**Twelfth Night: Act II, scene ii**

Meanwhile, outside Olivia’s house, [Malvolio](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/twelfthnight/character/malvolio/) has caught up with Viola (still disguised as Cesario). Malvolio gives Cesario the ring that Olivia has sent with him, rebuking him for having left it with Olivia. Viola realizes Olivia’s deception and plays along with it, pretending that she did indeed give the ring to Olivia. She tells Malvolio that Olivia took the ring and insists that Olivia must keep it.

Malvolio throws the ring onto the ground and exits. Alone, the confused Viola picks up the ring and wonders why Olivia has given it to her. She wonders if it means that Olivia has fallen in love with Cesario. If such is the case, Viola reflects, then events have indeed taken an ironic turn, because Olivia has unknowingly fallen in love with another woman. “Poor lady, she were better love a dream,” Viola says to herself (II.ii.24). Apparently loved by Olivia and in love with Orsino, who loves Olivia, Viola expresses her hope that time will untangle these problems since she certainly cannot figure out how to solve them.

**Analysis:**

Here Viola refers to the love triangle among the three main characters, Viola, Ovilia and Duke Orsino.

Viola, is the central character in the action, and thus the only one who understands the entirety of the complicated love triangle. Orsino loves Olivia, who loves Viola, who in turn loves Orsino—but matters are hardly this simple, because both [Orsino and Olivia](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/twelfthnight/character/orsino-and-olivia/) are mistaken about Viola’s real gender. Viola knows that romantic love, ideally, should lead to marriage. But in this particular triangle, there seems to be no hope of a resolution anywhere. Calling herself a “poor monster”—implying not that she is ugly but rather something not quite human, halfway between man and woman—Viola puts her finger on the problem (II.ii.32). As a man, Viola cannot win Orsino’s love, but as a woman, she cannot return Olivia’s. Finally giving herself up into the hands of fate, she says despairingly, “O time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t’untie” (II.ii.38–39). But fate—or, more accurately, the playwright—has already set the untangling forces in motion.