

THE STORY

Searching for her fiancé Ruggiero, Bradamante arrives on an island belonging to the enchantress Alcina. She is traveling disguised as her brother Ricciardo and is accompanied by her protector, Melissa, who is also an enchantress. Morgana, Alcina's sister, falls instantly in love with "Ricciardo," despite Morgana's existing relationship with Oronte. Bradamante is distraught when she discovers that Ruggiero and Alcina are lovers.

Once Bradamante and Melissa are alone with Ruggiero, they demand to know why he has abandoned Bradamante. Believing that he is really talking with her brother Ricciardo, Ruggiero insists that he only loves Alcina. Oronte is furious at "Ricciardo" for stealing Morgana from him, but Morgana only derides his despair at losing her. Oronte tells Ruggiero that Alcina will doubtless have fallen for the newcomer "Ricciardo," and that it will not be long before she turns Ruggiero into a wild beast as she has done all her previous lovers. Ruggiero is furious when he finds Alcina flirting with "Ricciardo." Alcina tries to reassure him that it meant nothing and is shocked when he will not be pacified.

In her despair Bradamante reveals her true identity to Ruggiero, but Melissa intervenes to say she's lying. Ruggiero allows himself to be persuaded it's a ruse of "Ricciardo's" to keep Alcina for himself. Morgana warns "Ricciardo" that Alcina is going to turn him into a wild beast in order to pacify Ruggiero's jealousy. "Ricciardo" says Ruggiero has no reason to be jealous as he loves someone else. "Is it me?," asks Morgana, and to preserve her disguise, Bradamante is forced to say "Yes."

Showing him the ring he gave to Bradamante, Melissa opens Ruggiero's eyes to the truth he has chosen to suppress, that he is betrothed to Bradamante. Consumed with guilt, he asks for Melissa's help in escaping Alcina's clutches. "Ask her to let you go hunting," says Melissa. "And then we can escape the island."

Bradamante convinces Ruggiero that she is herself and not her brother, but Ruggiero, confronted with his betrayal of her, tells himself that she must in fact be Alcina transforming herself to torment him. Now that "Ricciardo" has admitted to loving her, Morgana manages to persuade Alcina not to turn him into a wild beast, as Ruggiero no longer has reason to be jealous of him.

Alcina reluctantly agrees to let Ruggiero go hunting.

Intermission

Alcina is waiting for Ruggiero to return, when Oronte arrives with the news that Ruggiero is escaping from her with the help of the new arrivals. She swears vengeance on them all.

Oronte is in despair when Morgana refuses to believe that "Ricciardo" has left her. Morgana despairs when she sees "Ricciardo" with Ruggiero, clearly a couple, and that "Ricciardo" is clearly a woman. She rages at them that Alcina will avenge their betrayal.

Alcina calls on the spirits to help her keep Ruggiero, but they do not answer her. Overwhelmed by love and grief, she feels her power slipping away. Morgana begs Oronte to take her back. Although he still loves her, he is too hurt to forgive.

As they try to make their escape, Ruggiero and Bradamante come across Alcina. She pours out her rage and scorn for them both. Bradamante refuses to leave until Alcina's hold over Ruggiero is finally broken. Not until Ruggiero has put the ring back on Bradamante's finger does Alcina accept defeat, knowing that Melissa has won and that all her powers have deserted her.