

The Knight's Tale

Roman Gods Alluded to in This Tale

Venus - The Roman goddess of love is depicted as a beautiful woman and accompanied by her son the cherub, Cupid.

Mars - The Roman god of war is depicted as a powerful, red warrior and a wrathful figure.

Diana - The Roman goddess of the forest and the hunt is depicted as a woman carrying a bow.

Saturn - The Roman god of agriculture is presented in this story as an older and wiser god, who is able to devise strategies to please everyone.

Mercury - The Roman god of commerce and travel is portrayed as showing compassion and giving assistance to Arcita.

Figures from Greek Mythology

Theseus - The Duke of Athens is a firm but fair ruler who shows both wisdom and humanity. Among his exploits he had conquered the land of the Amazons and wed their queen, Hippolyta. He is a strong conqueror but capable of tempering justice with mercy. He represents the social order and is its upholder.

Hippolyta - The former Queen of the Amazons, is now happily married to Theseus. As the story opens, she is on her way to Athens to live with her husband. She is accompanied by her beautiful sister Emily, who, like the other Amazons, is generally more interested in hunting than in men and/or romance.

Creon is ruler of Thebes. Creon and Thebes have just been defeated in battle by Theseus and Athens. Among the dead bodies, two cousins are found alive. These cousins, Palamon and Arcita, are part of Creon's royal family.

Concepts Familiar to Chaucer's Readers

The Code of Courty Love: In the literature of the Middle Ages, there were conventions regarding a knight's love for a noble woman. The gallant and courageous knight always had to adore and respect the beautiful, intelligent and lofty minded noblewoman, who usually remained chaste and unattainable. While he performs noble deeds for her sake, he suffers terribly because she remains indifferent to him. If not indifferent, she does not grant him any sexual favors, and because of her purity and his respect for it, they never consummate their love. In addition, because she is married he must keep her name secret. The lady will, however, give the knight some token like a glove or scarf, to carry into battle with him. While he suffers a great deal because of this love, he sings of his love and his suffering. He welcomes the suffering because it inspires him to greater achievements.

Divine Providence was a popular idea in the Middle Ages. As the name implies, it holds that man's fate or fortune in life was ordained by God from the time the man was born. Although man had free will and could make choices, whatever was to occur would.

Note: Like many of Chaucer's and Shakespeare's stories, the general plot line of most of these tales was well known to Chaucer's readers, but the delight was in the way the story was retold.

The Knight's Tale is a rather simple story about friendship and courtly love. It is an interesting narrative told in verse with many good images. When reading the verse, be careful to read from punctuation mark to punctuation mark. It may be helpful, even when reading alone, to read it aloud. That could help you fall in with the cadence. The more you read in verse, the easier it is to follow.

The Knight's Tale

- ONCE ON A TIME, as old tales tell to us,
There was a duke whose name was Theseus;
Of Athens he was lord and governor,
And in his time was such a conqueror
- 5 That greater was there not beneath the sun.
Full many a rich country had he won;
What with his wisdom and his chivalry
He gained the realm of Femininity,
That was of old time known as Scythia.
- 10 There wedded he the queen, Hippolyta,
And brought her home with him to his country.
In glory great and with great pageantry,
And, too, her younger sister, Emily.
And thus, in victory and with melody,
15 Let I this noble duke to Athens ride.
With all his armed host marching at his side.
This duke of whom I speak, of great renown,
When he had drawn almost unto the town,
In all well-being and in utmost pride,
20 He grew aware, casting his eyes aside,
That right upon the road, as suppliants do,
A company of ladies, two by two,
Knelt, all in black, before his cavalcade;
But such a clamorous cry of woe they made
25 That in the whole world living man had heard
No such a lamentation, on my word;
Nor would they cease lamenting till at last
They'd clutched his bridle reins and held them fast.
"What folk are you that at my home-coming
30 Disturb my triumph with this dolorous thing?"
Cried Theseus. "Do you so much envy

The Knight's Tale

Once upon a time, as old tales tell us, there was a duke by the name of Theseus, who was a great lord and governor of Athens. In his time, there was not a greater conqueror in the whole world. He had conquered many rich countries, and with his wisdom and his knights, he conquered the land of the Amazons, which was in olden times known as Scythia. In Scythia, he wedded its queen, Hippolyta, and with great pomp and pageantry he brought her and her younger sister Emily home with him to his own country. And so, in victory and with song, I let this noble duke ride to Athens with all his army marching at his side.

When this great duke in all his glory and pride drew close to town, he looked around and became aware that on the road in front of his procession, kneeling in the bowed positions of those who seek favors, was a group of ladies, two by two, dressed all in black. They made such a loud cry of sorrow that, I swear, living man had never heard such expressions of grief. These women would not stop crying until they had snatched Theseus' bridle reins and held them tightly.

"What folks are you that disturb my triumphant homecoming with all this crying?" cried Theseus. "Do you envy my fame so much that it causes you to complain and cry like this? Or has someone

My honour that you thus complain and cry?
Or who has wronged you now, or who offended?
Come, tell me whether it may be amended;

35 And tell me, why are you clothed thus in black?"

The eldest lady of them answered back,
After she'd swooned, with cheek so deathly drear
That it was pitiful to see and hear,

40 And said: "Lord, to whom Fortune has but given
Victory, and to conquer where you've striven,
Your glory and your honour grieve not us;

But we beseech your aid and pity thus.
Have mercy on our woe and our distress.

45 Some drop of pity, of your gentleness,
Upon us wretched women, oh, let fall!
For see, lord, there is no one of us all

That has not been a duchess or a queen;
Now we are captives, as may well be seen:

50 Thanks be to Fortune and her treacherous wheel,
There's none can rest assured of constant weal.

And truly, lord, expecting your return,
In Pity's temple, where the fires yet burn.
We have been waiting through a long fortnight;

Now help us, lord, since it is in your might."

55 "I, wretched woman, who am weeping thus,
Was once the wife of King Capaneus,
Who died at Thebes, oh, cursed be the day!
And all we that you see in this array,

60 And make this lamentation to be known,
All we have lost our husbands at that town
During the siege that round about it lay.

And now the old Creon, ah welaway!
The lord and governor of Thebes city,
Full of his wrath and all iniquity,

65 He, in despite and out of tyranny,
To do the dead a shame and villainy,
Of all our husbands, lying among the slain,

Has piled the bodies in a heap, amain,
And will not suffer them, nor give consent,

70 To buried be, or burned, nor will relent,
But sets his dogs to eat them, out of spite."

wronged or offended you? If so, tell me if I can fix the situation; and tell me, why are all of you dressed in black?"

The eldest lady in the group answered back, after she had fainted, with a face so deathly sad that it was pitiful to see and hear; she said: "Lord Theseus, to whom Fortune has given victory in all of your battles, the glory and honor you achieved does not sadden us. But we beg for your help and compassion. Have mercy on our sorrow and distress. Oh please let some drops of pity fall, some gentleness, upon us wretched women. For you see, lord, there is not one of us present who has not been a duchess or a queen. Now, as you can see, we are all captives of misfortune; thanks to Fortune and her treacherous ways, none of us can be certain of our own future welfare. And truly, lord, we've awaited your presence these long two weeks in the temple where we prayed for your return. Now, help us, lord, since it is in your power to do so.

"I, this wretched woman who is weeping so, was once the wife of King Capaneus, who was killed at Thebes. Oh, cursed be that day! All of us that you see in this group, who cry out to you, have lost our husbands in the battle that took place at that town. And now Creon, lord and governor of Thebes, filled with anger and evil, and out of spite and a desire to shame the dead, has piled the dead bodies of our slain husbands in a heap. And he will not permit us to give them a proper burial or cremation. Instead, out of spite, he sets his dogs loose to eat them."

And on that word, at once, without respice,
They all fell prone and cried out piteously:
"Have on us wretched women some mercy,

75 And let our sorrows sink into your heart!

This gentle duke down from his horse did start
With heart of pity; when he'd heard them speak.
It seemed to him his heart must surely break,

And in his arms he took them tenderly,
Giving them comfort understandingly:

80 And swore his oath, that as he was true knight,

He would put forth so thoroughly his might
Against the tyrant Creon as to wreak

Vengeance so great that all of Greece should speak
And say how Creon was by Theseus served,

85 As one that had his death full well deserved.

This sworn and done, he no more there abode;

His banner he displayed and forth he rode
Toward Thebes, and all his host marched on beside.

90 Thus rode this duke, thus rode this conqueror,

And in his host of chivalry the flower,
Until he came to Thebes and did alight

Full in the field where he'd intent to fight.
But to be brief in telling of this thing,

95 With Creon, who was Thebes' dread lord and king,

He fought and slew him, manfully, like knight,
In open war, and put his host to flight;

And by assault he took the city then,
Levelling wall and rafter with his men;

100 And to the ladies he restored again

The bones of their poor husbands who were slain,
To do for them the last rites of that day.

In searching through the heap of enemy dead,
Stripping them of their gear from heel to head,

105 The busy pillagers could pick and choose,
After the battle, what they best could use;

And so befell that in a heap they found,
Pierced through with many a grievous, bloody wound,

Two young knights lying together, side by side,
And of those two Arcita was the one,

110

And suddenly without pausing, they all fell prone and cried out piteously: "Have mercy on us wretched women and let our sorrows sink into your heart!"

Hearing this story, the gentle duke came down from his horse with a heart full of pity. It seemed to him that his heart would surely break; and he took the women in his arms tenderly and comforted them with understanding. And he swore his oath as a true knight that he would put all of his strength into defeating the tyrant Creon and inflict vengeance so great that all of Greece would speak and say that Theseus gave Creon the kind of death which he deserved. This sworn and done, he remained there no longer; he raised his flag and rode forth toward Thebes, and all of his army marched with him.

Thus rode Duke Theseus, thus rode this conqueror, and in his army the finest knights, until he came to Thebes. There he dismounted his horse in the field where he intended to fight. But to be brief in telling this story, there Theseus fought Creon, who was Thebes' dread lord and king. Manfully, like a knight in open war, Theseus fought and slew Creon and drove his army away; and by attacking, he and his men then took the city, knocking down the walls and roofs. And to the ladies he restored the bones of their poor slain husbands, so that they might give them a proper burial and last rites on that day.

In searching through the heap of the enemy dead after the battle and stripping them of their gear, the busy looters could pick and choose what they could best use. And so it happened that in a heap they found two young knights pierced through with many a grievous, bloody wound lying together, side by side. And of those two one was Arcita; the other knight was known as Palamon. They were not fully alive, yet not fully dead. But by their coats of arms and by their gear, Theseus' soldiers could tell that they were of the Theban

The other knight was known as Palamon.
 Not fully quick, nor fully dead they were,
 But by their coats of arms and by their gear
 The heralds readily could tell, withal,
 115 That they were of the Theban blood royal,
 And that they had been of two sisters born.
 Out of the heap the spoilers had them torn
 And carried gently over to the tent
 Of Theseus; who shortly had them sent
 120 To Athens, there in prison cell to lie
 For ever, without ransom till they die.
 And when this worthy duke had all this done,
 He gathered host and home he rode anon,
 With laurel crowned again as conqueror;
 125 There lived he in all joy and all honour
 His term of life; what more need words express?
 And in a tower, in anguish and distress,
 Palamon and Arcita, day and night,
 Dwelt whence no gold might help them to take flight.
 130 Thus passed by year by year and day by day,
 Till it fell out, upon a morn in May,
 That Emily, far fairer to be seen
 Than is the lily on its stalk of green,
 And fresher than is May with flowers new
 135 (For with the rose's colour strove her hue,
 I know not which was fairer of the two),
 Before the dawn, as was her wont to do,
 She rose and dressed her body for delight;
 For May will have no sluggards of the night.
 140 That season rouses every gende heart
 And forces it from winter's sleep to start,
 Saying: "Arise and show thy reverence."
 So Emily remembered to go thence
 In honour of the May, and so she rose.
 145 Clothed, she was sweeter than any flower that blows;
 Her yellow hair was braided in one tress
 Behind her back, a full yard long, I guess.
 And in the garden, as the sun up-rose,
 She sauntered back and forth and through each close,

blood royal, and that they were cousins. They were taken from the heap and carried gently over to the tent of Theseus, who had them sent to Athens; there they were to be imprisoned forever in a cell until they died without any hope of ever being ransomed. And when this worthy duke had done all, he gathered his army and rode home crowned with laurel again as conqueror; there he lived in all joy and all honor for the rest of his life; what more needs to be said?

And imprisoned in a tower, in anguish and distress, Palamon and Arcita lived day and night in a place from which no gold might help them escape.

Thus passed year by year and day by day until one morning in May when Emily, far lovelier than the lily on its stalk of green and fresher than May with its new flowers, rose and dressed before the dawn as was her custom, for May will not tolerate lazy people of the night. That season rouses every gentle heart and forces it to wake up from winter's sleep saying, "Arise and show thy respect." So Emily remembered to go therefore in honor of May, and so she rose. Dressed, she was sweeter than any flower that blooms. Her yellow hair was tied in one braid behind her back, a full yard long, I guess. And in the garden, as the sun rose, she strolled back and forth through each pathway, gathering many red and white flowers so that she might weave a delicate garland for her head. And like a heavenly angel's was her singing.

- 150 Gathering many a flower, white and red,
To weave a delicate garland for her head;
And like a heavenly angel's was her song.
The tower tall, which was so thick and strong,
And of the castle was the great donjon,
155 (Wherein the two knights languished in prison,
Of whom I told and shall yet tell, withal),
Was joined, at base, unto the garden wall
Whereunder Emily went dallying.
Bright was the sun and clear that morn in spring,
160 And Palamon, the woeful prisoner,
As was his wont, by leave of his gaoler
Was up and pacing round that chamber high,
From which the noble city filled his eye,
And, too, the garden full of branches green,
165 Wherein bright Emily, fair and serene
Went walking and went roving up and down.
This sorrowing prisoner, this Palamon,
Being in the chamber, pacing to and fro,
And to himself complaining of his woe,
170 Cursing his birth, he often cried "Alas!"
And so it was, by chance or other pass,
That through a window, closed by many a bar
Of iron, strong and square as any spar,
He cast his eyes upon Emilia,
175 And thereupon he blenched and cried out "Ah!"
As if he had been smitten to the heart.
And at that cry Arcita did up-start,
Asking: "My cousin, why what ails you now
That you've so deathly pallor on your brow?
180 Why did you cry out? Who's offended you?
For God's love, show some patience, as I do,
With prison, for it may not different be;
Fortune has given this adversity.
Some evil disposition or aspect
185 Of Saturn did our horoscopes affect
To bring us here, though differently 'twere sworn;
But so the stars stood when we two were born;
We must endure it; that, in brief, is plain."

The tall tower, which was so thick and strong, was the great dungeon of the castle (where the two knights whose story I tell languished in prison) and was joined at its base to the wall of the garden where Emily strolled. The sun was bright and clear that spring morning, and Palamon, the wretched prisoner, with permission from his jailer, was as usual walking around that high chamber from which he could see the noble city and the garden full of green branches where bright Emily, fair and peaceful, went walking and roaming up and down. This suffering prisoner, this Palamon, in the chamber pacing to and fro and complaining to himself of his misery, cursing his birth, often cried "Alas!" And so it was by chance that through a window strongly barred with iron he first saw Emily; and at that moment he turned pale and cried out "Ah!" as if he had been pierced in the heart.

And at that cry Arcita did look up and ask, "My cousin, why what ails you now that you've become so deathly pale? Why did you cry out? Who has offended you? For God's love, show some patience, as I do with prison, because it can't be any different; Fortune has given us this adversity. Some evil disposition or aspect of Saturn affected our horoscopes to bring us to this; but the stars decided our fate when we two were born, so we must endure it; that, in short, is clear."

This Palamon replied and said again:

190 "It's not our prison that caused me to cry;
But I was wounded lately through the eye
Down to my heart, and that my bane will be.

The beauty of the lady that I see
There in that garden, pacing to and fro,
Is cause of all my crying and my woe.
195 I know not if she's woman or goddess;
But Venus she is verily, I guess."

And thereupon down on his knees he fell,
And said: "O Venus, if it be thy will

200 To be transfigured in this garden, thus
Before me, sorrowing wretch, oh now help us
Out of this prison to be soon escaped.

And if it be my destiny is shaped,
By fate, to die in durance, in bondage,
Have pity, then upon our lineage

205 That has been brought so low by tyranny."
And on that word Arcita looked to see

This lady who went roving to and fro.
And in that look her beauty struck him so
210 That, if poor Palamon is wounded sore,
Arcita is as deeply hurt, and more.

And with a sigh he said then, piteously:
"The virgin beauty slays me suddenly
215 Of her that wanders yonder in that place;
And save I have her pity and her grace,
That I at least may see her day by day,
I am but dead; there is no more to say."

This Palamon, when these words he had heard,
Pitilessly he watched him, and answered:

220 "Do you say this in earnest or in play?"

"Nay," quoth Arcita, "earnest, now, I say!
God help me, I am in no mood for play!

225 Palamon knit his brows and stood at bay.
"It will not prove," he said, "to your honour
After so long a time to turn traitor

To me, who am your cousin and your brother.
Sworn as we are, and each unto the other,

Palamon replied and said, "It's not our prison that caused me to cry. I was wounded through the eye down to my heart, and that will be my misfortune. The beauty of the lady that I see pacing to and fro in the garden is cause of all my crying and my woe. I don't know if she's woman or goddess; but she is truly Venus, I guess." Falling on his knees, he said: "O Venus, if it be your will to be transformed in this garden before this sorrowing wretch, now help us to escape from this prison. And if it is my destiny to die in bondage, have pity, then, upon our family who has been brought so low by tyranny."

Hearing all this, Arcita looked to see this lady who was walking back and forth. And in that look Emily's beauty struck Arcita so, that if poor Palamon is wounded painfully, Arcita is as deeply hurt, and more.

With a sigh Arcita then said piteously: "The pure beauty of her who wanders yonder in that place unexpectedly overwhelms me. Unless I win her pity and her favor so I may at least see her day by day, I am dead; there is no more to say."

When Palamon heard these words he looked at Arcita without feeling and asked, "Do you say this in earnest or in play?"

"No," said Arcita, "I am serious! God help me, I am in no mood for play!"

Palamon frowned and stood back. "It will not be to your honor," he said, "after so long a time to turn traitor on me who is your cousin and your brother. We have sworn to protect and care for each other and to let nothing come between us till death shall part us. Nor shall either of us get in the way of the other in love or in

That never, though for death in any pain,
Never, indeed, till death shall part us twain,

230 Either of us in love shall hinder other,
No, nor in any thing, O my dear brother;
But that, instead you shall so further me
As I shall you. All this we did agree.

235 Such was your oath and such was mine also.
You dare not now deny it, well I know.
And now you would all falsely go about
To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
And shall while life my heart's blood may preserve.
Nay, false Arcita, it shall not be so.

240 I loved her first, and told you all my woe,
As to a brother and to one that swore
To further me, as I have said before.

For which you are in duty bound, as knight,
To help me, if the thing lie in your might,
Or else you're false, I say, and downfallen"

245 Then this Arcita proudly spoke again:

"You shall," he said, "be rather false than I;
And that you're so, I tell you utterly;
For *par amour* I loved her first, you know.
250 What can you say? You know not, even now,
Whether she is a woman or goddess!
Yours is a worship as of holiness,

While mine is love, as of a mortal maid;
Wherefore I told you of it, unafraid,
255 As to my cousin and my brother sworn.

Let us assume you loved her first, this morn;
Know you not well the ancient writer's saw
Of 'Who shall give a lover any law?'

260 Love is a greater law, aye by my pan,
Than man has ever given to earthly man.
And therefore statute law and such decrees
Are broken daily and in all degrees.

265 A man must needs have love, maugre his head.
He cannot flee it though he should be dead,
And be she maid, or widow, or a wife.
And yet it is not likely that, in life,

anything else, O, my dear brother. Instead, we agreed that I will help you and you will help me. Such was your oath and mine also. You don't dare deny it now, I know. And now you would be disloyal to love my lady, whom I love and serve, and shall as long as I live. No, disloyal Arcita, it shall not be so. I loved her first and told you of my sorrow as to a brother who swore to help me, as I have said before. You are duty bound as a knight to help me if it is within your power. Otherwise you are a liar, I say, and ruined."

Then Arcita proudly spoke again: "You shall," he said, "be more disloyal than I; and you are, I tell you absolutely. As for love, I loved her first, you know. What can you say? You do not know, even now, whether she is a woman or a goddess! Your love is like holy worship, while mine is love for a mortal maid; wherefore I told you of my love, unafraid, as to my sworn cousin and brother. Let us assume you loved her first this morning: don't you know well the ancient writer's saying, 'Who shall give a lover any law?' Love is a greater law, by my mind, than man has ever given to man. And, therefore, legal laws and decrees are broken daily to various degrees.

A man must have love in spite of what his mind tells him. He cannot run away from it even though it kills him. But, yet, whether she is a maiden, a widow, or a wife, it is not likely that in life, either of us shall ever win her. You are well aware that you and I

270 You'll stand within her graces; nor shall I;
For you are well aware, aye verily,
That you and I are doomed to prison drear
Perpetually; we gain no ransom here.

275 We strive but as those dogs did for the bone
They fought all day, and yet their gain was none.
Till came a kite while they were still so wroth
And bore the bone away between them both.

280 And therefore, at the king's court, O my brother,
Its each man for himself and not for other.
Love if you like; for I love and aye shall;
And certainly, dear brother, that is all.

285 Here in this prison cell must we remain
And each endure whatever fate ordain."
Great was the strife, and long, betwixt the two,

290 If I had but the time to tell it you,
Save in effect. It happened on a day
(To tell the tale as briefly as I may),

295 A worthy duke men called Pirithous,
Who had been friend unto Duke Theseus,
Since each had been a little child, a chit,
Was come to visit Athens and visit

300 His play-fellow, as he was wont to do,
For in this whole world he loved no man so;
And Theseus loved him as truly—nay,
So well each loved the other, old books say,

305 That when one died (it is but truth I tell),
The other went and sought him down in Hell,
But of that tale I have no wish to write.
Pirithous loved Arcita, too, that knight,

310 Having known him in Thebes full many a year;
And finally, at his request and prayer,
And that without a coin of ransom paid,
Duke Theseus released him out of shade,

315 Freely to go where'er he wished, and to
His own devices, as I'll now tell you.
The compact was, to set it plainly down,
That if Arcita, any time, were found,

320 Ever in life, by day or night, on ground

are doomed to this dreary prison forever; we get no ransom here. We struggle like two dogs who fought over a bone all day, but got nothing out of it, until a hawk came along while they were still so angry and carried the bone away right between them both. And therefore, O my brother, at the king's court it's each man for himself and not for the other. Go ahead and love her if you like; for I will do the same. And certainly, dear brother, that is all. We must remain here in this prison cell and each endure whatever fate has decided."

Great and lengthy was the struggle between the two, but I have not time to tell it all; one day (to tell the story as briefly as I can), a worthy duke called Pirithous, who had been a friend of Duke Theseus since they were children, came to visit Athens and visit his friend as he was accustomed to doing, for in this whole world he loved no man so well; and Theseus loved him just as much. Pirithous and Theseus loved each other so much that, as the old books tell, when one died (I only relate the truth), the other went to Hell to seek him out. But I have no wish to write about that story. Pirithous also loved Arcita, having known that knight for many years in Thebes.

Finally, at Pirithous's earnest request, and without any ransom paid, Duke Theseus released Arcita out of darkness to go freely wherever he wished and to do as he wished, as I will now tell you.

The agreement was, to state it clearly, that if Arcita were ever found on any of Theseus' land and caught, he would immediately have his head chopped off. He had no choice, so he left

Of any country of this Theseus,
And he were caught, it was concerted thus,
That by the sword he straight should lose his head.

310 He had no choice, so taking leave he sped
Homeward to Thebes, lest by the sword's sharp edge
He forfeit life. His neck was under pledge.

How great is Arcita's sorrow now!
How through his heart he feels death's heavy blow;
He weeps, he wails, he cries out piteously;
He thinks that he may slay himself all privily.

315 Said he: "Alas, the day that I was born!
I'm in worse prison, now, and more forlorn;
Now am I doomed eternally to dwell
No more in Purgatory, but in Hell.

320 Alas, that I have known Pirithous!
For else had I remained with Theseus,
Fettered within that cell; but even so
Then had I been in bliss and not in woe.

325 Only the sight of her that I would serve,
Though I might never her dear grace deserve,
Would have sufficed, oh well enough for me!

O my dear cousin Palamon," said he,
"Yours is the victory, and that is sure,
For there, full happily, you may endure.

330 In prison? Never, but in Paradise!
Oh, well has Fortune turned for you the dice,
Who have the sight of her, I the absence.

335 For possible it is, in her presence,
You being a knight, a worthy and able,
That by some chance, since Fortune's changeable,
You may to your desire sometime attain.

340 But I, that am in exile and in pain,
Stripped of all hope and in so deep despair
That there's no earth nor water, fire nor air,
Nor any creature made of them there is—
To help or give me comfort, now, in this—
Surely I'll die of sorrow and distress;
Farewell, my life, my love, my joyousness!"

and sped homeward to Thebes for fear that he would lose his life by the sword's sharp edge. His life depended on his keeping the agreement.

Very great is Arcita's sorrow now! In his heart he feels death's heavy blow; he weeps, he wails, he cries out piteously; he thinks about killing himself. Said he: "Curse the day I was born! I'm in a worse prison now, and more miserable. I am doomed eternally to dwell not in Purgatory, but in Hell. Alas, that I have known Pirithous! Otherwise, I would have remained with Theseus chained within that cell; but even so, then I had been in bliss and not in woe. Just the sight of her that I would serve, even though I might never deserve her dear favor, would have sufficed to make me happy!"

"O my dear cousin Palamon," said he, "Yours is the victory, and that is sure, for there you live happily; you endure. In prison? Never, but in Paradise! Oh, Fortune has turned the dice in your favor, for you have the sight of her, I the absence. It is possible since Fortune is changeable that you, being a worthy and able knight and there in her presence, might by some chance attain your desire. But I, in exile and in pain, stripped of all hope and in deep despair because there's no earth nor water, fire nor air, nor any creature made of them able to help or give me comfort in this. Surely I'll die of sorrow and distress; farewell, my life, my love, my joyousness!"

"Alas! Why is it men complain so much of what God, or Fortune, may determine when that may be a better gift than anything men may devise for themselves. One man desires great wealth, which may cause his death, or a life filled with ill health. Someone who would gladly be free from prison might be slain by his own servants at home."

- 345 “Alas! Why is it men so much complain
Of what great God, or Fortune, may ordain,
When better is the gift, in any guise,
Than men may often for themselves devise?
One man desires only that great wealth
Which may but cause his death or long ill-health.
350 One who from prison gladly would be free,
At home by his own servants slain might be.”
And on the other hand, this Palamon,
When that he found Arcita truly gone,
Such lamentation made he, that the tower
355 Resounded of his crying, hour by hour:
The very fetters on his legs were yet
Again with all his bitter salt tears wet.
“Alas!” said he, “Arcita, cousin mine,
With all our strife, God knows, you’ve won the wine.
360 You’re walking, now, in Theban streets, at large,
And all my woe you may from mind discharge.
You may, too, since you’ve wisdom and manhood,
Assemble all the people of our blood
And wage a war so sharp on this city
365 That by some fortune, or by some treaty,
You shall yet have that lady to your wife
For whom I now must needs lay down my life.
For surely ’tis in possibility,
Since you are now at large, from prison free,
370 And are a lord, great is your advantage
Above my own, who die here in a cage.
For I must weep and wail, the while I live,
In all the grief that prison cell may give,
And now with pain that love gives me, also,
375 Which doubles all my torment and my woe.”
Now will I leave this Palamon, for he
Is in his prison, where he still must dwell,
And of Arcita will I forthwith tell.
380 Summer being passed away and nights grown long,
Increased now doubly all the anguish strong
Both of the lover and the prisoner.
I know not which one was the woefuller.
For, to be brief about it, Palamon

On the other hand, when Palamon found out that Arcita was truly gone he grieved so much that the tower resounded with his crying, hour after hour. The chains on his legs were wet with all his bitter tears. “Alas!” said Palamon. “Arcita, my cousin, after all our troubles, God knows, you have won the wine. You are now walking freely in Theban streets and you may forget about all my misery. And since you have wisdom and courage, you may assemble all the people of our blood and wage a war so severe on this city that by some fortune or treaty you shall yet have that lady to be your wife for whom I would lay down my life. It is truly a possibility since you are now free from prison and are a lord that your advantage is greater than mine, which dies here in a cage. For while I live, I must weep and wail with all the grief that a prison cell may cause. And also, now with pain that love causes me, which doubles all my torment and my sorrow.”

Now I will leave this Palamon, for he is in his prison where he still must dwell, and I will now tell of Arcita. Summer passed and the nights grew long, which doubly increased the intense anguish of both the lover and the prisoner. I do not know which one was the worse off. For, to be brief about it, Palamon is doomed to lie forever in chains and shackles in prison until he is dead; and exiled (on the loss of his head) Arcita must remain abroad and nevermore see the face of the lady he loves.

385 Is doomed to lie for ever in prison,
In chains and fetters till he shall be dead;
And exiled (on the forfeit of his head)

Arcita must remain abroad, nor see,
For evermore, the face of his lady.

You lovers, now I ask you this question:

390 Who has the worse, Arcita or Palamon?
The one may see his lady day by day;

But yet in prison must he dwell for aye.
The other, where he wishes, he may go,

But never see his lady more, ah no.
Now answer as you wish, all you that can,

395 For I will speak right on as I began.
Now when Arcita unto Thebes was come,

He lay and languished all day in his home,
Since he his lady nevermore should see,

400 But telling of his sorrow brief I'll be.
Had never any man so much torture,

No, nor shall have while this world may endure.
Bereft he was of sleep and meat and drink,

That lean he grew and dry as shaft, I think.
His eyes were hollow and ghasty to behold,

405 His face was sallow, all pale and ashen-cold,
And solitary kept he and alone,
Wailing the whole night long, making his moan.

And so changed was he, that no man could know
Him by his words or voice, whoever heard.

410 And in this change, for all the world he fared
As if not troubled by malady of love,
But by that humor dark and grim, whereof

Springs melancholy madness in the brain,
And fantasy unbridled holds its reign.

415 And shortly, all was turned quite upside-down,
Both habits and the temper all had known
Of him, this woeful lover, Dan Arcita.

Upon a night, while sleeping in his bed,
He dreamed of how the winged God Mercury,
Before him stood and bade him happier be.

420 His sleep-bestowing wand he bore upright;
Is doomed to lie for ever in prison,
In chains and fetters till he shall be dead;

You lovers, I ask you this question: Who has it the worst, Arcita or Palamon? The one may see his lady day by day but must dwell in prison forever. The other may go where he wishes but never again see his lady. Now answer as you wish, all you that can, for I will continue as I began.

When Arcita came to Thebes, he lay about in his home all day and suffered with longing because he would never see his lady again, but in telling of his sorrow I'll be brief. Never had any man so much torture, no, nor will have while this world may endure. He so deprived himself of sleep and food and drink that he grew thin and dry as an old shaft, I think. His eyes were hollow and ghastly to behold, his face was all pale and ashen-cold, and he kept to himself, avoiding all company. He cried and moaned the whole night long, and if he heard a song or instrument, then he would weep uncontrollably. So low and feeble were his spirits and so changed was he, that no man who heard him would recognize him by his words or voice. And in this change, people thought that he was troubled not by a malady of love, but by a dark and grim humor from which comes a melancholy madness in the brain and the rule of unrestrained fantasy. And shortly, everything was turned quite upside-down, both the habits and temper everyone had known belonged to this sorrowful lover, Dan Arcita.

One night, while sleeping in his bed, he dreamed that the winged God Mercury stood before him and told him to be happier. He held his sleep-bestowing wand upright and wore a hat upon his bright ringlets. This god was dressed as he had been when he gave sleep

- A hat he wore upon his ringlets bright.
 Arrayed this god was (noted at a leap)
 425 As he'd been when to Argus he gave sleep.
 And thus he spoke: "To Athens shall you wend;
 For all your woe is destined there to end."
 And on that word Arcita woke and started.
 "Now truly, howsoever sore I'm smarted,"
 430 Said he, "to Athens right now will I fare;
 Nor for the dread of death will I now spare
 To see my lady, whom I love and serve;
 I will not reck of death, with her, nor swerve."
 And with that word he caught a great mirror,
 435 And saw how changed was all his old colour,
 And saw his visage altered from its kind.
 And right away it ran into his mind
 That since his face was now disfigured so,
 By suffering endured (as well we know),
 440 He might, if he should bear him low in town,
 Live there in Athens evermore, unknown,
 Seeing his lady well-nigh every day.
 And right anon he altered his array,
 Like a poor labourer in mean attire,
 445 And all alone, save only for a squire,
 Who knew his secret heart and all his case,
 And who was dressed as poorly as he was,
 To Athens was he gone the nearest way.
 And to the court he went upon a day,
 450 And at the gate he proffered services
 To drudge and drag, as any one devises.
 And to be brief herein, and to be plain,
 He found employment with a chamberlain
 Who was serving in the house of Emily;
 455 For he was sharp and very soon could see
 What every servant did who served her there.
 Right well could he hew wood and water bear,
 For he was young and mighty, let me own,
 And big of muscle, aye and big of bone,
 460 To do what any man asked in a trice.
 A year or two he was in this service,

to Argus. And thus he spoke: "To Athens you shall go, and all your
 woe is destined to end there." And on that word Arcita awoke and
 jumped up. "Now truly, however badly I'm grieving," he said, "to
 Athens right now I will go; not for the fear of death will I give up
 seeing my lady whom I love and serve; I will not be concerned about
 death, nor let it distract me."

And with that word he got a mirror and saw how his old color
 had changed and saw his appearance altered from its original. And
 right away he realized that since his face was now so disfigured
 from the suffering he had endured (as we well know), he might,
 if he should carry himself as a lowly person in town, live there in
 Athens forever, unrecognized, seeing his lady almost every day. And
 he immediately changed his fine clothes to dress like a poor laborer
 in shabby attire. And with only his squire who knew his secret heart
 and his whole story and was dressed as poorly as he was, he went to
 Athens the shortest way. He went to the palace one day and at the
 gate he offered his services as a porter or laborer:

And to be brief and frank, he found employment with the cham-
 berlain of Emily's house. Since he was so smart, he soon learned
 what every servant who worked there did. Because he was young
 and strong with large muscles and bones, he could hew wood and
 carry water well and do what any man asked him to do in a very
 short time. For a year or two he was in this service as page of the
 chamber of Emily the beautiful. He said "Philistrates" was his
 name. But there was never a man in his position at that palace who
 was loved half so well as he. His gentle nature was so clearly shown
 that his reputation spread throughout the palace. People said that it

Page of the chamber of Emily the bright;
He said "Philostrates" would name him right.
But half so well beloved a man as he

465 Was never in that court, of his degree;
His gentle nature was so clearly shown,
That throughout all the court spread his renown.

They said it were but kindly courtesy
If Theseus should heighten his degree
470 And put him in more honourable service
Wherein he might his virtue exercise.

And thus, anon, his name was so up-sprung,
Both for his deeds and sayings of his tongue,
That Theseus had brought him nigh and nigher
475 And of the chamber he had made him squire,
And given him gold to maintain dignity.
Besides, men brought him, from his own country,
From year to year, clandestinely, his rent;
But honestly and slyly it was spent,

480 And no man wondered how he came by it.
And three years thus he lived, with much profit,
And bore him so in peace and so in war
There was no man that Theseus loved more.

And in such bliss I leave Arcita now,
485 And upon Palamon some words bestow.
In darksome, horrible, and strong prison

These seven years has now sat Palamon,
Wasted by woe and by his long distress.
Who has a two-fold heaviness

490 But Palamon? whom love yet tortures so
That half of his wits he is for woe;
And joined thereto he is a prisoner,
Perpetually, not only for a year.

And who could rhyme in English, properly,
495 His martyrdom? Forsooth, it is not I,
And therefore I pass lightly on my way.

It fell out in the seventh year, in May,
On the third night (as say the books of old
Which have this story much more fully told),
500 Were it by chance or were it destiny

would be a kindly compliment if Theseus should give him a better position and put him in a more honorable service where he might better exercise his virtue.

And thus, because people spoke so well of him both for his actions and his words, Theseus promoted him to squire of the palace and gave him gold to maintain his position. In addition, men from his own country secretly paid for his rent each year, but it was spent so honestly and cleverly that no man wondered where it came from. He lived for three years with much profit, and bore himself so well in peace and in war that there was no man that Theseus loved more. And in this bliss I leave Arcita now, and of Palamon some words I now will speak.

Palamon has now sat in the dark, horrible, and strong prison these seven years, wasted by sorrow and his long suffering. Who has a double burden except Palamon? He, whom love tortures so that he is half out of his wits for woe; and in addition to that, he is a prisoner, not only for a year, but forever. And who could properly rhyme in English, his martyrdom? In truth, it is not I; and therefore I pass lightly on my way.

It happened on the third night in May of the seventh year (as say the old books, which tell these stories in more detail) either by chance or destiny (since when a thing is destined, it must be), that shortly after midnight Palamon, with the help of a friend, escaped

(Since, when a thing is destined, it must be),
That, shortly after midnight, Palamon,
By helping of a friend, broke from prison,
And fled the city, fast as he might go;

505 For he had given his guard a drink that so
Was mixed of spice and honey and certain wine
And Theban opiate and anodyne,

That all that night, although a man might shake
This gaoler, he slept on, nor could awake.

510 And thus he flees as fast as ever he may.
The night was short and it was nearly day,

Wherefore he needs must find a place to hide;
And to a grove that grew hard by, with stride
Of furtive foot, went fearful Palamon.

515 In brief, he'd formed his plan, as he went on,
That in the grove he would lie fast all day,
And when night came, then would he take his way
Toward Thebes, and there find friends, and of them pray

Their help on Theseus in war's array;
520 And briefly either he would lose his life,
Or else win Emily to be his wife;
This is the gist of his intention plain.

Now I'll return to Arcita again,
Who little knew how near to him was care
Till Fortune caught him in her tangling snare.

525 The busy lark, the herald of the day,
Salutes now in her song the morning grey;
And fiery Phoebus rises up so bright

That all the east is laughing with the light,
530 And with his streamers dries, among the greves,
The silver droplets hanging on the leaves.

And so Arcita, in the court royal
With Theseus, and his squire principal,
Is risen, and looks on the merry day.

535 And now, to do his reverence to May,
Calling to mind the point of his desire,
He on a courser, leaping high like fire,
Is ridden to the fields to muse and play;
Out of the court, a mile or two away;

from prison and fled the city as fast as he could. He had given his guard a drink that mixed a spice, honey, and wine with Theban opiate and a painkiller, as a result all that night the jailer slept and could not be awakened, even if a man shook him. Thus, Palamon ran away as fast as possible.

The night was short and it was nearly dawn, so Palamon had to find a place to hide. Fearful Palamon went with a stealthy stride into a nearby grove of trees. He quickly formed his plan as he went: he would lie still in the grove all during the day; then rise and flee at night towards Thebes, and there find friends and beg their help to wage war on Theseus; shortly he would either lose his life or win Emily for his wife. This is the gist of his plan.

Now I'll return to Arcita, who had little idea that danger was so near, until Fortune caught him in her tangling trap. The busy lark, who introduces the day, now salutes the gray morning with her song; and fiery Phoebus rises so bright that all the East laughs with the light, and his rays dry the dewdrops hanging on the leaves. And so Arcita, in the royal palace with Theseus and as his principal squire, rises and looks out on the merry day. And now, to honor May and thinking of Emily, he rides his spirited horse out of the palace a mile or two away to the fields to daydream and play. By accident, his way began to lead to the grove I recently mentioned to make himself the garland one weaves of woodbine leaves and green hawthorn leaves. And he sang loudly in the bright sunlight: "Oh May, with all thy flowers and all thy green, you are welcome, thou fair and freshening May: I hope to pick some green garland today."

- 540 And to the grove, whereof I lately told,
By accident his way began to hold,
To make him there the garland that one weaves
Of woodbine leaves and of green hawthorn leaves.
And loud he sang within the sunlit sheen:
545 "O May, with all thy flowers and all thy green,
Welcome be thou, thou fair and freshening May:
I hope to pluck some garland green today."
And on a path he wandered up and down,
Near which, and as it chanced, this Palamon
550 Lay in the thicket, where no man might see,
For sore afraid of finding death was he.
He knew not that Arcita was so near:
God knows he would have doubted eye and ear,
But it has been a truth these many years
555 That "Fields have eyes and every wood has ears."
It's well for one to bear himself with poise;
For every day unlooked-for chance annoys.
And little knew Arcita of his friend,
Who was so near and heard him to the end,
560 Where in the bush he sat now, keeping still.
Arcita, having roamed and roved his fill,
and having sung, began to speak,
And sat him down, sighing like one forlorn.
"Alas," said he, "the day that I was born!
565 How long, O Juno, of thy cruelty,
Wilt thou wage bitter war on Thebes city?
Alas! Confounded beyond all reason
The blood of Cadmus and of Amphion;
Of royal Cadmus, who was the first man
570 To build at Thebes, and first the town began,
And first of all the city to be king;
Of his lineage am I, and his offspring,
By true descent, and of the stock royal:
And now I'm such a wretched serving thrall,
575 That he who is my mortal enemy,
I serve him as his squire, and all humbly,
And even more does Juno give me shame,
For I dare not acknowledge my own name;

He wandered up and down on a path near which, by chance, Palamon lay in the thicket where no man might see him because he was so afraid of dying. He did not know that Arcita was so near; God knows he would have doubted his eyes and ears. But it has been a truth for many years that "Fields have eyes and every forest has ears." It's important for one to carry himself with composure because every day unexpected coincidence is bothersome. Arcita didn't realize that he was so near to his friend, who was hiding quietly in the bushes, and heard everything he said.

After having sung and roamed about at his pleasure, Arcita sat down, sighing like one forlorn and began to speak. "Alas," he said, "the day that I was born! How long, O Juno, with your cruelty will you wage bitter war on Thebes city? It is not to be believed that I, the heir to the throne of Cadmus and Amphion, the son of Cadmus, the founder and first King of Thebes, and of royal blood, am now a lowly servant to a man who is my mortal enemy; I serve him as a humble squire, but Juno heaps even more shame on me because I dare not reveal my true name. Whereas Arcita was my rightful name, now I'm Philostrates which is worth nothing.

But whereas I was Arcita by right,
Now I'm Philostrates, not worth a mite.

580 Alas, thou cruel Mars! Alas, Juno!
Thus have your angers all our kin brought low,
Save only me, and wretched Palamon,
Whom Theseus martyrs yonder in prison.

585 And above all, to slay me utterly,
Love has his fiery dart so burningly
Struck through my faithful and care-laden heart,
My death was patterned ere my swaddling-shirt.
You slay me with your two eyes, Emily;
590 You are the cause for which I now must die.
For on the whole of all my other care
I would not set the value of a tare,

So I could do one thing to your pleasance!"
And with that word he fell down in a trance
That lasted long; and then he did up-start.

595 This Palamon, who thought that through his heart
He felt a cold and sudden sword blade glide,
For rage he shook, no longer would he hide.
But after he had heard Arcita's tale,

600 As he were mad, with face gone deathly pale,
He started up and sprang out of the thicket,
Crying: "Arcita, oh you traitor wicked,
Now are you caught, that crave my lady so,
For whom I suffer all this pain and woe,
605 And have befooled the great Duke Theseus,
And falsely changed your name and station thus:
Either I shall be dead or you shall die.

You shall not love my lady Emily,
But I will love her, and none other, no;
610 For I am Palamon, your mortal foe.
And though I have no weapon in this place,
Being but out of prison by God's grace,

I say again, that either you shall die
Or else forgo your love for Emily.
615 Choose which you will, for you shall not depart."
This Arcita, with scornful, angry heart,
When he knew him and all the tale had heard,

"Alas, cruel Mars! Alas, Juno! Your angers have brought down our family, except for me and miserable Palamon whom Theseus tortures in that prison. And now, to finish me completely, love has struck his fiery dart so burningly through my faithful and care-laden heart, and my death was destined before I was ever born. You slay me with your two eyes, Emily; you are the cause for which I now must die. For all my other troubles, I am not concerned at all, if I could do but one thing for you!" And with that word he fell down in a long trance; and then he jumped up.

Palamon, feeling as though his heart had been pierced with a sudden, cold sword blade, shook with rage and would no longer hide. After he had heard Arcita's tale, he jumped up and sprang out of the thicket as if he were crazy, with face gone deathly pale, crying: "Arcita, oh you wicked traitor. Now you are caught; you who wish to steal my lady for whom I suffer all this pain and sorrow, and you who have deceived the great Duke Theseus and falsely changed your name and station. Either I shall be dead or you shall die. You shall not love my lady Emily, for I will love her and none other, for I am Palamon, your mortal foe. And though I have no weapon here, just having escaped from prison by God's grace, I say again that either you shall die or else give up your love for Emily. Choose which you will, for you shall not leave."

When Arcita saw Palamon and heard all he had to say, Arcita, with scornful, angry heart and fierce as a lion, pulled a sword and

- Fierce as a lion, out he pulled a sword
 And answered thus: "By God that sits above!
 Were it not you are sick and mad for love,
 620 And that you have no weapon in this place,
 Out of this grove you'd never move a pace,
 But meet your death right now, and at my hand.
 For I renounce the bond and its demand
 625 Which you assert that I have made with you.
 What, arrant fool, love's free to choose and do,
 And I will have her, spite of all your might!
 But in as much as you're a worthy knight
 And willing to defend your love, in mail,
 630 Hear now this word: tomorrow I'll not fail
 (Without the cognizance of any wight)
 To come here armed and harnessed as a knight,
 And to bring arms for you, too, as you'll see;
 And choose the better and leave the worse for me.
 635 And meat and drink this very night I'll bring,
 Enough for you, and clothes for your bedding.
 And if it be that you my lady win
 And slay me in this wood that now I'm in,
 Then may you have your lady, for all of me."
 640 This Palamon replied: "I do agree."
 And thus they parted till the morrow morn,
 When each had pledged his honour to return.
 Arcita rode into the town anon,
 And on the morrow, ere the dawn, he bore,
 645 Secretly, arms and armour out of store,
 Enough for each, and proper to maintain
 A battle in the field between the twain.
 And in the grove, at time and place they'd set,
 Arcita and this Palamon were met.
 650 There was no "good-day" given, no saluting,
 But without word, rehearsal, or such thing,
 Each of them helping, so they armed each other
 As dutifully as he were his own brother;
 And afterward, with their sharp spears and strong,
 655 They thrust each at the other wondrous long.
 You might have fancied that this Palamon,

answered thus: "By God that sits above! If you were not sick and mad for love and had a weapon in this place, you'd never move a step out of this grove, but would die by my hand right now. For I renounce the bond and oath which you say that I have made with you. What a fool you are. Love is free to choose and do, and I will have her in spite of all your strength. But in as much as you're a worthy knight and willing to defend your love in armor, hear me now. Tomorrow I will come here armed and outfitted as a knight and will bring arms for you, too, as you will see; and you may choose the better and leave the worse for me. I'll bring enough meat and drink for you this night along with some clothes and bedding. And if it happens that you win my lady and slay me in this forest that I'm now in, then you may have your lady in spite of me."

Palamon replied: "I do agree." And thus they parted until the next morning when each pledged his honor to return. Arcita rode into town later, and before dawn the next morning, he secretly carried all of the weapons and armor that they would need for their battle out of the storehouse. And Arcita and Palamon met in the grove at the time and place according to their agreement. There was no "good-day" given, no saluting, but without a word, rehearsal, or anything, each helped the other to put armor on as dutifully as if each were a brother. And afterward, with their sharp, strong spears, they stabbed at each other for an extraordinarily long time. You might have imagined that Palamon in battle was a furious, mad lion, and that Arcita was quite a tiger. Like wild boars, the two began to fight, like boars that foam at the mouth with anger in the forest. They fought in blood up to their ankles.

- In battle, was a furious, mad lion,
 And that Arcita was a tiger quite:
 Like very boars the two began to smite,
 Like boars that froth for anger in the wood.
 660 Up to the ankles fought they in their blood.
 Clear was the day, as I have told ere this,
 When Theseus, compact of joy and bliss,
 With his Hippolyta, the lovely queen,
 And fair Emilia, clothed all in green,
 665 A-hunting they went riding royally.
 And to the grove of trees that grew hard by,
 In which there was a hart, as men had told,
 Duke Theseus the shortest way did hold.
 670 And to the glade he rode on, straight and right,
 For there the hart was wont to go in flight,
 And over a brook, and so forth on his way.
 This duke would have a course at him today,
 With such hounds as it pleased him to command.
 675 And when this duke was come upon that land,
 Under the slanting sun he looked, anon,
 And there saw Arcita and Palamon
 Who furiously fought, as two boars do;
 The bright swords went in circles to and fro
 680 So terribly, that even their least stroke
 Seemed powerful enough to fell an oak;
 But who the two were, nothing did he note.
 This duke his courser with the sharp spurs smote
 And in one bound he was between the two
 685 And lugged his great sword out, and cried out: "Ho!
 No more, I say, on pain of losing head!
 By mighty Mars, that one shall soon be dead
 Who smites another stroke that I may see!
 But tell me now what manner of men ye be
 690 That are so hardy as to fight out here
 Without a judge or other officer,
 As if you rode in lists right royally?"
 This Palamon replied, then, hastily,
 Saying: "O Sire, what need for more ado?
 695 We have deserved our death at hands of you.

The day was clear, as I said before, when Theseus, full of joy and bliss, went hunting with his lovely queen Hippolyta and fair Emily, riding royally dressed all in green. Duke Theseus took the shortest way to a nearby grove of trees in which, as men had told him, there was a deer. And he rode straight on to the glade, for the deer was accustomed to go there fleeing danger, and over a brook, and so forth on his way. The duke would chase at him today with as many hounds as it pleased him to command.

When the Duke rode into the grove, under the sun's rays, he suddenly saw Arcita and Palamon, who fought furiously like two wild boars. The bright swords swung in circles to and fro so terribly that even their least stroke seemed powerful enough to fell an oak tree. But he didn't notice who the two were. This duke struck his horse with his sharp spurs and in one bound he was between the two and lugged his great sword out, and cried: "Stop! No more, I say, or you will loose your heads! By mighty Mars, anyone I see who strikes another blow shall soon be dead. What kind of men are you to be fighting out here with no judges as when you rode in royal tournaments?"

Palamon quickly replied, "Oh Sire, what need for more trouble? We deserve to die at your hands. We are two sorrowful wretches, captives burdened by our own sad lives. Since you are a righteous

Two woeful wretches are we, two captives
That are encumbered by our own sad lives;
And as you are a righteous lord and judge

700 Give us not either mercy or refuge
But slay me first, for sacred charity,
But slay my fellow here, as well, with me.
Or slay him first; for though you learn it late,

705 This is your mortal foe, Arcita—wait!—
That from the land was banished, on his head.
And for the which he merits to be dead.
For this is he who came unto your gate,
Calling himself Philostrates—nay, wait!—

Thus has he fooled you well this many a year,
And you have made him your chief squire, I hear:
And this is he that loves fair Emily.

710 And since the day is come when I must die,
I make confession plainly and say on,
That I am that same woeful Palamon
Who has your prison broken, viciously:

715 I am your mortal foe, and it is I
Who love so hotly Emily the bright
That I'll die gladly here within her sight.

720 This worthy duke presently spoke again,
Saying: "This judgment needs but a short session:
Your own mouth, aye, and by your own confession,
Has doomed and damned you, as I shall record.

725 There is no need for torture, on my word.
But you shall die, by mighty Mars the red!"
But then the queen, whose heart for pity bled,
Began to weep, and so did Emily
And all the ladies in the company.

730 Great pity must it be, so thought they all,
That ever such misfortune should befall:
For these were gentlemen, of great estate,
And for no thing, save love, was their debate.
And all cried out—greater and less, they cried

"Have mercy, lord, upon us women all!"
And down upon their bare knees did they fall,
and would have kissed his feet there where he stood,

lord and judge, do not give us mercy or shelter, but kill me first for holy charity, and also kill my companion here with me. Or kill him first; for though you learn it late, this is your mortal enemy Arcita that was banished from the land on penalty of his head, and for which he deserves to be dead. For this is he who came to your gate calling himself Philostrates. He has fooled you well like this for many years, and I hear you have made him your chief squire. And he loves fair Emily. Since the day has come when I must die, I clearly confess and say that I am that same sorrowful Palamon who has recently escaped from your prison. I am your mortal foe, and it is I who love Emily the bright so dearly that I'll gladly die here in her sight."

The worthy duke spoke again at once, saying: "This is not a difficult decision; for from your own mouth came the confession that doomed you. There is no need for torture, on my word. But by oath to mighty Mars the red, you shall die!" But then the queen, whose heart bled with pity, began to weep, and so did Emily and all the ladies in the company. They all thought that it was a great pity that such a misfortune should occur, for these were gentlemen of noble birth, and their only conflict was over love. And all cried out, "Have mercy, lord, upon all us women." And down upon their bare knees they fell and would have kissed his feet there where he stood until his anger was calmed; for pity soon flows through a gentle heart.

- 735 Till at the last assuaged was his high mood;
 For soon will pity flow through gentle heart.
 And though he first for ire did shake and start,
 He soon considered, to state the case in brief,
 What cause they had for fighting, what for grief;
 740 And though his anger still their guilt accused,
 Yet in his reason he held them both excused;
 In such wise: he thought well that every man
 Will help himself in love, if he but can,
 And will himself deliver from prison;
 745 And, too, at heart he had compassion on
 Those women, for they cried and wept as one;
 And in his gentle heart he thought anon,
 And softly to himself he said then: "Fie
 Upon a lord that will have no mercy,
 750 But acts the lion, both in word and deed,
 To those repentant and in fear and need,
 As well as to the proud and pitiless man
 That still would do the thing he began!
 That lord must surely in discretion lack
 755 Who, in such case, can no distinction make,
 But weighs both proud and humble in one scale."
 And shortly, when his ire was thus grown pale,
 He looked up to the sky, with eyes alight,
 And spoke these words, as he would promise plight:
 760 "The god of love, ah *benedicite!*
 How mighty and how great a lord is he!
 Against his might may stand no obstacles,
 A true god is he by his miracles;
 For he can manage, in his own sweet wise,
 765 The heart of anyone as he devise.
 Lo, here, Arcita and this Palamon,
 That were delivered out of my prison,
 And might have lived in Thebes right royally,
 Knowing me for their mortal enemy,
 770 And also that their lives lay in my hand;
 And yet their love has wiled them to this land,
 Against all sense, and brought them here to die!
 Look you now, is not that a folly high?

And though at first in anger he did rant and rave, he soon considered the reason they had for fighting and for grief. And though in his anger, he still found them guilty, in his mind, he excused them both. In reasoning, he understood that every man, if he can, will help himself in love or to escape from prison. And, too, at heart, he had compassion on those women, for they cried and wept as one. And in his gentle heart he thought at once and softly to himself, he said then, "Shame on a lord that will have no mercy, but acts like the lion in both word and deed to those who are repentant and in fear and need and acts as well to the proud and pitiless man that would do the thing he began! That lord must surely lack good judgment who, in such case, can make no distinction but instead weighs both proud and humble on one scale."

And later when his anger had lessened, he looked up to the sky with shining eyes and spoke these words, as if he made a pledge: "May the god of love bless us. How mighty and great a lord he is! By his miracles he is a true god; no obstacle may stand against his might. He can manage, by his own sweet manner, the heart of anyone as he wishes. Here are Arcita and this Palamon, who were delivered from my prison and might have lived royally in Thebes knowing that I was their mortal enemy and also knowing that their lives lay in my hand; and yet their love has compelled them to come to this land against all sense and brought them here to die! Look now, isn't that a great foolishness? Who can be called a fool, except he who loves? A man must play the fool, when young or old; I know it myself from years gone by, for I have been numbered one of love's servants. Therefore, since I well know all love's pain and how sorely it can compel man, as one who has been taken in the net, I will forgive and forget your trespass at the plea of my sweet queen, kneeling here, and of Emily, my dear sister. But you must agree to swear that

Who can be called a fool, except he love?
 A man must play the fool, when young or old;

775 I know it of myself from years long gone:
 For of love's servants I've been numbered one.
 And therefore, since I know well all love's pain,
 And know how sorely it can man constrain,
 As one that has been taken in the net,
 780 I will forgive your trespass, and forget,
 At instance of my sweet queen, kneeling here,
 Aye, and of Emily, my sister dear.

785 And you shall presently consent to swear
 That nevermore will you my power dare,
 Nor wage war on me, either night or day,
 But will be friends to me in all you may;
 I do forgive this trespass, full and fair.
 And then they swore what he demanded there,

790 And, of his might, they of his mercy prayed,
 And he extended grace, and thus he said:
 "To speak for royalty's inheritress,
 Although she be a queen or a princess,
 Each of you both is worthy; I confess,
 When comes the time to wed: but nonetheless
 795 When comes the time to wed: but nonetheless
 I speak now of my sister Emily,
 The cause of all this strife and jealousy—
 You know yourselves she may not marry two
 At once, although you fight or what you do:

800 One of you, then, and be he loath or lief,
 Must pipe his sorrows in an ivy leaf.
 That is to say, she cannot have you both,
 However jealous one may be, or wroth.
 Therefore I put you both in this decree,
 805 That each of you shall learn his destiny
 As it is cast, and hear, now, in what wise
 The word of fate shall speak through my device."
 "My will is this, to draw conclusion flat,

810 Without reply, or plea, or caveat
 (In any case, accept it for the best),
 That each of you shall follow his own quest,
 Free of all ransom or of fear from me;

nevermore will you oppose my power, nor wage war on me, either night or day; but will in all ways be a friend to me. I do forgive this trespass completely."

And they swore to what he demanded and praised his strength and mercy, and he extended favor and thus he said: "To speak for royalty's heiress, although she might be a queen or a princess, each of you is worthy, I confess, when comes the time to wed: but, nonetheless, I speak now for my sister Emily, the cause of all this strife and jealousy—you know yourselves she may not marry two of you at once, despite your fight or what you do. One of you, then, whether he is hated or beloved, must arrange his sorrows in an ivy leaf. That is to say, she cannot have you both, however jealous or angry one may be of the other. Therefore, I put to both of you this decree, so that each of you shall learn his destiny as it is cast; hear, now, in whatever way the word of fate shall speak through my plan."

"To bring about an absolute decision, my command is this, and I do not wish to hear any replies, pleas or threats to it, (in any case, accept it for the best). Each of you shall live his own life free of all ransom and of fear from me; and fifty weeks from now both shall be here once again, each with a hundred knights armed for battle,

- 815 And this day, fifty weeks hence, both shall be
Here once again, each with a hundred knights,
Armed for the lists, who stoutly for your rights
Will ready be to battle, to maintain
Your claim to love. I promise you, again,
Upon my word, and as I am a knight,
That whichever of you wins the fight,
820 That is to say, whichever of you two
May with his hundred, whom I spoke of, do
His foe to death, or out of boundary drive,
Then he shall have Emilia to wive
To whom Fortuna gives so fair a grace."
825 I think that men would deem it negligence
If I forgot to tell of the expense
Of Theseus, who went so busily
To work upon the lists, right royally;
For such an amphitheatre he made,
830 Its equal never yet on earth was laid.
The day of their return is forthcoming,
When each of them a hundred knights must bring
The combat to support, as I have told;
And into Athens, covenant to uphold,
835 Has each one ridden with his hundred knights,
Well armed for war, at all points, in their might.
And certainly, 'twas thought by many a man
That never, since the day this world began,
Speaking of good knights hardy of their hands,
840 Wherever God created seas and lands,
Was, of so few, so noble company.
For every man that loved all chivalry,
And eager was to win surpassing fame,
Had prayed to play a part in that great game;
845 And all was well with him who chosen was.
That Sunday night, ere day began to spring,
When Palamon the earliest lark heard sing,
Although it lacked two hours of being day
Yet the lark sang, and Palamon sang a lay.
850 With pious heart and with a high courage
He rose, to go upon a pilgrimage

to bravely defend your claim to love. I promise you again, upon my word, and as I am a knight, that whichever of you wins the fight, that is to say, whichever of you two with his hundred men kills his foe or drives him from the tournament field, then he shall have Emilia as his wife, she who Fortune gives so fair a beauty."

I think that men would believe it negligence if I forgot to tell you of the expense Theseus incurred in setting up this tournament. Never on earth was there an amphitheater equal to the one he had built.

So when the day of their return came, both knights rode into Athens to uphold the agreement, each with one hundred knights well-armed for war. And certainly many men thought that never since the day this world began had so noble a company of good knights come from wherever God created seas and lands. For every man that loved chivalry and was eager to gain great fame had prayed to play a part in that great tournament; and all was well with him who was chosen.

It was that Sunday night, before day began to break, when Palamon heard the earliest lark sing two hours before dawn. The lark sang, and Palamon sang a song. With a pious heart and high courage, he rose to go to pay homage to the blessed Cytherea's shrine (I mean the goddess of love, Venus, worthy and kind). At her hour he walked swiftly out to the tournament field where her temple