

All's Well That Ends Well

1.1

Enter young Bertram Count of Roussillon, his mother the Countess, Helen, and Lord 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. 5

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. 10

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. 15

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 20 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: GeÂrard de Narbonne. 25

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 30 of?

LAFEU A fistula, my lord.

BERTRAM I heard not of it before.

LAFEU I would it were not notorious.±±Was this gentle-
woman the daughter of GeÂrard de Narbonne? 35

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 40
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 45
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,
Helen. Go to, no more, lest it be rather thought you
affect a sorrow than to have±± 50

HELEN 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 not enemy to the grief, the excess
makes it soon mortal. 55

BERTRAM (*kneeling*) Madam, I desire your holy wishes.

LAFEU How understand we that?

COUNTESS
Be thou blessed, Bertram, and succeed thy father
In manners as in shape. Thy blood and virtue
Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness 60
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 checked for silence
But never taxed for speech. What heaven more will 65
That thee may furnish and my prayers pluck down,
Fall on thy head. Farewell. (*To Lafeu*) My lord,
'Tis an unseasoned courtier. Good my lord,
Advise him.

LAFEU He cannot want the best
That shall attend his love. 70

COUNTESS Heaven bless him!±±Farewell, Bertram.

BERTRAM (*rising*) The best wishes that can be forged in
your thoughts be servants to you.

[*Exit Countess*]

(*To Helen*) Be comfortable to my mother, your mistress,
and make much of her. 75

LAFEU Farewell, pretty lady. You must hold the credit of
your father.

Exeunt Bertram and Lafeu

HELEN

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? 80

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 85
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.
Th'ambition in my love thus plagues itself.
The hind that would be mated by the lion 90
Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
To see him every hour, to sit and draw
His archèd brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
In our heart's table±±heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour. 95
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his relics. Who comes here?

Enter Paroles

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. 100
Yet these fixed evils sit so fit in him
That they take place when virtue's steely bones
Looks bleak i'th' cold wind. Withal, full oft we see
Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.

PAROLES Save you, fair queen. 105

HELEN And you, monarch.

PAROLES No.

HELEN And no.

PAROLES Are you meditating on virginity?

HELEN Ay. You have some stain of soldier in you, let me 110
ask you a question. Man is enemy to virginity: how
may we barricado it against him?

PAROLES Keep him out.

HELEN But he assails, and our virginity, though valiant 115
in the defence, yet is weak. Unfold to us some warlike
resistance.

PAROLES There is none. Man, setting down before you,
will undermine you and blow you up.

HELEN Bless our poor virginity from underminers and 120
blowers-up. Is there no military policy how virgins
might blow up men?

PAROLES Virginity being blown down, man will quicklier 125
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 mettle 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, 130
away with't.

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

PAROLES There's little can be said in't. 'Tis against the 135
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; 140
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 t'one year it 145
will make itself two, which is a goodly increase, and
the principal itself not much the worse. Away with't.

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

PAROLES Let me see. Marry, ill, to like him that ne'er it
likes. 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying: 150
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 155
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? 160

HELEN 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, 165
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 170
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±±

PAROLES What one, i'faith?

HELEN That I wish well. 'Tis pity. 175

PAROLES What's pity?

HELEN
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 180
And show what we alone must think, which never
Returns us thanks.

Enter a Page

PAGE
Monsieur Paroles, my lord calls for you.

[Exit]

PAROLES Little Helen, farewell. If I can remember thee I
will think of thee at court. 185

HELEN Monsieur Paroles, you were born under a
charitable star.

PAROLES Under Mars, I.

HELEN I especially think *under* Mars.

PAROLES Why '*under* Mars'? 190

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

PAROLES When he was predominant.

HELEN When he was retrograde, I think rather.

PAROLES Why think you so? 195

HELEN You go so much backward when you fight.

PAROLES That's for advantage.

HELEN 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 200
well.

PAROLES 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 205
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 210
farewell.

Exit

HELEN

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. 215
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 220
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose

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 fixed and will not leave me. 225
Exit