

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ALL'S WELL THAT
ENDS WELL

Bird Publisher, 2012

About this eBook

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL
William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, 1603
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Dramatis Personae

KING OF FRANCE

THE DUKE OF FLORENCE

BERTRAM, Count of Rousillon

LAFEU, an old lord

PAROLLES, a follower of Bertram

TWO FRENCH LORDS, serving with Bertram

STEWARD, Servant to the Countess of Rousillon

LAVACHE, a clown and 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

A WIDOW OF FLORENCE.

DIANA, daughter to the Widow

VIOLENTA, neighbour and friend to the Widow

MARIANA, neighbour and friend to the Widow

LORDS, OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, etc., French and Florentine

SCENE:

Rousillon; Paris; Florence; Marseilles

ACT I.

SCENE 1.

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 abandon'd 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 stretch'd 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 call'd 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 liv'd 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 to have-

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 check'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. The best wishes that can be forg'd in your thoughts be
 servants to you! [*To HELENA*] 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.
 Th' ambition in my love thus plagues itself:
 The hind that would be mated by the lion
 Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a 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 relics. 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 fix'd 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.

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'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 lose 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?