

The Two Noble Kinsmen

1.2

Enter Palamon and Arcite

ARCITE

Dear Palamon, dearer in love than blood,
And our prime cousin, yet unhardened in
The crimes of nature, let us leave the city,
Thebes, and the temptings in't, before we further
Sully our gloss of youth. 5

And here to keep in abstinence we shame
As in incontinence; for not to swim
I'th' aid o'th' current were almost to sink±±
At least to frustrate striving; and to follow
The common stream 'twould bring us to an eddy 10
Where we should turn or drown; if labour through,
Our gain but life and weakness.

PALAMON

Your advice

Is cried up with example. What strange ruins
Since first we went to school may we perceive
Walking in Thebes? Scars and bare weeds 15
The gain o'th' martialist who did propound
To his bold ends honour and golden ingots,
Which though he won, he had not; and now flirted
By peace for whom he fought. Who then shall offer
To Mars's so-scorned altar? I do bleed 20
When such I meet, and wish great Juno would
Resume her ancient fit of jealousy
To get the soldier work, that peace might purge
For her repletion and retain anew
Her charitable heart, now hard and harsher 25
Than strife or war could be.

ARCITE

Are you not out?

Meet you no ruin but the soldier in
The cranks and turns of Thebes? You did begin
As if you met decays of many kinds.
Perceive you none that do arouse your pity 30
But th'unconsidered soldier?

PALAMON

Yes, I pity

Decays where'er I find them, but such most
That, sweating in an honourable toil,
Are paid with ice to cool 'em.

ARCITE 'Tis not this

I did begin to speak of. This is virtue, 35
Of no respect in Thebes. I spake of Thebes,
How dangerous, if we will keep our honours,
It is for our residing where every evil
Hath a good colour, where every seeming good's
A certain evil, where not to be ev'n jump 40
As they are here were to be strangers, and
Such things to be, mere monsters.

PALAMON 'Tis in our power,

Unless we fear that apes can tutor's, to
Be masters of our manners. What need I
Affect another's gait, which is not catching 45
Where there is faith? Or to be fond upon
Another's way of speech, when by mine own
I may be reasonably conceived±±saved, too±±
Speaking it truly? Why am I bound
By any generous bond to follow him 50
Follows his tailor, haply so long until
The followed make pursuit? Or let me know
Why mine own barber is unblest±±with him
My poor chin, too±±for 'tis not scissored just
To such a favourite's glass? What canon is there 55
That does command my rapier from my hip
To dangle't in my hand? Or to go tiptoe
Before the street be foul? Either I am
The fore-horse in the team or I am none
That draw i'th' sequent trace. These poor slight sores 60
Need not a plantain. That which rips my bosom
Almost to th' heart's±±

ARCITE Our uncle Creon.

PALAMON

He,

A most unbounded tyrant, whose successes
Makes heaven unfear'd and villainy assured
Beyond its power there's nothing; almost puts 65
Faith in a fever, and deifies alone

Voluble chance; who only attributes
The faculties of other instruments
To his own nerves and act; commands men's service,
And what they win in't, boot and glory; one 70
That fears not to do harm, good dares not. Let
The blood of mine that's sib to him be sucked
From me with leeches. Let them break and fall
Off me with that corruption.

ARCITE Clear-spirited cousin,
Let's leave his court that we may nothing share 75
Of his loud infamy: for our milk
Will relish of the pasture, and we must
Be vile or disobedient; not his kinsmen
In blood unless in quality.

PALAMON Nothing truer.
I think the echoes of his shames have deafed 80
The ears of heav'nly justice. Widows' cries
Descend again into their throats and have not
Enter Valerius
Due audience of the gods±±Valerius.

VALERIUS
The King calls for you; yet be leaden-footed
Till his great rage be off him. Phoebus, when 85
He broke his whipstock and exclaimed against
The horses of the sun, but whispered to
The loudness of his fury.

PALAMON Small winds shake him.
But what's the matter?

VALERIUS
Theseus, who where he threats, appals, hath sent 90
Deadly defiance to him and pronounces
Ruin to Thebes, who is at hand to seal
The promise of his wrath.

ARCITE Let him approach.
But that we fear the gods in him, he brings not
A jot of terror to us. Yet what man 95
Thirds his own worth±±the case is each of ours±±
When that his action's dregged with mind assured
'Tis bad he goes about.

PALAMON Leave that unreasoned.

Our services stand now for Thebes, not Creon,
Yet to be neutral to him were dishonour, 100
Rebellious to oppose. Therefore we must
With him stand to the mercy of our fate,
Who hath bounded our last minute.

ARCITE So we must.
Is't said this war's afoot? Or it shall be
On fail of some condition?

VALERIUS 'Tis in motion, 105
The intelligence of state came in the instant
With the defier.

PALAMON Let's to the King, who, were he
A quarter carrier of that honour which
His enemy come in, the blood we venture
Should be as for our health, which were not spent, 110
Rather laid out for purchase. But, alas,
Our hands advanced before our hearts, what will
The fall o'th' stroke do damage?

ARCITE Let th'event±±
That never-erring arbitrator±±tell us
When we know all ourselves, and let us follow 115
The becking of our chance.
Exeunt