

# The Two Noble Kinsmen

## 5.1

*[An altar prepared.] Flourish. Enter Theseus,  
Pirithous, Hippolyta, attendants*

**THESEUS**

Now let 'em enter and before the gods  
Tender their holy prayers. Let the temples  
Burn bright with sacred fires, and the altars  
In hallowed clouds commend their swelling incense  
To those above us. Let no due be wanting. 5

*Flourish of cornetts*

They have a noble work in hand, will honour  
The very powers that love 'em.

*Enter Palamon with his three Knights [at  
one door], and Arcite with his three Knights  
[at the other door]*

**PIRITHOUS**

Sir, they enter.

**THESEUS**

You valiant and strong-hearted enemies,  
You royal german foes that this day come  
To blow that nearness out that flames between ye, 10  
Lay by your anger for an hour and, dove-like,  
Before the holy altars of your helpers,  
The all-feared gods, bow down your stubborn bodies.  
Your ire is more than mortal±±so your help be;  
And as the gods regard ye, fight with justice. 15  
I'll leave you to your prayers, and betwixt ye  
I part my wishes.

**PIRITHOUS** Honour crown the worthiest.

*Exit Theseus and his train*

**PALAMON** *(to Arcite)*

The glass is running now that cannot finish  
Till one of us expire. Think you but thus,  
That were there aught in me which strove to show 20  
Mine enemy in this business, were't one eye  
Against another, arm oppressed by arm,  
I would destroy th'offender±±coz, I would,  
Though parcel of myself. Then from this gather

How I should tender you.

**ARCITE** I am in labour 25

To push your name, your ancient love, our kindred,  
Out of my memory, and i'th' selfsame place  
To seat something I would confound. So hoist we  
The sails that must these vessels port even where  
The heavenly limiter pleases.

**PALAMON** You speak well. 30

Before I turn, let me embrace thee, cousin±±  
This I shall never do again.

**ARCITE** One farewell.

**PALAMON**

Why, let it be so±±farewell, coz.

**ARCITE** Farewell, sir.

*Exeunt Palamon and his three Knights*

Knights, kinsmen, lovers±±yea, my sacrifices,  
True worshippers of Mars, whose spirit in you 35  
Expels the seeds of fear and th'apprehension  
Which still is father of it, go with me

Before the god of our profession. There  
Require of him the hearts of lions and  
The breath of tigers, yea, the fierceness too, 40  
Yea, the speed also±±to go on, I mean,  
Else wish we to be snails. You know my prize

Must be dragged out of blood±±force and great feat  
Must put my garland on me, where she sticks,  
The queen of flowers. Our intercession, then, 45  
Must be to him that makes the camp a cistern  
Brimmed with the blood of men±±give me your aid,  
And bend your spirits towards him.

*They kneel before the altar, [fall on their faces, then  
on their knees again]*

*(Praying to Mars)*

Thou mighty one,  
That with thy power hast turned green Neptune into  
purple;

Whose havoc in vast field comets prewarn, 50  
Unearthed skulls proclaim; whose breath blows down  
The teeming Ceres' foison; who dost pluck  
With hand armipotent from forth blue clouds  
The masoned turrets, that both mak'st and break'st

The stony girths of cities; me thy pupil, 55  
Youngest follower of thy drum, instruct this day  
With military skill, that to thy laud  
I may advance my streamer, and by thee  
Be styled the lord o'th' day. Give me, great Mars,  
Some token of thy pleasure. 60

*Here they fall on their faces, as formerly, and there  
is heard clanging of armour, with a short thunder,  
as the burst of a battle, whereupon they all rise and  
bow to the altar*

O great corrector of enormous times,  
Shaker of o'er-rank states, thou grand decider  
Of dusty and old titles, that heal'st with blood  
The earth when it is sick, and cur'st the world  
O'th' plurisy of people, I do take 65  
Thy signs auspiciously, and in thy name,  
To my design, march boldly. *(To his Knights)* Let us go.  
*Exeunt*