

The Two Noble Kinsmen

1.1

Music. Enter Hymen with a torch burning, a Boy in a white robe before, singing and strewing flowers. After Hymen, a nymph encompassed in her tresses, bearing a wheaten garland. Then Theseus between two other nymphs with wheaten chaplets on their heads. Then Hippolyta, the bride, led by Pirithous and another holding a garland over her head, her tresses likewise hanging. After her, Emilia holding up her train. Then Artesius [and other attendants]

BOY *(sings during procession)*

Roses, their sharp spines being gone, Not royal in their smells alone, But in their hue; Maiden pinks, of odour faint, Daisies smell-less, yet most quaint,	5
And sweet thyme true; Primrose, first-born child of Ver, Merry springtime's harbinger, With harebells dim; Oxlips, in their cradles growing,	10
Marigolds, on deathbeds blowing, Lark's-heels trim; All dear nature's children sweet, Lie fore bride and bridegroom's feet, <i>He strews flowers</i>	
Blessing their sense.	15
Not an angel of the air, Bird melodious, or bird fair, Is absent hence. The crow, the sland'rous cuckoo, nor The boding raven, nor chough hoar,	20
Nor chatt'ring pie, May on our bridehouse perch or sing, Or with them any discord bring, But from it fly.	

Enter three Queens in black, with veils stained, with imperial crowns. The First Queen falls down at the foot of Theseus; the Second falls down at the foot of Hippolyta; the Third, before Emilia

FIRST QUEEN (to Theseus)

For pity's sake and true gentility's, 25
Hear and respect me.

SECOND QUEEN (to Hippolyta) For your mother's sake,
And as you wish your womb may thrive with fair ones,
Hear and respect me.

THIRD QUEEN (to Emilia)

Now for the love of him whom Jove hath marked
The honour of your bed, and for the sake 30
Of clear virginity, be advocate
For us and our distresses. This good deed
Shall raze you out o'th' Book of Trespasses
All you are set down there.

THESEUS (to First Queen)

Sad lady, rise.

HIPPOLYTA (to Second Queen) Stand up.

EMILIA (to Third Queen) No knees to me. 35

What woman I may stead that is distressed
Does bind me to her.

THESEUS (to First Queen)

What's your request? Deliver you for all.

FIRST QUEEN [kneeling still]

We are three queens whose sovereigns fell before
The wrath of cruel Creon; who endured 40
The beaks of ravens, talons of the kites,
And pecks of crows in the foul fields of Thebes.
He will not suffer us to burn their bones,
To urn their ashes, nor to take th'offence
Of mortal loathsomeness from the blest eye 45
Of holy Phoebus, but infects the winds
With stench of our slain lords. O pity, Duke!
Thou purger of the earth, draw thy feared sword
That does good turns to'th' world; give us the bones
Of our dead kings that we may chapel them; 50
And of thy boundless goodness take some note
That for our crowneÁd heads we have no roof,

Save this, which is the lion's and the bear's,
And vault to everything.

THESEUS

Pray you, kneel not:

I was transported with your speech, and suffered 55
Your knees to wrong themselves. I have heard the
fortunes

Of your dead lords, which gives me such lamenting
As wakes my vengeance and revenge for 'em.

King Capaneus was your lord: the day
That he should marry you±±at such a season 60

As now it is with me±±I met your groom
By Mars's altar. You were that time fair,
Not Juno's mantle fairer than your tresses,
Nor in more bounty spread her. Your wheaten wreath
Was then nor threshed nor blasted; fortune at you 65
Dimpled her cheek with smiles; Hercules our
kinsman±±

Then weaker than your eyes±±laid by his club.
He tumbled down upon his Nemean hide
And swore his sinews thawed. O grief and time,
Fearful consumers, you will all devour. 70

FIRST QUEEN [*kneeling still*] O, I hope some god,
Some god hath put his mercy in your manhood,
Whereto he'll infuse power and press you forth
Our undertaker.

THESEUS O no knees, none, widow:

[*The First Queen rises*]

Unto the helmeted Bellona use them 75
And pray for me, your soldier. Troubled I am.
He turns away

SECOND QUEEN [*kneeling still*] Honoured Hippolyta,
Most dreaded Amazonian, that hast slain
The scythe-tusked boar, that with thy arm, as strong
As it is white, wast near to make the male 80
To thy sex captive, but that this, thy lord±±
Born to uphold creation in that honour
First nature styled it in±±shrunk thee into
The bound thou wast o'erflowing, at once subduing
Thy force and thy affection; soldieress, 85
That equally canst poise sternness with pity,

Whom now I know hast much more power on him
 Than ever he had on thee, who ow'st his strength,
 And his love too, who is a servant for
 The tenor of thy speech; dear glass of ladies, 90
 Bid him that we, whom flaming war doth scorch,
 Under the shadow of his sword may cool us.
 Require him he advance it o'er our heads.
 Speak't in a woman's key, like such a woman
 As any of us three. Weep ere you fail. 95
 Lend us a knee:
 But touch the ground for us no longer time
 Than a dove's motion when the head's plucked off.
 Tell him, if he i'th' blood-sized field lay swoll'n,
 Showing the sun his teeth, grinning at the moon, 100
 What you would do.

HIPPOLYTA Poor lady, say no more.
 I had as lief trace this good action with you
 As that whereto I am going, and never yet
 Went I so willing way. My lord is taken
 Heart-deep with your distress. Let him consider. 105
 I'll speak anon.

[The Second Queen rises]

THIRD QUEEN (*kneeling [still] to Emilia*) O, my petition was
 Set down in ice, which by hot grief uncandied
 Melts into drops; so sorrow, wanting form,
 Is pressed with deeper matter.

EMILIA Pray stand up:
 Your grief is written in your cheek.

THIRD QUEEN O woe, 110
 You cannot read it there; there, through my tears,
 Like wrinkled pebbles in a glassy stream,
 You may behold 'em.

[The Third Queen rises]

Lady, lady, alack±±
 He that will all the treasure know o'th' earth
 Must know the centre too; he that will fish 115
 For my least minnow, let him lead his line
 To catch one at my heart. O, pardon me:
 Extremity, that sharpens sundry wits,
 Makes me a fool.

EMILIA Pray you, say nothing, pray you.
Who cannot feel nor see the rain, being in't, 120
Knows neither wet nor dry. If that you were
The ground-piece of some painter, I would buy you
T'instruct me 'gainst a capital grief, indeed
Such heart-pierced demonstration; but, alas,
Being a natural sister of our sex, 125
Your sorrow beats so ardently upon me
That it shall make a counter-reflect 'gainst
My brother's heart, and warm it to some pity,
Though it were made of stone. Pray have good
comfort.

THESEUS
Forward to th' temple. Leave not out a jot 130
O'th' sacred ceremony.

FIRST QUEEN O, this celebration
Will longer last and be more costly than
Your suppliants' war. Remember that your fame
Knolls in the ear o'th' world: what you do quickly
Is not done rashly; your first thought is more 135
Than others' laboured meditative; your premeditating
More than their actions. But, O Jove, your actions,
Soon as they move, as ospreys do the fish,
Subdue before they touch. Think, dear Duke, think
What beds our slain kings have.

SECOND QUEEN What griefs our beds, 140
That our dear lords have none.

THIRD QUEEN None fit for th' dead.
Those that with cords, knives, drams, precipitance,
Weary of this world's light, have to themselves
Been death's most horrid agents, human grace
Affords them dust and shadow.

FIRST QUEEN But our lords 145
Lie blist'ring fore the visitating sun,
And were good kings, when living.

THESEUS It is true,
And I will give you comfort to give your dead lords
graves,
The which to do must make some work with Creon.

FIRST QUEEN

And that work presents itself to th' doing. 150
 Now 'twill take form, the heats are gone tomorrow.
 Then, bootless toil must recompense itself
 With its own sweat; now he's secure,
 Not dreams we stand before your puissance
 Rinsing our holy begging in our eyes 155
 To make petition clear.

SECOND QUEEN Now you may take him,
 Drunk with his victory.

THIRD QUEEN And his army full
 Of bread and sloth.

THESEUS Artesius, that best knowest
 How to draw out, fit to this enterprise
 The prim'st for this proceeding and the number 160
 To carry such a business: forth and levy
 Our worthiest instruments, whilst we dispatch
 This grand act of our life, this daring deed
 Of fate in wedlock.

FIRST QUEEN (*to the other two Queens*) Dowagers, take hands;
 Let us be widows to our woes; delay 165
 Commends us to a famishing hope.

ALL THREE QUEENS Farewell.

SECOND QUEEN
 We come unseasonably, but when could grief
 Cull forth, as unpang'd judgement can, fitt'st time
 For best solicitation?

THESEUS Why, good ladies,
 This is a service whereto I am going 170
 Greater than any war±it more imports me
 Than all the actions that I have foregone,
 Or futurely can cope.

FIRST QUEEN The more proclaiming
 Our suit shall be neglected when her arms,
 Able to lock Jove from a synod, shall 175
 By warranting moonlight corslet thee! O when
 Her twinning cherries shall their sweetness fall
 Upon thy tasteful lips, what wilt thou think
 Of rotten kings or blubbered queens? What care
 For what thou feel'st not, what thou feel'st being able 180
 To make Mars spurn his drum? O, if thou couch

But one night with her, every hour in't will
Take hostage of thee for a hundred, and
Thou shalt remember nothing more than what
That banquet bids thee to.

HIPPOLYTA (*to Theseus*) Though much unlike 185
You should be so transported, as much sorry
I should be such a suitor±±yet I think
Did I not by th'abstaining of my joy,
Which breeds a deeper longing, cure their surfeit
That craves a present medicine, I should pluck 190
All ladies' scandal on me. [*Kneels*] Therefore, sir,
As I shall here make trial of my prayers,
Either presuming them to have some force,
Or sentencing for aye their vigour dumb,
Prorogue this business we are going about, and hang 195
Your shield afore your heart±±about that neck
Which is my fee, and which I freely lend
To do these poor queens service.

ALL THREE QUEENS (*to Emilia*) O, help now,
Our cause cries for your knee.

EMILIA (*kneels to Theseus*) If you grant not
My sister her petition in that force 200
With that celerity and nature which
She makes it in, from henceforth I'll not dare
To ask you anything, nor be so hardy
Ever to take a husband.

THESEUS Pray stand up.

[*They rise*]
I am entreating of myself to do 205
That which you kneel to have me.±±Pirithous,
Lead on the bride: get you and pray the gods
For success and return; omit not anything
In the pretended celebration.±±Queens,
Follow your soldier. (*To Artesius*) As before, hence you, 210
And at the banks of Aulis meet us with
The forces you can raise, where we shall find
The moiety of a number for a business
More bigger looked.

Exit Artesius

(*To Hippolyta*) Since that our theme is haste,

I stamp this kiss upon thy current lip±± 215
Sweet, keep it as my token. (*To the wedding party*) Set
you forward,

For I will see you gone.

(*To Emilia*) Farewell, my beauteous sister.±±Pirithous,
Keep the feast full: bate not an hour on't.

PIRITHOUS

Sir,

I'll follow you at heels. The feast's solemnity 220
Shall want till your return.

THESEUS

Cousin, I charge you

Budge not from Athens. We shall be returning
Ere you can end this feast, of which, I pray you,
Make no abatement.±±Once more, farewell all.

*Exeunt Hippolyta, Emilia, Pirithous, and train
towards the temple*

FIRST QUEEN

Thus dost thou still make good the tongue o'th' world. 225

SECOND QUEEN

And earn'st a deity equal with Mars±±

THIRD QUEEN If not above him, for

Thou being but mortal mak'st affections bend
To godlike honours; they themselves, some say,
Groan under such a mast'ry.

THESEUS

As we are men,

230

Thus should we do; being sensually subdued
We lose our human title. Good cheer, ladies.
Now turn we towards your comforts.

[Flourish.] Exeunt