers)*. Another brandy here.

Clovis appears and acknowledges the order

Another for you? Make that two. *(He ignores the women.)* Not a bad dinner that, although the gnocchi were a trifle overcooked in my opinion. So, have you had a good day? I gather you took the horses out this morning. Good idea. Might have a crack at that myself one of these mornings. Good way to survey the scene, on horseback, though I doubt I'll persuade my wife to join me, she does as she pleases. Well we've had a splendid time. You really should take a look at that church we saw today, it really is a very fine example. Renaissance architecture at it's very best. Perfectly proportioned, harmonious in every detail – now that was a time when a sense of order, of propriety, really meant something. A valuable guiding principle.

Viola: Bit of a murderous lot, though weren't they? Duels and assassinations, child brides and so on?

Vincenzio: Do you know I sometimes feel I was born out of my time? I miss that sense of order. Of course where I have influence, and I think it's fair to say I do have influence, in my own sphere – (*Clovis arrives with the brandy*) – thank you my boy – I do run a tight ship. My people know their place. I insist on, and get, high standards. Obedience. And what about you, Orsino, what line are you in?

Orsino: I run a large estate. Fruit and vines mostly. And some agritourism. Own it, actually. Been in the family quite a while.

Viola: When he says running it, he means going out riding and hunting. I run the estate.

Orsino: Darling, how unfair. She's joking of course. And she adores the venison.. But it is true she is my right hand man. Woman.

Viola: And Isabella? Do you –

Vincenzio: She doesn't work. She is my wife.

Viola: Oh. Right.

Vincenzio: Well now, Isabella my love, it's time we were off. Leave these good people to themselves. So we will bid you both good night. Come along, darling.

Exit Don Vincenzio and Isabella

Orsino: Good night.

Viola: Why doesn't he just put a lead on her and be done with it?

Orsino: Odd couple. I think he married a nun by mistake.

Viola: Maybe it's a game. In fact, beneath that demure and sober exterior there's a scorching hot basque and suspenders –

Orsino: Stop, please.

Viola: Have you actually heard her say anything in his presence?

Orsino: Oh yes. Almost an entire sentence.

Viola: Hero reckons he's a mafia boss.

Orsino: You two girls been gossiping?

Viola: She seems keen to talk. Must be a bit lonely with her husband away so much. The regiment as rival perhaps.

Orsino: It happens. I like the mafia boss theory though.

Viola: I bet he has a stack of porn in his room.

Orsino: What makes you say that?

Viola: Keeps his women on a tight rein. Wants everything squeaky clean. No one's that squeaky clean unless they have something to hide.

Orsino: My girl is becoming a cynic.

Viola: Girls grow up.

Orsino: He could be a model citizen for all we know.

Viola: Of course he could.

The music has stopped

Time for bed, do you think? Shall we? I'm sure I could find a –

Orsino: It's early yet. You go on up if you're tired. I'll just sit for a bit and finish this, enjoy the stars.

Viola: I thought –

Orsino: Go on, darling, I'll be right there.

She hesitates, then kisses him and exits. He moves to a darker spot and admires the heavens. Clovis enters to collect glasses, extinguish candles etc. He doesn't notice Orsino at first, jumps when he does.

Clovis: I'm sorry, sir, I didn't see you there, in the dark.

Orsino: Please, less of the sir. Sorry I startled you.

Clovis: I'll just finish –

Orsino: It's a lovely night. Couldn't resist just sitting out a bit longer. Finishing this splendid brandy. You should take the weight off – give yourself a break.

Clovis: Well I need to –

Orsino: Go on, just for a minute. You must be tired.

Clovis sits reluctantly

That's better. *(He holds a light up as if to inspect him)* There you see, dark circles under the eyes.

Clovis: Well I –

Orsino: What do you do to relax? What do you do when you're not working?

Clovis: Look it's nice sitting here and chatting but there's still a bit to do backstage as it were so you really must excuse me. If your glass is empty –

Orsino: Of course. I wouldn't want to keep you from your work.

Clovis: Good night then, sir.

Orsino: Good night Clovis.

Exit Clovis, taking remaining lights with him. Orsino watches him go, then exits.

Scene Three

Lights change to morning. Enter Clovis to open sun umbrellas etc

Clovis: *(To audience)* Another glorious day. How fitting – a year ago today since our couples tied the knot. The men, however, are off riding together, leaving the women... The don's idea. However, there's no accounting for how people choose to celebrate their key moments. Each to their own. Hero and Viola have got their heads together over a cup of coffee, which I'm sure they will want to enjoy out here in the sunshine.

Enter Viola and Hero, with coffee. They shift chairs into shade.

Viola: Morning, Clovis. The men were out early this morning.

Clovis: Indeed. Took me quite by surprise.

Viola: I hope they didn't put you out too much.

Clovis: Not at all. We are at your service.

He exits

Hero: Did he at least remember your anniversary before taking off this morning?

Viola: *(Showing a fine bracelet)* Oh yes, he didn't forget.

Hero: Have you got any plans for the day?

Viola: I'll have to wait till my lord and master returns from his ride.

Hero: It was the don's idea. I have the feeling that what the don wants the don gets.

Viola: Yes. *(Pause)* I didn't sleep that well last night.

Hero: Oh? I'm sorry to hear that.

Viola: Something woke me. I'm not sure, I thought I heard a cry but it could have been a dream. Or an animal. Either way it was a bit disturbing. Couldn't get back to sleep. Silly really. *(Pause)* Have you seen Isabella this morning?

Hero: She didn't come down to breakfast. I'm sorry you had a disturbed night.

Viola: It's fine. Nothing, really.

Pause

Hero: Claudio, that's my husband, he rang first thing this morning.

Viola: Oh that's good news, you must be pleased.

Hero: Oh yes. I knew he wouldn't forget, whatever Clovis...

Viola: Is he coming home soon?

Hero: I hope so. It's just that, the situation is becoming quite tricky, apparently, so it's difficult to say. And of course soldiers can't talk about things, can they.

Viola: No of course. Must be very difficult.

Hero: And he's not worried about me being here on my own, well I'm not on my own, am I, there's Clovis, and Beatrice and Benedick are here normally, it's a shame you won't meet them, you'd love them, they're such fun and they get on so well together, they're like a couple of kids. It's heart-warming to watch them together and of course Claudio trusts me completely. Now.

Viola: Now?

Hero: There was a time... some people said some bad things about me – they weren't true of course but...

Viola: But he believed them.

Hero: Well at first he did but then he realised he'd made a terrible mistake, it was awful, how could people be so deceitful? But it's all over now, and he trusts me completely.

Viola: And he believed these people, just like that?

Hero: Well he had no reason not to.

Viola: Apart from faith in you.

Hero: As I said, he soon realised his mistake.

Viola: Well that's something I suppose.

Hero: He was tricked. *(Pause)* Listen to me going on. I am sorry.

Viola: No, don't be. I like talking. *(Pause)* Have you known Clovis long?

Hero: All my life. We used to play together as kids.

- Viola:** He seems very – nice.
- Hero:** Oh he is. He's the best. Straight as a die. The B and B wouldn't be what it is without him.
- Viola:** You must be glad to have him around.
- Hero:** Oh yes, very.
- Viola:** And you and he...
- Hero:** Me and him what?
- Viola:** There's nothing, you know –
- Hero:** I don't know what you – oh I see. Oh good heavens no, no way.
- Viola:** I'm sorry, I'm out of order. It's just that I couldn't help wondering –
- Hero:** No, I couldn't, I could never – it'd be like – Claudio's the only one for me.
- Viola:** Well good for you.
- Hero:** He knows that now. We're very happy. And you two seem very happy too.
- Viola:** Oh we are, we are. Not a cloud on the horizon.
- Hero:** That's lovely, I'm so pleased for you.

Enter Orsino and Don Vincenzio

- Orsino:** Ah there they are.
- Vincenzio:** I told you we'd find the girls out here. But where's my wife?
- Hero:** I don't think she's been down this morning.

Exit Don Vincenzo

- Viola:** Oops. Good ride, darling?
- Orsino:** Excellent. Although our don likes to set a cracking pace. Not sure I approve – no need to thrash an animal like that.
- Hero:** Well I'd better go and see what's happening in the kitchen. We're planning something a bit special for you all tonight.
- Orsino:** How kind. I'll look forward to it.

Exit Hero

Well I could do with a bath. Come up and scrub my back?

- Viola:** Let's just sit here for a bit.
- Orsino:** Well if you can put up with the smell of horse. *(Pause)* So how have you been amusing yourself? Getting friendly with our charming hostess?
- Pause*
- Viola:** I saw you.
- Orsino:** What's that supposed to mean, you saw me?
- Viola:** Last night. On the terrace.
- Orsino:** I don't follow. I was on the terrace. So?
- Viola:** With Clovis.
- Orsino:** Oh well. With Clovis.
- Viola:** You refused to come up with me, wanting to commune with the stars or something, next thing I know you are whispering with Clovis by candlelight.
- Orsino:** So you were spying on me.
- Viola:** Our room overlooks this terrace, or had you forgotten.
- Orsino:** So you *were* spying on me.
- Viola:** I went to close the shutters and there you were. Quite cosy.
- Orsino:** I will not be checked up on.
- Viola:** Don't make this out to be about me.
- Orsino:** Well it certainly is nothing to do with me.
- Viola:** How do you make that out?
- Orsino:** It's you that's got some wrinkle in your head. Making something out of nothing.
- Viola:** A wrinkle? Is that what you call it?
- Orsino:** For heaven's sake – I'm sitting here, enjoying the evening air –
- Viola:** Instead of being in bed with me –
- Orsino:** - enjoying the evening air, Clovis comes out to do some tidying up, I can hardly ignore him, can I, wouldn't be polite. So we get chatting.
- Viola:** And that's it?
- Orsino:** That's it.

- Viola:** Are you sure? The body language –
- Orsino:** Oh spare me the psycho-babble, please. (*Pause*) I think I've had enough of this conversation. Are we done?
- Viola:** The thing is, you see –
- Orsino:** Obviously not.
- Viola:** I just can't help wondering. I thought I wouldn't mind, I was just so happy at the time –
- Orsino:** And you're not now?
- Viola:** It was all so sudden, but thinking about it afterwards –
- Orsino:** So maybe you should stop thinking about it.
- Viola:** Have you?
- Pause*
- There. That same look in your eyes as when you found out what I really am.
- Orsino:** I love what you really are.
- Pause*
- Viola:** I was your servant once.
- Orsino:** Don't be ridiculous. You were never that.
- Viola:** Call it secretary or clerk or whatever you like, still essentially a servant. And things may have changed a bit, but back then you ran your household like a medieval fiefdom.
- Orsino:** That's hardly fair.
- Viola:** Oh come on. Would you have taken on a girl in that role?
- Orsino:** Well maybe not. The rest of the staff might have –
- Viola:** A boy, yes, however young, practically a child, but a girl – never. Of course it was wrong to try to fool you like that. But I was good at it, wasn't I? I did make a very good boy, didn't I?
- Orsino:** Very good. Very cute.
- Viola:** So you see, I can't help wondering, what if you'd known –
- Orsino:** Look it's too late for what ifs. We're here, we're happy, I adore you as you are. Alright, the disguise thing was crazy but it's done know. Forgotten.

Viola: I was desperate. I'd lost everything. As a girl I would have ended up in the kitchens. And I wanted to get close to you.

Orsino: For which I am eternally grateful.

Viola: Close to you, only to find you were head over heels in love with someone else.

Orsino: What are you trying to achieve?

Viola: I need to know.

Orsino: Know what? Why? And why now?

Viola: I don't know. Maybe – anniversaries. They're markers. Pointers.

Orsino: So what is it you need to know?

Viola: One minute you're in love with someone else, then when you realise you can't have her, you promptly agree to marry me.

Orsino: It wasn't that simple.

Viola: My point exactly. Not simple how?

Orsino: Maybe, at heart, I knew it was just a game. Playing at being in love. I knew she'd never have me. Just a game. I shouldn't have involved you. But you see I knew, really, I knew that it was you. It was you all along.

Viola: A game? You did threaten to kill me. When you thought I'd betrayed you with her. Urt pride was it?

Orsino: No. Love. For you. Why are we talking about this now?

Viola: Maybe because we didn't talk about it then.

Orsino: We got on with our lives together. Sensibly.

Viola: So you say it was love.

Orsino: yes.

Viola: Not a game. Love. For me.

Orsino: Yes.

Viola: But which me? The boy me, or the girl me?

Orsino: Does it matter? You're the same person, aren't you? On the inside?

Viola: But on the outside? Was that the side you liked? *(Pause)* Which brings us back to Clovis.

Orsino: To Clovis? I don't see how.

Viola: You don't? He's cute too. *(Pause)* Tell me –

Orsino: No.

Viola: Please. Just tell me – what went through your mind, at the moment you discovered the truth about me?

Pause

Orsino: Counter-question. Are you sure that was the truth? Are you sure you wouldn't have been happier the way you were?

Viola: Well then we wouldn't be together, would we?*(Pause)* But you know what worries me? I'm not sure I know who you are.

Orsino: Me? Or you?

Pause

Viola: It's our anniversary and we are fighting. That's not right.

Orsino: No.

Viola: I shouldn't have brought it up.

Orsino: No.

Viola: Of course you can talk to Clovis or anyone you like.

Orsino: Thank you.

Viola: I'm sorry.

Orsino: I'm sorry too.

Viola: Kiss me?

He does. Enter Don Vincenzo

Vincenzio: Am I interrupting?

Viola: I'll just - go freshen up.

Exit

Vincenzio: The little lady seems a bit put out.

Orsino: No, not really. Emotional. You know.

Vincenzio: I do I do. Have you seen Isabella?

Orsino: Not recently, no.

Vincenzio: Probably gone for a walk. She's fond of that sort of thing. Women, eh? They never seem to know what they want, do they?

Orsino: Perhaps not.

Vincenzio: The thing is, Orsino, I may call you Orsino mayn't I?

Orsino: Please do.

Vincenzio: The thing is, I'm an old fashioned sort, and in my view the world's a safer place when there are rulers and ruled. You can't have two masters. And women should be ruled, it stands to reason. Luckily where I come from that is well understood. I make sure of it. Isabella understands how it works. But that said you are a very lucky man, if I may say so. Your wife is charming. Delightful.

Orsino: Yes she is. Thank you.

Vincenzio: Knows her own mind I expect.

Orsino: Yes. I hope she does.

Vincenzio: You want to watch that, if you want my advice. Be firm. Firm. It pays in the long run, believe me.

Orsino: I'll bear it in mind. Well if you'll excuse me, after our ride this morning I'm really not fit for company. I'll follow my wife's example and go freshen up. I expect we'll meet up later. I gather they're planning a bit of a bash for us later.

Vincenzio: So I gather. Looking forward to it immensely.

Orsino: Well until later then.

Vincenzio: And if you see Isabella –

Orsino: I'll tell her you're looking for her.

Exit Orsino. Vincenzo appears to be at a bit of a loose end. Enter Clovis.

Clovis: Can I get you anything, sir?

Vincenzio: No thank you, I'm fine. I'll just... I'm... off to...

He blusters off

Clovis: *(Singing to himself – first verse of 'When I was but a little tiny boy...')* But no rain today. A sky of perfect cerulean blue. A long, hot afternoon. Our guests are quiet, each amusing themselves in their own way, no doubt. That time of day when the heat hangs still, the birds fall silent, leaving the air to the cicadas. Work stops, and it is very peaceful. Isabella has indeed been for a walk.

She enters and finds herself a chair off centre

Viola too is a little restless – perhaps she finds it cooler out of doors.

Enter Viola with a book.

And she can't help being curious about Isabella.

Exit Clovis. Viola sits, opens book but is too conscious of Isabella on her own doing nothing. She goes to her

Viola: I'm sorry – can't seem to concentrate (*on the book*). Are you – do you mind some company?

Isabella: No, of course. That would be nice. At least – I'm sorry, I'm not quite well at the moment.

Viola: I'm sorry to hear that.

Isabella: It's nothing. It will pass. But maybe I'm not the best of company –

Viola: Oh if you'd prefer –

Isabella: No, stay, please.

Viola: Is there – anything I can get you?

Isabella: No really, thank you.

Tears well

Viola: Oh – what is it?

Isabella: I can't –

Viola: Tell me.

Isabella: I didn't... (*She collects herself*) There was a time when I was so certain – I knew what my life was to be, I was content, confident... How can things change so suddenly? I wanted to dedicate my life Do you believe in God?

Viola: Of course, yes, I suppose –

Isabella: Not suppose. I can't do suppose. I know, I *know* that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are the most important things in my life – that was the life I wanted. And then to have it snatched – it was like – I felt like - a puppet, strings grabbed by some - evil - puppet master. Invisible behind his black screen, but I didn't know, I couldn't see – pulling the strings. (*Pause*) You mentioned a brother.

Viola: Yes. Sebastian.

Isabella: And you thought you'd lost him?

Viola: An accident at sea. We lost everything, and I believed he had drowned. I was rescued but he couldn't be found. Orsino took me in, gave me a job, saved my life in more ways than one. But without Sebastian – then the relief when was found to be alive – you can't imagine. Caused a few – complications, mind you – we're twins, you see, and then.... But perhaps you can imagine. You also spoke of a brother.

Isabella: We were happy growing up. I loved him more than anything. But I knew, even as a little girl – the convent near our house was very beautiful, and it drew me. There was a quiet cloister full of flowers where the nuns would let me sit and read. Just the silence of thought and prayer, and a fountain playing, and the sounds of the city beyond shut out. Safe away from all that corruption and vice. And violence. That was to be my life.... Tell me something. What would you do to save a brother?

Viola: I'm not sure what you mean.

Isabella: If you thought he was going to die, if you thought that, what would you give?

Viola: Anything, of course.

Isabella: Is there nothing – would you even give yourself?

Viola: You mean my life for his? I'm not sure I would be that brave – when the ship capsized – I tried – yes, then, I would have –

Isabella: I don't mean your life. That goes without saying. I mean – yourself. Your body.

Viola: Oh I see. *(She finds this somewhat funny)* You mean, would I sleep with someone to save him? I can't imagine – on a sinking ship I don't think the opportunity –

Isabella: But would you? On principle?

Viola: On principle? Yes I would. Wouldn't you?

Isabella: No. *(Pause)* Vows to God are sacred. Unbreakable. Claudio should have understood that. *(She stops Viola from speaking)* No, let me. I need to get things clear in my head. Decide what to do. In our world Vincenzo's word is law, but he has been – indulgent. Then suddenly he wants a crack-down, clean out the sewers. I had already begun my novitiate then. Only he left it to his deputy to do the dirty work, Vincenzo must be above the pollution, the clean-handed puppet master. Claudio – transgressed. They wanted him killed, an example. Oh yes, they can do that. Can, and do. Poor lamb was terrified, he begged me to intervene, plead for him. I couldn't refuse him. Such a little sin, in comparison. And do you know what they did, these men of honour, of unbreakable laws? They struck a deal with me. His life for my – body.

Viola: Vincenzo?

Isabella: No, but he knew, of course he know. He has spies everywhere.

Viola: And you refused.

Isabella: I refused. *(Pause)* My vow would not let me accept. *(Pause)* And yet. My conscience, still, now, troubles me. The strength of my vow, was it? Or cowardice? Or fear. You see, I refused, but I was willing to let another do what I would not. Am I no better than them? I followed them into trickery and deceit. And still they let me believe Claudio was dead. Vincenzo was so pleased with himself, his little game. He must have his moment of glory, the grand unveiling of his justice and mercy. And power. Behold – the veil snatched aside – he is not dead, I have saved him, and to all my erring people, I give their just deserts. And mine? My just deserts? I was to be his wife. I have been well – rewarded.

Viola: I see.

Isabella: I could not thank him. I have not thanked him. I will not thank him.

Viola: Is he so – untouchable?

Vincenzo has entered US

Isabella: You are fortunate, Viola. You live in the light. Ours is a world of darkness, a world within a world, and yes, there he is untouchable.

Vincenzio: Isabella. I find you gossiping.

Viola takes a hint and exits

No doubt discussing what to wear this evening. Well, I'll take your chatting as a positive sign. A sign that you are in agreement with me that our second year together will be unlike the first. That there will be an end to your silences and your refusals. And of course when you are a mother, the mother of my child.... *(Silence)* Still sulking. Well, no matter. I expect you will enjoy this evening. I have been making plans with our hosts, to mark the grand occasion. There will be wine, of course, and music. And perhaps, fancy dress – would you like that? Come on, you know how much you admire the art of disguise. No? Well, I give you notice, Isabella. You will enjoy this evening. As my wife.

He formally gestures for her to exit ahead of him.

Scene Four

Late afternoon. Enter Clovis

Clovis: Preparations, preparations. It'll soon be party time. Vincenzio has been giving us his orders. Big celebration he says. He wants fireworks, a band. It's a bit short notice, we tell him.

Enter Hero

Hero: Is it safe out here? The man's impossible.

Clovis: I think I've calmed him down. He'll have to make do with drinks and nibbles on the terrace before dinner.

Hero: Maybe back home he's got minions who can magic up a band and fireworks at a few hours notice but we haven't. Anyway, he hasn't calmed down. Now he's suggesting fancy dress.

Clovis: Be firm. Just tell him you can't have a fancy dress party with four people.

Hero: Oh I don't know. If you and I joined in. And all the staff. Could be fun. I could go as –

Clovis: No.

Hero: No?

Clovis: No. The man's a creep. Don't encourage him. And I have a feeling that our guests aren't really in the party mood.

Hero: You noticed that too. Me, I could do with cheering up.

Clovis: Something happened?

Hero: Claudio phoned.

Clovis: Oh. I'm sorry.

Hero: He says it could be weeks before he can get away. The situation is deteriorating, apparently.

Clovis: What situation? Should we be worried?

Hero: He can't say. Manoeuvres, he says, and that's it.

Clovis: Poor you. I am sorry.

She tries to laugh off tears

Hero: No, I'm fine, don't worry. I knew this. I married a soldier after all. My dashing handsome soldier-boy.

Clovis: Reality and expectations don't always match up, though, do they? Come here, my lovely.

She goes to him for an almost entirely brotherly hug

And you won't be lonely. You've got me –

Hero: Yes, I've got you.

Clovis: And Beatrice and Benedick will be back soon and that will cheer you up and then maybe we really will have a dressing up party, staff and all, band and fireworks, the lot. When the scary don has left and there are no guests. Would you like that?

Hero: Yes please.

Clovis: There. That's better. Don't you worry, Uncle Clovis is here to look after you.
(*Beat*) Now. Plan of campaign for this evening's merriment. Drinks and nibbles
–

Hero: Canapés.

Clovis: Beg pardon. Canapés. Then a late dinner.

Hero: The best champagne. Then by the time they've finished it will be dark and we can set out the lanterns. No fireworks but maybe we've got a few sparklers around somewhere?

Clovis: Probably. There'll be some left over from –

Hero: And maybe as a concession to his donship we could dig out those masks, remember, that we used to have? I'd hate to see him throw a tantrum. I think he's dangerous. We've still got them haven't we, the masks? Do you think they'd go for that?

Clovis: If he orders them to I'm sure they will.

Hero: So. That's it. Chef's got everything in hand.

Clovis: All sorted then. Well done.

Hero: I'll go and look for those sparklers.

Clovis: You do that. Feeling better?

Hero: Yes. Thank you.

Hero exits

Clovis: (*To audience*) We have moved on, and the day is declining into a pink and golden afternoon. Tomorrow, or the day after, there will be rain, perhaps. But not this evening. This evening will be perfect, and there will be merriment.

Enter Vincenzo, a drink – not his first – in hand. Orsino, Viola and Isabella follow without much enthusiasm. They have all made an effort to dress up for the occasion – Viola is fetchingly boyish, Isabella painfully girly. Hero enters and distributes drinks.

Vincenzio: No, I insist, I absolutely insist. Clovis, where's that box? This will be fun.

Clovis fetches the box of masks, then goes to fetch canapés and more drinks

Now you're not to look. Eyes shut. Just reach in and take one. No one to open their eyes until we're all ready. That way we'll be in disguise.

Viola: This is ridiculous. Of course we'll know who we are.

Vincenzio: Come now, girl, where's your sense of humour. You too, Hero, Clovis. Join us, have a drink with us. Now everybody. Close your eyes.

Exchanging glances they obey. They reach into the box, select a mask and put it on. They are a mixture of traditional Venetian and modern comic book characters.

Everybody ready? (*Muttered assent*). Open eyes. Oh my. Who are we all? I can't begin to guess.

He goes round the group, chinking glasses, jovially and deliberately mistaking each in turn

Now let me see, Clovis, is it? And this must be Hero. And you're Viola – I know it's you, no good pretending. And this, this, without a shadow of a doubt, is my lovely wife.

It is. She reaches up to take the mask off. He stops her by grabbing her wrist, quite hard.

Leave it on. We're having fun, aren't we? Yes, it's me. You couldn't have guessed that, could you?

Awkward pause

Well here we are then. Ah the music! We've forgotten the music.

He dashes off. Music starts, loud, brash. He re-enters, jigging, and has to shout over it.

That's better. Get us in the party mood.

He gobbles a couple of canapés.

My compliments to your chef, Hero. Hero? Ah there she is. Now what's this one I'm eating. No let me guess. Salmon and cream cheese, obviously, but what's that flavour I'm getting? Is it fennel?

Hero: Dill.

Vincenzio: Dill. Of course. Though you could pass on to your chef that the pastry base could be just a little crisper.

Hero: I'll do that.

Vincenzio: Try them, everyone. They're really very nice.

Pause. Clovis slips out to turn the music down. It remains muted in the background

So. What plans have you all got for the rest of the week?

Orsino: Haven't made any yet. We'll take it as it comes.

Vincenzio: You should get out there and explore. This area is rich in treasures. Of course I've done my research.

As he speaks, surreptitiously the masks come off one by one until his is the only one

There's an archaeological museum in town that we will definitely be visiting, won't we my love? I'm intrigued by local archaeology – the detritus of history preserved for our enlightenment. And there's a necropolis nearby, they're always fascinating. Perfectly preserved, apparently. Not very big, not grand enough to draw the grave-robbers, all the better for us. It was their way to have buried with them all their favourite things from life. Food, wine. Board games. Pets. Servants. No, I'm joking, about the servants - not here anyway. And apparently they marked the entrance to each tomb to show whether it's a man or a woman buried there. For a man – if you'll pardon me – it's private parts, if you follow. Male, naturally, and for a woman, it's a little house. Isn't that splendid? They knew how to live then. Sadly those days are gone. And, and – there's a chapel somewhere with a particularly fine fresco of the Last Judgement. Not a well known artist but a fine example. Always a splendid scene, that – the sinners and the saved. Demons and angels. Such drama.

So, plenty to see, you have to admit. Ah, now, here's an idea. We could all go together, make a day of it, tomorrow, why not? What do you say?

Viola: Well that's kind of you. Perhaps we can wait and see. See what the morning brings.

Orsino: Check on the weather.

Vincenzio: Of course, of course. We wouldn't want it to rain on our celebrations would we? You must forgive me if I'm a little – it's a special occasion, a very special occasion – and I don't mind sharing with you, we're practically friends now aren't we – that I am confident that very shortly we will be able to announce the imminent arrival of my son.

Viola: You have a son?

Vincenzio: No, I don't mean - not yet. I am speaking of the birth of our son. Imminently. Isn't that right Isabella. Isabella?

Isabella has taken advantage of his restricted vision and left. He takes his mark off and calls sharply

Isabella! (*No response*) No matter. Let her go. These are – emotional times for her, I'm sure you understand. Say what you will, women are the weaker sex.

Viola: I'm not sure she's very well at the moment.

Vincenzio: Perhaps she isn't.

Viola: Don't you think you should –

Vincenzio: What I think is that perhaps you should mind your own business, young lady.

Orsino: I'm sorry but I don't think –

Vincenzio: I'm perfectly capable of looking after my own wife. I will now go and find her. Bring her back to the party.

He exits

Hero: We'd best check on the dining room. Clovis?

Hero and Clovis exit. Pause

Orsino: Some party. Happy anniversary all round.

Viola: Except that it isn't, is it?

Orsino: They're not having much fun, obviously.

Viola: I meant us.

Orsino: What do you mean, us. We're fine.

Viola: No, we're not. And I don't think I can go on pretending any longer. And neither should you.

Orsino: I really don't know what you mean.

Viola: Oh yes you do. Of course you do.

Orsino: Only I don't. Really.

Viola: Then I'll spell it out, shall I?

Orsino: Well yes, you'd better.

Viola: You've been making eyes at that boy all evening.

Orsino: Boy? What boy?

Viola: Oh for heaven's sake. Clovis. Who else. Since the moment we arrived in fact.

Orsino: That's absurd. You're imagining things.

Viola: I don't think so.

Pause

Orsino: Is that why you're dressed like that? Hoping to catch my eye? Well you've succeeded. You look stunning.

He goes to kiss her, but she evades him

Viola: I don't think I can do this anymore. I just wish you'd be honest.

Orsino: But I am being. Right now you look – delicious. I would like to take you to bed right now, let's skip dinner, what do you say? Is that honest enough for you?

Viola: No. I will not be a substitute.

Orsino: For what?

Viola: For Clovis.

Orsino: How can you say that? I adore you, I want *you*.

Viola: Not enough to stop you drooling over Clovis.

Orsino: I don't drool.

Viola: I don't know where I am anymore. *(Pause)* What if I'd worn that pretty little dress you picked out for me, if I'd worn that this evening? Would you still be adoring me, wanting me?

Pause

Orsino: In the end, Viola, in the end, some things are just best left unsaid. Don't you think?

Viola: In the end, my love, I think that's the coward's way out.

Enter Clovis

Clovis: Excuse me, just to let you know that dinner is on its way, but there's plenty of time for another drink if that is what you would like.

Orsino: Thank you, Clovis, that would be nice.

Enter Vincenzo

Viola: I think I'll go change.

Exit Viola

Vincenzo: Silly girl's gone and locked herself in the bathroom. Hormones I expect. Give her time, she'll come down when she's had enough. Women. We love them but they can be quite a handful. You married, Clovis?

Clovis: No sir, I'm not.

Vincenzio: Anyone in the offing?

Clovis: No I don't think so.

Vincenzio: Haven't found the right girl yet, is that it?

Clovis: Or maybe the right one hasn't found me.

Vincenzio: Not because you're batting for the other side or anything like that is it?

Clovis: No sir. Nothing like that.

Vincenzio: Well that's good then. Carry on.

Exit Clovis. Pause

Orsino: She's definitely all right, is she, Isabella? She's not looking at all well.

Vincenzio: But then as you don't know her you couldn't really say, could you?

Orsino: No, of course not.

Vincenzio: She's fine, absolutely fine. And you're sure that your wife... the way she left just -

Orsino: Also fine, thank you. She's a very sensible young woman, as it goes. Sensible and smart.

Vincenzio: Not too smart I hope.

Orsino: Of course not.

Vincenzio: Well then, you're a lucky man.

Enter Viola in the pretty little dress

My, what a picture. She looks quite a picture your wife.

Orsino: You do. You look – lovely, darling. Although I'm not sure it was necessary –

Viola: Thank you darling. *(She twirls and goes to kiss him.)*

Enter Isabella, followed by an anxious Hero and Clovis. She is wearing a white nun's habit, apparently splattered in blood from the waist down. She is towing a small suitcase

Vincenzio: Good God.

Viola: What is it? Are you hurt?

- Isabella:** No, I'm not hurt - at least... No, just a change of costume.
- Vincenzio:** What is that? If you're not hurt, what is this, some kind of stunt?
- Isabella:** No.
- Vincenzio:** Then go and change at once.
- Isabella:** No. I have kept this 'costume' as a memento of what I lost. Of what you stole.
- Vincenzio:** I'm not asking you, I am telling you. You are making a fool –
- Isabella:** Still no. I'm not obeying you any longer because I am leaving. Leaving here, leaving you.
- Vincenzio:** You can't be serious. You can't do that.
- Isabella:** I think I can.
- Vincenzio:** I will not allow it.
- Isabella:** Then you will have to stop me by force.
- Vincenzio:** Don't think I won't. *(Pause)* Very well. You may go.
- Isabella:** I don't need your permission either.
- Vincenzio:** You are a disgrace. A wife is no use to me in such a mood. But be warned. I will come and find you. You know very well that I can do that.
- Isabella:** And I will make very sure that you don't. But before I go I would like to explain to these people the reasons for my - performance. I've helped ruin their evening after all, they deserve an explanation.
- Vincenzio:** At least go take that disgusting thing off.
- Isabella:** No. It's part of the story. And Clovis and Hero too, I'd like them to hear it.
- Vincenzio:** Where has all this come from, out of the blue?
- Isabella:** Not exactly out of the blue. It's a little over a year since your 'proposal'. An offer I couldn't refuse. Since then I've withheld what I could – my voice, my body. Until last night. So yes, I know you can use force to get what you want. To speak plainly, he raped me.
- Vincenzio:** You are my wife.
- Isabella:** He raped me, and here, now, I choose to illustrate the fact. You wanted disguises. Well here you have the opposite. Your actions, undisguised.
- Viola:** Should we call the police?

Isabella: No need for that. I choose to leave, and there's an end of it.

She exits

Vincenzio: She's leaving? Looking like that? She's mad. Unhinged.

Orsino: And you're just letting her go?

Vincenzio: I will not go chasing – I will deal with it -

Viola: I'll go after her. She may need help, or hasn't that occurred to you?

Vincenzio: Are you two in this together? Your little dressing-up game?

Exit Viola

Orsino: Is this true? What she says?

Vincenzio: Oh you know how it is.

Orsino: Not sure I do.

Vincenzio: Well maybe I was a little rough. But for heaven's sake, a year. I've been patient a whole year.

Orsino: Even so.

Vincenzio: She is my wife.

Orsino: It's against the law.

Vincenzio: Not my law. She'll say nothing further. I'll make sure of it.

Pause

Hero: Excuse me, Don Vincenzio, I can't help thinking, in the circumstances – I know you have booked for a whole week, but I think it would be best if –

Vincenzio: So you believe her silly story, do you? Don't worry, I'll be gone first thing in the morning. I'll expect a refund –

Hero: I don't think we can allow –

Vincenzio: Well then forget it. It's nothing to me. Did you know about this too? In on it together?

Hero: I knew nothing until I heard the taxi pulled up.

Pause

Vincenzio: Well I don't propose to let it spoil the evening entirely. I suggest we go and get something to eat. Our hosts have gone to a lot of trouble after all, it would be a

shame to let it go to waste. And I expect the girls will be back by the time we've finished.

Hero: As you wish.

Exit Hero, Orsino, Vincenzo

Scene Five

Clovis: *(To audience)* Dinner, as you can imagine, was not a happy affair, despite the excellent food. The two men sat stubbornly alone at their respective tables trying not to rattle the cutlery. No sign of Viola. Conversation impossible. What could they possibly say? And now it is morning again – inevitably, a greyer day. There are suitcases in the hall. A story winding down, or perhaps the start of another.

Lights change to morning as he speaks – greyer morning

Vincenzo: Ah Clovis. All done. I'll be off. Thank you for your trouble. I raised the question of a refund with Hero again but she was –

Clovis: Our cancellation policy –

Vincenzo: Whatever. If she reconsiders you have my contact details. Well I'm sorry my wife's stupid theatrical gesture put a dampener on things. I'll find her, don't you worry. She'll come to her senses.

Enter Orsino

Ah there you are, I was going to come and find you. So you're leaving too? Quite right. You shouldn't just wait around... Can I offer you a lift anywhere?

Orsino: I have a taxi, thank you.

Vincenzo: Right, of course... I was just saying to Clovis here – well – never mind. I'll just say goodbye then. It's been a pleasure.

Exit Vincenzo

Orsino: Can't say I can say the same.

Clovis: It was food dye.

Orsino: What was?

Clovis: The dress. She startled the kitchen staff by rushing in demanding cochineal.

Orsino: Oh.

Clovis: What shall I tell her when she comes back? Viola?

Orsino: She won't be coming back.

- Clovis:** So you have heard from her.
- Orsino:** Yes, as a matter of fact. Up half the night trying to contact her. Then finally she gets in touch. I should have gone straight away, stopped her. Sitting here, trying to pretend.... They're together. And they're not coming back. Either of them.
- Clovis:** I'm sorry.
- Orsino:** Clovis, what did I do that was so wrong?
- Clovis:** I couldn't say sir.
- Orsino:** She didn't want to discuss it. The decision is final, she says. She's left me, just like that. What have I done?
- Clovis:** Did she offer any explanation?
- Orsino:** Not in any way that makes any sense. She said.... She says it's something to do with you.
- Clovis:** Oh?
- Orsino:** Isn't that ridiculous? *(Pause)* I mean, if you can't sit and have a chat with someone without being accused of flirting. Ridiculous word to choose, flirting. Hardly appropriate. Like she's deliberately misconstruing – I mean that never occurred to you, did it?
- Clovis:** Well –
- Orsino:** It's absurd. We've been so happy, she must know I adore her and I'm certain she adores me. And that's not all. She says I'm shallow. And fickle. Well I'm sorry, I'm the man she chose to marry a year ago and I haven't changed – she can't now say – she knew me well enough. Although, perhaps, it was all a bit of a whirlwind. You see when I first knew her I was in love with someone else, head over heels, I was determined she was the one I wanted. Beautiful she was, an absolute stunner. And rich. But she wouldn't be moved. And then I realised that it was Viola – she was the one, of course, how could I not have seen it? But there were – complications, things weren't all that they seemed, as soon as I knew - and then it turned out that she had been in love with me all along and of course I was delighted. Do you see?
- Clovis:** Not really.
- Orsino:** And now this. Out of the blue. And they're together. What a crazy pair. That was quite an entrance Isabella made last night.
- Clovis:** I suspect she was telling the truth.
- Orsino:** Do you think? Shocking if true. But where can they have gone? You don't think that they're- you know – together. You know.
- Clovis:** I wouldn't know, no.

- Orsino:** Maybe Vincenzo's henchmen – or the police –
- Clovis:** Or maybe, they're adults. They can choose for themselves.
- Orsino:** She didn't have to be so hurtful. There was no call for that.
- Clovis:** I'm sorry.
- Orsino:** So am I. And that this week has turned out so badly for you as well.
- Clovis:** Oh that's all right. Gives us a few days unexpected holiday. No harm done as far as we're concerned.
- Orsino:** Good, I'm glad to hear that. *(Pause)* Well I've got a taxi coming. She took the car. Left it at the station. That's where she caught up with Isabella. There can't be that many trains they could have caught. If I quiz the ticket office people – it's not like they wouldn't have been noticed -
- Clovis:** Or maybe you could just let them go.
- Orsino:** But to just run away like that. She should come back, face the music. Maybe I should have.... Where could they have gone, do you suppose?
- Clovis:** I don't know. If they went by train, the next stop along from here is a major junction. They could have gone anywhere.
- Orsino:** You're right of course. Maybe best not to go running after her. She'll probably come round in her own time.
- Clovis:** Quite possibly.
- Orsino:** Well that taxi is about due. I'll get my stuff together. It's been a pleasure. Mostly. Wonderful place you have here. Well worth the visit. In other circumstances – who knows.... Anyway, I'll say goodbye. And if you ever –
- Clovis:** Thank you. I hope you have a safe journey.

Enter Hero

- Hero:** Your taxi has arrived.
- Orsino:** Oh good. Thank you.
- Hero:** Do you need any help with anything?
- Orsino:** No, I'm fine, I can manage.
- Hero:** Well goodbye then. And a pleasant journey.
- Clovis:** And I hope everything works out for you.
- Orsino:** Thank you. So do I. Goodbye.

Exit Orsino

- Hero:** That's the last of them. I've given the staff a couple of days off. No one argued. So, we've got the place to ourselves.
- Clovis:** Can't say I'm sorry to see the back of that lot. Do you think she was telling the truth?
- Hero:** Isabella? Yes I do. Something viola said, and Vincenzo – something definitely not right there. Strange way she had of dealing with it though.
- Clovis:** If he's as dangerous as he seems to like to make out, she's done well to get away from him.
- Hero:** Some anniversary it turned out to be.
- Clovis:** And yours not celebrated yet.
- Hero:** No.
- Clovis:** I'm sure it will be soon and in fine style.
- Hero:** Do you think so?
- Clovis:** Of course. Why not?
- Hero:** I'm beginning to think, maybe it shouldn't be.
- Clovis:** What do you mean?
- Hero:** I mean, I don't know, what kind of a marriage is this? Am I just fooling myself? I never see him, when I do all he wants to talk about is his life with the regiment, and his precious Benedick. We hardly spoke before we were married, and he was so quick to think the worst of me.
- Clovis:** He worked hard to make amends for that.
- Hero:** But is that enough?
- Clovis:** Only you can answer that.
- Hero:** And when he's posted again, should I go with him? Do I even want to? I love it here. I'd hate to have to go.
- Clovis:** I would hate that too.
- Hero:** I mean, he was Benedick's friend before he knew me, maybe that's the tie that keeps him coming back. Not me at all.
- Clovis:** I've no doubt he loves you. Who wouldn't?

- Hero:** You're very sweet. I'm sorry, I shouldn't be complaining about this to you. It's not fair.
- Clovis:** Oh you know me. Broad shoulders.
- Hero:** Lovely broad shoulders.
- Clovis:** Why thank you.
- Hero:** Tell me something. Why hasn't someone as gorgeous as you got someone of their own?
- Clovis:** Maybe I'm just very, very, picky.
- Hero:** They should be queuing round the block.
- Clovis:** Haven't noticed any queues lately.
- Hero:** Maybe it's because you're stuck here.
- Clovis:** I like being stuck here. Don't send me away, please please don't send me away.
- Hero:** Don't worry. I won't. How could we manage without you?
- Clovis:** You can count on me. I'll even help you plan your anniversary celebration. Or whatever it is you decide to do. *(Pause)* So – who have we got next week then?
- Hero:** An all male group. Taken all the rooms.
- Clovis:** Better lock away the breakables then.
- Hero:** They're a choir. A chamber choir. Very mature and sensible.
- Clovis:** Well that's the evening entertainment taken care of.
- Hero:** You could join in. You've got a lovely voice.
- Clovis:** You're full of compliments this morning.
- Hero:** Don't let it go to your head. Well there's still dust to be settled after yesterday's carryings-on, so I'd better get on. Cochineal's the devil to get out of a carpet.

She blows him a kiss and exits. He begins to clear the terrace, humming, then picks up the song at:

*... with tosspots still had drunken heads,
For the rain it raineth every day.*

*A great while ago the world began
With hey-ho, the wind and the rain;
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day.*

End of play

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