

The Two Noble Kinsmen

2.3

Enter Arcite

ARCITE

Banished the kingdom? 'Tis a benefit,
A mercy I must thank 'em for; but banished
The free enjoying of that face I die for±±
O, 'twas a studied punishment, a death
Beyond imagination; such a vengeance 5
That, were I old and wicked, all my sins
Could never pluck upon me. Palamon,
Thou hast the start now±±thou shalt stay and see
Her bright eyes break each morning 'gainst thy
window,
And let in life into thee. Thou shalt feed 10
Upon the sweetness of a noble beauty
That nature ne'er exceeded, nor ne'er shall.
Good gods! What happiness has Palamon!
Twenty to one he'll come to speak to her,
And if she be as gentle as she's fair, 15
I know she's his±±he has a tongue will tame
Tempests and make the wild rocks wanton.
Come what can come,
The worst is death. I will not leave the kingdom.
I know mine own is but a heap of ruins, 20
And no redress there. If I go he has her.
I am resolved another shape shall make me,
Or end my fortunes. Either way I am happy±±
I'll see her and be near her, or no more.

*Enter four Country People, one of whom carries a
garland before them. Arcite stands apart*

FIRST COUNTRYMAN

My masters, I'll be there±±that's certain. 25

SECOND COUNTRYMAN And I'll be there.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN And I.

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN

Why then, have with ye, boys! 'Tis but a chiding±±
Let the plough play today, I'll tickle't out

Of the jades' tails tomorrow.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN I am sure 30
 To have my wife as jealous as a turkey±±
 But that's all one. I'll go through, let her mumble.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN
 Clap her aboard tomorrow night and stow her,
 And all's made up again.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN Ay, do but put
 A fescue in her fist and you shall see her 35
 Take a new lesson out and be a good wench.
 Do we all hold against the maying?

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN
 Hold? What should ail us?

THIRD COUNTRYMAN Arcas will be there.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN And Sennois, and Rycas, and three
 better lads ne'er danced under green tree; and ye know 40
 what wenches, ha? But will the dainty dominie, the
 schoolmaster, keep touch, do you think? For he does
 all, ye know.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN He'll eat a hornbook ere he fail. Go
 to, the matter's too far driven between him and the 45
 tanner's daughter to let slip now, and she must see the
 Duke, and she must dance too.

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN Shall we be lusty?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN All the boys in Athens blow wind
 i'th' breech on's! And here I'll be and there I'll be, for 50
 our town, and here again and there again±±ha, boys,
 hey for the weavers!

FIRST COUNTRYMAN This must be done i'th' woods.

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN O, pardon me.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN By any means, our thing of learning 55
 said so; where he himself will edify the Duke most
 parlously in our behalves±±he's excellent i'th' woods,
 bring him to th' plains, his learning makes no cry.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN We'll see the sports, then every man
 to's tackle±±and, sweet companions, let's rehearse, by 60
 any means, before the ladies see us, and do sweetly,
 and God knows what may come on't.

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN Content±±the sports once ended,
 we'll perform. Away boys, and hold.

ARCITE (*coming forward*)

By your leaves, honest friends, pray you whither go
you?

65

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN

Whither? Why, what a question's that?

ARCITE Yet 'tis a question

To me that know not.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN To the games, my friend.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN

Where were you bred, you know it not?

ARCITE

Not far, sir±±

Are there such games today?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN Yes, marry, are there, 70

And such as you never saw. The Duke himself

Will be in person there.

ARCITE

What pastimes are they?

SECOND COUNTRYMAN

Wrestling and running. (*To the others*) 'Tis a pretty
fellow.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN (*to Arcite*)

Thou wilt not go along?

ARCITE

Not yet, sir.

FOURTH COUNTRYMAN

Well, sir,

Take your own time. (*To the others*) Come, boys.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN

My mind misgives me±± 75

This fellow has a vengeance trick o'th' hip:

Mark how his body's made for't.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN

I'll be hanged though

If he dare venture; hang him, plum porridge!

He wrestle? He roast eggs! Come, let's be gone, lads.

Exeunt the four Countrymen

ARCITE

This is an offered opportunity

80

I durst not wish for. Well I could have wrestled±±

The best men called it excellent±±and run

Swifter than wind upon a field of corn,

Curling the wealthy ears, never flew. I'll venture,

And in some poor disguise be there. Who knows

85

Whether my brows may not be girt with garlands,

And happiness prefer me to a place
Where I may ever dwell in sight of her?
Exit