

PLOT SUMMARY OF *AS YOU LIKE IT*

There has been a palace coup: Duke Frederick has banished his brother, Duke Senior, and now rules in his place, while Senior and his followers establish a “court-in-exile” in the Forest of Ar-Den. Meanwhile Orlando has been dispossessed of his inheritance by his bullying brother Oliver. When Orlando takes part in a wrestling match at court, Oliver persuades the champion to break his neck. Against the odds, Orlando wins – and sets the rest of the story in train.

Among the spectators are Duke Senior’s daughter Rosalind and her best friend (and Duke Frederick’s daughter) Celia. Rosalind and Orlando fall head over heels in love. Then disaster strikes: Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind, and Orlando is warned to flee the court as well.

Accompanied by his father’s servant Adam, who informs him of Oliver’s murderous intentions, Orlando sets off into the forest. Celia has meanwhile volunteered to share her cousin’s exile, and suggests they should join Duke Senior, travelling incognito to avoid detection. Attended by Touchstone, their faithful Fool, Rosalind disguises herself as “Ganymede”, a young man, with Celia posing as “his” sister. Both sets of travellers find hospitality in Ar-Den: Orlando and Adam are welcomed to Senior’s table, while Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone meet the honest shepherd Corin – and learn of young Silvius’s unrequited love for Phoebe.

But Orlando is pining for his lost love, posting poetic celebrations of her on the forest trees – some of which are found by Rosalind herself, who, in her male disguise, approaches Orlando, offering to ease his heart by “impersonating” Rosalind. Love is elsewhere in the air: Touchstone has fallen for goat-herd Audrey; and when “Ganymede” (alias Rosalind) chides Phoebe for her rejection of Silvius, Phoebe promptly falls in love with “him”.

The mood darkens when Oliver arrives with a bloody cloth: Orlando has been wounded saving Oliver from a lion, and is late for an appointment with “Ganymede”. Oliver, shamed by Orlando’s actions, is now a reformed character and duly falls in love with Celia.

Orlando arrives but can no longer continue the charade: Ganymede’s impersonation of Rosalind is making him miss her all the more. “Ganymede” replies that Orlando and Rosalind will join Oliver and Celia at the altar. When Silvius and Phoebe arrive, “Ganymede” promises Phoebe that if “he” marries any woman, it will be her – but if “he” marries no woman, Phoebe must marry Silvius. Phoebe agrees.

And so the stage is set for four weddings – and an abstinence. For while Audrey and Touchstone, Phoebe and Silvius, Celia and Oliver, and Rosalind and Orlando all tie the knot, the melancholy Jaques joins the now-penitent Duke Frederick in monastic contemplation.

