

Act II: The Seventeenth Century



START *Scene 1: The Thaw. Also, the Archduchess.*

ORLANDO

I am alone.

CHORUS

The dawn broke with unusual suddenness,
and a sight of the most extraordinary nature met Orlando's eyes.

ORLANDO

Where there had once been solid ice
was now a race of turbulent yellow waters.

CHORUS

All was riot and confusion.
The river was strewn with icebergs.

ORLANDO

What was most terrible was the sight of
the human creatures, trapped on the ice.

CHORUS
Some cried out and
made wild promises to God.

A YOUNG WOMAN
*(An improvised
wild promise to God)*

CHORUS
Others were dazed with terror,
looking steadfastly before them.

CHORUS
Others called for vengeance:

AN OLD MAN
Vengeance upon
the dirty Irish rebels!

Some perished clasping a silver pot
or other treasure to their breasts.

AN OLD WOMAN
My teapot! My teapot!

Among other strange sights
to be seen was a table laid sumptuously
for twenty on an iceberg.

ORLANDO
Or a couple in bed
together with an extraordinary number of cooking utensils.

Orlando gazed, astounded.

CHORUS
But, seeming to recollect himself,
he galloped hard along the river bank,
until he reached his great house in the country.

ORLANDO
(To the audience) Orlando now took a strange delight in thoughts
of death and decay.

(To the chorus)
Are we so made that we have to take death in small doses daily or
we could not go on with the business of living?

(To the gods)
I am done with women!

CHORUS
He stood shaken with sobs, all for the desire of a woman in Rus-
sian trousers—

ORLANDO
Faithless, fickle, devil, adulteress, wench . . .

I must do something. I must do something. I must write.

CHORUS
Orlando would have given every penny to write one little book
and become famous—and yet, all the gold in Peru would not buy
him the treasure of one well-turned line . . .

ORLANDO
Fame is like . . . a braided coat which hampers the limbs, a jacket
of silver which curbs the heart . . . Confound it all! Why not sim-
ply say what one means!

Orlando throws himself at the foot of the oak tree.

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—a man in drag—approaches.

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