

STORY SEVEN: *Cocktails with Charles*

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola is shipwrecked on the shores of Illyria. Believing her twin brother has died in the shipwreck, she poses as a young male page named Cesario and goes to work for Duke Orsino. Orsino is in love with Lady Olivia and decides to use "Cesario" as an intermediary. Olivia, believing Viola to be a man, falls in love with him/her. Viola, in turn, falls in love with the Duke, who also believes Viola is a man and uses him/her as his confidant. In *Cocktails with Charles*, Mira has lost her twin brother to a fish bone and her parents to an embarrassing rowboat accident. Angel promises to be an antidote to Mira's loneliness, but Angel is contemplating marrying Charles for financial support.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

If you're into Shakespeare

1. How do both *Twelfth Night* and *Cocktails with Charles* show that love can cause pain?
2. *Twelfth Night* is a romantic comedy with romantic love the play's main focus. How is the main focus in *Cocktails with Charles* the same or different?
3. What in *Twelfth Night* and *Cocktails with Charles* point to the theme of gender ambiguity?
4. What are the similarities between Rhonda in *Cocktails with Charles* and Feste, the clown, in *Twelfth Night*? Any similarities between Malvolio and Charles?
5. How does the allusion to *Cyrano* in *Cocktails with Charles* also allude to *Twelfth Night*?
6. In *Twelfth Night*, Feste says, "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." How is this idea echoed in *Cocktails with Charles*?

If you're not

1. How does your impression of Charles change from the beginning to the end of the story? What role does he play in Mira's journey? In Angel's?
2. What indications are there that Mira struggles with sexual feelings for Angel? Can her sexuality be labelled?
3. Rhonda claims people live multiple, simultaneous lives according to scripts they write for themselves. What drama are Angel, Mira, and Charles performing together? What fears or needs connect them? In what ways, if at all, do Angel, Mira, and Charles attempt to rewrite their scripts?

4. What do you think accounts for Mira's switch from being sceptical about Rhonda's ideas at the beginning to apparently accepting at the end?
5. If it's true, as Rhonda says, that everything happens simultaneously, can *Cocktails with Charles* have a beginning or an end? What are possible developments after the story's last line? Which is most likely, in your opinion?