

William Shakespeare

All's Well That Ends Well

Dramatis Personae

King of France.

The Duke of Florence.

Bertram, Count of Rousillon.

Lafeu, an old Lord.

Parolles, a follower of Bertram.

Several young French Lords, that serve with Bertram in the Florentine War.

Steward, Servant to the Countess of Rousillon.

Clown, Servant to the Countess of Rousillon.

A Page, Servant to the Countess of Rousillon.

Countess of Rousillon, Mother to Bertram.

Helena, a Gentlewoman protected by the Countess.

An old Widow of Florence.

Diana, daughter to the Widow.

Violenta, neighbour and friend to the Widow.

Mariana, neighbour and friend to the Widow.

Lords attending on the King; Officers; Soldiers, &c., French and Florentine.

Act I.

Scene 1.

Rousillon. A room in the Countess'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 practices 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.

Lefeu. 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.

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

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

Lefeu. A fistula, my lord.

Bertram. I heard not of it before.

Lefeu. 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.

Lefeu. Your commendations, madam, get from her tears.

'Tis an unseason'd courtier; good my lord,
Advise him.

Lefeu.

He cannot want the best That shall attend his
love.

Countess.

Heaven bless him!-Farewell, Bertram.

[Exit Countess.]

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

Lefeu.

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

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, setting 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 it!

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 lose by't: out with't! within ten years it will make itself ten, which is a goodly increase; and the principal itself not much the worse: away with it!

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 toothpick, 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 wither'd pear; it was formerly better; marry, yet 'tis a wither'd

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
Returns us thanks.

[Enter a Page.]

Page. Monsieur Parolles, my lord calls for you.

[Exit Page.]

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 hath 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

What hath been cannot be: who ever strove
To 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.]

Scene 2.

Paris. A room in the King's palace.

[Flourish of cornets. Enter the King of France,
with letters; Lords and others attending.]

King.

The Florentines and Senoys are by the ears;
Have fought with equal fortune, and
continue A braving war.

First lord.

So 'tis reported, sir.

King.

Nay, 'tis most credible; we here receive it,
A certainty, vouch'd from our cousin Austria,
With caution, that the Florentine will move us
For speedy aid; wherein our dearest friend
Prejudicates the business, and would seem

To have us make denial.

First lord.

His love and wisdom,
Approv'd so to your majesty, may plead
For amplest credence.

King.

He hath arm'd our answer,
And Florence is denied before he comes:
Yet, for our gentlemen that mean to see
The Tuscan service, freely have they leave
To stand on either part.

Second lord.

It well may serve A nursery to our gentry, who
are sick For breathing and exploit.

King.

What's he comes here?

[Enter Bertram, Lafeu, and Parolles.]

First lord.

It is the Count Rousillon, my good lord,
Young Bertram.

King.

Youth, thou bear'st thy father's face;
Frank nature, rather curious than in haste,
Hath well compos'd thee. Thy father's moral
parts
Mayst thou inherit too! Welcome to Paris.

Bertram.

My thanks and duty are your majesty's.

King.

I would I had that corporal soundness now,
As when thy father and myself in friendship
First tried our soldiership! He did look far
Into the service of the time, and was
Discipl'd of the bravest: he lasted long;
But on us both did haggish age steal on,
And wore us out of act. It much repairs me
To talk of your good father. In his youth
He had the wit which I can well observe
To-day in our young lords; but they may jest
Till their own scorn return to them unnoted,
Ere they can hide their levity in honour
So like a courtier: contempt nor bitterness
Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,
His equal had awak'd them; and his honour,
Clock to itself, knew the true minute when
Exception bid him speak, and at this time

His tongue obey'd his hand: who were below
him

He us'd as creatures of another place;
And bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks,
Making them proud of his humility,
In their poor praise he humbled. Such a man
Might be a copy to these younger times;
Which, follow'd well, would demonstrate them
now

But goes backward.

Bertram.

His good remembrance, sir,
Lies richer in your thoughts than on his tomb;
So in approof lives not his epitaph
As in your royal speech.

King.

Would I were with him! He would always
say,-
Methinks I hear him now; his plausible words
He scatter'd not in ears, but grafted them
To grow there, and to bear, '-Let me not live,'-
This his good melancholy oft began,
On the catastrophe and heel of pastime,
When it was out, '-Let me not live' quoth he,
'After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses

All but new things disdain; whose judgments
are
Mere fathers of their garments; whose
constancies
Expire before their fashions: '-This he wish'd:
I, after him, do after him wish too,
Since I nor wax nor honey can bring home,
I quickly were dissolved from my hive,
To give some labourers room.

Second lord.

You're lov'd, sir;
They that least lend it you shall lack you first.

King.

I fill a place, I know't.-How long is't, Count,
Since the physician at your father's died?
He was much fam'd.

Bertram.

Some six months since, my lord.

King.

If he were living, I would try him yet;-
Lend me an arm;-the rest have worn me out
With several applications:-nature and sickness
Debate it at their leisure. Welcome, count;
My son's no dearer.

Bertram.

Thank your majesty.

[Exeunt. Flourish.]

Scene 3.

Rousillon.

A Room in the Palace.

[Enter Countess, Steward, and Clown.]

Countess. I will now hear: what say you of this gentlewoman?

Steward. Madam, the care I have had to even your content, I wish might be found in the calendar of my past endeavours; for then we wound our modesty, and make foul the clearness of our deservings, when of ourselves we publish them.

Countess. What does this knave here? Get you gone, sirrah: the complaints I have heard of you I do not all believe; 'tis my slowness that I do not; for I know you lack not folly to commit them, and have ability enough to make such knaveries yours.

Clown. 'Tis not unknown to you, madam, I am a poor fellow.

Countess. Well, sir.

Clown. No, madam, 'tis not so well that I am poor, though many of the rich are damned: but if I may have

your ladyship's good will to go to the world, Isbel the woman and I will do as we may.

Countess. Wilt thou needs be a beggar?

Clown. I do beg your good will in this case.

Countess. In what case?

Clown.

In Isbel's case and mine own. Service is no
heritage: and I
think I shall never have the blessing of God till
I have issue of
my body; for they say bairns are blessings.

Countess. Tell me thy reason why thou wilt marry.

Clown. My poor body, madam, requires it: I am driven on by the flesh; and he must needs go that the devil drives.

Countess. Is this all your worship's reason?

Clown. Faith, madam, I have other holy reasons, such as they are.

Countess. May the world know them?

Clown.

I have been, madam, a wicked creature, as you
and all flesh
and blood are; and, indeed, I do marry that I
may repent.

Countess.

Thy marriage, sooner than thy wickedness.

Clown.

I am out of friends, madam, and I hope to have
friends for my
wife's sake.

Countess.

Such friends are thine enemies, knave.

Clown.

Y'are shallow, madam, in great friends: for the
knaves come
to do that for me which I am a-weary of. He
that ears my land
spares my team, and gives me leave to in the
crop: if I be his
cuckold, he's my drudge: he that comforts my
wife is the
cherisher of my flesh and blood; he that
cherishes my flesh and
blood loves my flesh and blood; he that loves
my flesh and blood
is my friend; ergo, he that kisses my wife is
my friend. If men
could be contented to be what they are, there
were no fear in
marriage; for young Charbon the puritan and
old Poysam the
papist, howsome'er their hearts are severed in

religion, their
heads are both one; they may joll horns
together like any deer
i' the herd.

Countess.

Wilt thou ever be a foul-mouth'd and
calumnious knave?

Clown.

A prophet I, madam; and I speak the truth the
next way:

For I the ballad will repeat,
Which men full true shall find;
Your marriage comes by destiny,
Your cuckoo sings by kind.

Countess.

Get you gone, sir; I'll talk with you more anon.

Steward.

May it please you, madam, that he bid Helen
come to you; of her I
am to speak.

Countess.

Sirrah, tell my gentlewoman I would speak
with her; Helen I mean.

Clown. [Sings.]

Was this fair face the cause, quoth she
Why the Grecians sacked Troy?
Fond done, done fond,
Was this King Priam's joy?
With that she sighed as she stood,
With that she sighed as she stood,
And gave this sentence then:-
Among nine bad if one be good,
Among nine bad if one be good,
There's yet one good in ten.

Countess.

What, one good in ten? you corrupt the song,
sirrah.

Clown.

One good woman in ten, madam, which is a
purifying o' the
song: would God would serve the world so all
the year! we'd find
no fault with the tithe-woman, if I were the
parson: one in ten,
quoth 'a! an we might have a good woman
born before every blazing
star, or at an earthquake, 'twould mend the
lottery well: a man
may draw his heart out ere he pluck one.

Countess.

You'll be gone, sir knave, and do as I
command
you!

Clown.

That man should be at woman's command, and
yet no hurt done!-
Though honesty be no puritan, yet it will do no
hurt; it will
wear the surplice of humility over the black
gown of a big
heart.-I am going, forsooth:the business is for
Helen to come
hither.

[Exit.]

Countess.

Well, now.

Steward.

I know, madam, you love your gentlewoman
entirely.

Countess.

Faith I do: her father bequeathed her to me;
and she herself,

without other advantage, may lawfully make
title to as much love
as she finds: there is more owing her than is
paid; and more
shall be paid her than she'll demand.

Steward.

Madam, I was very late more near her than I
think she wished me:
alone she was, and did communicate to herself
her own words to
her own ears; she thought, I dare vow for her,
they touched not
any stranger sense. Her matter was, she loved
your son: Fortune,
she said, was no goddess, that had put such
difference betwixt
their two estates; Love no god, that would not
extend his might
only where qualities were level; Diana no
queen of virgins, that
would suffer her poor knight surprise, without
rescue in the
first assault, or ransom afterward. This she
delivered in the
most bitter touch of sorrow that e'er I heard
virgin exclaim in;
which I held my duty speedily to acquaint you

withal; sithence,
in the loss that may happen, it concerns you
something to know
it.

Countess.

You have discharged this honestly; keep it to
yourself; many
likelihoods informed me of this before, which
hung so
tottering in the balance that I could neither
believe nor
misdoubt. Pray you leave me: stall this in your
bosom; and I
thank you for your honest care: I will speak
with you further
anon.

[Exit Steward.]

Even so it was with me when I was young:
If ever we are nature's, these are ours; this
thorn
Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong;
Our blood to us, this to our blood is born;
It is the show and seal of nature's truth,
Where love's strong passion is impress'd in
youth:

By our remembrances of days foregone,
Such were our faults:-or then we thought them
none.

[Enter Helena.]

Her eye is sick on't;-I observe her now.

Helena.

What is your pleasure, madam?

Countess.

You know, Helen,
I am a mother to you.

Helena.

Mine honourable mistress.

Countess.

Nay, a mother.
Why not a mother? When I said a mother,
Methought you saw a serpent: what's in
mother,
That you start at it? I say I am your mother;
And put you in the catalogue of those
That were enwombed mine. 'Tis often seen
Adoption strives with nature; and choice
breeds

A native slip to us from foreign seeds:
You ne'er oppress'd me with a mother's groan,
Yet I express to you a mother's care:-
God's mercy, maiden! does it curd thy blood
To say I am thy mother? What's the matter,
That this distemper'd messenger of wet,
The many-colour'd iris, rounds thine eye?
Why,-that you are my daughter?

Helena.

That I am not.

Countess.

I say, I am your mother.

Helena.

Pardon, madam;
The Count Rousillon cannot be my brother:
I am from humble, he from honour'd name;
No note upon my parents, his all noble;
My master, my dear lord he is; and I
His servant live, and will his vassal die:
He must not be my brother.

Countess.

Nor I your mother?

If it be not, forswear't: howe'er, I charge thee,
As heaven shall work in me for thine avail,
To tell me truly.

Helena.

Good madam, pardon me!

Countess.

Do you love my son?

Helena.

Your pardon, noble mistress!

Countess.

Love you my son?

Helena.

Do not you love him, madam?

Countess.

Go not about; my love hath in't a bond
Whereof the world takes note: come, come,
disclose
The state of your affection; for your passions
Have to the full appeach'd.

Helena.

Then I confess,

Here on my knee, before high heaven and you,
That before you, and next unto high heaven,
I love your son:-

My friends were poor, but honest; so's my
love:

Be not offended; for it hurts not him
That he is lov'd of me: I follow him not
By any token of presumptuous suit;
Nor would I have him till I do deserve him;
Yet never know how that desert should be.

I know I love in vain, strive against hope;
Yet in this captious and intenable sieve
I still pour in the waters of my love,
And lack not to lose still: thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,
But knows of him no more. My dearest
madam,

Let not your hate encounter with my love,
For loving where you do; but if yourself,
Whose aged honour cites a virtuous youth,
Did ever, in so true a flame of liking,
Wish chastely, and love dearly, that your Dian
Was both herself and love; O, then, give pity
To her whose state is such that cannot choose
But lend and give where she is sure to lose;
That seeks not to find that her search implies,
But, riddle-like, lives sweetly where she dies!

Helena.

My lord your son made me to think of this;
Else Paris, and the medicine, and the king,
Had from the conversation of my thoughts
Haply been absent then.

Countess.

But think you, Helen,
If you should tender your supposed aid,
He would receive it? He and his physicians
Are of a mind; he, that they cannot help him;
They, that they cannot help: how shall they
credit
A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,
Embowell'd of their doctrine, have let off
The danger to itself?

Helena.

There's something in't
More than my father's skill, which was the
greatest
Of his profession, that his good receipt
Shall, for my legacy, be sanctified
By th' luckiest stars in heaven: and, would
your honour
But give me leave to try success, I'd venture
The well-lost life of mine on his grace's cure.
By such a day and hour.

Act II.

Scene 1.

Paris. A room in the King's palace.

[Flourish. Enter the King, with young LORDS taking leave for the Florentine war; Bertram, Parolles, and Attendants.]

King.

Farewell, young lord; these war-like principles
Do not throw from you:-and you, my lord,
farewell;-
Share the advice betwixt you; if both gain all,
The gift doth stretch itself as 'tis received,
And is enough for both.

First lord.

It is our hope, sir,
After well-enter'd soldiers, to return
And find your grace in health.

King.

No, no, it cannot be; and yet my heart
Will not confess he owes the malady
That doth my life besiege. Farewell, young
lords;
Whether I live or die, be you the sons

Parolles.

'Tis not his fault; the spark-

Second lord.

O, 'tis brave wars!

Parolles.

Most admirable: I have seen those wars.

Bertram.

I am commanded here and kept a coil with,
'Too young' and next year' and 'tis too early.'

Parolles.

An thy mind stand to it, boy, steal away
bravely.

Bertram.

I shall stay here the forehorse to a smock,
Creaking my shoes on the plain masonry,
Till honour be bought up, and no sword worn
But one to dance with! By heaven, I'll steal
away.

First lord.

There's honour in the theft.

Parolles.

Commit it, count.

Second lord.

I am your accessory; and so farewell.

Bertram.

I grow to you, and our parting is a tortured
body.

First lord.

Farewell, captain.

Second lord.

Sweet Monsieur Parolles!

Parolles. Noble heroes, my sword and yours are kin. Good sparks and lustrous, a word, good metals.-You shall find in the regiment of the Spinii one Captain Spurio, with his cicatrice, an emblem of war, here on his sinister cheek; it was this very sword entrenched it: say to him I live; and observe his reports for me.

First lord. We shall, noble captain.

Parolles. Mars dote on you for his novices! [Exeunt Lords.] What will ye do?

Bertram. Stay; the king-

Parolles. Use a more spacious ceremony to the noble lords; you have restrained yourself within the list

of too cold an adieu: be more expressive to them; for they wear themselves in the cap of the time; there do muster true gait; eat, speak, and move, under the influence of the most received star; and though the devil lead the measure, such are to be followed: after them, and take a more dilated farewell.

Bertram. And I will do so.

Parolles. Worthy fellows; and like to prove most sinewy sword-men.

[Exeunt Bertram and Parolles.]

[Enter Lafeu.]

Lafeu.

Pardon, my lord [kneeling], for me and for my
tidings.

King.

I'll fee thee to stand up.

Lafeu.

Then here's a man stands that has bought his
pardon.

I would you had kneel'd, my lord, to ask me
mercy;

And that at my bidding you could so stand up.