

The Two Noble Kinsmen

5.5

Flourish. Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Emilia, Pirithous, and some attendants

EMILIA

I'll no step further.

PIRITHOUS

Will you lose this sight?

EMILIA

I had rather see a wren hawk at a fly
Than this decision. Every blow that falls
Threats a brave life; each stroke laments
The place whereon it falls, and sounds more like 5
A bell than blade. I will stay here.
It is enough my hearing shall be punished
With what shall happen, 'gainst the which there is
No deafing, but to hear; not taint mine eye
With dread sights it may shun.

PIRITHOUS (to Theseus) Sir, my good lord, 10
Your sister will no further.

THESEUS

O, she must.

She shall see deeds of honour in their kind,
Which sometime show well pencilled. Nature now
Shall make and act the story, the belief
Both sealed with eye and ear. (To Emilia) You must be
present±± 15
You are the victor's meed, the price and garland
To crown the question's title.

EMILIA

Pardon me,

If I were there I'd wink.

THESEUS

You must be there±±

This trial is, as 'twere, i'th' night, and you
The only star to shine.

EMILIA

I am extinct. 20

There is but envy in that light which shows
The one the other. Darkness, which ever was
The dam of horror, who does stand accursed
Of many mortal millions, may even now,
By casting her black mantle over both, 25

That neither could find other, get herself
Some part of a good name, and many a murder
Set off whereto she's guilty.

HIPPOLYTA You must go.

EMILIA
In faith, I will not.

THESEUS Why, the knights must kindle
Their valour at your eye. Know, of this war 30
You are the treasure, and must needs be by
To give the service pay.

EMILIA Sir, pardon me±±
The title of a kingdom may be tried
Out of itself.

THESEUS Well, well±±then at your pleasure.
Those that remain with you could wish their office 35
To any of their enemies.

HIPPOLYTA Farewell, sister.
I am like to know your husband fore yourself,
By some small start of time. He whom the gods
Do of the two know best, I pray them he
Be made your lot. 40

Exeunt all but Emilia

*[Emilia takes out two pictures, one from her right
side, and one from her left]*

EMILIA
Arcite is gently visaged, yet his eye
Is like an engine bent or a sharp weapon
In a soft sheath. Mercy and manly courage
Are bedfellows in his visage. Palamon
Has a most menacing aspect. His brow 45
Is graved and seems to bury what it frowns on,
Yet sometime 'tis not so, but alters to
The quality of his thoughts. Long time his eye
Will dwell upon his object. Melancholy
Becomes him nobly±±so does Arcite's mirth. 50
But Palamon's sadness is a kind of mirth,
So mingled as if mirth did make him sad
And sadness merry. Those darker humours that
Stick misbecomingly on others, on them
Live in fair dwelling. 55

Cornetts. Trumpets sound as to a charge
Hark, how yon spurs to spirit do incite
The princes to their proof. Arcite may win me,
And yet may Palamon wound Arcite to
The spoiling of his figure. O, what pity
Enough for such a chance! If I were by
I might do hurt, for they would glance their eyes
Toward my seat, and in that motion might
Omit a ward or forfeit an offence
Which craved that very time. It is much better

60

*Cornetts. A great cry and noise within, crying, 'A
Palamon'*

I am not there. O better never born,
Than minister to such harm.

65

Enter Servant

What is the

chance?

SERVANT The cry's 'A Palamon'.

EMILIA

Then he has won. 'Twas ever likely±±
He looked all grace and success, and he is
Doubtless the prim'st of men. I prithee run
And tell me how it goes.

70

Shout and cornetts, crying, 'A Palamon'

SERVANT Still 'Palamon'.

EMILIA

Run and enquire.

Exit Servant

[She speaks to the picture in her right hand]

Poor servant, thou hast lost.

Upon my right side still I wore thy picture,
Palamon's on the left. Why so, I know not.
I had no end in't, else chance would have it so.

75

Another cry and shout within and cornetts

On the sinister side the heart lies±±Palamon
Had the best-boding chance. This burst of clamour
Is sure the end o'th' combat.

Enter Servant

SERVANT

They said that Palamon had Arcite's body

Within an inch o'th' pyramid±±that the cry 80
Was general `A Palamon'. But anon
Th'assistants made a brave redemption, and
The two bold titlers at this instant are
Hand to hand at it.

EMILIA Were they metamorphosed
Both into one! O why? There were no woman 85
Worth so composed a man: their single share,
Their nobleness peculiar to them, gives
The prejudice of disparity, value's shortness,
To any lady breathing±±
Cornetts. Cry within, `Arcite, Arcite'

More

exulting?

`Palamon' still?

SERVANT Nay, now the sound is `Arcite'. 90

EMILIA

I prithee, lay attention to the cry.
Cornetts. A great shout and cry, `Arcite, victory!'
Set both thine ears to th' business.

SERVANT The cry is
`Arcite' and `Victory'±±hark, `Arcite, victory!'
The combat's consummation is proclaimed
By the wind instruments.

EMILIA Half sights saw 95
That Arcite was no babe. God's lid, his richness
And costliness of spirit looked through him±±it could
No more be hid in him than fire in flax,
Than humble banks can go to law with waters
That drift winds force to raging. I did think 100
Good Palamon would miscarry, yet I knew not
Why I did think so. Our reasons are not prophets
When oft our fancies are. They are coming off±±
Alas, poor Palamon.

[She puts away the pictures.]

*Cornetts. Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Pirithous,
Arcite as victor, and attendants*

THESEUS

Lo, where our sister is in expectation, 105
Yet quaking and unsettled. Fairest Emily,

The gods by their divine arbitrament
Have given you this knight. He is a good one
As ever struck at head. *[To Arcite and Emilia]* Give me
your hands.

(To Arcite) Receive you her, *(to Emilia)* you him: *(to both)* be plighted with 110
A love that grows as you decay.

ARCITE Emilia,
To buy you I have lost what's dearest to me
Save what is bought, and yet I purchase cheaply
As I do rate your value.

THESEUS *(to Emilia)* O love! Ad sister,
He speaks now of as brave a knight as e'er 115
Did spur a noble steed. Surely the gods
Would have him die a bachelor lest his race
Should show i'th' world too godlike. His behaviour
So charmed me that, methought, Alcides was
To him a sow of lead. If I could praise 120
Each part of him to th'all I have spoke, your Arcite
Did not lose by't; for he that was thus good,
Encountered yet his better. I have heard
Two emulous Philomels beat the ear o'th' night
With their contentious throats, now one the higher, 125
Anon the other, then again the first,
And by and by out-breasted, that the sense
Could not be judge between 'em±±so it fared
Good space between these kinsmen, till heavens did
Make hardly one the winner. *(To Arcite)* Wear the
garland 130

With joy that you have won.±±For the subdued,
Give them our present justice, since I know
Their lives but pinch 'em. Let it here be done.
The scene's not for our seeing; go we hence
Right joyful, with some sorrow. *(To Arcite)* Arm your
prize; 135

I know you will not lose her. Hippolyta,
I see one eye of yours conceives a tear,
The which it will deliver.

Flourish

EMILIA

Is this winning?

O all you heavenly powers, where is your mercy?
But that your wills have said it must be so, 140
And charge me live to comfort this unfriended,
This miserable prince, that cuts away
A life more worthy from him than all women,
I should and would die too.

HIPPOLYTA Infinite pity
That four such eyes should be so fixed on one 145
That two must needs be blind for't.

THESEUS So it is.
Exeunt