

The Two Noble Kinsmen

5.3

Still music of recorders. Enter Emilia in white, her hair about her shoulders, with a wheaten wreath; one in white holding up her train, her hair stuck with flowers; one before her carrying a silver hind in which is conveyed incense and sweet odours, which being set upon the altar, her maids standing apart, she sets fire to it. Then they curtsy and kneel

EMILIA (*praying to Diana*)

O sacred, shadowy, cold, and constant queen,
Abandoner of revels, mute contemplative,
Sweet, solitary, white as chaste, and pure
As wind-fanned snow, who to thy female knights
Allow'st no more blood than will make a blush, 5
Which is their order's robe: I here, thy priest,
Am humbled fore thine altar. O, vouchsafe
With that thy rare green eye, which never yet
Beheld thing maculate, look on thy virgin;
And, sacred silver mistress, lend thine ear±± 10
Which ne'er heard scurril term, into whose port
Ne'er entered wanton sound±±to my petition,
Seasoned with holy fear. This is my last
Of vestal office. I am bride-habited,
But maiden-hearted. A husband I have 'pointed, 15
But do not know him. Out of two, I should
Choose one and pray for his success, but I
Am guiltless of election. Of mine eyes
Were I to lose one, they are equal precious±±
I could doom neither: that which perished should 20
Go to't unsentenced. Therefore, most modest queen,
He of the two pretenders that best loves me
And has the truest title in't, let him
Take off my wheaten garland, or else grant
The file and quality I hold I may 25
Continue in thy band.

Here the hind vanishes under the altar and in the place ascends a rose tree having one rose upon it

(*To her women*) See what our general of ebbs and flows
Out from the bowels of her holy altar,
With sacred act, advances±±but one rose!
If well inspired, this battle shall confound 30
Both these brave knights, and I a virgin flower
Must grow alone, unplucked.

*Here is heard a sudden twang of instruments and
the rose falls from the tree*

The flower is fall'n, the tree descends. (*To Diana*) O
mistress,

Thou here dischargest me±±I shall be gathered.

I think so, but I know not thine own will. 35

Unclasp thy mystery. [*To her women*] I hope she's
pleased;

Her signs were gracious.

They curtsy and exeunt