

ORLANDO

PROLOGUE

A figure emerges from darkness.

This is an age of passion, he tells us - of violence, and of romance. Danger and insecurity, lust and fear, poetry and filth swarm over the torturous highways of the city, and buzz and stink. The heads of rebels grin on pikes even as poets sing and courtiers dance and royalty feast on the spoils of war. The climate itself matches the passions of men's hearts - the sun blazes fiercely, or there is darkness; the rain pounds down, or falls not at all.

This is the age of Elizabeth - of conquerors and heroes - of men.

ACT ONE - THE GOLDEN AGE

1. THE OAK TREE

Orlando, not yet seventeen, alone under an oak tree, eyes shut, trying to remember and recite his Latin.

Amo... amas... amat.

He struggles. *I love... you love... he/she/it loves...
I love...*

A single leaf falls in his lap, and he opens his eyes. He picks up the leaf, takes it in. As he does so, his face lights up.

He looks around him as if he is about to misbehave. He pulls out a little folio, and reads. Aloud, he recites a fragment of Shakespeare that speaks to nature. He sighs.

He turns the folio over, pulls out a quill pen, and writes, speaking aloud, *The Oak Tree. A poem - by - Orlando.*

He goes to write more - and hesitates, uncertain as to how to begin.

He picks up the leaf again. He concentrates on it.
Time passes...

And suddenly - nightfall! Orlando is late. At once -

2. THE QUEEN

- he is standing before Queen Elizabeth herself, flanked by her court - a splendid and imposing force. The weight of all their eyes rest on Orlando.

He drops immediately to his knee in deference.

An attendant introduces him - presenting the son of the Lord of the House, Sir Andrew, who fought and killed the Spaniard; son of Sir Boris, who fought and killed the Turk; son of Sir Miles, who killed the Frank; and Sir Herbert, the Czech; Sir Richard, the Welshman; and Sir Jordan, the Egyptian - from this illustrious line of men - is presented - Orlando.

The Queen bids him stand; asks lightly, as if this is the usual routine, if he's prepared anything for her visit. Orlando recites, haltingly, a poem in her honour - one of his own, he tells her. The Queen croaks out a laugh. His own poem? How refreshing.

She comes closer to appraise him, and is struck by something unusual about him - he is the very image of a fine young nobleman, and yet... he seems unlike any other young man she has yet met. Unworldly, perhaps. A true innocent.

Suddenly, the Queen seems to suspend time - the courtiers are present, but not, she and Orlando in their own little bubble - a surreal, magical moment. She tells Orlando that with his illustrious lineage, and his own manly charm, he must know he is destined for greatness. Indeed, he says, he has always been told as much. She offers Orlando all the royal blessings he could ask for, a promotion to the nobility, just like his fathers, and a guaranteed path towards a great career as a nobleman. Orlando lights up - this must be the beginning of his great destiny - but before he can accept, the Queen tells him that there is, of course, another choice. He could decline her offer, and seek out his fortune, and his fate, for himself. After all, perhaps he wishes to forge his own path.

Orlando isn't sure what she could mean - clearly it is his destiny to follow in the footsteps of his fathers - and he asks the Queen to bestow the blessings she has promised. Very well, she says - and suddenly their little bubble suddenly breaks - the courtiers are present again.

The Queen bids Orlando kneel; she hangs the chains of office about his shoulders, naming him her Steward; ties around his knee the jewelled order of the Garter; and with a ceremonial sword, dubs him Lord Orlando.

Orlando rises, and in an instant he has been transformed from child to nobleman - young, rich, handsome.

He smiles to himself - and says, 'Onwards.'

3. THE COURT

Instantly, Orlando is at court, and as its newest addition is the object of everyone's attention - he reclines, surrounded by women admirers, fed grapes and wine, as the men also sit in repose. Nothing he desires will be denied him. Orlando seduces the women and makes the men laugh at the same time. Each of his admirers tries to draw him to her, seeking his attention for herself alone - but, he tells them, he cannot satisfy himself with just one. A young man has his appetites - he simply does as nature bids him - for as the sun rises and sinks, so the flower blooms and fades - and girls are roses, too, so before nightfall comes and they wither away, they must be - what is it that Will Shakespeare says? - plucked.

But now, he must bid them farewell, as he's promised to write a little ditty in honour of the Queen - she does love his poems so - and he has a phrase forming just now that he'd like to write down before he forgets. Wilt thou leave us so unsatisfied?! one woman cries, and alas, he says, he must. As he steps away -

4. THE FROST

- a sudden flurry of snow is unleashed - and the stage is transformed.

Orlando stands, surveying the new landscape with wonder. What a strange frost, to come so suddenly, so violently - it is almost like magic. But then, that is the nature of the age...

A farmer, covered in snow, staggers past. His whole field of cows are frozen solid! So is his wife, an apple halfway to her lips, and his son, a finger halfway up his nose. He hurries on, looking for some wood to burn that hasn't frosted over. Orlando warns him he's about to run right across the icy surface of the Thames - no matter, the farmer tells him, the River's frozen solid to a depth of 20 feet! He hurries off.

20 feet? A strange Frost indeed...

A herald of the Queen processes onstage, and announces to us that in light of the Greatest Frost ever to come to the country, her Majesty the Queen has announced, to be held on the ice of the Thames itself, and with a place especially reserved for the Court of the Queen herself, London's first ever Frost Fair -

5. THE FAIR

- and suddenly, with a shower of frozen rose petals thrown in the air, it is nightfall, and the Court are there, on the ice, in their finery. Music begins - the courtiers applaud, and fall into a courtly dance - Orlando dances with one of his admirers.

A figure appears at the edge of the ice, watching. Orlando, not seeing them, overenthusiastically spins out of their dance and into the stranger - and suddenly lights shift and the courtiers are

frozen in place, backgrounded, as if Orlando and the stranger are the only two people in the world.

Forgive me, good sir, he says.

The gentleman looks up - but it is a woman, in boots and trousers. Or *is* it a woman? Either way, Orlando is transfixed.

The stranger looks at Orlando. What a strange affair, she says, this festival on the ice. Does the court know the common people are starving in the snow?

Orlando is taken aback. The common people?

The stranger continues. Who are these dandies that stand about claiming conquest of woman and land? And these women, preening and simpering at these pitiful men - might not their corsets be restricting blood flow to their brains?

Orlando, at first, doesn't know how to respond - he's never heard anyone dismiss the court, his world, so easily. But the stranger punctures the pomp and artifice of court and Queen with such wit that Orlando can't help but laugh.

He asks who she is - she introduces herself as Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovitch. She has come from Romania - she likes to follow the frost - and besides, she was curious to see if England really does display the heads of their enemies on spikes.

Orlando is intrigued. He asks her if she'd like to dance with him - but she tells him she doesn't much care for the company of the court - the way their eyes seem to follow you about. She wants to go explore the rest of the frozen river. He can join her, of course, if he cares to. He hesitates... but has to tell her his duty is here, with the Queen, the Court. Pity, she says. She picks up a full rose from amongst the petals on the ice, and hands it to him with a smile, the way a man might hand a rose to a lady. Perhaps she even kisses his hand. And she leaves.

Orlando stands, alone, looking after the Princess. He looks at the rose - and slips the stem into his breast pocket.

6. THE FAIR, DAY

Suddenly, daylight at the Fair, and Orlando is surrounded by laughing male courtiers. They try to outwit each other, lamenting (often disparaging) the nature of women, and they try to draw Orlando into it given his usual interest in witty repartee. But he's distracted - and one of the courtiers makes a remark about having seen Orlando engaging with a foreign woman these last nights - or was it a woman? She certainly wasn't dressed like one. Surely, another comments,

you can't mean our Orlando - the man destined for the finest career in all of England - as if he'd throw it away by giving his affection to such a woman as that, and disgrace the English court? But Orlando is barely listening - for the Princess has begun to skate in circles around the edges of the stage, and it is as if only Orlando can see her...

Orlando, as if hypnotised, slips away from the conversation, and perhaps he begins to circle the stage too - perhaps it even seems at some point as if they are racing each other -

7. THE ESTATE

- and suddenly, Orlando and the Princess are alone, facing each other. All signs of the fair have disappeared - they're on the open ice.

Orlando tells the Princess no woman has ever skated as she does - so powerful, so graceful. Perhaps, she says, it is simply that the legs of the Englishwoman are most encumbered by her skirts.

Perhaps they slowly circle each other.

This is more like my country, she says - open and free. Although we have rivers ten miles wide on which one could gallop six horses abreast all day without meeting a soul. And no court like a cage in which to keep you. One is free to roam where they choose.

Orlando tells her he has always loved the open air - loved Nature. That in fact, they are just at the edge of his own estate at this very moment - he points it out in the distance - a great house that sprawls like a town, with gardens and mazes, surrounded by land, his land.

A large estate for one man, she says. And you live alone? Yes, he says, but I do not plan to always live alone.

And you? he asks. I go where the frost takes me, she tells him. I cannot stay in one place for long. When the ice here melts, I shall go too.

What is your substance, he asks - whereof are you made that millions of strange shadows on you tend? You have a strange way of speaking, she says. It's poetry, he tells her. Not my own. But you do inspire one to poetry, if one could only find the words to describe you.

Sasha, he suddenly says. I shall call you Sasha. After a white fox I was given as a child. A fox? she asks. Yes, Orlando says, beautiful and wild.

Where I am from we have no foxes, only wolves. I like to listen to them howl across the steppes. She barks like a wolf, wildly, and Orlando laughs - he joins her.

Princess, he says, I must admit, I feel as if I have been hooked through the nose like a fish and rushed through waters painfully but with my own consent. When I see you, the ice turns to wine

in my veins - I see spring break over the wintry landscape - I feel as if I am charging a daring foe
-

The Princess doesn't understand.

He tells her he is most enamoured with her - most devoted to her - that he feels he would fight all England's enemies for her sake.

How very gallant, she says, laughing.

They draw together and kiss.

Time passes...

8. THE DECK OF SASHA'S SHIP

- and the two are wrapped in a fur coat, lit by a lantern.

Orlando has his little folio of poetry out - and is reading an ode to Sasha - trying to find the words to describe her, trying to pin her down - she discourages him - he tells her he can't help it, what they have hardly warrants comparison to the loves he's had in the past - how can he even call them 'loves'? She tells him to put his poetry down and enjoy this moment. He is enjoying this moment, he tells her, so much so that he wants to memorialise it, to make it last forever - Sasha tells him nothing lasts forever, not really - they can only enjoy the moment they have. He is a little discomfited - but he brushes it off.

Night falls and the two sleep.

After a time, Sasha slips out of the fur and away...

And suddenly, Orlando wakes - alone. Where is she?

He picks up the lantern, calling her name - and as the lantern swings about, finds her on her way back to him -

She goes to comfort him, he grasps her to him, tells her he had horrible fears she'd left - that perhaps the ice had melted, and she'd gone - that perhaps she was even with someone else - but I'm here, she tells him. Yes, now! he says, but what about tomorrow? And the day after that? She can't tell him - she doesn't know where she'll be tomorrow - and he is taken aback. Orlando tells her that their destinies are linked - that they are destined for each other - so much so that he'd do anything for her - even leave his estate, his home, adventure together. He doesn't much care to drink vodka instead of whisky or hunt the wild beast instead of the rabbit, but this and more he would do, for her sake! Sasha goes to respond - but to quell the argument (and his own unease), he tells her simply to meet him tonight, at midnight, at the edge of the river under the clock - and then they will fly, together.

9. THE CLOCK

Orlando stands alone on the ice, in the bitter cold.

An innkeeper comes out with a lantern, asks if he plans to freeze to death out here, if he'd rather come inside for some ale. Orlando tells him no, thank you, he's waiting for someone.

The innkeeper disappears and Orlando waits. And waits.

But then the first stroke of midnight chimes - and the second, and third - and as the bell tolls, magnified into an otherworldly sound, it dawns on Orlando that he has been abandoned.

The final chime strikes, and he knows it is over.

And then, all at once - the heavens open.

The rain comes, the ice unfreezes - and the whole landscape transforms again before Orlando's eyes, taking the magic of the frost with it. He howls.

... we fade to -

10. A FIRE

Orlando standing over a fire, face twisted with bitterness.

He takes out the rose Sasha gave him - holds it over the fire.

All ends in death, he says. And nothing thicker than a knife's blade separates happiness from melancholy.

He burns the rose. He burns other mementos, if there end up being any from the previous scenes.

And finally, he holds out the little handmade folio of poetry he'd been writing for her. Let the Orlando who loved Sasha die too. He drops the folio in, and watches it all burn down to ash.

He breaks down into sobs, heart-broken. My Sasha...

What of my destiny, now? he cries. I cannot go back to the court now - but I cannot go forward without her.

Orlando looks into the ashes - stops crying - bends down - and picks up the folio, whole and unharmed from the flames. Strange.

He opens it, reads a passage from his hero - Shakespeare.

Perhaps not everything ends in death.

For this man and his words are immortal.

Perhaps, he thinks, I too can outlast death - perhaps a great destiny still awaits - a great career - fame, he thinks, and glory. The life of a poet!

He wraps a worn cloak around his nobleman's gear, concealing his status. Now to find such a one who lives that life - one who can read his work - perhaps even his great hero -

11. AN INN

- a burst of laughter, warm light - three men of the lower classes sit and chortle over ale. Orlando approaches, breathless, voice quavering - might one of them be - Mister William Shakespeare?

Certainly not, one says, affronted. He doesn't want to be taken for some vulgar upstart. It turns out he is Nick Greene, writer, critic; these three men are the literati, embittered old gatekeepers talking about the good old days of poetry, how everything now is misguided adolescent experiment, not *truly* art. If Orlando really wants to be a great writer, to have fame and glory, he needs to look to the Greeks - model himself on them. Orlando, thinking still that poetry is something alive, adventurous, full of feeling, is disconcerted to discover that if he truly seeks fame and glory he'll have to model himself after 'the greats' - for, my dear boy, Greene tells him, though it pains me to say it, literature in this day and age is dead.

Orlando tries to protest - surely he cannot mean to dismiss all the poets writing today? Is there not some value to the new territory these poets are carving out? - but Greene dismisses him immediately. This is the problem with this dissolute modern age, he says, everything is up for grabs. Take the rumblings about the city that common people are going to overthrow the crown - he's never heard such nonsense in his life. Orlando too is taken aback by the idea that the Crown might be overthrown - but Greene brings the conversation back to poetry, and thoroughly squashes Orlando's hopes that he might one day contribute his own great poetry to the world. Greene, having sniffed Orlando's noble status, tells him perhaps he'd do best simply following in the footsteps of his fathers.

12. THE TOWN SQUARE

Orlando on the street, outside the inn, crestfallen. Perhaps life as a poet isn't his destiny after all. But what is? Must he really follow in the footsteps of his fathers? Perhaps that is all that is left.

A nobleman staggers towards him. It seems he's imbibed a little too much wine. He seems to recognise Orlando despite his cloak. Orlando greets him -

And then he falls into Orlando's arms - and it becomes apparent there is an arrow in his back.

They're coming, he tells Orlando - the people. They've beheaded the King - and they're coming - for the Crown, and all loyal to it. Impossible, Orlando tells him.

But there is a din offstage - the yelling of the people - and the Courtier staggers away -

Immediately -

13. A CLEARING IN THE WOODS

Orlando is hurriedly digging a hole in the earth by the light of a single lantern a few feet away.

He throws off his peasant cloak. And one by one, he removes every item of clothing signifying him as a member of the nobility - the chains of office, his jewelled garter, even his richly embroidered jacket and pants - and casts them into the earth. He covers them with dirt, and stands, panting.

He is alone, in the middle of the woods, stripped down to smock and stockings. Orlando the nobleman is gone.

A strange creature barrels out of the trees and the silence - a person in some kind of dual mask - appearing to be two things at once (or perhaps a man in an upside down crown). They ask Orlando if he's come to join the revels. Orlando, uncertain as to how to answer, arouses the figure's suspicion. He asks who Orlando is, anyway. Orlando, looking briefly at the mound of earth tells him - I am no-one.

The figure grins. Orlando asks where they are - the figure tells him they are no-where - or anywhere - the King is gone, isn't he, the people rule now, everything is upside down - and anything is possible.

Anything is possible? The figure cackles, and takes Orlando's hand -

14. THE CARNIVAL

- and suddenly, we're plunged into music and dance - we're in the midst of a carnival, a true carnival - the total upending of monarchic order and the unleashing of all that is wild, free, sensuous, ridiculous, full of laughter - but the feeling and treatment of it should be dark and modern, like a truly wild rave.

Everything is indeed upside down or back to front - every costume is a meeting of opposites - night and day, man and woman - and Orlando begins to lose himself in the dance - and we begin to lose sight of him in the crowd -

Perhaps we hear Orlando yelling, as if drunk on the atmosphere of the night, at anyone who will listen -

'I don't know who I am anymore! I don't know who I am!
Or, 'I'm no-one! I'm no-one! I'm any-one!'

Orlando disappears into the crowd, and as the music pounds and the lights shift, we see strobe-like flashes in the centre of the group, illuminating one figure who rapidly becomes another - then someone else, who appears to be one thing and then becomes another - and finally, Orlando - spinning and spinning - and as he does his ponytail comes loose, and his smock spins out around him - is he transforming too? -

And suddenly, everything is still, and Orlando is alone onstage, hair about their shoulders, smock long and free - by all appearances, a woman.
They look down at themselves - and smile.

'Onwards.'

ACT TWO - THE INTERREGNUM

1. THE PAGANS

A clearing in the Woods.

An old crone, simply dressed, draws a circle upon the ground.

This, the crone says, is a time of new beginnings.

Figures begin to emerge from the darkness - also dressed simply, they begin to gather in a circle around the crone - and at some point during the following, Orlando appears, watching from a safe distance, unnoticed by the group.

The age of the monarch has passed, she says - the city is no longer the seat of power - and the people are beginning to organise themselves. We have seen many of them passing through these Woods, come to meet Nature for the first time. And we who listen to Her can see the signs of a new age - no more is this a time ruled by human passions, by the poles of violence and romance - for the sunsets now are longer; the dawns less sudden; and these woods are in a perpetual twilight, caught between night and day - this is a time that hasn't yet settled - a time of possibility.

And we welcome it.

The group gathered murmur their agreement. They step onto the circle, joining hands with the Crone, and begin to hum - they sing an ode to Nature together - then fade away into the Woods - save one young Druid.

She looks straight at Orlando, and asks who she is, this one who watches from the shadows. Orlando comes out from her hiding place, tries to reassure the Druid that she means no harm - but the group have cause to be wary, the Druid tells her - not all who have found them before have been friendly. What brings her to these woods? Orlando tells her she left the city as the King was deposed - and she left an old self behind, too - now she is finding a new one in these woods. And it's hard not to lose herself in the majesty of Nature here - at home she has a much-beloved single oak tree - but here - she is surrounded by many scores of them.

Orlando apologises to the Druid - she had simply been wandering the Woods, lost in thoughts of her own, when she heard their words, that music, and she couldn't help but listen - You sing to Nature like it is your God, Orlando tells her.

There are many Gods in Nature, the Druid says. The earth - the sky - each animal, each plant - the trees. Divinity comes not from one God, but is woven through all of the living earth. Including each of us.

Orlando is intrigued - she's never heard anything like this before. To worship Nature like that... is she a poet? Are they a band of poets?

I suppose, the Druid says, in the way that all people are poets at heart.

Orlando asks how they live, and the Druid tells her they live by the cycles of the moon; by the turning of the seasons; by the signs of Nature; that they live in the Woods but they move about as Nature tells them to. Orlando begins to wonder if this was her true destiny, to find these people who love Nature as much as she does, to live free from the constraints of the city. She asks if she can hear more of their poetry - the Druid tells her she can come back when the full moon lights the sky - Orlando turns to look up through the trees - turns back - and the Druid is gone.

Light melts around Orlando as time passes -

2. THE RITUAL

- and one-by-one, pinpricks of light emerge from the darkness as the Druids gather, holding candles, singing. They sweep Orlando up into a ritual of gratitude to nature's blessings - and when they see her cry at the beauty of the ceremony, they recognise that she loves Nature as much as they do.

Time passes -

Perhaps, as it does, we see Orlando lie on the ground, stretch out, revel in being in the woods as time passes around her - and then -

3. THE MEAL

- Orlando is seated with the Druids, poised to eat together - but when Orlando reaches for food to eat herself, she is stopped. First, food and drink is given ceremonially back to the earth from which it came - then all is shared equally. Orlando finds this symbolic gesture confusing - a Druid explains to her that everything the Earth gives them is a gift - that one cannot simply take from the earth until it is barren, but must allow it to replenish. Orlando had never considered this before, for all her feasting - and she is certain the Crown had never considered it -

The Druids quite agree. Oops - Orlando, not having intended to bring up the Monarchy, tries to speak as if she has no noble lineage - but cannot help speak on behalf of the Crown. As the conversation turns to the de-throning, she suggests to them that it is natural for a monarch to rule - after all it is a God-given right, and they laugh at her idea of what is 'natural' (and of 'God'). She argues - for arguments sake only, she says - that there are those born into royalty, just as there are those born into aristocracy, with blue blood and brown earth in their veins, who have ancestral estates going hundreds of years back, and the Druids respond that a few hundred years is quite a short time in the span of the earth. Besides, can one really own land?

Isn't the earth the birthright of all people, in which case owning land entails stealing it from someone else who rightfully should have access to it? She splutters that that would make the Monarch a thief - any nobleman a criminal - and any noble family that takes pride in what it thinks to be a long ancestry really no better than the *nouveau riche*. And they agree that yes, it would.

Orlando is discomfited. Time passes - the Druids melt away - perhaps again we see Orlando alone as time passes, perhaps with her paper and quill pen out, listening to the Woods -

4. THE SOLSTICE

- and we arrive with Orlando sitting in the near-dark.

The crone emerges from the trees - comes to sit with Orlando - we learn it is the winter Solstice, and the Druids are sitting in the Woods in vigil, waiting for the light to return. Orlando tells her how Nature is so much bigger and more powerful here than in the city. She has always loved to lie on the roots of her own oak tree at home - she always feels as if it is the spine of the earth. So unlike someone from the city, the Crone says, to recognise Nature for the force that it is.

Orlando tells the crone how she has always taken solace in watching the turning of the seasons; in knowing that no matter what, the seasons will turn, that one can depend on Nature - but the Crone warns her that yes, Nature has her cycles, and her seasons, but she is also a force unto herself - she plays her own queer tricks, and she moves not by our calendar but her own. Orlando is confused, but the Crone tells her that everything in the physical world is transient, and subject to change - even the fact of seasons themselves - that the very nature of life is transformation. (Perhaps the Crone recalls when winter meant the river that runs through the city would freeze over, and now, here they sit, no frost in sight - just as, before the age of ice, the land was a temperate one.)

Orlando is struggling to take this broader span of time in -

5. THE CALL

- and suddenly, the sun begins to rise, puncturing the twilight of the woods - a red sun.

Something has changed - the Druids can sense it - something in the city - the blood sun is a sign - a new age is dawning - and they ready themselves to leave, to move further into the woods. Orlando tries to figure out what's happening - and then she hears, as if carried on the wind, the peal of trumpets - Kings trumpets? - surely not - Orlando is caught over whether to go with the Druids or go back - but she doesn't want to give herself completely up to Nature, not the way the Druids think of it - perhaps her destiny is back home after all -
And suddenly -

ACT THREE - THE RESTORATION

1. A COURT OF LAW

Orlando stands in full Restoration dress in a court of law. She faces a flock of bewigged men in black robes. A judge pounds a gavel.

The duty of the Court is a most grave one, he says. This Chancery Court is an extension of the Crown itself - the Crown which has only recently, and rightly, been restored to the King, as God intended - and as such it is incumbent on the Court to uphold order in England. No more the chaos of the revolution, no more the dark days of Elizabethan stink and rot, petty crime and misery, excess of violence and of romance - no. This is an age of light, of clarity, of order - and as such decorum is all - meaning certain standards must be upheld, he says.

The Lady Orlando, he says, has been called here today on account of two suits in her name and as regards the great house of her ancestors. The first was that the Lord Orlando, who appears to be nowhere in sight, was in fact dead, killed in the revolution, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; and the second was that she, the Lady Orlando, was a woman, which, no matter her rank, amounted to much the same thing. As such, he decrees, the house of Orlando's fathers will pass out of her ownership and to the next available heir, whilst in the meantime, she may reside in the home in a state of incognito - or incognita, as the case may be. He bangs his gavel - the matter is closed.

(Perhaps) Orlando launches into a passionate defence of herself, with all the confidence (and lack of deference or decorum) of the nobleman she once was - and the men are horrified - the judge cuts her off short. You would do well to remember, he warns her, your proper place. *Lady Orlando*.

She stands there as the men of the court leave -

2. A COFFEE HOUSE

Lady Orlando! I thought it was you.

Three poets sit with their coffee, mid-discussion - they look alarmingly like the three literati Orlando encountered in the Elizabethan age. And, in fact, they are - one of them introduces himself as Nick Greene.

And if I am not mistaken, she says to the other two, you are Messrs Addison and Pope? Some of the greatest poets of the age? They answer in the affirmative, and Orlando is much relieved. Finally, her own people - she is a great lover of poetry herself, and has been hoping to find kindred spirits in this age - the men are gratified to have a woman fawn over their brilliance, and are exceedingly polite as they immediately proffer their teacups for her to fill them. Confused,

she does - and as the scene goes on is forced into the strange and highly gendered ritual of tea drinking in England - she is scarcely given room to say a word aside from asking, 'one lump or two?' - and of flattering men's egos - she is called upon only to give murmurs of assent or awe.

Eventually she interrupts to tell them that she herself is a poet - and immediately faces their derision. It's simply unnatural, they tell her, for a woman to write poetry - after all, women are but children of a larger growth, with smaller brains. A man of sense only trifles with them, flatters them and humours them. Orlando tries to argue that there is no evidence women are any lesser than men, but they tell her this is natural state of the world - that men are divided from women as sheerly as night from day - as mind is divided from body - the rational from the emotional - and it is usually clear which are the greater and which the lesser.

And what of twilight? Orlando asks. The poets look at her. You speak of the divisions of the world, of the difference between night and day, but what of twilight? Or sunset, or sunrise? One would think poets would be well-acquainted with such *natural* concepts - although they rather complicate your argument, no?

An argument, my dear lady, is simply a place to test one's ideas, whether they are correct or not. And it is pointless to engage any longer in discussion with a woman, who cannot understand this simple fact, one of the poets says. They bid her a good day and leave in a huff.

Orlando stands, and finds herself -

3. THE STREET

- brooding, on the street, under the light of a single lamp-post. What now? It seems that by virtue of being a woman in this age she has no freedom at all. Surely her destiny is not to sit still and silent, subject to the whims of men.

She scans the street either side of her - no-one is around. She pulls at the great folds of her skirt, tears them away, revealing a gentleman's pants underneath. She throws her skirt around her shoulders like a cloak, and waits.

Soon, a young lady of the night passes - she flutters her eyelashes at Orlando, propositions them - and Orlando, surprised, haltingly admits that he is in fact a woman. Oh, the young lady says, dropping her seductive act, coulda fooled me! She cackles, and introduces herself as Nell.

Orlando discovers (despite her trousers) some of the pleasures of being a woman in Nell's company - being able to commiserate (and laugh) over the blustering egos of men, for one - and Nell asks if she's on her way to the ball - ball? Dressed like that, Nell had assumed, the masquerade! - and she takes Orlando's hand as -

4. A MASQUERADE BALL

- a masquerade ball forms around them, which seems at first to be an expression of the decorum and rigid gender norms of the age - but takes on some of the more subversive energy of its carnivalesque roots as it continues. A sequence during which we catch sight of Orlando and lose it again, dressed as she pleases - here in a dress - there in pants and a cloak. As Orlando swaps in and out of different gender signifiers, and the ball itself takes on this gender-fluid/queer energy - at one moment two women dance with each other, perhaps - a man drops his handkerchief and a woman picks it up for him - etc. etc. -

Just as the sequence is reaching its peak, we hear a clock begin to strike midnight - it sounds alarmingly like the bell that tolled as Orlando waited in the snow - and thunder rumbles - a huge storm begins to brew, and as lightning flashes we lose sight of the ball -

The clock chimes, the storm builds, all is darkness and confusion - until -

ACT FOUR - THE AGE OF INDUSTRY

1. THE STEPS OF A CHURCH

- Orlando stands alone, in a huge dark Victorian crinoline, shrouded by fog.

A labourer, perhaps a chimney sweep, almost knocks into Orlando, apologises for not seeing her - this never-ending fog, he says, it's been hanging over all England for years now, who knows if it'll ever clear again - and the damp, the infernal damp - it's rusted my best kettle, he says, and a cushion fell to pieces in my hands just yesterday. Best to stay indoors, he says, as often as one can, and hurries away.

Church bells ring, and Orlando watches as a Victorian couple process on, followed by three of their guests. They come to a stop, and the groom addresses those gathered. What a happy day, he says, the most blessed of days, where man and woman are joined as they should be, in holy matrimony. And they marry not only for themselves, but because the Queen wishes it - for England and for Empire. For this is an age of industry, of work and the rewards of work - in this age a man of energy and skill can make his fortune, and fortune for all England, and in this endeavour he needs must have a wife to make house and home - and soon, hopefully, a baby. For Empire! Those watching coo and applaud, throwing rice over the silent wife and happy groom. They process off.

Orlando is horrified. Away from all this, to be alone - to write. She can still write.

2. A DRAWING ROOM

Orlando is seated, alone, in her darkened drawing room, away from the damp and the fog and all the talk of marriage and wives and babies, quill in hand, scribbling away furiously as if inspired.

She sits back - takes up her page - and begins to read aloud. It is an ode to the Angel in the House - how kind woman naturally is, how demure, how devoted to her husband above all else - and Orlando reads with growing horror, as if she is discovering just now what she has written whilst in some strange trance. She flings the quill away in horror, crumples up the paper and stashes it away. What was that drivel that poured out of her? Perhaps the damp has gotten into her, too, the spirit of the age infecting her mind, her soul, her writing. She hears in the distance wedding bells again - oh god, is she really hearing them or is she going mad?! - everything is conspiring to make her marry, to bend to the age - and she won't do it.

At once she stands up from her desk, turns, and -

3. THE MOOR

- she is on the expanse of moorland, fog rolling around her, the sky wide open above her.

She rages at the sky - at the age - is this it, then? Her great destiny? To live as a wife and mother to some man, confined forever to the house? Or else to live as as solitary shut-in cut off from society, from life, from love? That is all that is possible? Thunder rumbles as she rages. She won't do it - she will not bend to the will of the age -

But what is her alternative? Orlando cannot answer her own question, and stands in a state of despair matched by the desolation of the moor and the thunder rumbling about her.

In desperation, she declares her answer - she will not go back to society - she will renounce the Orlando she has been, once and for all - and she will be Nature's bride. Better to lie here, on this Moor, for all eternity - to let grasses grow round her finger like a wedding ring - to let birds drop feathers over her head as rice is thrown over the heads of brides - better to let the Orlando she has known die than to go back to society -

And then she hears, far off, a cry. Is it her own cry, echoing back to her? Or is it another cry of anguish? She looks for its source.

The cry gets closer. And suddenly, a figure in a Victorian suit appears, bellowing in their own rage at the sky.

The figure stops - sees Orlando.

It turns out this figure is also fleeing the demands of the age - they have no desire to be a husband. They go to introduce themselves - Orlando - Shelmerdine - but each guesses the other's name before they can say it. Strange - I feel as if we have known each other for a long time already. It strikes Orlando that Shel is not quite what they appear to be - 'are you sure you're not a woman, Shel? At least in part?' - and Shel seems to see the same thing in Orlando - 'are you entirely certain you're not, at least somewhat, a man?' Neither is able to give a clear answer.

The two come to realise that there is, perhaps, a way out of their predicament here - a way to outwit what seems to be their destiny - to perhaps carve out their own. Perhaps they will get married, but theirs would be a marriage that only appears to conform to the expectations of the age, so they can get on with their lives. Is it still a marriage, Orlando asks, if I want to spend every morning writing, rather than talking to you? Is it still a marriage if you wish to sail around the world for six months of the year? What about if we love other people? Or if people perceive us one day to be man and wife, and the next wife and man? Can it still be marriage if I am not quite a woman, and you are not quite a man?

Shel shrugs. Anything is possible, they tell her.

Orlando smiles - and they agree to wed. The thunder returns, closer, ominous - time to hurry up. Magically, they each have a ring in their pocket, and as the thunder builds, and lightning begins to flash, they exchange their rings and kiss -

And the lightning flashes -

We lose sight of the couple -

ACT FIVE - MODERNITY

1. THE TUBE

- and catch sight of them again, as the flashes of lightning become the lights of a tube carriage blinking in and out of sight as it passes through a tunnel -

And now we see them. Orlando and Shel stand, in puffer jackets and jeans, crammed into a tube compartment amongst 21st-century people. Orlando is amazed. They're travelling with such speed, she says to Shel - greater speed than she's ever travelled before - and look at the skyscrapers out the window - and everyone in the compartment is engaged in their own little glowing screens - technology, it seems, has progressed to a point where the very fabric of life seems like magic - like anything could be possible. And everyone in the carriage is dressed in their own style - as if the carriage is a meeting point of many different kinds of people - what a change from the cookie-cutter Victorian men and women. There are even two women holding hands, Orlando notices, and without hiding?

The tube reaches its destination and everyone disperses - Shel farewells her - Orlando steps off the tube in wonder. So this is the modern age. Have they reached the endpoint of history? Is this finally what it all amounts to - a time where anything is possible, where anyone can be anything, where no-one needs to hide or compromise or accept a lesser destiny - a time where humanity has finally reached its potential?

Someone calls Orlando's name - it is Nick Greene of the band of poets, but in modern dress now. She's late, he tells her.

2. A RECORDING STUDIO

Immediately, Orlando is in a studio, where Nick Greene is recording a podcast. He's a cultural commentator, now, and he's got quite the following. He's interviewing Orlando, 'a long-time aspiring writer,' he calls her, ahead of the imminent release of her new book - she has finished it, hasn't she? Not quite, she says, but almost.

As they talk, Orlando slowly comes to realise she hasn't quite landed in the modern utopia she thought she had. Nick Greene is the judgmental, conservative force he always was - nostalgic for a 'simpler, better time,' suspicious of the progressives who are stopping us from returning there, arguing that what they want simply goes against nature, will lead to a time of social degradation and decay.

Orlando still cannot find an adequate response to this man, and he asks her what, after all this time, she has to say about nature, in the end, her beloved subject - about life? Surely, after all these years, it's time to lay down her radical ideas - it's time to accept what is *truly* the natural state of the world.

And as he wraps up the interview -

3. LONDON CITY

- she finds herself standing, dejected, on a London street.

What *does* it all amount to? What is her final destiny?

[What follows is a montage sequence, to be determined, that brings up all of the symbols we've seen previously that signal change is about to come - weather events, protest/revolution, the wild dances of the carnival and masquerade, e.g.:]

Thunder rumbles in the distance. Orlando looks up. She's heard that before - it always signals a change -

But the thunder becomes a rumble of voices -

And she's caught up in a stream of angry protestors - 'the people talk of revolution' -

[Those symbols are intermixed with those we've seen that play with liminal boundaries - the gender swaps, queered marriages and other subversions - perhaps it culminates in a truly anarchic, subversive celebratory dance of modernity, what Mardi Gras once was perhaps before it got ironed out and straightened up - perhaps it ends with something like -]

And Orlando is swept up in the crowd of revellers - as the music pounds and the lights shift, we see strobe-like flashes in the centre of the group, much as in the carnival in the woods, illuminating Orlando dancing as a woman - then Orlando (is it?) as a man - as a woman - man - and finally -

Orlando stands, alone. They are dressed androgynously.

They smile. 'Onwards.'