

Thirty-six, owns a motor-car, 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.

Enter Queen Elizabeth.

Orlando kneels at her feet and kisses her hands.

START

ORLANDO

The house is at your service, Mum. Nothing has been changed.

THE QUEEN

What's wrong, Orlando?

ORLANDO

Wrong?

THE QUEEN

You don't seem like yourself.

ORLANDO

I'm not sure that there is such a thing, Your Highness.

THE QUEEN

Don't be silly, Orlando. You are many things, to many people. To me, you are a boy with delightful legs in silk stockings—apparently you have changed. But no matter. The dead have wonderful memories.

ORLANDO

I would like, Your Highness, at the present moment, to feel as though I am only one thing.

THE QUEEN

Poppycock! Don't be a bore, Orlando. You were never a bore in silk stockings.

ORLANDO

What is death like, Your Highness?

THE QUEEN

Oh, that. Nothing really, just a prick in the sides. My sinuses are *unbelievably* clear. All is air.

ORLANDO

I long for death at moments . . .

THE QUEEN

You've always been morbid. And yet, when I knew you, Orlando, you were filled with life—*exquisitely*—you were bursting with it.

ORLANDO

I remember.

THE QUEEN

Perhaps it's the spirit of the age.

ORLANDO

Perhaps. We don't know why we go upstairs or why we come down again—our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea.

THE QUEEN

(Pointing) Look, Orlando, there is the wild goose—in the garden.

ORLANDO

Where?

THE QUEEN

Just there—

ORLANDO

The wild goose—and the secret of life is . . . ?

THE QUEEN

(Turning to go) A small kiss, for old time's sake?

Orlando kisses the Queen. The Queen exits.

ORLANDO

Orlando banished these thoughts. She remembered with a start that she was married. Shelmerdine?

CHORUS

She was married, true, but if one's husband was always sailing around the world, was that marriage?

ORLANDO

And if one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage?

CHORUS

And finally . . . most importantly . . .

ORLANDO

If one still wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage?

CHORUS

She had her doubts.

ORLANDO

But she would put it to the test.

CHORUS

She flung herself under the old oak tree.
She took up her poem.

END