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ORLANDO

By Jack Brand

Based on *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf

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Scene 1 - INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE

Open on a shot of a large group of commuters of various ages, occupations and ethnicities sitting and standing in a cramped train carriage. We focus in on one out of many faces in this multifaceted crowd: an unassuming tan-skinned male in his early 40s, wearing an orange-and-red plaid suit. He is tall and slender, and the suit hangs off him slightly. Although greying very slightly, he is well-groomed and appears to be wearing some light foundation on his face.

His name, written in block caps flashes across the screen: ORLANDO.

Gazing sleepily across the carriage at a younger, darker-skinned woman in a red tracksuit (around 25), Orlando notices she carries a potted eucalyptus plant. He gives an enigmatic half-smirk that goes totally unnoticed by her before the train comes to a halt. As the flood of passengers busily rush past, parrying one another with courtesies while straining to not make eye-contact at any cost, Orlando whips out an iPad and begins scribbling something down with a stylus.

As he steps off the train, Orlando scrunches his face and taps his stylus against his temple. He agitatedly looks back and forth across the platform until he spots the girl with the plant walking away from him. Only the top part of the leaves can be seen from behind her. Orlando tries to laser-focus on the leaves. The greenness of them; the patterns of the cuticles.

But his eyes instead wander downwards towards the girl's rear. Orlando squints his eyes and rapid flashes of lewd imagery concerning himself and this plant-holding stranger flash in monochrome.

BAZ:
Sir? Sir?

When Orlando reopens his eyes, a short but warm and pleasant-faced information kiosk attendant of a similar age to the plant-girl is trying to communicate with him. As he focuses on the face of the helper, BAZ, a subtle, radiant glow emanates off of his fair features. Orlando quickly hides his tablet in his jacket.

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ORLANDO:

Y-yes? Can I help you?

BAZ:

Are you lost? You've just been standing here with your eyes closed for like five minutes.

Orlando gives a blank, disbelieving look to the helper.

ORLANDO:

I-I-I'm sorry, I was... It was just, uh...

Baz takes Orlando by the arm and guides him to a nearby train station coffee shop.

BAZ:

Hang on, let's get you- let's get you over here, yeah?

ORLANDO:

Oh no, no, no. No need to make a fuss, I'm terribly absent-minded. I was just... really in the zone.

BAZ:

With what, exactly?

ORLANDO:

My poetry.

BAZ:

Ah, okay.

ORLANDO:

Yes, I've been trying to come up with some ideas.

BAZ:

Oh yeah? Anything come up?

The helper sits Orlando down at a white deck table just outside the coffee shop.

ORLANDO:

Well... no, not really. There's nothing to write about in this urban shithole. I don't even know my way around.

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BAZ:

Not a fan of the city, then. I can dig that. I was a bit of a country mouse myself. So where are you from?

ORLANDO:

The country? Oh, I suppose you could say that. This country, back when it was good. My home, oh... I miss it. My father's mansion was as wide as these skyscrapers are tall.

BAZ:

A mansion? Were your family loaded or something?

ORLANDO:

Well, fortunes were decent under Queen Elizabeth, but I remember my writing was quite financially successful under Victoria's Empire.

Orlando gives a knowing look and a wry smile to the confused assistant. Baz smiles as well and starts laughing. He gets to his feet. He begins shuffling off back to a nearby info booth.

BAZ:

(chuckling nervously)

Are you sure you're alright, don't need me to get anyone?

ORLANDO:

Oh no, perfectly fine, thank you. Though I would like to know where and when the train to Ealing is arriving?

BAZ:

Platform 5, in about eight minutes.

ORLANDO:

Thank you.

Orlando watches the helper as he walks away. He gets out his tablet again and attempts to write, but writer's block hits again. He looks back at the assistant, closes his eyes. Inappropriate imagery with the assistant now fills his mind.

ORLANDO:

Actually!-

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The assistant turns back around.

ORLANDO:

Come back, I need to ask you something else...

Orlando gives a mischievous aside glance to the fourth wall.

Scene 2 - INT. ORLANDO'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM, 05:15am

ORLANDO (V.O.):

The primary object of fascination in my poetry was, much the same as many an empty-headed youth, the wonders of nature.

Orlando lies wide awake, staring motionlessly at the ceiling, his arms sprawled out to the sides. Baz lies asleep to the left of him, half covered by sheets, facing away from Orlando. The bedroom is ornate but ill-kept, with a few shirts and jeans lying in a heap on the floor. The bedside desktop is covered in tissue paper, a couple of poorly made roll-up joints, a smartphone and a PlayStation controller.

After a few seconds, Orlando eventually lets out a loud sigh and turns to face the desktop as the phone flashes to life. He tries to bend his arm in an awkward, inefficient manner in order to grab it. He overstretches and accidentally pushes it off the side and onto the floor.

ORLANDO:

(whispering)

Ah, fuck.

Reaching blindly past the side of the bed, Orlando eventually scrapes it off the dusty carpet and looks at the time. He rolls his eyes and slides it back onto the sideboard. Lethargic, he lets out a large, snotty sniff and exhales before pushing himself up with some delicacy so as not to wake his latest hollow conquest.

Nude, he stands up and stretches widely. As he creaks his back and massages his temples, he runs his hands down the outline of his figure, down to his hips. A spark of confusion appears on his face as

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he continuously runs his hands up and down his torso. His hips are wider than one would expect from a man of his lanky figure. Suddenly, a wide-eyed look of realisation! He swivels around, picks up the phone and stares at it intensely.

ORLANDO:

(louder)

Ah, fuck!

Orlando sprints out of the bedroom towards the bathroom, his hands clasped tightly around his genitals.

ORLANDO:

You stay put, you hear me?

As he approaches the door he grabs the door knob and tries to twist it round. However, the brass handle is loosely fitted and rusted while the latch will not open sufficiently when the knob is turned. Orlando begins twisting it and smacking it frustratedly.

ORLANDO:

Fuck! Fuck! Come on, come on! Fucking... knobs...

Eventually electing to get the door open with brute force, he smashes himself into it before recoiling and rubbing his shoulder to ease the pain.

Meanwhile, in the bedroom, Baz lets out a loud sniff and stirs from his sleep - the tiniest sliver of sclera in his eye cracks open.

Eventually busting his way into the bathroom, Orlando leans into the sink and begins vigorously washing his face. He picks up a bar of soap and rubs the lather into his hands, but as he puts it back it slides onto the floor. He looks up at the mirror. His face looks the same. He leans towards as closely as possible to try and catch a glimpse of the reflection of his lower body, but the mirror is too small and the sink blocks him from getting the preferred view.

Looking around the room in a panic, he notices the bathtub. Like most modern baths, it has a plastic edge around it that connects it to the floor and walls to keep it stable. Various shampoos, conditioners, soaps and beauty products sit on the edges. Clumsily sweeping all of

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that away, Orlando begins to climb onto the edge of the tub leg-first.

After a few false starts in trying to get a grip on the slippery surface with his feet, he eventually gets a precarious footing and attempts to lean over to get a good view of his lower body in the mirror.

Baz throws the sheets off himself and stumbles out of bed.

BAZ:
(shouting)
Orlando? Hey!

In the bathroom, Orlando nearly falls over but balances himself by grabbing onto a shower curtain. He answers while still trying to peer at himself.

ORLANDO:
(shouting)
What?

Baz puts on some pants, strides down the corridor and knocks at the bathroom door. Orlando quickly dismounts from the bathtub and locks the door.

BAZ:
Orlando, are you alright?

ORLANDO:
Yeah, yeah! I'm fine, everything's fine! Just go back to bed!

Orlando leaps back onto the side of the bathtub with great haste, but in doing so he oversteps it, slipping front-first onto the round edge. His ribs crack loudly and he lets out a piercing shriek of agony.

Baz begins knocking more furiously.

BAZ:
Hey! What was that?

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Sliding off the bath, Orlando lets out a series of whimpers before crawling back to his feet. Clutching his midsection, he limps back over to the mirror.

ORLANDO:

(grunting)

I'm... nnggh... alright.

Staring back at him now is the face of a beautiful, sharp-featured woman. His formerly close-cut hair begins to grow out in waves at a rapid rate until it falls past his shoulders. He looks down and sees that he now has pronounced breasts, and moves his arm off his midsection to reveal that his penis has been exchanged with a vagina.

ORLANDO (V.O.):

The cycles of change that all things in nature exhibit.

Orlando lets out a great, weary sigh. No longer panicked, his body language slumps into resignation that he has changed his sex.

ORLANDO:

(whispering to himself)

Well, here we go again.

Hunching over the sink, Orlando tenses herself to move over to the door and reveal her new form to Baz. As she steps out to open the door, she slips on the dropped soap bar and flies in the air, legs-akimbo. Her back crashes down on the hard floor while her head rebounds off the bath edge, knocking her unconscious. Lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, Baz continues to pound on the door.

BAZ:

(yelling)

Orlando! Orlando! What the hell was that? Orlando?

After enough time of Orlando not replying, Baz takes drastic action. Taking a nearby fire extinguisher, he uses it as a battering ram to break down the door. After a few hits, the lock snaps off and Baz charges in. Looking down at Orlando's slumped, unconscious body, Baz looks confused and rolls her over to reveal her as a woman.

Stepping back nervously, three ethereal lights suddenly phase through the bathroom ceiling. They are coloured green, blue and red. The

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three spirit lights swirl around the room and eventually merge with Orlando. A couple of seconds later, Orlando springs up awake. There is a prolonged awkward silence as Baz and the new Orlando stare at each other, bewildered.

ORLANDO:

... I can explain.

Baz quickly backs away, runs back to the bedroom and starts putting on more clothes. Orlando continues to sit and stare blankly for a moment while smacking her new lips and inspecting herself. Crawling on all-fours, she peers over the threshold while Baz grabs all his things and begins making his way to the exit.

ORLANDO:

Don't go.

Baz stares wide-eyed and petrified as he awkwardly shimmies past the bathroom, trying hard not to make eye contact. As Baz goes to the front door of the flat, Orlando quickly chases him, still on all-fours. Baz is visibly scared of the sight of this naked stranger galloping down the hallway.

ORLANDO:

Wait, wait, wait! I can actually explain!

Orlando grabs onto Baz's leg like a frightened puppy. Baz tries to shake her off but to no avail, so grabs her by the face and pushes her back.

BAZ:

Get away from me!

Orlando lies back in shock as Baz throws the door open and leaves. The saturated amber light of a nearby streetlamp blares through and a gush of cold air pins Orlando to a nearby wall. Orlando scrunches her face in sadness but she sheds no tears. Over the horizon of a small forest parallel to the small apartment block, Orlando sees a sliver of real sunlight.

ORLANDO (V.O.):

But in change of the land and the hearts of lovers...

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Orlando briefly looks serene as she climbs to her feet and basks in the mixture of artificial and natural light. She closes her eyes. Her naked skin begins to prickle with goosebumps as the short, fine hairs on her arms stand on end. She closes the door and slinks back to the bedroom.

ORLANDO (V.O.):

I can do nothing but shut the natural away.

Orlando climbs back into bed and goes back to sleep.

Scene 3 - INT. ORLANDO'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM, 11:00am

There is a loud knock at the front door and Orlando awakes with a start. Getting up and grabbing a silk dressing gown, Orlando walks down the hallway and opens the door.

There stands NICHOLAS "NICK" GREENE, a somewhat portly, round-featured white man with a thick ginger moustache. He wears green all over: a green bowler hat, a green waistcoat and green pinstripe trousers.

ORLANDO:

Yes, can I help you?

GREENE:

(nodding, in a stereotypical "simpleton" voice)

Uh, yes!

Orlando squints and looks the gentleman up and down before a look of realisation crosses her face.

ORLANDO:

Oh, Nicholas Green!

GREENE:

Yep, there it is.

ORLANDO:

Oh, wow, I haven't seen you since- do you wanna come in?

Green steps in and places his hat on a wall-mounted hook.

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GREENE:

(muttering to himself)

Honestly, I wear nothing but fucking green.

ORLANDO:

(blissfully ignorant of Green's muttering)

Yeah, no, come in! Wow, it really has been a long time.

GREENE:

(sarcastically)

Yes, yes it has, Orlando, and how large and shapely your breasts have grown since then.

ORLANDO:

Oh, uh... yeah. As you can see, it's happened again.

GREENE:

I know, which is why I'm here.

Orlando closes the front door as Green struts down the hallway and into a door on the right. Orlando follows him into the kitchen and sees him filling a kettle with water.

ORLANDO:

It's amazing that you can keep track of these things. You never told me how.

GREENE:

Writing pays well in the long run. Keeping track of all the people like us is quite simple with bugs and drones and informants.

ORLANDO:

I couldn't have gotten where I am now without that little promotion you gave me a few decades back.

Greene looks around at the slightly grotty kitchen, littered with unopened letters and dirty dishes.

GREENE:

Quite. But you realise that was nearly a hundred years ago, right?

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ORLANDO:

Time flies.

GREENE:

And apparently you can't keep yours' zipped up.

ORLANDO:

That's not exactly news to anyone.

GREENE:

We were counting on it. That boy you were with...

The kettle boils.

ORLANDO:

What about him?

GREENE:

We've been tracking him for some time. He's like us, Orlando.

ORLANDO:

What, a poet?

GREENE:

No, you cretin! Immortal, sex changing! We wanted to keep track of him so we tried to arrange a meeting between you two. As much as it pains to say, you're quite a bit more charming than the stiffes under my organisation's payroll.

ORLANDO:

Thank you!

GREENE:

Though they did manage to convince Lord Lucan. The less said about that, the better. It seemed logical that if you two became an item, it'd be easier for you both to stay out of trouble. But you had to fuck him on the night you were scheduled to change, didn't you?

ORLANDO:

Well, that's not my fault! Your people clearly aren't very good party planners!

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Greene chucks a teabag into a mug and pours the water.

GREENE:

Admittedly, it was... poor timing. But he's gone off the grid after he left your flat. You must have really freaked him out.

ORLANDO:

I never had to deal with such intolerance until now. No one used to care. Shel, God rest her soul, we dealt with the same things with no hassle. With all the strides that society has made since, you'd think that people now would be even more accepting.

Greene shovels spoonful after spoonful of sugar into the cup.

GREENE:

Hmm... I think it's more the fact that he didn't expect his hook up to literally transform into a woman right in front of him. That's slightly more unusual compared to your average sex change operation.

Greene takes a sip of tea and puckers his lips in from the heat of it.

ORLANDO:

So what are you going to do?

GREENE:

What are you gonna do? You're going to help me find him.

ORLANDO:

But I don't know where he is!

GREENE:

Well, we're gonna have to look! He works at the trainyard, we can start by asking around there.

ORLANDO:

He wouldn't want to see me like this even if we could find him.

GREENE:

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Orlando, I need you because you're living proof that people like us exist. He has no idea about his true nature. It'll be easier if we can keep him in the loop.

Orlando leans on a sideboard and ruminates silently. Greene slurps down the last of his tea and slams the mug down with a gasp of satisfaction.

GREENE:

Right! Shall we get going?

Scene 4 - INT. KING'S CROSS STATION, Midday

Amongst the crowd of commuters, Orlando and Greene walk through the main entrance of King's Cross. Orlando wears a pair of red-tinted Lennon shades and is finely dressed in a masculine two-piece suit and tie, exposing a tasteful amount of cleavage. Her hair is tied up in a bun - very androgynous.

Autumn is in full decay; reddened leaves breeze by and get stuck in the pigeon spikes that line the building. The duo of immortals chat to another information attendant, SHIREEN, at the closest info desk.

GREENE:

Does he usually have sick days?

SHIREEN:

No, hardly ever.

GREENE:

And absolutely no one around here has seen him?

SHIREEN:

Nope.

A bored Orlando stands by Greene's side and stares around blankly like a five year old who's been dragged to an estate agent's. The leaves in the wind outside constantly distract her eye.

GREENE:

Okay. Well, thanks for your help.

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SHIREEN:
No problem, dude.

Greene drags Orlando away.

GREENE:
Well, this is great, now we have no leads.

ORLANDO:
Oh well.

GREENE:
"Oh well"?

ORLANDO:
Yes, "oh well". I already want to go home.

GREENE:
Go home? Jesus, We've barely done anything yet.

ORLANDO:
I wanna go home, lie down-

GREENE:
Orlando, we can't, we still have to-

ORLANDO:
Lie down, listen to Frank Zappa and probably go out to have sex with something.

GREENE:
God. Let's go find the manager or something, come on.

Orlando reels back his head and lets out a loud, exaggerated groan.

GREENE:
Come on!

Scene 5 - KING'S CROSS STATION, MANAGER OFFICE, Midday

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Greene interrogates a manager in a run-down office. Orlando leans on the glass door just outside, her hands in her pockets. She takes out a cigarette and a match box. She sticks the cigarette in her mouth, sparks a match to light the cigarette with and waves the match out.

Orlando only hears muffled voices of Greene and the manager chatting about this Baz character. Greene has his back against Orlando as he's engrossed in the conversation. Orlando takes her back off the door and looks through the glass. Her eyebrows become cross. She puffs some smoke to steam up the glass. She steps back... and walks away into the distant crowd. Nobody notices.

Scene 6 - CENTRAL LONDON BACKSTREETS, 01:00pm

Orlando struts down a winding backstreet, picturesque if not for the noisy construction work turfing up the pavement going on around her. Various construction workers silently ogle her while on a smoke break. After walking a little way, she goes by a pleasant but desolate-looking dead-end close. She stops, walks backwards a couple steps, and changes direction to go down it to investigate for seemingly no discernible reason.

However, she does not see a sign that reads "NO ENTRY: DEMOLITION"

ORLANDO (V.O.):

For its flaws, the unnatural world can lead us to many unexpected paths...

Orlando follows the small street down to its end and finds yet another, even smaller passageway. She follows it down until she reaches a wire fence that blocks her. She hears a whistle, and suddenly the walls cave in as a wrecking ball flies through it.