

Orlando & Chorus

CHORUS

Orlando dashed downhill.
He let himself in at a wicket gate.
He tore up the winding staircase.
He tripped.
He reached his room.
He scoured his hands.
He pared his fingernails.
With no more than six inches of
looking-glass and a pair of old candles
to help him, he had thrust on
crimson breeches
a lace collar
and shoes
with rosettes
as big as
double
dahlias.

He was ready.
He was flushed.
He was excited.

ORLANDO

But he was terribly late.
He reached the banqueting hall only just in time
to sink upon his knees and, hanging his head in confusion,
to offer a bowl of rose water to the...

ORLANDO AND CHORUS

great
Queen
herself.

Orlando & The Queen

ORLANDO Such was Orlando's shyness that he saw no more of her than her ringed hand in water, but it was enough.

ORLANDO AND CHORUS

It was a memorable hand.

THE QUEEN A thin hand with long fingers always curling as if 'round orb or scepter;

ORLANDO a nervous, crabbed, sickly hand;

THE QUEEN a commanding hand, a hand that had only to raise itself for a head to fall; yes, the Queen had a hand—

ORLANDO —Orlando guessed, attached to an old body that smelt like a cupboard.

THE QUEEN Come.

ORLANDO approaches THE QUEEN and kneels at her feet.

THE QUEEN The Queen studied Orlando.

ORLANDO He only felt something press against his hair...

THE QUEEN kisses ORLANDO's hair.

CHORUS ————— ~~He had been kissed by a queen without knowing it.~~

THE QUEEN What is your name, dear boy?

ORLANDO Orlando.

THE QUEEN Orlando! And what do you want to be when you grow up, Orlando?

ORLANDO I would very much like to be a poet, Your Highness.

THE QUEEN I think you would make a fine poet, Orlando. How would you like to come to Court, Orlando?

ORLANDO To Court—that's a very great honor, Your Highness.

THE QUEEN Yes.

The Queen plucked a ring from her finger— Orlando, I want to give you this ring. I hereby name you my Treasurer and Steward.

ORLANDO Thank you.

Chorus

CHORUS

Birds froze in mid-air
and fell like stones to the ground.

It was no uncommon sight to come upon
a whole herd of swine frozen immovable upon the road.

The fields were full of shepherds all struck stark
in the act of the moment
one with his hand to his nose
another with the bottle to his lips
a third with a stone raised to throw at
a raven who sat, as if stuffed, upon the hedge.

But while the country people suffered,
London enjoyed a carnival
of the utmost brilliancy.

Music and trumpets.

CHORUS

Frozen roses fell in showers when the Queen and her courtiers walked
abroad.

Colored balloons hovered motionless in the air.

Lovers dallied upon divans.

The ice went so deep and so clear that there could be seen,
congealed at a depth of a few thousand feet,
here a porpoise,
there a flounder!!!

Sasha & Orlando

SASHA Take me away. I detest your English Court. It is full of prying old women. They smell bad. It is like being in a cage. I want to leave the Court!

ORLANDO Do you fancy seeing London?

SASHA I don't know—what is in this London?

ORLANDO The Tower, the Beefeaters, the jeweler's shops, the theaters...

SASHA Ah! Yes. I would like to see your London.

ORLANDO AND SASHA

So they skated to London on the frozen Thames.
They got further and further away from the Court.

SASHA They would speak of everything under the sun.

ORLANDO For instance:

SASHA This man's beard!

ORLANDO That woman's skin!

SASHA A rat that fed from my hand!

ORLANDO A face!

SASHA A feather!

ORLANDO Nothing was too small for such talk.

SASHA Nothing was too great.
Sometimes Orlando would be melancholy.

ORLANDO All ends in death.

SASHA But I do not like Orlando to be melancholy. So I speak to him enchantingly, wittily, wisely (but always in French, which I'm afraid loses its flavor in translation).

She whispers French into his ear.

ORLANDO You are a fox, an olive tree, an emerald.
Orlando tried to tell her what she was like—
Darling, you are a— a—
but words failed him.

He wanted another landscape, and another tongue. English was too frank for describing Sasha. In all that the Princess said, there was something hidden.

SASHA (*To the audience*) What did she hide from him?

Chorus (as Othello & Desdemona)

CHORUS That handkerchief which I so love and gave thee
Thou gav'st to Cassio.

CHORUS No, by my life and soul!
Send for the man and ask him.

CHORUS Sweet soul, take heed,
Take heed of perjury; thou art on thy deathbed.

CHORUS Ay, but not yet to die.

CHORUS Yes, presently.

~~**ORLANDO** ————— The melody of the words stirred Orlando like music.~~

CHORUS I never did
Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio
But with such general warranty of heaven
As I might love. I never gave him token.

CHORUS By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand!
O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart—

CHORUS O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!
Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!

CHORUS Nay if you strive—

CHORUS But half an hour? But while I say one prayer!

CHORUS It is too late.

The CHORUS smothers itself.

The CHORUS stabs itself and falls over itself.

Orlando, Archduchess, Chorus

CHORUS One day, he was adding a line or two with enormous labor to “The Oak Tree, A Poem”—

ORLANDO The grass is green... and the sky is... blue...

CHORUS When a shadow crossed the edge of his paper.

The ARCHDUCHESS approaches.

ORLANDO It was no shadow—
but a very tall lady in riding hood and mantle.

ARCHDUCHESS Forgive my intrusion. I am the Archduchess Harriet Griselda of Finster-Aarhorn Scand-Op Boom in the Romanian territory. I desire above all things to make your acquaintance. I saw your picture and it was the image of a sister of mine who was long since dead. I’m visiting the English Court, the Queen being my cousin.

ORLANDO I see.

ARCHDUCHESS Well don’t good manners require you to ask me in and offer me a glass of wine?

ORLANDO Certainly. This way.

ARCHDUCHESS Oh my! Your ankle buckle is undone! Shall I clasp it for you? I must!

ORLANDO If you must.

The ARCHDUCHESS leans down and fastens ORLANDO’s shoe.

CHORUS Orlando was violently overcome by a passion of some sort.

ORLANDO Excuse me.

(To himself)

What sort of passion can this be?
It’s unaccountable.

CHORUS For when the Archduchess stopped
to fasten his buckle,
Orlando heard—

ORLANDO far off, the beating of Love’s wings—
He was ready to raise his hands and let the bird of beauty
alight upon his shoulders when—horror!

Chorus

CHORUS Morning and evening, they tried to wake him,
but still Orlando slept.
On the sixth day of Orlando's trance,
the Turks rose against the Sultan,
set fire to the town,
and put foreigners to death.
Gentlemen of the British embassy
preferred to swallow bunches of keys
rather than fall into
the hands of the Infidel.
Still, Orlando slept.
On the seventh day,
he awoke.
He stretched himself.
He stood upright
while the trumpets pealed out:
Truth!
Truth!
Truth!

ORLANDO *stretches behind curtain. We see "his" silhouette.*

CHORUS We have no choice but to confess...
he was a woman.

The CHORUS looks at ORLANDO. ORLANDO emerges and looks at herself in a mirror; she's wearing a huge, confining, elaborate dress and hat.

CHORUS And here we pause.
Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it.
But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been.

Many people hold that such a change of sex is against nature and have been at pains to prove, first, that Orlando had always been a woman, and secondly, that Orlando is at this moment a man.

Let biologists and psychologists determine.

It is enough for us to state the simple fact:

Orlando was a man till the age of thirty, when he became a woman and has remained so ever since.

Orlando

ORLANDO

So, while the old servants gossiped,
Orlando took a silver candle in her hand
and roamed once more through the halls,
the galleries,
the courts,
the bedrooms.

In this window seat she had written her first verses.
In that chapel, she would be buried.
She, who believed in no immortality,
could not help feeling that her soul
would come and go forever
with the reds on the panels and the greens on the sofa.
The house was no longer hers—it belonged to time now.

I am growing up, she thought—
I am losing some illusions, perhaps to acquire others.

Orlando & Archduke

ARCHDUKE That fly is dead!
You killed that fly!
You pasted it onto your sugar lump!
Didn't you? Did you?

ORLANDO Yes.

ARCHDUKE That you won my fortune is nothing. You are welcome to it. It's only that you deceived me... It hurts me to think you capable of it. To love a woman who cheats at play is, I'm afraid, impossible. And yet, you are, after all, only a woman. Allowances must be made. Perhaps I can forgive you... out of the wildness of my passion...

ORLANDO Orlando feared such a speech. And now, after concealing a toad under her blouse all morning, she dropped the toad down the shirt of the Archduke.

The ARCHDUKE howls.

ORLANDO laughs.

ORLANDO She laughed.

ARCHDUKE The Archduke blushed.

ORLANDO She laughed!

ARCHDUKE The Archduke cursed.

ORLANDO She laughed.

ARCHDUKE The Archduke slammed the door.

ORLANDO Heaven be praised!
I am alone.

Orlando & Grimsditch

ORLANDO Until Orlando felt positively ashamed of the second finger of her left hand without in the least knowing why.

ORLANDO tries to hide her finger. Enter the MAID.

ORLANDO Let me see your hands, Grimsditch.

The MAID holds out her hands—she wears a wedding ring.

ORLANDO Let me look at your ring for a moment, Grimsditch. I'll just pull it off for a moment—

ORLANDO reaches for the ring. GRIMSDITCH clutches her ring, dumbstruck.

GRIMSDITCH No! Your Ladyship may *look* if you please, but as for taking off my wedding ring, neither the Pope nor Queen Victoria could force me to. Since my Thomas put this ring on me finger twenty-five years, six months, three weeks ago (an' that's an exact figure, Your Ladyship), I've slept in it, worked in it, washed in it, an' prayed in it. In fact, it's by the gleam on this 'ere ring that I'll be assigned my station among the angels, an' its luster would be tarnished now and forever if I let it out o' my keeping even for a wee bit.

ORLANDO I'm sorry Grimsditch. I didn't realize. Heaven help us. What a world we live in. What a world to be sure.

Orlando & Marmaduke

ORLANDO You think... you think I'm a man? Oh, no, I'm very much a woman.

MARMADUKE And you, for a moment, thought I was a woman? How ridiculous.

But you're so entirely *sympathetic*—and you never take more than ten minutes to dress—how can it be—

ORLANDO And you have a passion for—peppermints, and you blush so easily. How can it be—

And they talked two hours or more, perhaps about the sea or perhaps *not* about the sea, and really it would profit little to record what they said, for they knew each other so well that they could say anything, which is tantamount to saying nothing.

MARMADUKE Once I was sailing the South Seas and was caught in a *terrific* gale. Masts were snapped off, sails were torn to ribbons. The ship sank, and I was left, the only survivor, on a raft holding a biscuit.

ORLANDO And?

MARMADUKE I ate the biscuit. It's about all a fellow can do nowadays...

ORLANDO *laughs.*

MARMADUKE Are you positive you aren't a man?

ORLANDO Can it be possible you're not a woman?

MARMADUKE AND ORLANDO

And then they must put it to the proof without more ado.

Orlando & Chorus

CHORUS The true length of a person's life is always a matter of dispute. Of some we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight years allotted them on the tombstone. Others are hundreds of years old though we call them thirty-six.

It is a difficult business, this time-keeping.

ORLANDO Confound it all! No matter. I want, more than anything, to go home.

Orlando walked into her house
and called, Orlando!

Orlando! Come here! I'm sick to death of
this particular self. I want another. Orlando?

CHORUS For she had a great variety of selves to call upon:
the boy who sat under the oak tree,
the young man who fell in love with Sasha,
the boy who handed the Queen a bowl of rose water,
the poet, the fine lady,
the woman who called Mar
or Shelmerdine
or Bonthrop—

ORLANDO Orlando! Haunted, haunted, ever since I was a child. Flinging a net of words after the wild goose of meaning and everything shrivels... Orlando?

CHORUS Still, the Orlando that she wanted did not come.

ORLANDO All right then.

(To the audience) Who then am I?

Thirty-six, a woman. Yes—but a million other things as well. Am I a snob? Proud of my ancestors?

Don't give a damn if I am. Truthful? I think so. Generous? Oh, but that doesn't count. Spoilt? Perhaps. Clumsy? Absolutely.

I love trees. And barns. And the night. But people. People? I don't know. Chattering, spiteful, always telling lies.

And, yet... love—what of it? Flies on the ceiling? Sasha? Marmaduke?

CHORUS The great wings of silence beat up and down the empty house.
All was lit as if for the coming of a dead queen.