

The Two Noble Kinsmen

1.4

*Cornetts. A battle struck within. Then a retreat.
Flourish. Then enter Theseus, victor. The three
Queens meet him and fall on their faces before him.
[Also enter a Herald, and attendants bearing
Palamon and Arcite on two hearses]*

FIRST QUEEN (to Theseus)

To thee no star be dark.

SECOND QUEEN (to Theseus) Both heaven and earth
Friend thee for ever.

THIRD QUEEN (to Theseus) All the good that may
Be wished upon thy head, I cry `Amen' to't.

THESEUS

Th'impartial gods, who from the mounted heavens
View us their mortal herd, behold who err 5
And in their time chastise. Go and find out
The bones of your dead lords and honour them
With treble ceremony: rather than a gap
Should be in their dear rites we would supply't.
But those we will depute which shall invest 10
You in your dignities, and even each thing
Our haste does leave imperfect. So adieu,
And heaven's good eyes look on you.
Exeunt the Queens

What are those?

HERALD

Men of great quality, as may be judged
By their appointment. Some of Thebes have told's 15
They are sisters' children, nephews to the King.

THESEUS

By th' helm of Mars I saw them in the war,
Like to a pair of lions smeared with prey,
Make lanes in troops aghast. I fixed my note
Constantly on them, for they were a mark 20
Worth a god's view. What prisoner was't that told me
When I enquired their names?

HERALD Wi' leave, they're called

Arcite and Palamon.

THESEUS 'Tis right: those, those.

They are not dead?

HERALD

Nor in a state of life. Had they been taken 25
When their last hurts were given, 'twas possible
They might have been recovered. Yet they breathe,
And have the name of men.

THESEUS Then like men use 'em.

The very lees of such, millions of rates
Exceed the wine of others. All our surgeons 30
Convent in their behoof; our richest balms,
Rather than niggard, waste. Their lives concern us
Much more than Thebes is worth. Rather than have
'em

Freed of this plight and in their morning state±±
Sound and at liberty±±I would 'em dead; 35
But forty-thousandfold we had rather have 'em
Prisoners to us, than death. Bear 'em speedily
From our kind air, to them unkind, and minister
What man to man may do±±for our sake, more,
Since I have known frights, fury, friends' behests, 40
Love's provocations, zeal, a mistress' task,
Desire of liberty, a fever, madness,
Hath set a mark which nature could not reach to
Without some imposition, sickness in will
O'er-wrestling strength in reason. For our love 45
And great Apollo's mercy, all our best
Their best skill tender.±±Lead into the city
Where, having bound things scattered, we will post
To Athens fore our army.

Flourish. Exeunt