

The Two Noble Kinsmen

5.6

*Enter, guarded, Palamon and his three Knights
pinioned; enter with them the Jailer and an
executioner with block and axe*

PALAMON

There's many a man alive that hath outlived
The love o'th' people; yea, i'th' selfsame state
Stands many a father with his child: some comfort
We have by so considering. We expire,
And not without men's pity; to live still, 5
Have their good wishes. We prevent
The loathsome misery of age, beguile
The gout and rheum that in lag hours attend
For grey approachers; we come towards the gods
Young and unwappered, not halting under crimes 10
Many and stale±±that sure shall please the gods
Sooner than such, to give us nectar with 'em,
For we are more clear spirits. My dear kinsmen,
Whose lives for this poor comfort are laid down,
You have sold 'em too too cheap.

FIRST KNIGHT

What ending could be 15

Of more content? O'er us the victors have
Fortune, whose title is as momentary
As to us death is certain±±a grain of honour
They not o'erweigh us.

SECOND KNIGHT

Let us bid farewell,

And with our patience anger tott'ring fortune, 20
Who at her certain'st reels.

THIRD KNIGHT

Come, who begins?

PALAMON

E'en he that led you to this banquet shall
Taste to you all. *(To the Jailer)* Aha, my friend, my
friend,
Your gentle daughter gave me freedom once;
You'll see't done now for ever. Pray, how does she? 25
I heard she was not well; her kind of ill
Gave me some sorrow.

JAILER Sir, she's well restored
And to be married shortly.
PALAMON By my short life,
I am most glad on't. 'Tis the latest thing
I shall be glad of. Prithee, tell her so; 30
Commend me to her, and to piece her portion
Tender her this.

He gives his purse

FIRST KNIGHT Nay, let's be offerers all.

SECOND KNIGHT

Is it a maid?

PALAMON Verily, I think so±±
A right good creature more to me deserving
Than I can quit or speak of.

ALL THREE KNIGHTS Commend us to her. 35

They give their purses

JAILER

The gods requite you all, and make her thankful.

PALAMON

Adieu, and let my life be now as short
As my leave-taking.

He lies on the block

FIRST KNIGHT Lead, courageous cousin.

SECOND AND THIRD KNIGHTS We'll follow cheerfully.

A great noise within: crying, 'Run! Save! Hold!'

Enter in haste a Messenger

MESSENGER Hold! Hold! O, hold! Hold! Hold! 40

Enter Pirithous in haste

PIRITHOUS

Hold, ho! It is a curse! Ad haste you made
If you have done so quickly! Noble Palamon,
The gods will show their glory in a life
That thou art yet to lead.

PALAMON Can that be,
When Venus, I have said, is false? How do things
fare? 45

PIRITHOUS

Arise, great sir, and give the tidings ear
That are most rarely sweet and bitter.

PALAMON

What

Hath waked us from our dream?

PIRITHOUS

List, then: your cousin,

Mounted upon a steed that Emily
Did first bestow on him, a black one owing 50
Not a hair-worth of white±±which some will say
Weakens his price and many will not buy
His goodness with this note; which superstition
Here finds allowance±±on this horse is Arcite
Trotting the stones of Athens, which the calkins 55
Did rather tell than trample; for the horse
Would make his length a mile, if't pleased his rider
To put pride in him. As he thus went counting
The flinty pavement, dancing, as 'twere, to th' music
His own hooves made±±for, as they say, from iron 60
Came music's origin±±what envious flint,
Cold as old Saturn and like him possessed
With fire malevolent, darted a spark,
Or what fierce sulphur else, to this end made,
I comment not±±the hot horse, hot as fire, 65
Took toy at this and fell to what disorder
His power could give his will; bounds; comes on end;
Forgets school-doing, being therein trained
And of kind maneÁge; pig-like he whines
At the sharp rowel, which he frets at rather 70
Than any jot obeys; seeks all foul means
Of boist'rous and rough jad'ry to disseat
His lord, that kept it bravely. When naught served,
When neither curb would crack, girth break, nor
diff'ring plunges
Disroot his rider whence he grew, but that 75
He kept him 'tween his legs, on his hind hooves±±
On end he stands±±
That Arcite's legs, being higher than his head,
Seemed with strange art to hang. His victor's wreath
Even then fell off his head; and presently 80
Backward the jade comes o'er and his full poise
Becomes the rider's load. Yet is he living;
But such a vessel 'tis that floats but for
The surge that next approaches. He much desires
To have some speech with you±±lo, he appears. 85

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Emilia, and Arcite in a chair borne by attendants

PALAMON

O miserable end of our alliance!
The gods are mighty. Arcite, if thy heart,
Thy worthy manly heart, be yet unbroken,
Give me thy last words. I am Palamon,
One that yet loves thee dying.

ARCITE

Take Emilia,

90

And with her all the world's joy. Reach thy hand±±
Farewell±±I have told my last hour. I was false,
Yet never treacherous. Forgive me, cousin±±
One kiss from fair Emilia±± *(they kiss)* 'tis done.
Take her; I die.

He dies

PALAMON Thy brave soul seek Elysium.

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EMILIA *(to Arcite's body)*

I'll close thine eyes, Prince. BlesseÁd souls be with thee.
Thou art a right good man, and, while I live,
This day I give to tears.

PALAMON

And I to honour.

THESEUS

In this place first you fought, e'en very here
I sundered you. Acknowledge to the gods
Our thanks that you are living.
His part is played, and, though it were too short,
He did it well. Your day is lengthened and
The blissful dew of heaven does arrouse you.
The powerful Venus well hath graced her altar,
And given you your love; our master, Mars,
Hath vouched his oracle, and to Arcite gave
The grace of the contention. So the deities
Have showed due justice.±±Bear this hence.

100

105

[Exeunt attendants with Arcite's body]

PALAMON

O cousin,

That we should things desire which do cost us
The loss of our desire! That naught could buy
Dear love, but loss of dear love!

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THESEUS

Never fortune

Did play a subtler game±±the conquered triumphs,
The victor has the loss. Yet in the passage
The gods have been most equal. Palamon, 115
Your kinsman hath confessed the right o'th' lady
Did lie in you, for you first saw her and
Even then proclaimed your fancy. He restored her
As your stol'n jewel, and desired your spirit
To send him hence forgiven. The gods my justice 120
Take from my hand, and they themselves become
The executioners. Lead your lady off,
And call your lovers from the stage of death,
Whom I adopt my friends. A day or two
Let us look sadly and give grace unto 125
The funeral of Arcite, in whose end
The visages of bridegrooms we'll put on
And smile with Palamon, for whom an hour,
But one hour since, I was as dearly sorry
As glad of Arcite, and am now as glad 130
As for him sorry. O you heavenly charmers,
What things you make of us! For what we lack
We laugh, for what we have, are sorry; still
Are children in some kind. Let us be thankful
For that which is, and with you leave dispute 135
That are above our question. Let's go off
And bear us like the time.

Flourish. Exeunt