

# The Two Noble Kinsmen

## 3.6

*Enter Palamon from the bush*

**PALAMON**

About this hour my cousin gave his faith  
To visit me again, and with him bring  
Two swords and two good armours; if he fail,  
He's neither man nor soldier. When he left me,  
I did not think a week could have restored 5  
My lost strength to me, I was grown so low  
And crest-fall'n with my wants. I thank thee, Arcite,  
Thou art yet a fair foe, and I feel myself,  
With this refreshing, able once again  
To out-dure danger. To delay it longer 10  
Would make the world think, when it comes to  
hearing,  
That I lay fatting, like a swine, to fight,  
And not a soldier. Therefore this blest morning  
Shall be the last; and that sword he refuses,  
If it but hold, I kill him with; 'tis justice. 15  
So, love and fortune for me!

*Enter Arcite with two armours and two swords*

O, good

morrow.

**ARCITE**

Good morrow, noble kinsman.

**PALAMON**

I have put you

To too much pains, sir.

**ARCITE**

That too much, fair cousin,

Is but a debt to honour, and my duty.

**PALAMON**

Would you were so in all, sir; I could wish ye 20  
As kind a kinsman, as you force me find  
A beneficial foe, that my embraces  
Might thank ye, not my blows.

**ARCITE**

I shall think either,

Well done, a noble recompense.

**PALAMON**

Then I shall quit you.

**ARCITE**

Defy me in these fair terms, and you show 25  
More than a mistress to me±±no more anger,  
As you love anything that's honourable.  
We were not bred to talk, man. When we are armed  
And both upon our guards, then let our fury,  
Like meeting of two tides, fly strongly from us; 30  
And then to whom the birthright of this beauty  
Truly pertains±±without upbraidings, scorns,  
Despisings of our persons, and such poutings  
Fitter for girls and schoolboys±±will be seen,  
And quickly, yours or mine. Will't please you arm,  
sir? 35

Or, if you feel yourself not fitting yet,  
And furnished with your old strength, I'll stay,  
cousin,  
And every day discourse you into health,  
As I am spared. Your person I am friends with,  
And I could wish I had not said I loved her, 40  
Though I had died; but loving such a lady,  
And justifying my love, I must not fly from't.

**PALAMON**

Arcite, thou art so brave an enemy  
That no man but thy cousin's fit to kill thee.  
I am well and lusty±±choose your arms.

**ARCITE**

Choose you, sir. 45

**PALAMON**

Wilt thou exceed in all, or dost thou do it  
To make me spare thee?

**ARCITE** If you think so, cousin,  
You are deceived, for as I am a soldier,  
I will not spare you.

**PALAMON** That's well said.

**ARCITE**

You'll find it.

**PALAMON**

Then as I am an honest man, and love 50  
With all the justice of affection,  
I'll pay thee soundly.  
*He chooses one armour*

This I'll take.  
 That's mine, then.  
**ARCITE** (*indicating the remaining armour*)  
 I'll arm you first.  
**PALAMON** Do.  
*Arcite arms Palamon*  
 Pray thee tell me, cousin,  
 Where gott'st thou this good armour?  
**ARCITE** 'Tis the Duke's,  
 And to say true, I stole it. Do I pinch you?  
**PALAMON** No.  
 55  
**ARCITE**  
 Is't not too heavy?  
**PALAMON** I have worn a lighter±±  
 But I shall make it serve.  
**ARCITE** I'll buckle't close.  
**PALAMON**  
 By any means.  
**ARCITE** You care not for a grand guard?  
**PALAMON**  
 No, no, we'll use no horses. I perceive  
 You would fain be at that fight.  
**ARCITE** I am indifferent. 60  
**PALAMON**  
 Faith, so am I. Good cousin, thrust the buckle  
 Through far enough.  
**ARCITE** I warrant you.  
**PALAMON** My casque now.  
**ARCITE**  
 Will you fight bare-armed?  
**PALAMON** We shall be the nimbler.  
**ARCITE**  
 But use your gauntlets, though±±those are o'th' least.  
 Prithee take mine, good cousin.  
**PALAMON** Thank you, Arcite. 65  
 How do I look? Am I fall'n much away?  
**ARCITE**  
 Faith, very little±±love has used you kindly.  
**PALAMON**  
 I'll warrant thee, I'll strike home.  
**ARCITE** Do, and spare not±

±

I'll give you cause, sweet cousin.

**PALAMON**

Now to you, sir.

*Palamon arms Arcite*

Methinks this armour's very like that, Arcite, 70

Thou wor'st that day the three kings fell, but lighter.

**ARCITE**

That was a very good one, and that day,

I well remember, you outdid me, cousin.

I never saw such valour. When you charged

Upon the left wing of the enemy, 75

I spurred hard to come up, and under me

I had a right good horse.

**PALAMON**

You had indeed±±

A bright bay, I remember.

**ARCITE**

Yes. But all

Was vainly laboured in me±±you outwent me,

Nor could my wishes reach you. Yet a little 80

I did by imitation.

**PALAMON**

More by virtue±±

You are modest, cousin.

**ARCITE**

When I saw you charge first,

Methought I heard a dreadful clap of thunder

Break from the troop.

**PALAMON**

But still before that flew

The lightning of your valour. Stay a little, 85

Is not this piece too strait?

**ARCITE**

No, no, 'tis well.

**PALAMON**

I would have nothing hurt thee but my sword±±

A bruise would be dishonour.

**ARCITE**

Now I am perfect.

**PALAMON**

Stand off, then.

**ARCITE**

Take my sword; I hold it better.

**PALAMON**

I thank ye. No, keep it±±your life lies on it. 90

Here's one±±if it but hold, I ask no more

For all my hopes. My cause and honour guard me.

**ARCITE**

And me, my love.

*They bow several ways, then advance and stand*

Is there aught else to say?

**PALAMON**

This only, and no more. Thou art mine aunt's son,

And that blood we desire to shed is mutual: 95

In me, thine, and in thee, mine. My sword

Is in my hand, and if thou kill'st me,

The gods and I forgive thee. If there be

A place prepared for those that sleep in honour,

I wish his weary soul that falls may win it. 100

Fight bravely, cousin. Give me thy noble hand.

**ARCITE**

Here, Palamon. This hand shall never more

Come near thee with such friendship.

**PALAMON**

I commend thee.

**ARCITE**

If I fall, curse me, and say I was a coward±±

For none but such dare die in these just trials. 105

Once more farewell, my cousin.

**PALAMON**

Farewell, Arcite.

*Fight. Horns within; they stand*

**ARCITE**

Lo, cousin, lo, our folly has undone us.

**PALAMON**

Why?

**ARCITE**

This is the Duke a-hunting, as I told you.

If we be found, we are wretched. O, retire,

For honour's sake, and safely, presently, 110

Into your bush again. Sir, we shall find

Too many hours to die. In, gentle cousin±±

If you be seen, you perish instantly

For breaking prison, and I, if you reveal me,

For my contempt. Then all the world will scorn us, 115

And say we had a noble difference,

But base disposers of it.

**PALAMON**

No, no, cousin,

I will no more be hidden, nor put off

This great adventure to a second trial.

I know your cunning and I know your cause±± 120

He that faints now, shame take him! Put thyself  
Upon thy present guard±±

**ARCITE**

You are not mad?

**PALAMON**

Or I will make th'advantage of this hour  
Mine own, and what to come shall threaten me  
I fear less than my fortune. Know, weak cousin,  
I love Emilia, and in that I'll bury  
Thee and all crosses else.

125

**ARCITE**

Then come what can come,  
Thou shalt know, Palamon, I dare as well  
Die as discourse or sleep. Only this fears me,  
The law will have the honour of our ends.  
Have at thy life!

130

**PALAMON**

Look to thine own well, Arcite!

*They fight again.*

*Horns. Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Emilia, Pirithous,  
and train. [Theseus] separates Palamon and Arcite*

**THESEUS**

What ignorant and mad malicious traitors  
Are you, that 'gainst the tenor of my laws  
Are making battle, thus like knights appointed,  
Without my leave and officers of arms?  
By Castor, both shall die.

135

**PALAMON**

Hold thy word, Theseus.

We are certainly both traitors, both despisers  
Of thee and of thy goodness. I am Palamon,  
That cannot love thee, he that broke thy prison±±  
Think well what that deserves. And this is Arcite;  
A bolder traitor never trod thy ground,  
A falsar ne'er seemed friend. This is the man  
Was begged and banished; this is he contemns thee,  
And what thou dar'st do; and in this disguise,  
Against thine own edict, follows thy sister,  
That fortunate bright star, the fair Emilia,  
Whose servant±±if there be a right in seeing  
And first bequeathing of the soul to±±justly  
I am; and, which is more, dares think her his.  
This treachery, like a most trusty lover,  
I called him now to answer. If thou be'st

140

145

150

As thou art spoken, great and virtuous,  
The true decider of all injuries,  
Say, 'Fight again', and thou shalt see me, Theseus,  
Do such a justice thou thyself wilt envy. 155  
Then take my life±±I'll woo thee to't.

**PIRITHOUS**

O

heaven,

What more than man is this!

**THESEUS**

I have sworn.

**ARCITE**

We seek

not

Thy breath of mercy, Theseus. 'Tis to me  
A thing as soon to die as thee to say it,  
And no more moved. Where this man calls me traitor 160  
Let me say thus much±±if in love be treason,  
In service of so excellent a beauty,  
As I love most, and in that faith will perish,  
As I have brought my life here to confirm it,  
As I have served her truest, worthiest, 165  
As I dare kill this cousin that denies it,  
So let me be most traitor and ye please me.  
For scorning thy edict, Duke, ask that lady  
Why she is fair, and why her eyes command me  
Stay here to love her, and if she say, 'Traitor', 170  
I am a villain fit to lie unburied.

**PALAMON**

Thou shalt have pity of us both, O Theseus,  
If unto neither thou show mercy. Stop,  
As thou art just, thy noble ear against us;  
As thou art valiant, for thy cousin's soul, 175  
Whose twelve strong labours crown his memory,  
Let's die together, at one instant, Duke.  
Only a little let him fall before me,  
That I may tell my soul he shall not have her.

**THESEUS**

I grant your wish; for to say true, your cousin 180  
Has ten times more offended, for I gave him  
More mercy than you found, sir, your offences  
Being no more than his. None here speak for 'em,  
For ere the sun set both shall sleep for ever.

**HIPPOLYTA** *(to Emilia)*

Alas, the pity! Now or never, sister, 185  
Speak, not to be denied. That face of yours  
Will bear the curses else of after ages  
For these lost cousins.

**EMILIA** In my face, dear sister,  
I find no anger to 'em, nor no ruin.

The misadventure of their own eyes kill 'em. 190  
Yet that I will be woman and have pity,

*[She kneels]*

My knees shall grow to th' ground, but I'll get mercy.  
Help me, dear sister±±in a deed so virtuous  
The powers of all women will be with us.

*Hippolyta kneels*

Most royal brother±±

**HIPPOLYTA** Sir, by our tie of marriage±± 195

**EMILIA**

By your own spotless honour±±

**HIPPOLYTA** By that faith,

That fair hand, and that honest heart you gave me±±

**EMILIA**

By that you would have pity in another,  
By your own virtues infinite±±

**HIPPOLYTA** By valour,

By all the chaste nights I have ever pleased you±± 200

**THESEUS**

These are strange conjurings.

**PIRITHOUS** Nay, then, I'll in too.

*[He kneels]*

By all our friendship, sir, by all our dangers,  
By all you love most: wars, and this sweet lady±±

**EMILIA**

By that you would have trembled to deny  
A blushing maid±±

**HIPPOLYTA** By your own eyes, by strength±± 205

In which you swore I went beyond all women,  
Almost all men±±and yet I yielded, Theseus±±

**PIRITHOUS**

To crown all this, by your most noble soul,  
Which cannot want due mercy, I beg first±±

**HIPPOLYTA**



Next hear my prayers±±

EMILIA

Last let me entreat, sir±± 210

PIRITHOUS

For mercy.

HIPPOLYTA     Mercy.

EMILIA

Mercy on these princes.

THESEUS

Ye make my faith reel. Say I felt  
Compassion to 'em both, how would you place it?  
[*They rise*]

EMILIA

Upon their lives±±but with their banishments.

THESEUS

You are a right woman, sister: you have pity,     215  
But want the understanding where to use it.  
If you desire their lives, invent a way  
Safer than banishment. Can these two live,  
And have the agony of love about 'em,  
And not kill one another? Every day     220  
They'd fight about you, hourly bring your honour  
In public question with their swords. Be wise, then,  
And here forget 'em. It concerns your credit  
And my oath equally. I have said±±they die.  
Better they fall by th' law than one another.     225  
Bow not my honour.

EMILIA

O my noble brother,  
That oath was rashly made, and in your anger.  
Your reason will not hold it. If such vows  
Stand for express will, all the world must perish.  
Beside, I have another oath 'gainst yours,     230  
Of more authority, I am sure more love±±  
Not made in passion, neither, but good heed.

THESEUS

What is it, sister?

PIRITHOUS     (*to Emilia*)     Urge it home, brave lady.

EMILIA

That you would ne'er deny me anything  
Fit for my modest suit and your free granting.     235  
I tie you to your word now; if ye fail in't,  
Think how you maim your honour±±  
For now I am set a-begging, sir. I am deaf

To all but your compassion±±how their lives  
Might breed the ruin of my name, opinion. 240

Shall anything that loves me perish for me?

That were a cruel wisdom: do men prune

The straight young boughs that blush with thousand  
blossoms

Because they may be rotten? O, Duke Theseus,

The goodly mothers that have groaned for these, 245

And all the longing maids that ever loved,

If your vow stand, shall curse me and my beauty,

And in their funeral songs for these two cousins

Despise my cruelty and cry woe worth me,

Till I am nothing but the scorn of women. 250

For heaven's sake, save their lives and banish 'em.

**THESEUS**

On what conditions?

**EMILIA** Swear 'em never more

To make me their contention, or to know me,

To tread upon thy dukedom; and to be,

Wherever they shall travel, ever strangers 255

To one another.

**PALAMON** I'll be cut a-pieces

Before I take this oath±±forget I love her?

O all ye gods, despise me, then. Thy banishment

I not mislike, so we may fairly carry

Our swords and cause along±±else, never trifle, 260

But take our lives, Duke. I must love, and will;

And for that love must and dare kill this cousin

On any piece the earth has.

**THESEUS**

Will you, Arcite,

Take these conditions?

**PALAMON** He's a villain then.

**PIRITHOUS**

These are

men!

**ARCITE**

No, never, Duke. 'Tis worse to me than begging, 265

To take my life so basely. Though I think

I never shall enjoy her, yet I'll preserve

The honour of affection and die for her,

Make death a devil.

**THESEUS**

What may be done? For now I feel compassion.

270

**PIRITHOUS**

Let it not fall again, sir.

**THESEUS**

Say, Emilia,

If one of them were dead±±as one must±±are you

Content to take the other to your husband?

They cannot both enjoy you. They are princes

As goodly as your own eyes, and as noble

275

As ever fame yet spoke of. Look upon 'em,

And if you can love, end this difference.

I give consent. (*To Palamon and Arcite*)      Are you  
content too, princes?

**PALAMON AND ARCITE**

With all our souls.

**THESEUS**

He that she refuses

Must die, then.

**PALAMON AND ARCITE**      Any death thou canst invent, Duke. 280

**PALAMON**

If I fall from that mouth, I fall with favour,

And lovers yet unborn shall bless my ashes.

**ARCITE**

If she refuse me, yet my grave will wed me,

And soldiers sing my epitaph.

**THESEUS** (*to Emilia*)      Make choice, then.

**EMILIA**

I cannot, sir. They are both too excellent.

285

For me, a hair shall never fall of these men.

**HIPPOLYTA** [*to Theseus*]

What will become of 'em?

**THESEUS**

Thus I ordain it,

And by mine honour once again it stands,

Or both shall die. (*To Palamon and Arcite*)      You shall  
both to your country,

And each within this month, accompanied

290

With three fair knights, appear again in this place,

In which I'll plant a pyramid; and whether,

Before us that are here, can force his cousin,

By fair and knightly strength, to touch the pillar,

He shall enjoy her; the other lose his head,

295

And all his friends; nor shall he grudge to fall,  
Nor think he dies with interest in this lady.  
Will this content ye?

**PALAMON** Yes. Here, cousin Arcite,  
I am friends again till that hour.

**ARCITE** I embrace ye.

**THESEUS** *(to Emilia)*  
Are you content, sister?

**EMILIA** Yes, I must, sir, 300  
Else both miscarry.

**THESEUS** *(to Palamon and Arcite)* Come, shake hands again, then,  
And take heed, as you are gentlemen, this quarrel  
Sleep till the hour prefixed, and hold your course.

**PALAMON**  
We dare not fail thee, Theseus.

**THESEUS** Come, I'll give ye  
Now usage like to princes and to friends. 305  
When ye return, who wins I'll settle here,  
Who loses, yet I'll weep upon his bier.

*Exeunt. [In the act-time the bush is removed]*