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*Shakespeare*

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# All's Well That Ends Well



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# All's Well That Ends Well

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# Cambridge School Shakespeare

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This edition of *All's Well That Ends Well* is part of the *Cambridge School Shakespeare* series. Like every other play in the series, it has been specially prepared to help all students in schools and colleges.

This *All's Well That Ends Well* aims to be different from other editions of the play. It invites you to bring the play to life in your classroom, hall or drama studio through enjoyable activities that will increase your understanding. Actors have created their different interpretations of the play over the centuries. Similarly, you are encouraged to make up your own mind about *All's Well That Ends Well*, rather than having someone else's interpretation handed down to you.

*Cambridge School Shakespeare* does not offer you a cut-down or simplified version of the play. This is Shakespeare's language, filled with imaginative possibilities. You will find on every left-hand page: a summary of the action, an explanation of unfamiliar words, a choice of activities on Shakespeare's language, characters and stories.

Between each act and in the pages at the end of the play, you will find notes, illustrations and activities. These will help to increase your understanding of the whole play.

There are a large number of activities to give you the widest choice to suit your own particular needs. Please don't think you have to do every one. Choose the activities that will help you most.

This edition will be of value to you whether you are studying for an examination, reading for pleasure, or thinking of putting on the play to entertain others. You can work on the activities on your own or in groups. Many of the activities suggest a particular group size, but don't be afraid to make up larger or smaller groups to suit your own purposes.

Although you are invited to treat *All's Well That Ends Well* as a play, you don't need special dramatic or theatrical skills to do the activities. By choosing your activities, and by exploring and experimenting, you can make your own interpretations of Shakespeare's language, characters and stories. Whatever you do, remember that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be acted, watched and enjoyed.

Rex Gibson

This edition of *All's Well That Ends Well* uses the text of the play established by Russell Fraser in *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*.

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# List of characters

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## Rossillion

COUNTESS OF ROSSILLION

BERTRAM Count of Rossillion (her son)

HELENA DE NARBON a gentlewoman in the Countess's household

LAVATCH a clown, servant to the Countess

PAROLLES a friend of Bertram

RINALDO steward to the Countess

A PAGE

## Paris

KING OF FRANCE

LAFEW an old Lord

FIRST LORD Dumaine

SECOND LORD Dumaine } lords in the service of the King

Other young lords, Servants

## Florence

DUKE OF FLORENCE

WIDOW CAPILET

DIANA her daughter

MARIANA

VIOLENTA } neighbours and friends of the Widow

Citizens, Soldiers, Messenger

## Marseilles

A GENTLE ASTRINGER a gentleman falconer

The action of the play takes place in Rossillion, Paris, Florence and Marseilles

*The Countess of Rossillion says farewell to her son. He has been commanded to attend the court of the King of France, who is fatally ill. No doctor can cure him.*

---

### 1 Sorting out the information (in groups of three)

These first lines give a great deal of information. Read them through two or three times. Talk together about what you discover about the characters. Present your information to the rest of the class as a short news report. You could begin: 'Today the young Count of Rossillion took leave of his mother, the Dowager Countess, to go to court . . .'.

### 2 Declaring the theme?

Shakespeare often introduces at least one of the themes of a play in the first line of the script. The Countess uses the word 'delivering' to mean that she is sending Bertram away from her, but it is used more often to mean 'giving birth'. From line 1, what do you think could be a theme of the play?

### 3 His majesty the King (in pairs)

Lafew's lines 5–8 suggest that the King is everything to everybody. Make a list of the words which you feel indicate the King's qualities. Compare your list with your partner's.

### 4 Persecuting time with hope (in groups of three or four)

Present two tableaux (still pictures) of lines 10–12 to show the contrast between the two stages of the King's quest for a cure.

### 5 Honesty

'Honesty' (honour) is one of the major themes of the play. In lines 14–15 the Countess suggests that, if the doctor's skill as a physician had been as great as his integrity, he would have defeated death.

---

**in ward** under the king's protection  
**wanted** was lacking  
**amendment** recovery

**practices** medical treatments  
**passage** word, reference to the past  
**honesty** honour

# All's Well That Ends Well

## ACT I SCENE I The Palace of Rossillion

Enter BERTRAM, the COUNTESS OF ROSSILLION, LORD LAFEW and  
HELENA, 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.

LAFEW You shall find of the king a husband, madam; you, sir, a father. 5  
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?

LAFEW He hath abandoned his physicians, madam, under whose 10  
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 15  
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.

LAFEW 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. 20



*The Countess and Lafew discuss the King's illness, and praise Helena for her virtue. The Countess gives parting advice to her son, Bertram.*

---

## 1 Helena's virtues (in pairs)

Read through the Countess's description of Helena (lines 30–5) twice, taking turns to read a sentence each. Notice how the Countess stresses Helena's virtue and honour. How do you think Helena feels as she listens to this?

## 2 Advice to a young person about to leave home

The Countess is not the only parent to offer advice in a play by Shakespeare. Here, from *Hamlet*, is some of the advice Polonius offers to his son, Laertes.

Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;  
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
Of each new-hatched, unfledged courage. Beware  
Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,  
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee . . .  
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy; . . .  
Neither a borrower nor a lender be;  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
This above all – to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Compare both pieces of parental advice. Then write your own advice to a modern young person about to leave home.

---

**languishes of** is afflicted by  
**fistula** painful abscess or ulcer  
**derives** inherits  
**brine** salt water (tears)  
**season** preserve  
**affect** pretend, imitate  
**mortal** deadly

**holy wishes** blessing  
**blood** inherited qualities  
**Contend for empire** struggle for  
dominance  
**able for** better than  
**checked** criticised  
**unseasoned** inexperienced

LAFEW 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?

LAFEW A fistula, my lord. 25

BERTRAM I heard not of it before.

LAFEW 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, their 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. 30 35

LAFEW 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. 40

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

LAFEW 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. 45

BERTRAM Madam, I desire your holy wishes.

LAFEW How understand we that?

COUNTESS Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed thy father

In manners as in shape. Thy blood and virtue 50

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 checked for silence, 55

But never taxed for speech. What heaven more will,

That thee may furnish, and my prayers pluck down,

Fall on thy head. – Farewell, my lord.

'Tis an unseasoned courtier; good my lord,

Advise him.

*Left alone, Helena speaks of her secret love for Bertram and the impossibility of her marrying him. Bertram's friend, Parolles, comes in, and Helena comments on his character.*

---

### 1 'That I should love a bright particular star' (in pairs)

- a** Facing one another, speak Helena's lines 67–86 reading one *line* each alternately. Read them through again, this time speaking one *sentence* alternately. Talk together about the different tone given by each way of reading.
- b** Choose two sentences each which you feel sum up Helena's feelings, and talk about your choices. Share your choice of sentences with the rest of the class.
- c** Helena uses the image of a star to demonstrate how far above her Bertram is. Identify the other images she uses to suggest how impossible it is for them to marry. She feels that she could no more marry Bertram than touch a star; her comfort must be in being able to see him. What does this suggest to you about the relationships between social classes in this society?

### 2 His hawkling eye . . .

Who would you cast as Bertram, using Helena's description of him? For example, think of stage, film or television actors.

### 3 I love him for his sake

Helena is critical of Parolles, yet she says that she loves him just because he is a friend of Bertram's. In Jane Austen's novel *Emma*, Harriet keeps a plaster just because it had once been on Mr Elton's finger. Can you imagine keeping something or loving someone just because of their connection with the person you love?

---

**forgèd** made  
**Be comfortable** comfort  
**credit** reputation  
**collateral** reflected  
**in his sphere** by physical contact  
**hind** female deer  
**table** notebook

**capable** both (1) susceptible (her heart), and (2) easy to draw on (her notebook)  
**trick** facial expression  
**take place** are considered superior  
**waiting on** attending on



*Parolles and Helena discuss the merits of virginity. Parolles compares it to a city under siege, then argues that it is against nature to preserve virginity.*

---

### 1 Is man 'enemy to virginity'? (in pairs)

- List the types of imagery used by Helena and Parolles in talking about the losing of virginity (lines 100–39), for example warfare. How apt do you think they are?
- Why do you think Helena joins in this bawdy conversation?
- Identify Parolles' arguments in favour of losing virginity. Devise and present an argument to counter each of Parolles' reasons, putting the case against losing virginity.



'You lose your city.' A medieval town under siege. A siege had fairly strict conventions which made it sound almost like a game. The reality was much more brutal. Parolles' metaphor is of virginity besieged by man.

---

**'Save you** God save you (a greeting)  
**barricado** defend  
**setting down before** besieging, attacking  
**undermine . . . up** lay explosives under (also, make you pregnant)  
**breach** gap in defences

**politic** sensible  
**got** conceived  
**infallible** certain  
**paring** last tiny bit  
**inhibited** forbidden  
**canon** law of the Church  
**principal** stake money

PAROLLES 'Save you, fair queen!

HELENA And you, monarch!

95

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?

100

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.

105

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!

110

115

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 two, which is a goodly increase, and the principal itself not much the worse. Away with't!

120

125

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

*Parolles urges losing virginity at a young age, before it becomes stale. Helena lists the many qualities a virgin will bring to Bertram as his future wife. Parolles claims that he was born to be a soldier.*

---

### 1 'There shall your master have a thousand loves' (in pairs)

- a Talk together about how Helena changes the tone of the conversation at line 141.
- b As one of you slowly reads the twelve 'loves' in lines 142–5, the other makes a gesture and expression to suit each one.
- c Do you think Helena is talking about herself in lines 141–50, or listing the conventional images of women in courtly love poetry (see page 34)?

### 2 Helena's confusion

Helena's confused feelings about Bertram are reflected in her language, which contradicts itself ('humble ambition, proud humility'). This pairing of an adjective with a contradictory noun is called an oxymoron (from two Greek words meaning 'sharp' and 'dull'). Write a short poem which uses oxymorons.

### 3 'He is one –'

Write two lines in the same verse style as lines 141–50 to complete Helena's real thoughts after line 152.

### 4 'Baser stars'

In lines 155–61 Helena again reflects on how low her social status is in comparison with Bertram's. Keep this in mind as you read on. How would you make sure your audience was aware that Helena was considered of inferior status in the household of Rossillion?

---

**Marry** By St Mary  
**ill** sinfully  
**gloss** newness  
**vendible** saleable  
**brooch and the toothpick**  
ornaments worn in the hat  
**wear not now** are out of fashion

**phoenix** mythical bird, born out of fire  
**dulcet** soothing  
**adoptious christendoms . . .**  
**gossips** christenings of adopted children with blind ('blinking')  
Cupid as godfather

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 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  
 Returns 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. 165

PAROLLES Under Mars I.



*Helena mocks Parolles for being a coward. He gives her his advice before leaving to follow Bertram to court. Helena determines to do something positive to win Bertram.*

---

### 1 Astrology: the 'fated sky' (in groups of four)

Parolles claims that being born under the star sign of Mars makes him a brave soldier. Do you read your horoscope, or do you make fun of such things, as Helena does in lines 166–72? Talk together about how much value you think should be placed on horoscopes. Many famous and powerful people regularly consult astrologers. Does this increase or lessen your respect for them?

### 2 'I cannot answer thee acutely' (in pairs)

Even though Parolles cannot answer Helena 'acutely', he is not lost for a reply (lines 179–86). Try at least four different ways of delivering these lines to suggest Parolles' personality. On the evidence you have so far, decide which one is the most likely.

### 3 A change of mood (in pairs)

Helena's cheerfully bawdy conversation with Parolles is framed by her two soliloquies. Read through the soliloquy opposite two or three times, speaking alternate sentences. Then turn back to page 7 and read that soliloquy through to refresh your memory.

Talk about the change in Helena's mood between the two soliloquies. What do you think has caused the change?

### 4 How should she speak?

Try out at least four ways of delivering Helena's soliloquy, for example: directly to the audience, to herself, to a portrait of Bertram, to a mirror . . . . Decide which way of speaking is the most appropriate.

---

**predominant** a favourable influence  
**retrograde** an unfavourable influence  
**of a good wing** enables you to run away (but also a comment on Parolles' clothes)

**wear** fashion, style  
**naturalise** familiarise, teach  
**makes thee away** destroys you  
**fated sky** fateful stars  
**like likes** similar natures