

The Two Noble Kinsmen

Cast

Prologue and Epilogue.....*Simon Russell Beale*
Palamon.....*Jonathan Firth*
Arcite.....*Nigel Cooke*
Emilia.....*Helen Schlesinger*
Theseus.....*Geoffrey Whitehead*
Gaoler's Daughter.....*Sarah-Jane Holm*
Gaoler.....*Richard Cordery*
Hippolyta.....*Adjoa Andoh*
Gerrold.....*Geoffrey Beevers*
Pirithous.....*James Greene*
First Queen.....*Lucy Robinson*
Second Queen.....*Nicola King*
Third Queen.....*Sian Radinger*
Wooper.....*Andrew Wincott*
Other parts played by: Arthur Cox, Neil Daglish, Alisdair Simpson,
James Wallace and Rupert Wickham

Play description

ACT I

Scene 1. Three queens interrupt the wedding celebrations of Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta. They seek revenge for the deaths of their husbands, killed by Creon of Thebes. Hippolyta and her sister Emilia entreat Theseus to help them and he instructs his army to prepare for war.

Scene 2. In Thebes, two noble kinsmen, Palamon and Arcite, discuss the tyrannical rule of their uncle Creon. They are resolving to leave the court when news comes of impending war with Athens; they now have no choice but to stay.

Scene 3. Hippolyta and Emilia bid farewell to Theseus's general Pirithous. Once he has gone, Emilia marvels at Pirithous's affection for the Duke but remains convinced that the friendship between women cannot be matched. She is certain that she can never love a man as she loved her friend Flavina.

Scene 4. Theseus returns victorious from battle and the queens express their gratitude. Palamon and Arcite have been taken captive but Theseus orders that they be well treated, praising their courage.

Scene 5. The three queens process with the hearses of their lords.

ACT II

Scene 1. The Athenian gaoler and his daughter's wooper discuss marriage portions. The gaoler's daughter marvels at the nobility of Palamon and Arcite, who are captives in her father's prison.

Scene 2. Palamon and Arcite lament their captivity but rejoice in their affection for one another, deciding to view their prison as a sanctuary from the corrupt outside world. Emilia appears with her woman in the garden below the prison. Palamon sees her and points her out to Arcite; both fall in love with her at first sight. Their friendship turns to wrangling, only interrupted by the arrival of the gaoler who escorts Arcite to the Duke. Arcite is banished from Athens, but Palamon must remain a prisoner.

Scene 3. Arcite is ambivalent about his banishment, being convinced that Palamon will now have the opportunity to speak to Emilia and win her heart: "If I go, he has her."

Overhearing a village schoolmaster and a group of rustics discussing the pageant they plan to perform for the Duke, Arcite decides to disguise himself and join the games in the hope of gaining access to his beloved.

Scene 4. The gaoler's daughter has fallen in love with Palamon and, though she acknowledges that she is "base," is nonetheless determined to win him.

Scene 5. Arcite distinguishes himself in the sports and becomes Emilia's servant.

Scene 6. The gaoler's daughter has helped Palamon to escape to the forest and vows to follow him.

ACT III

Scene 1. As the Athenians celebrate May Day in the forest, Arcite marvels at his good fortune and pities his captive cousin. At that moment, Palamon emerges from the undergrowth in shackles, accusing Arcite of treachery and determined to fight him for Emilia. Arcite, however, insists that he must first regain his strength, promising that he will bring him food and a file that night.

Scene 2. In another part of the forest, the distraught gaoler's daughter searches for Palamon whom she fears eaten by wolves. Her father is to be hanged for allowing Palamon's escape.

Scene 3. Arcite brings sustenance to his cousin, but Palamon remains determined to fight.

Scene 4. The gaoler's daughter, now completely insane, wanders through the forest.

Scene 5. The gaoler's daughter falls in with the rustics and agrees to join in their entertainment.

Theseus arrives with Hippolyta and Emilia; the schoolmaster greets them with a pompous oration and the rustics perform their dance.

Scene 6. Palamon and Arcite have begun to fight when they hear the Duke approaching. Palamon reveals their identities to Theseus and asks that they be allowed to finish their combat. The Duke agrees but Hippolyta, fearing for Emilia's reputation, urges her to intercede. Despite Emilia's intervention the kinsmen will not be deflected from their duel. The Duke orders them to return to Thebes and then, a month from now, to return to the forest for another contest. The victor wins Emilia's hand, the loser must be beheaded.

ACT IV

Scene 1. The gaoler has been pardoned but he is worried about his daughter. As the wooer tells how he has seen her singing distractedly of her love for Palamon, she enters, singing fragments of songs and raving wildly about her love.

Scene 2. Emilia compares pictures of Palamon and Arcite but is unable to choose between them. Word comes that the fight is to begin and she asks why two such noble men "must be the sacrifice/To my unhappy beauty?" Meanwhile, the court extols the virtues of the noble cousins and their attendant knights.

Scene 3. A doctor advises the wooer to approach the jailer's daughter pretending to be Palamon and persuade her to eat and sleep, thereby restoring her health.

ACT V

Scene 1. Arcite prays to Mars.

Scene 2. Palamon prays to Venus.

Scene 3. Emilia prays to Diana.

Scene 4. The gaoler's daughter has accepted the wooer.

Scene 5. Despite the insistence of Hippolyta and Theseus, Emilia refuses to be present when the cousins fight. After a furious struggle, Arcite is victorious.

Scene 6. As the block is prepared for Palamon's execution, he asks after the gaoler's daughter and is told that she has recovered and is to be married. As he goes to his death, news comes that Arcite has been thrown and trampled by his horse. He is borne in on a stretcher and takes his dying leave of Palamon and Emilia, confessing that his cousin had the better claim to the maiden. Preparations must now begin both for a funeral and a wedding.

Track list

Disc 1

Track 1	Prologue
Track 2	Act I Scene i
Track 3	Act I Scene ii
Track 4	Act I Scene iii
Track 5	Act I Scene iv
Track 6	Act I Scene v
Track 7	Act II Scene i
Track 8	Act II Scene ii
Track 9	Act II Scene iii
Track 10	Act II Scene iv
Track 11	Act II Scene v
Track 12	Act II Scene vi

Disc 2

Track 1	Act III Scene i
Track 2	Act III Scene ii
Track 3	Act III Scene iii
Track 4	Act III Scene iv
Track 5	Act III Scene v
Track 6	Act III Scene vi
Track 7	Act IV Scene i
Track 8	Act IV Scene ii
Track 9	Act IV Scene iii

Disc 3

Track 1	Act V Scene i (up to line 33)
Track 2	Act V Scene i (from line 34)
	Act V Scene ii
	Act V Scene iii
Track 3	Act V Scene iv
Track 4	Act V Scene v
Track 5	Act V Scene vi
Track 6	Epilogue