

# All's Well That Ends Well



*William Shakespeare*

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## Act I

### SCENE I. Rousillon. The COUNT's palace.

*Enter BERTRAM, the COUNTESS of Rousillon, HELENA, and LAFEU, all in black*

**COUNTESS**

In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband.

**BERTRAM**

And I in going, madam, weep o'er my father's death anew: but I must attend his majesty's command, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection.

**LAFEU**

You shall find of the king a husband, madam; you, sir, a father: he that so generally is at all times good must of necessity hold his virtue to you; whose worthiness would stir it up where it wanted rather than lack it where there is such abundance.

**COUNTESS**

What hope is there of his majesty's amendment?

**LAFEU**

He hath abandoned his physicians, madam; under whose practises he hath persecuted time with hope, and finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time.

**COUNTESS**

This young gentlewoman had a father,—O, that 'had'! how sad a passage 'tis!—whose skill was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretched so far, would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work. Would, for the king's sake, he were living! I think it would be the death of the king's disease.

**LAFEU**

How called you the man you speak of, madam?

**COUNTESS**

He was famous, sir, in his profession, and it was his great right to be so: Gerard de Narbon.

**LAFEU**

He was excellent indeed, madam: the king very lately spoke of him admiringly and mourningly: he was skilful enough to have lived still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality.

**BERTRAM**

What is it, my good lord, the king languishes of?

**LAFEU**

A fistula, my lord.

**BERTRAM**

I heard not of it before.

**LAFEU**

I would it were not notorious. Was this gentlewoman the daughter of Gerard de Narbon?

**COUNTESS**

His sole child, my lord, and bequeathed to my overlooking. I have those hopes of her good that her education promises; her dispositions she inherits, which makes fair gifts fairer; for where an unclean mind carries virtuous qualities, there commendations go with pity; they are virtues and traitors too; in her they are the better for their simpleness; she derives her honesty and achieves her goodness.

**LAFEU**

Your commendations, madam, get from her tears.

**COUNTESS**

'Tis the best brine a maiden can season her praise in. The remembrance of her father never approaches her heart but the tyranny of her sorrows takes all livelihood from her cheek. No more of this, Helena; go to, no more; lest it be rather thought you affect a sorrow than have it.

**HELENA**

I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too.

**LAFEU**

Moderate lamentation is the right of the dead, excessive grief the enemy to the living.

**COUNTESS**

If the living be enemy to the grief, the excess makes it soon mortal.

**BERTRAM**

Madam, I desire your holy wishes.

**LAFEU**

How understand we that?

**COUNTESS**

Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed thy father  
In manners, as in shape! thy blood and virtue  
Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness  
Share with thy birthright! Love all, trust a few,  
Do wrong to none: be able for thine enemy  
Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend  
Under thy own life's key: be cheque'd for silence,

But never tax'd for speech. What heaven more will,  
That thee may furnish and my prayers pluck down,  
Fall on thy head! Farewell, my lord;  
'Tis an unseason'd courtier; good my lord,  
Advise him.

**LAFEU**

He cannot want the best  
That shall attend his love.

**COUNTESS**

Heaven bless him! Farewell, Bertram.

*Exit*

**BERTRAM**

[To HELENA] The best wishes that can be forged in  
your thoughts be servants to you! Be comfortable  
to my mother, your mistress, and make much of her.

**LAFEU**

Farewell, pretty lady: you must hold the credit of  
your father.

*Exeunt BERTRAM and LAFEU*

**HELENA**

O, were that all! I think not on my father;  
And these great tears grace his remembrance more  
Than those I shed for him. What was he like?  
I have forgot him: my imagination  
Carries no favour in't but Bertram's.  
I am undone: there is no living, none,  
If Bertram be away. 'Twere all one  
That I should love a bright particular star  
And think to wed it, he is so above me:  
In his bright radiance and collateral light  
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.  
The ambition in my love thus plagues itself:  
The hind that would be mated by the lion  
Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though plague,  
To see him every hour; to sit and draw  
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,  
In our heart's table; heart too capable  
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour:  
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy  
Must sanctify his reliques. Who comes here?

*Enter PAROLLES*

*Aside*

One that goes with him: I love him for his sake;  
And yet I know him a notorious liar,  
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;

Yet these fixed evils sit so fit in him,  
That they take place, when virtue's steely bones  
Look bleak i' the cold wind: withal, full oft we see  
Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.

**PAROLLES**

Save you, fair queen!

**HELENA**

And you, monarch!

**PAROLLES**

No.

**HELENA**

And no.

**PAROLLES**

Are you meditating on virginity?

**HELENA**

Ay. You have some stain of soldier in you: let me  
ask you a question. Man is enemy to virginity; how  
may we barricado it against him?

**PAROLLES**

Keep him out.

**HELENA**

But he assails; and our virginity, though valiant,  
in the defence yet is weak: unfold to us some  
warlike resistance.

**PAROLLES**

There is none: man, sitting down before you, will  
undermine you and blow you up.

**HELENA**

Bless our poor virginity from underminers and  
blowers up! Is there no military policy, how  
virgins might blow up men?

**PAROLLES**

Virginity being blown down, man will quicklier be  
blown up: marry, in blowing him down again, with  
the breach yourselves made, you lose your city. It  
is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to  
preserve virginity. Loss of virginity is rational  
increase and there was never virgin got till  
virginity was first lost. That you were made of is  
metal to make virgins. Virginity by being once lost  
may be ten times found; by being ever kept, it is  
ever lost: 'tis too cold a companion; away with 't!

**HELENA**

I will stand for 't a little, though therefore I die a virgin.

**PAROLLES**

There's little can be said in 't; 'tis against the rule of nature. To speak on the part of virginity, is to accuse your mothers; which is most infallible disobedience. He that hangs himself is a virgin: virginity murders itself and should be buried in highways out of all sanctified limit, as a desperate offendress against nature. Virginity breeds mites, much like a cheese; consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach. Besides, virginity is peevish, proud, idle, made of self-love, which is the most inhibited sin in the canon. Keep it not; you cannot choose but loose by't: out with 't! within ten year it will make itself ten, which is a goodly increase; and the principal itself not much the worse: away with 't!

**HELENA**

How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own liking?

**PAROLLES**

Let me see: marry, ill, to like him that ne'er it likes. 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept, the less worth: off with 't while 'tis vendible; answer the time of request. Virginity, like an old courtier, wears her cap out of fashion: richly suited, but unsuitable: just like the brooch and the tooth-pick, which wear not now. Your date is better in your pie and your porridge than in your cheek; and your virginity, your old virginity, is like one of our French withered pears, it looks ill, it eats drily; marry, 'tis a withered pear; it was formerly better; marry, yet 'tis a withered pear: will you anything with it?

**HELENA**

Not my virginity yet [ ]

There shall your master have a thousand loves,  
A mother and a mistress and a friend,  
A phoenix, captain and an enemy,  
A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,  
A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear;  
His humble ambition, proud humility,  
His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet,  
His faith, his sweet disaster; with a world  
Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms,  
That blinking Cupid gossips. Now shall he—  
I know not what he shall. God send him well!  
The court's a learning place, and he is one—



**PAROLLES**

What one, i' faith?

**HELENA**

That I wish well. 'Tis pity—

**PAROLLES**

What's pity?

**HELENA**

That wishing well had not a body in't,  
Which might be felt; that we, the poorer born,  
Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,  
Might with effects of them follow our friends,  
And show what we alone must think, which never  
Return us thanks.

*Enter Page*

**Page**

Monsieur Parolles, my lord calls for you.

*Exit*

**PAROLLES**

Little Helen, farewell; if I can remember thee, I  
will think of thee at court.

**HELENA**

Monsieur Parolles, you were born under a charitable star.

**PAROLLES**

Under Mars, I.

**HELENA**

I especially think, under Mars.

**PAROLLES**

Why under Mars?

**HELENA**

The wars have so kept you under that you must needs  
be born under Mars.

**PAROLLES**

When he was predominant.

**HELENA**

When he was retrograde, I think, rather.

**PAROLLES**

Why think you so?

**HELENA**

You go so much backward when you fight.

**PAROLLES**

That's for advantage.

**HELENA**

So is running away, when fear proposes the safety;  
but the composition that your valour and fear makes  
in you is a virtue of a good wing, and I like the wear well.

### PAROLLES

I am so full of businesses, I cannot answer thee acutely. I will return perfect courtier; in the which, my instruction shall serve to naturalize thee, so thou wilt be capable of a courtier's counsel and understand what advice shall thrust upon thee; else thou diest in thine unthankfulness, and thine ignorance makes thee away: farewell. When thou hast leisure, say thy prayers; when thou hast none, remember thy friends; get thee a good husband, and use him as he uses thee; so, farewell.

*Exit*

### HELENA

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky  
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull  
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.  
What power is it which mounts my love so high,  
That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?  
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings  
To join like likes and kiss like native things.  
Impossible be strange attempts to those  
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose  
What hath been cannot be: who ever strove  
So show her merit, that did miss her love?  
The king's disease—my project may deceive me,  
But my intents are fix'd and will not leave me.

*Exit*