

# The Two Noble Kinsmen

## 2.2

*Enter Palamon and Arcite in prison, [in shackles, above]*

**PALAMON**

How do you, noble cousin?

**ARCITE**

How do you, sir?

**PALAMON**

Why, strong enough to laugh at misery  
And bear the chance of war. Yet we are prisoners,  
I fear, for ever, cousin.

**ARCITE**

I believe it,

And to that destiny have patiently 5  
Laid up my hour to come.

**PALAMON**

O, cousin Arcite,

Where is Thebes now? Where is our noble country?  
Where are our friends and kindreds? Never more  
Must we behold those comforts, never see  
The hardy youths strive for the games of honour, 10  
Hung with the painted favours of their ladies,  
Like tall ships under sail; then start amongst 'em  
And, as an east wind, leave 'em all behind us,  
Like lazy clouds, whilst Palamon and Arcite,  
Even in the wagging of a wanton leg, 15  
Outstripped the people's praises, won the garlands  
Ere they have time to wish 'em ours. O never  
Shall we two exercise, like twins of honour,  
Our arms again and feel our fiery horses  
Like proud seas under us. Our good swords, now±± 20  
Better the red-eyed god of war ne'er wore±±  
Ravished our sides, like age must run to rust  
And deck the temples of those gods that hate us.  
These hands shall never draw 'em out like lightning  
To blast whole armies more.

**ARCITE**

No, Palamon,

25

Those hopes are prisoners with us. Here we are,  
And here the graces of our youths must wither,  
Like a too-timely spring. Here age must find us

And, which is heaviest, Palamon, unmarried±±  
 The sweet embraces of a loving wife 30  
 Loaden with kisses, armed with thousand Cupids,  
 Shall never clasp our necks; no issue know us;  
 No figures of ourselves shall we e'er see  
 To glad our age, and, like young eagles, teach 'em  
 Boldly to gaze against bright arms and say, 35  
 `Remember what your fathers were, and conquer.'  
 The fair-eyed maids shall weep our banishments,  
 And in their songs curse ever-blinded fortune,  
 Till she for shame see what a wrong she has done  
 To youth and nature. This is all our world. 40  
 We shall know nothing here but one another,  
 Hear nothing but the clock that tells our woes.  
 The vine shall grow, but we shall never see it;  
 Summer shall come, and with her all delights,  
 But dead-cold winter must inhabit here still. 45

**PALAMON**

'Tis too true, Arcite. To our Theban hounds  
 That shook the ageÁd forest with their echoes,  
 No more now must we holler; no more shake  
 Our pointed javelins whilst the angry swine  
 Flies like a Parthian quiver from our rages, 50  
 Struck with our well-steeled darts. All valiant uses±±  
 The food and nourishment of noble minds±±  
 In us two here shall perish; we shall die±±  
 Which is the curse of honour±±lastly,  
 Children of grief and ignorance.

**ARCITE**

Yet, cousin, 55

Even from the bottom of these miseries,  
 From all that fortune can inflict upon us,  
 I see two comforts rising±±two mere blessings,  
 If the gods please, to hold here a brave patience  
 And the enjoying of our griefs together. 60  
 Whilst Palamon is with me, let me perish  
 If I think this our prison.

**PALAMON**

Certainly

'Tis a main goodness, cousin, that our fortunes  
 Were twined together. 'Tis most true, two souls  
 Put in two noble bodies, let 'em suffer 65

The gall of hazard, so they grow together,  
Will never sink; they must not, say they could.  
A willing man dies sleeping and all's done.

**ARCITE**

Shall we make worthy uses of this place  
That all men hate so much?

**PALAMON**

How, gentle cousin?

70

**ARCITE**

Let's think this prison holy sanctuary,  
To keep us from corruption of worse men.  
We are young, and yet desire the ways of honour  
That liberty and common conversation,  
The poison of pure spirits, might, like women, 75  
Woo us to wander from. What worthy blessing  
Can be, but our imaginations  
May make it ours? And here being thus together,  
We are an endless mine to one another:  
We are one another's wife, ever begetting 80  
New births of love; we are father, friends,  
acquaintance;  
We are in one another, families±±  
I am your heir, and you are mine; this place  
Is our inheritance: no hard oppressor  
Dare take this from us. Here, with a little patience, 85  
We shall live long and loving. No surfeits seek us±±  
The hand of war hurts none here, nor the seas  
Swallow their youth. Were we at liberty  
A wife might part us lawfully, or business;  
Quarrels consume us; envy of ill men 90  
Crave our acquaintance. I might sicken, cousin,  
Where you should never know it, and so perish  
Without your noble hand to close mine eyes,  
Or prayers to the gods. A thousand chances,  
Were we from hence, would sever us.

**PALAMON**

You have made me±

± 95

I thank you, cousin Arcite±±almost wanton  
With my captivity. What a misery  
It is to live abroad, and everywhere!  
'Tis like a beast, methinks. I find the court here;

I am sure, a more content; and all those pleasures 100  
That woo the wills of men to vanity  
I see through now, and am sufficient  
To tell the world 'tis but a gaudy shadow,  
That old Time, as he passes by, takes with him.  
What had we been, old in the court of Creon, 105  
Where sin is justice, lust and ignorance  
The virtues of the great ones? Cousin Arcite,  
Had not the loving gods found this place for us,  
We had died as they do, ill old men, unwept,  
And had their epitaphs, the people's curses. 110  
Shall I say more?

ARCITE I would hear you still.

PALAMON Ye shall.

Is there record of any two that loved  
Better than we do, Arcite?

ARCITE Sure there cannot.

PALAMON I do not think it possible our friendship  
Should ever leave us.

ARCITE Till our deaths it cannot, 115

*Enter Emilia and her Woman [below]. Palamon sees  
Emilia and is silent*

And after death our spirits shall be led  
To those that love eternally. Speak on, sir.

EMILIA (to her Woman)  
This garden has a world of pleasure in't.  
What flower is this?

WOMAN 'Tis called narcissus, madam.

EMILIA  
That was a fair boy, certain, but a fool 120  
To love himself. Were there not maids enough?

ARCITE (to Palamon)  
Pray forward.

PALAMON Yes.

EMILIA (to her Woman) Or were they all hard-hearted?

WOMAN  
They could not be to one so fair.

EMILIA Thou wouldst not.

WOMAN

I think I should not, madam.

**EMILIA** That's a good wench±±  
 But take heed to your kindness, though.

**WOMAN** Why,  
 madam? 125

**EMILIA**  
 Men are mad things.

**ARCITE** (*to Palamon*) Will ye go forward, cousin?

**EMILIA** (*to her Woman*)  
 Canst not thou work such flowers in silk, wench?

**WOMAN**  
 Yes.

**EMILIA**  
 I'll have a gown full of 'em, and of these.  
 This is a pretty colour±±will't not do  
 Rarely upon a skirt, wench?

**WOMAN** Dainty, madam. 130

**ARCITE** (*to Palamon*)  
 Cousin, cousin, how do you, sir? Why, Palamon!

**PALAMON**  
 Never till now was I in prison, Arcite.

**ARCITE**  
 Why, what's the matter, man?

**PALAMON** Behold and wonder!  
*Arcite sees Emilia*  
 By heaven, she is a goddess!

**ARCITE** Ha!

**PALAMON** Do reverence.  
 She is a goddess, Arcite.

**EMILIA** (*to her Woman*) Of all flowers 135  
 Methinks a rose is best.

**WOMAN** Why, gentle madam?

**EMILIA**  
 It is the very emblem of a maid±±  
 For when the west wind courts her gently,  
 How modestly she blows, and paints the sun  
 With her chaste blushes! When the north comes near  
 her, 140  
 Rude and impatient, then, like chastity,  
 She locks her beauties in her bud again,

And leaves him to base briers.

WOMAN

Yet, good madam,

Sometimes her modesty will blow so far

She falls for't±±a maid,

145

If she have any honour, would be loath

To take example by her.

EMILIA

Thou art wanton.

ARCITE *(to Palamon)*

She is wondrous fair.

PALAMON

She is all the beauty extant.

EMILIA *(to her Woman)*

The sun grows high±±let's walk in. Keep these flowers.

We'll see how close art can come near their colours. 150

I am wondrous merry-hearted±±I could laugh now.

WOMAN

I could lie down, I am sure.

EMILIA

And take one with you?

WOMAN

That's as we bargain, madam.

EMILIA

Well, agree then.

*Exeunt Emilia and her Woman*

PALAMON

What think you of this beauty?

ARCITE

'Tis a rare one.

PALAMON

Is't but a rare one?

ARCITE

Yes, a matchless beauty.

155

PALAMON

Might not a man well lose himself and love her?

ARCITE

I cannot tell what you have done; I have,

Beshrew mine eyes for't. Now I feel my shackles.

PALAMON

You love her then?

ARCITE

Who would not?

160

PALAMON

And desire her?

ARCITE

Before my liberty.

PALAMON

I saw her first.

ARCITE

That's nothing.

PALAMON

But it shall be.

ARCITE

I saw her too.

**PALAMON** Yes, but you must not love her.

**ARCITE**

I will not, as you do, to worship her 165  
As she is heavenly and a blesseÁd goddess!  
I love her as a woman, to enjoy her±±  
So both may love.

**PALAMON** You shall not love at all.

**ARCITE**

Not love at all±±who shall deny me?

**PALAMON**

I that first saw her, I that took possession 170  
First with mine eye of all those beauties  
In her revealed to mankind. If thou lov'st her,  
Or entertain'st a hope to blast my wishes,  
Thou art a traitor, Arcite, and a fellow  
False as thy title to her. Friendship, blood, 175  
And all the ties between us I disclaim,  
If thou once think upon her.

**ARCITE** Yes, I love her±±

And if the lives of all my name lay on it,  
I must do so. I love her with my soul±±  
If that will lose ye, farewell, Palamon! 180  
I say again,  
I love her, and in loving her maintain  
I am as worthy and as free a lover,  
And have as just a title to her beauty,  
As any Palamon, or any living 185  
That is a man's son.

**PALAMON** Have I called thee friend?

**ARCITE**

Yes, and have found me so. Why are you moved  
thus?

Let me deal coldly with you. Am not I  
Part of your blood, part of your soul? You have  
told me

That I was Palamon and you were Arcite.

**PALAMON**

Yes.

190

**ARCITE**

Am not I liable to those affections,  
Those joys, griefs, angers, fears, my friend shall  
suffer?

**PALAMON**

Ye may be.

**ARCITE** Why then would you deal so cunningly,  
So strangely, so unlike a noble kinsman,  
To love alone? Speak truly. Do you think me  
Unworthy of her sight?

195

**PALAMON** No, but unjust  
If thou pursue that sight.

**ARCITE** Because another  
First sees the enemy, shall I stand still,  
And let mine honour down, and never charge?

**PALAMON**

Yes, if he be but one.

**ARCITE** But say that one  
Had rather combat me?

200

**PALAMON** Let that one say so,  
And use thy freedom; else, if thou pursuest her,  
Be as that curseÁd man that hates his country,  
A branded villain.

**ARCITE** You are mad.

**PALAMON** I must be.

Till thou art worthy, Arcite, it concerns me;  
And in this madness if I hazard thee  
And take thy life, I deal but truly.

205

**ARCITE** Fie, sir.

You play the child extremely. I will love her,  
I must, I ought to do so, and I dare±±  
And all this justly.

**PALAMON** O, that now, that now 210

Thy false self and thy friend had but this fortune±±  
To be one hour at liberty and grasp  
Our good swords in our hands! I would quickly teach  
thee

What 'twere to filch affection from another.  
Thou art baser in it than a cutpurse.  
Put but thy head out of this window more  
And, as I have a soul, I'll nail thy life to't.

215



**ARCITE**

Thou dar'st not, fool; thou canst not; thou art feeble.  
Put my head out? I'll throw my body out  
And leap the garden when I see her next, 220  
*Enter the Jailer [above]*

And pitch between her arms to anger thee.

**PALAMON**

No more±±the keeper's coming. I shall live  
To knock thy brains out with my shackles.

**ARCITE**

Do.

**JAILER**

By your leave, gentlemen.

**PALAMON**

Now, honest keeper?

**JAILER**

Lord Arcite, you must presently to th' Duke. 225  
The cause I know not yet.

**ARCITE**

I am ready, keeper.

**JAILER**

Prince Palamon, I must a while bereave you  
Of your fair cousin's company.

*Exeunt Arcite and the Jailer*

**PALAMON**

And me, too,

Even when you please, of life. Why is he sent for?  
It may be he shall marry her±±he's goodly, 230  
And like enough the Duke hath taken notice  
Both of his blood and body. But his falsehood!  
Why should a friend be treacherous? If that  
Get him a wife so noble and so fair,  
Let honest men ne'er love again. Once more 235  
I would but see this fair one. BlesseÁd garden,  
And fruit and flowers more blesseÁd, that still blossom  
As her bright eyes shine on ye! Would I were,  
For all the fortune of my life hereafter,  
Yon little tree, yon blooming apricot±± 240  
How I would spread and fling my wanton arms  
In at her window! I would bring her fruit  
Fit for the gods to feed on; youth and pleasure  
Still as she tasted should be doubled on her;  
And if she be not heavenly, I would make her 245  
So near the gods in nature they should fear her±±

*Enter the Jailer [above]*

And then I am sure she would love me. How now,  
keeper,  
Where's Arcite?

**JAILER** Banished±±Prince Pirithous  
Obtained his liberty; but never more,  
Upon his oath and life, must he set foot 250  
Upon this kingdom.

**PALAMON** *[aside]* He's a blesseÁd man.  
He shall see Thebes again, and call to arms  
The bold young men that, when he bids 'em charge,  
Fall on like fire. Arcite shall have a fortune,  
If he dare make himself a worthy lover, 255  
Yet in the field to strike a battle for her;  
And if he lose her then, he's a cold coward.  
How bravely may he bear himself to win her  
If he be noble Arcite; thousand ways!  
Were I at liberty I would do things 260  
Of such a virtuous greatness that this lady,  
This blushing virgin, should take manhood to her  
And seek to ravish me.

**JAILER** My lord, for you  
I have this charge to±±

**PALAMON** To discharge my life.

**JAILER**  
No, but from this place to remove your lordship±± 265  
The windows are too open.

**PALAMON** Devils take 'em  
That are so envious to me±±prithee kill me.

**JAILER**  
And hang for't afterward?

**PALAMON** By this good light,  
Had I a sword I would kill thee.

**JAILER** Why, my lord?

**PALAMON**  
Thou bring'st such pelting scurvy news continually, 270  
Thou art not worthy life. I will not go.

**JAILER**  
Indeed you must, my lord.

**PALAMON** May I see the garden?

**JAILER**

No.

**PALAMON** Then I am resolved±±I will not go.

**JAILER**

I must constrain you, then; and for you are dangerous,  
I'll clap more irons on you.

**PALAMON** Do, good keeper. 275

I'll shake 'em so ye shall not sleep:  
I'll make ye a new morris. Must I go?

**JAILER**

There is no remedy.

**PALAMON** Farewell, kind window.

May rude wind never hurt thee. O, my lady,  
If ever thou hast felt what sorrow was, 280  
Dream how I suffer. Come, now bury me.

*Exeunt Palamon and the Jailer*