

'All's Well That Ends Well in 10 Plot Points'

1. The widowed Countess begs her son, Bertram, not to go to war but he wants to leave for France and prove himself in battle. The Countess greets her ward, Helena, who is secretly in love with Bertram. Helena is not his equal but in a soliloquy she vows to change her fortune.

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

Bertram: *I must attend his majesty's command, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection.*

Helena: *'Twere all one That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above me:*

2. The French King is ill and will not join the military campaign in Italy but allows his men to fight if they wish. He welcomes Bertram but says he's too young to go and fight. Bertram shares his anger at being left behind with his boastful friend, Parolles.

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

Parolles: *An thy mind stand to't, boy, steal away bravely.*

3. Helen offers to cure the King using her father's medicine and asks to choose a husband from his court as her reward. The King agrees. Helena cures him and chooses Bertram. Horrified, Bertram is forced to marry her but refuses to sleep with her and consummate the marriage.

Helena: *[To Bertram] I dare not say I take you; but I give
Me and my service, ever whilst I live,
Into your guiding power. This is the man.*

Bertram: *My wife, my liege! I shall beseech your highness,
In such a business give me leave to use
The help of mine own eyes.*

King: *Here, take her hand,
Proud scornful boy, unworthy this good gift*

4. Lord Lafeu accuses Parolles of being a lying coward. Bertram tells Helena in a letter she will not be his wife until she gets a precious family ring off his finger and becomes pregnant with his child. He and Parolles run off to join the military campaign in Italy.

Bertram: *O my Parolles, they have married me!
I'll to the Tuscan wars, and never bed her.*

Helena: *[Reads.] When thou canst get the ring upon my finger which
never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body
that I am father to, then call me husband.*

This is a dreadful sentence.

5. Deeply hurt, Helena goes on a pilgrimage to Florence, where Bertram is encamped with troops. She stays with a widow who tells her that Bertram has done well in battle but has been trying to seduce her daughter, Diana. Helena denies knowing Bertram.

Diana: *I would he loved his wife: if he were honest
He were much goodlier: is't not a handsome gentleman?*

Helena: *His face I know not.*

Widow: *Come, pilgrim, I will bring you Where you shall host:
There's four or five already at my house.*

6. Helena befriends the widow and reveals herself as Bertram's rejected wife. Helena pays the Widow and Diana to help in a plot to win him back. Diana agrees to go to bed with Bertram if he will give her his family ring. Bertram gives the ring to Diana.

Widow: *I have yielded:
Instruct my daughter how she shall persevere,
That time and place with this deceit so lawful*

Helena: *to-night Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed,
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed
And lawful meaning in a wicked act*

7. Unknown to Bertram, Helena takes Diana's place in a darkened room and she and Bertram make love. During the night Helena places her own ring, given to her by the King, on his finger.

Bertram: *A heaven on earth I have won by wooing thee.*

Diana: *I'll lie with him When I am buried. Since Frenchmen are so braid,
Marry that will, I live and die a maid:*

8. Parolles is kidnapped by French lords who trick him into thinking he's been captured by the enemy. Parolles tells his "captors" everything they want to know in order to save his skin and is exposed to Bertram as a traitor and a coward.

Parolles: *I will confess what I know without constraint: if ye pinch
me like a pasty, I can say no more.*

Bertram: *Damnably both-sides rogue!*

Parolles: *Yet am I thankful: if my heart were great,
'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more;
But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft*

9. The wars are now over and Bertram plans to return to France, having been told that Helena is dead. The Countess grieves for Helena but supports Lafeu's plan to marry Bertram to his own daughter.

King: *We lost a jewel of her; and our esteem
Was made much poorer by it*

Countess: *'Tis past, my liege;
And I beseech your majesty to make it
Natural rebellion, done i' the blaze of youth;*

10. The King spots Helena's ring on Bertram's finger and suspects him of murder. Diana reveals the tangled plot and Helena enters, pregnant. Having met Bertram's conditions, she claims her husband and he asks for forgiveness.

Diana: *Great king, I am no strumpet, by my life;
I am either maid, or else this old man's wife.*

Helena: *'When from my finger you can get this ring
And are by me with child.' This is done:
Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?*

Bertram

*If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly,
I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly.*