



The Two Noble Kinsmen

The Two Noble Kinsmen is essentially an adaptation of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. In this story, the two kinsmen are Palamon and Arcite; they are captured while fighting for Thebes against Athens. While imprisoned, the two cousins find themselves attracted to Emilia, who is the sister of Hippolyta, wife of Theseus. Their professed "eternal friendship" takes a beating as the two vow to woo her. Theseus exiles Arcite from Athens and leaves Palamon in jail.

Arcite has other ideas once he is freed; he disguises himself as a peasant in order to keep an eye on Emilia. Meanwhile, the jailer's daughter has fallen in love with Palamon. She helps him to escape and aids him once he's hiding in the nearby forest. There Arcite encounters him. The two men resume their argument over Emilia and finally decide to duel for her that night. However, as they prepare for the duel, the two are discovered by Theseus. At first he condemns both to death; at the behest of Emilia and Hippolyta, however, the duke attempts to banish them both. Both Palamon and Arcite refuse, so Theseus asks Emilia to choose between them, with the loser being put to death. Emilia, however, can't decide, so Theseus declares that the matter will be settled by combat after all—in one month, Palamon and Arcite will fight for Emilia's hand, with the loser to be executed.

In the meantime, the jailer's daughter has gone mad as a result of her unrequited love for Palamon. Theseus absolves the jailer, who had no part in Palamon's escape, and gives a pardon to his deranged daughter. A doctor attempts to help her by getting the man to whom she's engaged pretend to be Palamon in order to restore her sanity. The time for the contest comes about, and Arcite defeats Palamon. However, fate twists dramatically as Palamon awaits execution; a messenger arrives bringing news of Arcite's mortal wounding suffered in a horse riding accident. Arcite gives Emilia's hand to Palamon before he dies.

Dramatis Personae

Theseus, Duke of Athens
Palamon, nephew of the King of Thebes
Arcite, nephew of the King of Thebes
Pirithous, an Athenian general
Artesius, an Athenian captain
Valerius, a noble of Thebes
Six Knights
A Herald
A Jailer
Wooer of the jailer's daughter
A Doctor
Brother of the jailer
Friends of the jailer
A Gentleman
Gerrold, a schoolmaster
Hippolyta, wife of Theseus
Emilia, her sister
Three Queens
Jailer's Daughter
Emilia's Servant
Country Wenches and Women personating Hymen, Boy
A Laborer
Countrymen, Messengers
A Man personating Hymen, Boy
Executioners, Guards, Soldiers, Attendants