

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice
Topic 3 Content: "The Knight's Tale" of *The Canterbury Tales*
by Geoffrey Chaucer

1 Once on a time, as old tales tell to us,
2 There was a duke whose name was Theseus:
3 Of Athens he was lord and governor,
4 And in his time was such a conqueror
5 That greater was there not beneath the sun.
6 Full many a rich country had he won;
7 What with his wisdom and his chivalry
8 He gained the realm of Femininity,
9 That was of old time known as Scythia.
10 There wedded he the queen, Hippolyta,
11 And brought her home with him to his country.
12 In glory great and with great pageantry,
13 And, too, her younger sister, Emily.
14 And thus, in victory and with melody,
15 Let I this noble duke to Athens ride
16 With all his armed host marching at his side.
17 And truly, were it not too long to hear,
18 I would have told you fully how, that year,
19 Was gained the realm of Femininity
20 By Theseus and by his chivalry;
21 And all of the great battle that was wrought
22 Where Amazons and the Athenians fought;
23 And how was wooed and won Hippolyta,
24 That fair and hardy queen of Scythia;
25 And of the feast was made at their wedding,
26 And of the tempest at their home-coming;
27 But all of that I must for now forbear.
28 I have, God knows, a large field for my share,
29 And weak the oxen, and the soil is tough.
30 The remnant of the tale is long enough.
31 I will not hinder any, in my turn;
32 Let each man tell his tale, until we learn
33 Which of us all the most deserves to win;
34 So where I stopped, again I'll now begin.
35 This duke of whom I speak, of great renown,
36 When he had drawn almost unto the town,
37 In all well-being and in utmost pride,
38 He grew aware, casting his eyes aside,
39 That right upon the road, as suppliants do,
40 A company of ladies, two by two,
41 Knelt, all in black, before his cavalcade;
42 But such a clamorous cry of woe they made

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43 That in the whole world living man had heard
44 No such a lamentation, on my word;
45 Nor would they cease lamenting till at last
46 They'd clutched his bridle reins and held them fast.
47 What folk are you that at my home-coming
48 Disturb my triumph with this dolorous thing?
49 Cried Theseus. Do you so much envy
50 My honour that you thus complain and cry?
51 Or who has wronged you now, or who offended?
52 Come, tell me whether it may be amended;
53 And tell me, why are you clothed thus, in black?
54 The eldest lady of them answered back,
55 After she'd swooned, with cheek so deathly drear
56 That it was pitiful to see and hear,
57 And said: Lord, to whom Fortune has but given
58 Victory, and to conquer where you've striven,
59 Your glory and your honour grieve not us;
60 But we beseech your aid and pity thus.
61 Have mercy on our woe and our distress.
62 Some drop of pity, of your gentleness,
63 Upon us wretched women, oh, let fall!
64 For see, lord, there is no one of us all
65 That has not been a duchess or a queen;
66 Now we are captives, as may well be seen:
67 Thanks be to Fortune and her treacherous wheel,
68 There's none can rest assured of constant weal.
69 And truly, lord, expecting your return,
70 In Pity's temple, where the fires yet burn,
71 We have been waiting through a long fortnight;
72 Now help us, lord, since it is in your might.
73 I, wretched woman, who am weeping thus,
74 Was once the wife of King Capaneus,
75 Who died at Thebes, oh, cursed be the day!
76 And all we that you see in this array,
77 And make this lamentation to be known,
78 All we have lost our husbands at that town
79 During the siege that round about it lay.
80 And now the old Creon, ah welaway!
81 The lord and governor of Thebes city,
82 Full of his wrath and all iniquity,
83 He, in despite and out of tyranny,
84 To do the dead a shame and villainy,

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85 Of all our husbands, lying among the slain,
86 Has piled the bodies in a heap, amain,
87 And will not suffer them, nor give consent,
88 To buried be, or burned, nor will relent,
89 But sets his dogs to eat them, out of spite.
90 And on that word, at once, without respite,
91 They all fell prone and cried out piteously:
92 Have on us wretched women some mercy,
93 And let our sorrows sink into your heart!
94 This gentle duke down from his horse did start
95 With heart of pity, when he'd heard them speak.
96 It seemed to him his heart must surely break,
97 Seeing them there so miserable of state,
98 Who had been proud and happy but so late.
99 And in his arms he took them tenderly,
100 Giving them comfort understandingly:
101 And swore his oath, that as he was true knight,
102 He would put forth so thoroughly his might
103 Against the tyrant Creon as to wreak
104 Vengeance so great that all of Greece should speak
105 And say how Creon was by Theseus served,
106 As one that had his death full well deserved.
107 This sworn and done, he no more there abode;
108 His banner he displayed and forth he rode
109 Toward Thebes, and all his host marched on beside;
110 Nor nearer Athens would he walk or ride,
111 Nor take his ease for even half a day,
112 But onward, and in camp that night he lay;
113 And thence he sent Hippolyta the queen
114 And her bright sister Emily, I ween,
115 Unto the town of Athens, there to dwell
116 While he went forth. There is no more to tell.
117 The image of red Mars, with spear and shield,
118 So shone upon his banner's snow-white field
119 It made a billowing glitter up and down;
120 And by the banner borne was his pennon,
121 On which in beaten gold was worked, complete,
122 The Minotaur, which he had slain in Crete.
123 Thus rode this duke, thus rode this conqueror,
124 And in his host of chivalry the flower,
125 Until he came to Thebes and did alight
126 Full in the field where he'd intent to fight.

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127 But to be brief in telling of this thing,
128 With Creon, who was Thebes' dread lord and king,
129 He fought and slew him, manfully, like knight,
130 In open war, and put his host to flight;
131 And by assault he took the city then,
132 Levelling wall and rafter with his men;
133 And to the ladies he restored again
134 The bones of their poor husbands who were slain,
135 To do for them the last rites of that day.
136 But it were far too long a tale to say
137 The clamour of great grief and sorrowing
138 Those ladies raised above the bones burning
139 Upon the pyres, and of the great honour
140 That Theseus, the noble conqueror,
141 Paid to the ladies when from him they went;
142 To make the story short is my intent.
143 When, then, this worthy duke, this Theseus
144 Had slain Creon and won Thebes city thus,
145 Still on the field he took that night his rest,
146 And dealt with all the land as he thought best.
147 In searching through the heap of enemy dead,
148 Stripping them of their gear from heel to head,
149 The busy pillagers could pick and choose,
150 After the battle, what they best could use;
151 And so befell that in a heap they found,
152 Pierced through with many a grievous, bloody wound,
153 Two young knights lying together, side by side,
154 Bearing one crest, wrought richly, of their pride,
155 And of those two Arcita was the one,
156 The other knight was known as Palamon.
157 Not fully quick, nor fully dead they were,
158 But by their coats of arms and by their gear
159 The heralds readily could tell, withal,
160 That they were of the Theban blood royal,
161 And that they had been of two sisters born.
162 Out of the heap the spoilers had them torn
163 And carried gently over to the tent
164 Of Theseus; who shortly had them sent
165 To Athens, there in prison cell to lie
166 For ever, without ransom, till they die.
167 And when this worthy duke had all this done,
168 He gathered host and home he rode anon,

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169 With laurel crowned again as conqueror;
170 There lived he in all joy and all honour
171 His term of life; what more need words express?
172 And in a tower, in anguish and distress,
173 Palamon and Arcita, day and night,
174 Dwelt whence no gold might help them to take flight.
175 Thus passed by year by year and day by day,
176 Till it fell out, upon a morn in May,
177 That Emily, far fairer to be seen
178 Than is the lily on its stalk of green,
179 And fresher than is May with flowers new
180 (For with the rose's colour strove her hue,
181 I know not which was fairer of the two),
182 Before the dawn, as was her wont to do,
183 She rose and dressed her body for delight;
184 For May will have no sluggards of the night.
185 That season rouses every gentle heart
186 And forces it from winter's sleep to start,
187 Saying: Arise and show thy reverence.
188 So Emily remembered to go thence
189 In honour of the May, and so she rose.
190 Clothed, she was sweeter than any flower that blows;
191 Her yellow hair was braided in one tress
192 Behind her back, a full yard long, I guess.
193 And in the garden, as the sun up-rose,
194 She sauntered back and forth and through each close,
195 Gathering many a flower, white and red,
196 To weave a delicate garland for her head;
197 And like a heavenly angel's was her song.
198 The tower tall, which was so thick and strong,
199 And of the castle was the great donjon,
200 (Wherein the two knights languished in prison,
201 Of whom I told and shall yet tell, withal),
202 Was joined, at base, unto the garden wall
203 Whereunder Emily went dallying.
204 Bright was the sun and clear that morn in spring,
205 And Palamon, the woeful prisoner,
206 As was his wont, by leave of his gaoler,
207 Was up and pacing round that chamber high,
208 From which the noble city filled his eye,
209 And, too, the garden full of branches green,
210 Wherein bright Emily, fair and serene,

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211 Went walking and went roving up and down.
212 This sorrowing prisoner, this Palamon,
213 Being in the chamber, pacing to and fro,
214 And to himself complaining of his woe,
215 Cursing his birth, he often cried Alas!
216 And so it was, by chance or other pass,
217 That through a window, closed by many a bar
218 Of iron, strong and square as any spar,
219 He cast his eyes upon Emilia,
220 And thereupon he blenched and cried out Ah!
221 As if he had been smitten to the heart.
222 And at that cry Arcita did up-start,
223 Asking: My cousin, why what ails you now
224 That you've so deathly pallor on your brow?
225 Why did you cry out? Who's offended you?
226 For God's love, show some patience, as I do,
227 With prison, for it may not different be;
228 Fortune has given this adversity.
229 Some evil disposition or aspect
230 Of Saturn did our horoscopes affect
231 To bring us here, though differently 'twere sworn;
232 But so the stars stood when we two were born;
233 We must endure it; that, in brief, is plain.
234 This Palamon replied and said again:
235 Cousin, indeed in this opinion now
236 Your fancy is but vanity, I trow.
237 It's not our prison that caused me to cry.
238 But I was wounded lately through the eye
239 Down to my heart, and that my bane will be.
240 The beauty of the lady that I see
241 There in that garden, pacing to and fro,
242 Is cause of all my crying and my woe.
243 I know not if she's woman or goddess;
244 But Venus she is verily, I guess.
245 And thereupon down on his knees he fell,
246 And said: O Venus, if it be thy will
247 To be transfigured in this garden, thus
248 Before me, sorrowing wretch, oh now help us
249 Out of this prison to be soon escaped.
250 And if it be my destiny is shaped,
251 By fate, to die in durance, in bondage,
252 Have pity, then, upon our lineage

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253 That has been brought so low by tyranny.
254 And on that word Arcita looked to see
255 This lady who went roving to and fro.
256 And in that look her beauty struck him so
257 That, if poor Palamon is wounded sore,
258 Arcita is as deeply hurt, and more.
259 And with a sigh he said then, piteously:
260 The virgin beauty slays me suddenly
261 Of her that wanders yonder in that place;
262 And save I have her pity and her grace,
263 That I at least may see her day by day,
264 I am but dead; there is no more to say.
265 This Palamon, when these words he had heard,
266 Pitilessly he watched him, and answered:
267 Do you say this in earnest or in play?
268 Nay, quoth Arcita, earnest, now, I say!
269 God help me, I am in no mood for play!
270 Palamon knit his brows and stood at bay.
271 It will not prove, he said, to your honour
272 After so long a time to turn traitor
273 To me, who am your cousin and your brother,
274 Sworn as we are, and each unto the other,
275 That never, though for death in any pain,
276 Never, indeed, till death shall part us twain,
277 Either of us in love shall hinder other,
278 No, nor in any thing, O my dear brother;
279 But that, instead, you shall so further me
280 As I shall you. All this we did agree.
281 Such was your oath and such was mine also.
282 You dare not now deny it, well I know.
283 Thus you are of my party, beyond doubt.
284 And now you would all falsely go about
285 To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
286 And shall while life my heart's blood may preserve.
287 Nay, false Arcita, it shall not be so.
288 I loved her first, and told you all my woe,
289 As to a brother and to one that swore
290 To further me, as I have said before.
291 For which you are in duty bound, as knight,
292 To help me, if the thing lie in your might,
293 Or else you're false, I say, and downfallen.
294 Then this Arcita proudly spoke again:

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295 You shall, he said, be rather false than I;
296 And that you're so, I tell you utterly;
297 For par amour I loved her first, you know.
298 What can you say? You know not, even now,
299 Whether she is a woman or goddess!
300 Yours is a worship as of holiness,
301 While mine is love, as of a mortal maid;
302 Wherefore I told you of it, unafraid,
303 As to my cousin and my brother sworn.
304 Let us assume you loved her first, this morn;
305 Know you not well the ancient writer's saw
306 Of 'Who shall give a lover any law?'
307 Love is a greater law, aye by my pan,
308 Than man has ever given to earthly man.
309 And therefore statute law and such decrees
310 Are broken daily and in all degrees.
311 A man must needs have love, maugre his head.
312 He cannot flee it though he should be dead,
313 And be she maid, or widow, or a wife.
314 And yet it is not likely that, in life,
315 You'll stand within her graces; nor shall I;
316 For you are well aware, aye verily,
317 That you and I are doomed to prison drear
318 Perpetually; we gain no ransom here.
319 We strive but as those dogs did for the bone;
320 They fought all day, and yet their gain was none.
321 Till came a kite while they were still so wroth
322 And bore the bone away between them both.
323 And therefore, at the king's court, O my brother,
324 It's each man for himself and not for other.
325 Love if you like; for I love and aye shall;
326 And certainly, dear brother, that is all.
327 Here in this prison cell must we remain
328 And each endure whatever fate ordain.
329 Great was the strife, and long, betwixt the two,
330 If I had but the time to tell it you,
331 Save in effect. It happened on a day
332 (To tell the tale as briefly as I may),
333 A worthy duke men called Pirithous,
334 Who had been friend unto Duke Theseus
335 Since each had been a little child, a chit,
336 Was come to visit Athens and visit

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337 His play-fellow, as he was wont to do,
338 For in this whole world he loved no man so;
339 And Theseus loved him as truly—nay,
340 So well each loved the other, old books say,
341 That when one died (it is but truth I tell),
342 The other went and sought him down in Hell;
343 But of that tale I have no wish to write.
344 Pirithous loved Arcita, too, that knight,
345 Having known him in Thebes full many a year;
346 And finally, at his request and prayer,
347 And that without a coin of ransom paid,
348 Duke Theseus released him out of shade,
349 Freely to go where'er he wished, and to
350 His own devices, as I'll now tell you.
351 The compact was, to set it plainly down,
352 As made between those two of great renown:
353 That if Arcita, any time, were found,
354 Ever in life, by day or night, on ground
355 Of any country of this Theseus,
356 And he were caught, it was concerted thus,
357 That by the sword he straight should lose his head.
358 He had no choice, so taking leave he sped
359 Homeward to Thebes, lest by the sword's sharp edge
360 He forfeit life. His neck was under pledge.
361 How great a sorrow is Arcita's now!
362 How through his heart he feels death's heavy blow,
363 He weeps, he wails, he cries out piteously;
364 He thinks to slay himself all privily.
365 Said he: Alas, the day that I was born!
366 I'm in worse prison, now, and more forlorn;
367 Now am I doomed eternally to dwell
368 No more in Purgatory, but in Hell.
369 Alas, that I have known Pirithous!
370 For else had I remained with Theseus,
371 Fettered within that cell; but even so
372 Then had I been in bliss and not in woe.
373 Only the sight of her that I would serve,
374 Though I might never her dear grace deserve,
375 Would have sufficed, oh well enough for me!
376 O my dear cousin Palamon, said he,
377 Yours is the victory, and that is sure,
378 For there, full happily, you may endure.

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379 In prison? Never, but in Paradise!
380 Oh, well has Fortune turned for you the dice,
381 Who have the sight of her, I the absence.
382 For possible it is, in her presence,
383 You being a knight, a worthy and able,
384 That by some chance, since Fortune's changeable.
385 You may to your desire sometime attain.
386 But I, that am in exile and in pain,
387 Stripped of all hope and in so deep despair
388 That there's no earth nor water, fire nor air,
389 Nor any creature made of them there is
390 To help or give me comfort, now, in this-
391 Surely I'll die of sorrow and distress;
392 Farewell, my life, my love, my joyousness!
393 Alas! Why is it men so much complain
394 Of what great God, or Fortune, may ordain,
395 When better is the gift, in any guise,
396 Than men may often for themselves devise?
397 One man desires only that great wealth
398 Which may but cause his death or long ill-health.
399 One who from prison gladly would be free,
400 At home by his own servants slain might be.
401 Infinite evils lie therein, 'tis clear;
402 We know not what it is we pray for here.
403 We fare as he that's drunken as a mouse;
404 A drunk man knows right well he has a house,
405 But he knows not the right way leading thither;
406 And a drunk man is sure to slip and slither.
407 And certainly, in this world so fare we;
408 We furiously pursue felicity,
409 Yet we go often wrong before we die.
410 This may we all admit, and specially I,
411 Who deemed and held, as I were under spell,
412 That if I might escape from prison cell,
413 Then would I find again what might heal,
414 Who now am only exiled from my weal.
415 For since I may not see you, Emily,
416 I am but dead; there is no remedy.
417 And on the other hand, this Palamon,
418 When that he found Arcita truly gone,
419 Such lamentation made he, that the tower
420 Resounded of his crying, hour by hour.

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421 The very fetters on his legs were yet
422 Again with all his bitter salt tears wet.
423 Alas! said he, Arcita, cousin mine,
424 With all our strife, God knows, you've won the wine.
425 You're walking, now, in Theban streets, at large,
426 And all my woe you may from mind discharge.
427 You may, too, since you've wisdom and manhood,
428 Assemble all the people of our blood
429 And wage a war so sharp on this city
430 That by some fortune, or by some treaty,
431 You shall yet have that lady to your wife
432 For whom I now must needs lay down my life.
433 For surely 'tis in possibility,
434 Since you are now at large, from prison free,
435 And are a lord, great is your advantage
436 Above my own, who die here in a cage.
437 For I must weep and wail, the while I live,
438 In all the grief that prison cell may give,
439 And now with pain that love gives me, also,
440 Which doubles all my torment and my woe.
441 Therewith the fires of jealousy up-start
442 Within his breast and burn him to the heart
443 So wildly that he seems one, to behold,
444 Like seared box tree, or ashes, dead and cold.
445 Then said he: O you cruel Gods, that sway
446 This world in bondage of your laws, for aye,
447 And write upon the tablets adamant
448 Your counsels and the changeless words you grant,
449 What better view of mankind do you hold
450 Than of the sheep that huddle in the fold?
451 For man must die like any other beast,
452 Or rot in prison, under foul arrest,
453 And suffer sickness and misfortune sad,
454 And still be oftentimes guiltless, too, by gad!
455 What management is in this prescience
456 That, guiltless, yet torments our innocence?
457 And this increases all my pain, as well,
458 That man is bound by law, nor may rebel,
459 For fear of God, but must repress his will,
460 Whereas a beast may all his lust fulfill.
461 And when a beast is dead, he feels no pain;
462 But, after death, man yet must weep amain,

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463 Though in this world he had but care and woe:
464 There is no doubt that it is even so.
465 The answer leave I to divines to tell,
466 But well I know this present world is hell.
467 Alas! I see a serpent or a thief,
468 That has brought many a true man unto grief,
469 Going at large, and where he wills may turn,
470 But I must lie in gaol, because Saturn,
471 And Juno too, both envious and mad,
472 Have spilled out well-nigh all the blood we had
473 At Thebes, and desolated her wide walls.
474 And Venus slays me with the bitter galls
475 Of fear of Arcita, and jealousy.
476 Now will I leave this Palamon, for he
477 Is in his prison, where he still must dwell,
478 And of Arcita will I forthwith tell.
479 Summer being passed away and nights grown long,
480 Increased now doubly all the anguish strong
481 Both of the lover and the prisoner.
482 I know not which one was the woefuller.
483 For, to be brief about it, Palamon
484 Is doomed to lie for ever in prison,
485 In chains and fetters till he shall be dead;
486 And exiled (on the forfeit of his head)
487 Arcita must remain abroad, nor see,
488 For evermore, the face of his lady.
489 You lovers, now I ask you this question:
490 Who has the worse, Arcita or Palamon?
491 The one may see his lady day by day,
492 But yet in prison must he dwell for aye.
493 The other, where he wishes, he may go,
494 But never see his lady more, ah no.
495 Now answer as you wish, all you that can.
496 For I will speak right on as I began.
497 Explicit prima pars.
498 Sequitur pars secunda.
499 Now when Arcita unto Thebes was come,
500 He lay and languished all day in his home,
501 Since he his lady nevermore should see,
502 But telling of his sorrow brief I'll be.
503 Had never any man so much torture,
504 No, nor shall have while this world may endure.

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505 Bereft he was of sleep and meat and drink,
506 That lean he grew and dry as shaft, I think.
507 His eyes were hollow and ghastly to behold,
508 His face was sallow, all pale and ashen-cold,
509 And solitary kept he and alone,
510 Wailing the whole night long, making his moan.
511 And if he heard a song or instrument,
512 Then he would weep uncontrolled and lament;
513 So feeble were his spirits, and so low,
514 And so changed was he, that no man could know
515 Him by his words or voice, whoever heard.
516 And in this change, for all the world he fared
517 As if not troubled by malady of love,
518 But by that humor dark and grim, whereof
519 Springs melancholy madness in the brain,
520 And fantasy unbridled holds its reign.
521 And shortly, all was turned quite upside-down,
522 Both habits and the temper all had known
523 Of him, this woeful lover, Dan Arcite.
524 Why should I all day of his woe indite?
525 When he'd endured all this a year or two,
526 This cruel torment and this pain and woe,
527 At Thebes, in his own country, as I said,
528 Upon a night, while sleeping in his bed,
529 He dreamed of how the winged God Mercury
530 Before him stood and bade him happier be.
531 His sleep-bestowing wand he bore upright;
532 A hat he wore upon his ringlets bright.
533 Arrayed this god was (noted at a leap)
534 As he'd been when to Argus he gave sleep.
535 And thus he spoke: To Athens shall you wend;
536 For all your woe is destined there to end.
537 And on that word Arcite woke and started.
538 Now truly, howsoever sore I'm smarted,
539 Said he, to Athens right now will I fare;
540 Nor for the dread of death will I now spare
541 To see my lady, whom I love and serve;
542 I will not reck of death, with her, nor swerve.
543 And with that word he caught a great mirror,
544 And saw how changed was all his old colour,
545 And saw his visage altered from its kind.
546 And right away it ran into his mind

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547 That since his face was now disfigured so,
548 By suffering endured (as well we know),
549 He might, if he should bear him low in town,
550 Live there in Athens evermore, unknown,
551 Seeing his lady well-nigh every day.
552 And right anon he altered his array,
553 Like a poor labourer in mean attire,
554 And all alone, save only for a squire,
555 Who knew his secret heart and all his case,
556 And who was dressed as poorly as he was,
557 To Athens was he gone the nearest way.
558 And to the court he went upon a day,
559 And at the gate he proffered services
560 To drudge and drag, as any one devises.
561 And to be brief herein, and to be plain,
562 He found employment with a chamberlain
563 Was serving in the house of Emily;
564 For he was sharp and very soon could see
565 What every servant did who served her there.
566 Right well could he hew wood and water bear,
567 For he was young and mighty, let me own,
568 And big of muscle, aye and big of bone,
569 To do what any man asked, in a trice.
570 A year or two he was in this service,
571 Page of the chamber of Emily the bright;
572 He said Philostrates would name him right.
573 But half so well beloved a man as he
574 Was never in that court, of his degree;
575 His gentle nature was so clearly shown,
576 That throughout all the court spread his renown.
577 They said it were but kindly courtesy
578 If Theseus should heighten his degree
579 And put him in more honourable service
580 Wherein he might his virtue exercise.
581 And thus, anon, his name was so up-sprung,
582 Both for his deeds and sayings of his tongue,
583 That Theseus had brought him nigh and nigher
584 And of the chamber he had made him squire,
585 And given him gold to maintain dignity.
586 Besides, men brought him, from his own country,
587 From year to year, clandestinely, his rent;
588 But honestly and slyly it was spent,

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by Geoffrey Chaucer

589 And no man wondered how he came by it.
590 And three years thus he lived, with much profit,
591 And bore him so in peace and so in war
592 There was no man that Theseus loved more.
593 And in such bliss I leave Arcita now,
594 And upon Palamon some words bestow.
595 In darksome, horrible, and strong prison
596 These seven years has now sat Palamon,
597 Wasted by woe and by his long distress.
598 Who has a two-fold evil heaviness
599 But Palamon? whom love yet tortures so
600 That half out of his wits he is for woe;
601 And joined thereto he is a prisoner,
602 Perpetually, not only for a year.
603 And who could rhyme in English, properly,
604 His martyrdom? Forsooth, it is not I;
605 And therefore I pass lightly on my way.
606 It fell out in the seventh year, in May,
607 On the third night (as say the books of old
608 Which have this story much more fully told),
609 Were it by chance or were it destiny
610 (Since, when a thing is destined, it must be),
611 That, shortly after midnight, Palamon,
612 By helping of a friend, broke from prison,
613 And fled the city, fast as he might go;
614 For he had given his guard a drink that so
615 Was mixed of spice and honey and certain wine
616 And Theban opiate and anodyne,
617 That all that night, although a man might shake
618 This gaoler, he slept on, nor could awake.
619 And thus he flees as fast as ever he may.
620 The night was short and it was nearly day,
621 Wherefore he needs must find a place to hide;
622 And to a grove that grew hard by, with stride
623 Of furtive foot, went fearful Palamon.
624 In brief, he'd formed his plan, as he went on,
625 That in the grove he would lie fast all day,
626 And when night came, then would he take his way
627 Toward Thebes, and there find friends, and of them pray
628 Their help on Theseus in war's array;
629 And briefly either he would lose his life,
630 Or else win Emily to be his wife;

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631 This is the gist of his intention plain.
632 Now I'll return to Arcita again,
633 Who little knew how near to him was care
634 Till Fortune caught him in her tangling snare.
635 The busy lark, the herald of the day,
636 Salutes now in her song the morning grey;
637 And fiery Phoebus rises up so bright
638 That all the east is laughing with the light,
639 And with his streamers dries, among the greves,
640 The silver droplets hanging on the leaves.
641 And so Arcita, in the court royal
642 With Theseus and his squire principal,
643 Is risen, and looks on the merry day.
644 And now, to do his reverence to May,
645 Calling to mind the point of his desire,
646 He on a courser, leaping high like fire,
647 Is ridden to the fields to muse and play,
648 Out of the court, a mile or two away;
649 And to the grove, whereof I lately told,
650 By accident his way began to hold,
651 To make him there the garland that one weaves
652 Of woodbine leaves and of green hawthorn leaves.
653 And loud he sang within the sunlit sheen:
654 O May, with all thy flowers and all thy green,
655 Welcome be thou, thou fair and freshening May:
656 I hope to pluck some garland green today.
657 And from his courser, with a lusty heart,
658 Into the grove right hastily did start,
659 And on a path he wandered up and down,
660 Near which, and as it chanced, this Palamon
661 Lay in the thicket, where no man might see,
662 For sore afraid of finding death was he.
663 He knew not that Arcita was so near:
664 God knows he would have doubted eye and ear,
665 But it has been a truth these many years
666 That Fields have eyes and every wood has ears.
667 It's well for one to bear himself with poise;
668 For every day unlooked-for chance annoys.
669 And little knew Arcita of his friend,
670 Who was so near and heard him to the end,
671 Where in the bush lie sat now, keeping still.
672 Arcita, having roamed and roved his fill,

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673 And having sung his rondel, lustily,
674 Into a study fell he, suddenly,
675 As do these lovers in their strange desires,
676 Now in the trees, now down among the briers,
677 Now up, now down, like bucket in a well.
678 Even as on a Friday, truth to tell,
679 The sun shines now, and now the rain comes fast,
680 Even so can fickle Venus overcast
681 The spirits of her people; as her day,
682 Is changeful, so she changes her array.
683 Seldom is Friday quite like all the week.
684 Arcita, having sung, began to speak,
685 And sat him down, sighing like one forlorn.
686 Alas, said he, the day that I was born!
687 How long, O Juno, of thy cruelty,
688 Wilt thou wage bitter war on Thebes city?
689 Alas! Confounded beyond all reason
690 The blood of Cadmus and of Amphion;
691 Of royal Cadmus, who was the first man
692 To build at Thebes, and first the town began,
693 And first of all the city to be king;
694 Of his lineage am I, and his offspring,
695 By true descent, and of the stock royal:
696 And now I'm such a wretched serving thrall,
697 That he who is my mortal enemy,
698 I serve him as his squire, and all humbly.
699 And even more does Juno give me shame,
700 For I dare not acknowledge my own name;
701 But whereas I was Arcita by right,
702 Now I'm Philostrates, not worth a mite.
703 Alas, thou cruel Mars! Alas, Juno!
704 Thus have your angers all our kin brought low,
705 Save only me, and wretched Palamon,
706 Whom Theseus martyrs yonder in prison.
707 And above all, to slay me utterly,
708 Love has his fiery dart so burningly
709 Struck through my faithful and care-laden heart,
710 My death was patterned ere my swaddling-shirt.
711 You slay me with your two eyes, Emily;
712 You are the cause for which I now must die.
713 For on the whole of all my other care
714 I would not set the value of a tare,

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715 So I could do one thing to your pleasance!
716 And with that word he fell down in a trance
717 That lasted long; and then he did up-start.
718 This Palamon, who thought that through his heart
719 He felt a cold and sudden sword blade glide,
720 For rage he shook, no longer would he hide.
721 But after he had heard Arcita's tale,
722 As he were mad, with face gone deathly pale,
723 He started up and sprang out of the thicket,
724 Crying: Arcita, oh you traitor wicked,
725 Now are you caught, that crave my lady so,
726 For whom I suffer all this pain and woe,
727 And are my blood, and know my secrets' store,
728 As I have often told you heretofore,
729 And have befooled the great Duke Thesues,
730 And falsely changed your name and station thus:
731 Either I shall be dead or you shall die.
732 You shall not love my lady Emily,
733 But I will love her, and none other, no;
734 For I am Palamon, your mortal foe.
735 And though I have no weapon in this place,
736 Being but out of prison by God's grace,
737 I say again, that either you shall die
738 Or else forgo your love for Emily.
739 Choose which you will, for you shall not depart.
740 This Arcita, with scornful, angry heart,
741 When he knew him and all the tale had heard,
742 Fierce as a lion, out he pulled a sword,
743 And answered thus: By God that sits above!
744 Were it not you are sick and mad for love,
745 And that you have no weapon in this place,
746 Out of this grove you'd never move a pace,
747 But meet your death right now, and at my hand.
748 For I renounce the bond and its demand
749 Which you assert that I have made with you.
750 What, arrant fool, love's free to choose and do,
751 And I will have her, spite of all your might!
752 But in as much as you're a worthy knight
753 And willing to defend your love, in mail,
754 Hear now this word: tomorrow I'll not fail
755 (Without the cognizance of any wight)
756 To come here armed and harnessed as a knight,

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757 And to bring arms for you, too, as you'll see;
758 And choose the better and leave the worse for me.
759 And meat and drink this very night I'll bring,
760 Enough for you, and clothes for your bedding.
761 And if it be that you my lady win
762 And slay me in this wood that now I'm in,
763 Then may you have your lady, for all of me.
764 This Palamon replied: I do agree.
765 And thus they parted till the morrow morn,
766 When each had pledged his honour to return.
767 O Cupido, that know'st not charity!
768 O despot, that no peer will have with thee!
769 Truly, 'tis said, that love, like all lordship,
770 Declines, with little thanks, a partnership.
771 Well learned they that, Arcite and Palamon.
772 Arcita rode into the town anon,
773 And on the morrow, ere the dawn, he bore,
774 Secretly, arms and armour out of store,
775 Enough for each, and proper to maintain
776 A battle in the field between the twain.
777 So on his horse, alone as he was born,
778 He carried out that harness as he'd sworn;
779 And in the grove, at time and place they'd set,
780 Arcita and this Palamon were met.
781 Each of the two changed colour in the face.
782 For as the hunter in the realm of Thrace
783 Stands at the clearing with his ready spear,
784 When hunted is the lion, or the bear,
785 And through the forest hears him rushing fast,
786 Breaking the boughs and leaves, and thinks aghast.
787 Here comes apace my mortal enemy!
788 Now, without fail, he must be slain, or I;
789 For either I must kill him ere he pass,
790 Or he will make of me a dead carcass-
791 So fared these men, in altering their hue,
792 So far as each the strength of other knew.
793 There was no good-day given, no saluting,
794 But without word, rehearsal, or such thing,
795 Each of them helping, so they armed each other
796 As dutifully as he were his own brother;
797 And afterward, with their sharp spears and strong,
798 They thrust each at the other wondrous long.

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799 You might have fancied that this Palamon,
800 In battle, was a furious, mad lion,
801 And that Arcita was a tiger quite:
802 Like very boars the two began to smite,
803 Like boars that froth for anger in the wood.
804 Up to the ankles fought they in their blood.
805 And leaving them thus fighting fast and fell,
806 Forthwith of Theseus I now will tell.
807 Great destiny, minister-general,
808 That executes in this world, and for all,
809 The needs that God foresaw ere we were born,
810 So strong it is that, though the world had sworn
811 The contrary of a thing, by yea or nay,
812 Yet sometime it shall fall upon a day,
813 Though not again within a thousand years.
814 For certainly our wishes and our fears,
815 Whether of war or peace, or hate or love,
816 All, all are ruled by that Foresight above.
817 This show I now by mighty Theseus,
818 Who to go hunting is so desirous,
819 And specially of the hart of ten, in May,
820 That, in his bed, there dawns for him no day
821 That he's not clothed and soon prepared to ride
822 With hound and horn and huntsman at his side.
823 For in his hunting has he such delight,
824 That it is all his joy and appetite
825 To be himself the great hart's deadly bane:
826 For after Mars, he serves Diana's reign.
827 Clear was the day, as I have told ere this,
828 When Theseus, compact of joy and bliss,
829 With his Hippolyta, the lovely queen,
830 And fair Emilia, clothed all in green,
831 A-hunting they went riding royally.
832 And to the grove of trees that grew hard by,
833 In which there was a hart, as men had told,
834 Duke Theseus the shortest way did hold.
835 And to the glade he rode on, straight and right,
836 For there the hart was wont to go in flight,
837 And over a brook, and so forth on his way.
838 This duke would have a course at him today,
839 With such hounds as it pleased him to command.
840 And when this duke was come upon that land,

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841 Under the slanting sun he looked, anon,
842 And there saw Arcita and Palamon,
843 Who furiously fought, as two boars do;
844 The bright swords went in circles to and fro
845 So terribly, that even their least stroke
846 Seemed powerful enough to fell an oak;
847 But who the two were, nothing did he note.
848 This duke his courser with the sharp spurs smote,
849 And in one bound he was between the two,
850 And lugged his great sword out, and cried out: Ho!
851 No more, I say, on pain of losing head!
852 By mighty Mars, that one shall soon be dead
853 Who smites another stroke that I may see!
854 But tell me now what manner of men ye be
855 That are so hardy as to fight out here
856 Without a judge or other officer,
857 As if you-rode in lists right royally?
858 This Palamon replied, then, hastily,
859 Saying: O Sire, what need for more ado?
860 We have deserved our death at hands of you.
861 Two woeful wretches are we, two captives
862 That are encumbered by our own sad lives;
863 And as you are a righteous lord and judge,
864 Give us not either mercy or refuge,
865 But slay me first, for sacred charity;
866 But slay my fellow here, as well, with me.
867 Or slay him first; for though you learn it late,
868 This is your mortal foe, Arcita—wait!—
869 That from the land was banished, on his head.
870 And for the which he merits to be dead.
871 For this is he who came unto your gate,
872 Calling himself Philostrates—nay, wait!—
873 Thus has he fooled you well this many a year,
874 And you have made him your chief squire, I hear:
875 And this is he that loves fair Emily.
876 For since the day is come when I must die,
877 I make confession plainly and say on,
878 That I am that same woeful Palamon
879 Who has your prison broken, viciously.
880 I am your mortal foe, and it is I
881 Who love so hotly Emily the bright
882 That I'll die gladly here within her sigh!

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883 Therefore do I ask death as penalty,
884 But slay my fellow with the same mercy,
885 For both of us deserve but to be slain.
886 This worthy duke presently spoke again,
887 Saying: This judgment needs but a short session:
888 Your own mouth, aye, and by your own confession,
889 Has doomed and damned you, as I shall record.
890 There is no need for torture, on my word.
891 But you shall die, by mighty Mars the red!
892 But then the queen, whose heart for pity bled,
893 Began to weep, and so did Emily
894 And all the ladies in the company.
895 Great pity must it be, so thought they all,
896 That ever such misfortune should befall:
897 For these were gentlemen, of great estate,
898 And for no thing, save love, was their debate.
899 They saw their bloody wounds, so sore and wide,
900 And all cried out—greater and less, they cried:
901 Have mercy, lord, upon us women all!
902 And down upon their bare knees did they fall,
903 And would have kissed his feet there where he stood,
904 Till at the last assuaged was his high mood;
905 For soon will pity flow through gentle heart.
906 And though he first for ire did shake and start,
907 He soon considered, to state the case in brief,
908 What cause they had for fighting, what for grief;
909 And though his anger still their guilt accused,
910 Yet in his reason he held them both excused;
911 In such wise: he thought well that every man
912 Will help himself in love, if he but can,
913 And will himself deliver from prison;
914 And, too, at heart he had compassion on
915 Those women, for they cried and wept as one,
916 And in his gentle heart he thought anon,
917 And softly to himself he said then: Fie
918 Upon a lord that will have no mercy,
919 But acts the lion, both in word and deed,
920 To those repentant and in fear and need,
921 As well as to the proud and pitiless man
922 That still would do the thing that he began!
923 That lord must surely in discretion lack
924 Who, in such case, can no distinction make,

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925 But weighs both proud and humble in one scale.
926 And shortly, when his ire was thus grown pale,
927 He looked up to the sky, with eyes alight,
928 And spoke these words, as he would promise plight:
929 The god of love, ah benedicite!
930 How mighty and how great a lord is he!
931 Against his might may stand no obstacles,
932 A true god is he by his miracles;
933 For he can manage, in his own sweet wise,
934 The heart of anyone as he devise.
935 Lo, here, Arcita and this Palamon,
936 That were delivered out of my prison,
937 And might have lived in Thebes right royally,
938 Knowing me for their mortal enemy,
939 And also that their lives lay in my hand;
940 And yet their love has wiled them to this land,
941 Against all sense, and brought them here to die!
942 Look you now, is not that a folly high?
943 Who can be called a fool, except he love?
944 And see, for sake of God who sits above,
945 See how they bleed! Are they not well arrayed?
946 Thus has their lord, the god of love, repaid
947 Their wages and their fees for their service!
948 And yet they are supposed to be full wise
949 Who serve love well, whatever may befall!
950 But this is yet the best jest of them all,
951 That she for whom they have this jollity
952 Can thank them for it quite as much as me;
953 She knows no more of all this fervent fare,
954 By God! than knows a cuckoo or a hare.
955 But all must be essayed, both hot and cold,
956 A man must play the fool, when young or old;
957 I know it of myself from years long gone:
958 For of love's servants I've been numbered one.
959 And therefore, since I know well all love's pain,
960 And know how sorely it can man constrain,
961 As one that has been taken in the net,
962 I will forgive your trespass, and forget,
963 At instance of my sweet queen, kneeling here,
964 Aye, and of Emily, my sister dear.
965 And you shall presently consent to swear
966 That nevermore will you my power dare,

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967 Nor wage war on me, either night or day,
968 But will be friends to me in all you may;
969 I do forgive this trespass, full and fair.
970 And then they swore what he demanded there,
971 And, of his might, they of his mercy prayed,
972 And he extended grace, and thus he said:
973 To speak for royalty's inheritress,
974 Although she be a queen or a princess,
975 Each of you both is worthy, I confess,
976 When comes the time to wed: but nonetheless,
977 I speak now of my sister Emily,
978 The cause of all this strife and jealousy-
979 You know yourselves she may not marry two,
980 At once, although you fight or what you do:
981 One of you, then, and be he loath or lief,
982 Must pipe his sorrows in an ivy leaf.
983 That is to say, she cannot have you both,
984 However jealous one may be, or wroth.
985 Therefore I put you both in this decree,
986 That each of you shall learn his destiny
987 As it is cast; and hear, now, in what wise
988 The word of fate shall speak through my device.
989 My will is this, to draw conclusion flat,
990 Without reply, or plea, or caveat
991 (In any case, accept it for the best),
992 That each of you shall follow his own quest,
993 Free of all ransom or of fear from me;
994 And this day, fifty weeks hence, both shall be
995 Here once again, each with a hundred knights,
996 Armed for the lists, who stoutly for your rights
997 Will ready be to battle, to maintain
998 Your claim to love. I promise you, again,
999 Upon my word, and as I am a knight,
1000 That whichever of you wins the fight,
1001 That is to say, whichever of you two
1002 May with his hundred, whom I spoke of, do
1003 His foe to death, or out of boundary drive,
1004 Then he shall have Emilia to wive
1005 To whom Fortune gives so fair a grace.
1006 The lists shall be erected in this place.
1007 And God so truly on my soul have ruth
1008 As I shall prove an honest judge, in truth.

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1009 You shall no other judgment in me waken
1010 Than that the one shall die or else be taken.
1011 And if you think the sentence is well said,
1012 Speak your opinion, that you're well repaid.
1013 This is the end, and I conclude hereon.
1014 Who looks up lightly now but Palamon?
1015 Who leaps for you but Arcita the knight?
1016 And who could tell, or who could ever write
1017 The jubilation made within that place
1018 Where Theseus has shown so fair a grace?
1019 But down on knee went each one for delight
1020 And thanked him there with all his heart and might,
1021 And specially those Thebans did their part.
1022 And thus, with high hopes, being blithe of heart,
1023 They took their leave; and homeward did they ride
1024 To Thebes that sits within her old walls wide.
1025 Explicit secunda pars.
1026 Sequitur pars tertia.
1027 I think that men would deem it negligence
1028 If I forgot to tell of the expense
1029 Of Theseus, who went so busily
1030 To work upon the lists, right royally;
1031 For such an amphitheatre he made,
1032 Its equal never yet on earth was laid.
1033 The circuit, rising, hemmed a mile about,
1034 Walled all of stone and moated deep without.
1035 Round was the shape as compass ever traces,
1036 And built in tiers, the height of sixty paces,
1037 That those who sat in one tier, or degree,
1038 Should hinder not the folk behind to see.
1039 Eastward there stood a gate of marble white.
1040 And westward such another, opposite.
1041 In brief, no place on earth, and so sublime,
1042 Was ever made in so small space of time;
1043 For in the land there was no craftsman quick
1044 At plane geometry or arithmetic,
1045 No painter and no sculptor of hard stone,
1046 But Theseus pressed meat and wage upon
1047 To build that amphitheatre and devise.
1048 And to observe all rites and sacrifice,
1049 Over the eastern gate, and high above,
1050 For worship of Queen Venus, god of love,

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1051 He built an altar and an oratory;
1052 And westward, being mindful of the glory
1053 Of Mars, he straightway builded such another
1054 As cost a deal of gold and many a bother.
1055 And northward, in a turret on the wall,
1056 Of alabaster white and red coral,
1057 An oratory splendid as could be,
1058 In honour of Diana's chastity,
1059 Duke Theseus wrought out in noble wise.
1060 But yet have forgot to advertise
1061 The noble carvings and the portraitures,
1062 The shapes, the countenances, the figures
1063 That all were in these oratories three.
1064 First, in the fane of Venus, one might see,
1065 Wrought on the wall, and piteous to behold,
1066 The broken slumbers and the sighing cold,
1067 The sacred tears and the lamenting dire,
1068 The fiery throbbing of the strong desire,
1069 That all love's servants in this life endure;
1070 The vows that all their promises assure;
1071 Pleasure and hope, desire, foolhardiness,
1072 Beauty, youth, bawdiness, and riches, yes,
1073 Charms, and all force, and lies, and flattery,
1074 Expense, and labour; aye, and Jealousy
1075 That wore of marigolds a great garland
1076 And had a cuckoo sitting on her hand;
1077 Carols and instruments and feasts and dances,
1078 Lust and array, and all the circumstances
1079 Of love that I may reckon or ever shall,
1080 In order they were painted on the wall,
1081 Aye, and more, too, than I have ever known.
1082 For truly, all the Mount of Citheron,
1083 Where Venus has her chief and favoured dwelling,
1084 Was painted on that wall, beyond my telling,
1085 With all the gardens in their loveliness.
1086 Nor was forgot the gate-guard Idleness,
1087 Nor fair Narcissus of the years long gone,
1088 Nor yet the folly of King Solomon,
1089 No, nor the giant strength of Hercules,
1090 Nor Circe's and Medea's sorceries,
1091 Nor Turnus with his hardy, fierce courage,
1092 Nor the rich Croesus, captive in his age.

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1093 Thus may be seen that wisdom, nor largess,
1094 Beauty, nor skill, nor strength, nor hardiness,
1095 May with Queen Venus share authority;
1096 For as she wills, so must the whole world be.
1097 Lo, all these folk were so caught in her snare
1098 They cried aloud in sorrow and in care.
1099 Here let suffice examples one or two,
1100 Though I might give a thousand more to you.
1101 The form of Venus, glorious as could be,
1102 Was naked, floating on the open sea,
1103 And from the navel down all covered was
1104 With green waves, bright as ever any glass.
1105 A citole in her small right hand had she,
1106 And on her head, and beautiful to see,
1107 A garland of red roses, sweet smelling,
1108 Above her swirled her white doves, fluttering.
1109 Before her stood her one son, Cupido,
1110 Whose two white wings upon his shoulders grow;
1111 And blind he was, as it is often seen;
1112 A bow he bore, and arrows bright and keen.
1113 Why should I not as well, now, tell you all
1114 The portraiture that was upon the wall
1115 Within the fane of mighty Mars the red?
1116 In length and breadth the whole wall was painted
1117 Like the interior of that grisly place,
1118 The mighty temple of great Mars in Thrace,
1119 In that same cold and frosty region where
1120 Mars to his supreme mansion may repair.
1121 First, on the wall was limned a vast forest
1122 Wherein there dwelt no man nor any beast,
1123 With knotted, gnarled, and leafless trees, so old
1124 The sharpened stumps were dreadful to behold;
1125 Through which there ran a rumbling, even now,
1126 As if a storm were breaking every bough;
1127 And down a hill, beneath a sharp descent,
1128 The temple stood of Mars armipotent,
1129 Wrought all of burnished steel, whereof the gate
1130 Was grim like death to see, and long, and strait.
1131 And therefrom raged a wind that seemed to shake
1132 The very ground, and made the great doors quake.
1133 The northern light in at those same doors shone,
1134 For window in that massive wall was none

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1135 Through which a man might any light discern.
1136 The doors were all of adamant eterne,
1137 Rivetted on both sides, and all along,
1138 With toughest iron; and to make it strong,
1139 Each pillar that sustained this temple grim
1140 Was thick as tun, of iron bright and trim.
1141 There saw I first the dark imagining
1142 Of felony, and all the compassing;
1143 And cruel anger, red as burning coal;
1144 Pickpurses, and the dread that eats the soul;
1145 The smiling villain, hiding knife in cloak;
1146 The farm barns burning, and the thick black smoke;
1147 The treachery of murder done in bed;
1148 The open battle, with the wounds that bled;
1149 Contest, with bloody knife and sharp menace;
1150 And loud with creaking was that dismal place.
1151 The slayer of himself, too, saw I there,
1152 His very heart's blood matted in his hair;
1153 The nail that's driven in the skull by night;
1154 The cold plague-corpse, with gaping mouth upright
1155 In middle of the temple sat Mischance,
1156 With gloomy, grimly woeful countenance.
1157 And saw I Madness laughing in his rage;
1158 Armed risings, and outcries, and fierce outrage;
1159 The carrion in the bush, with throat wide carved;
1160 A thousand slain, nor one by plague, nor starved.
1161 The tyrant, with the spoils of violent theft;
1162 The town destroyed, in ruins, nothing left.
1163 And saw I burnt the ships that dance by phares,
1164 The hunter strangled by the fierce wild bears;
1165 The sow chewing the child right in the cradle;
1166 The cook well scalded, spite of his long ladle.
1167 Nothing was lacking of Mars' evil part:
1168 The carter over-driven by his cart,
1169 Under a wheel he lay low in the dust.
1170 There were likewise in Mars' house, as needs must,
1171 The surgeon, and the butcher, and the smith
1172 Who forges sharp swords and great ills therewith.
1173 And over all, depicted in a tower,
1174 Sat Conquest, high in honour and in power,
1175 Yet with a sharp sword hanging o'er his head
1176 But by the tenuous twisting of a thread.

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1177 Depicted was the death of Julius,
1178 Of Nero great, and of Antonius;
1179 And though at that same time they were unborn,
1180 There were their deaths depicted to adorn
1181 The menacing of Mars, in likeness sure;
1182 Things were so shown, in all that portraiture,
1183 As are fore-shown among the stars above,
1184 Who shall be slain in war or dead for love.
1185 Suffice one instance from old plenitude,
1186 I could not tell them all, even if I would.
1187 Mars' image stood upon a chariot,
1188 Armed, and so grim that mad he seemed, God wot;
1189 And o'er his head two constellations shone
1190 Of stars that have been named in writings known.
1191 One being Puella, and one Rubeus.
1192 This god of armies was companioned thus:
1193 A wolf there was before him, at his feet,
1194 Red-eyed, and of a dead man he did eat.
1195 A cunning pencil there had limned this story
1196 In reverence of Mars and of his glory.
1197 Now to the temple of Diana chaste,
1198 As briefly as I can, I'll pass in haste,
1199 To lay before you its description well.
1200 In pictures, up and down, the wall could tell
1201 Of hunting and of modest chastity.
1202 There saw I how Callisto fared when she
1203 (Diana being much aggrieved with her)
1204 Was changed from woman into a she-bear,
1205 And after, made into the lone Pole Star;
1206 There was it; I can't tell how such things are.
1207 Her son, too, is a star, as men may see.
1208 There saw I Daphne turned into a tree
1209 (I do not mean Diana, no, but she,
1210 Peneus' daughter, who was called Daphne)
1211 I saw Actaeon made a hart all rude
1212 For punishment of seeing Diana nude;
1213 I saw, too, how his fifty hounds had caught
1214 And him were eating, since they knew him not.
1215 And painted farther on, I saw before
1216 How Atalanta hunted the wild boar;
1217 And Meleager, and many another there,
1218 For which Diana wrought him woe and care.

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1219 There saw I many another wondrous tale
1220 From which I will not now draw memory's veil.
1221 This goddess on an antlered hart was set,
1222 With little hounds about her feet, and yet
1223 Beneath her perfect feet there was a moon,
1224 Waxing it was, but it should wane full soon.
1225 In robes of yellowish green her statue was,
1226 She'd bow in hand and arrows in a case.
1227 Her eyes were downcast, looking at the ground.
1228 Where Pluto in his dark realm may be found.
1229 Before her was a woman travailing,
1230 Who was so long in giving birth, poor thing,
1231 That pitifully Lucina did she call,
1232 Praying, Oh help, for thou may'st best of all!
1233 Well could he paint, who had this picture wrought,
1234 With many a florin he'd his colours bought,
1235 But now the lists were done, and Theseus,
1236 Who at so great cost had appointed thus
1237 The temples and the circus, as I tell,
1238 When all was done, he liked it wondrous well.
1239 But hold I will from Theseus, and on
1240 To speak of Arcita and Palamon.
1241 The day of their return is forthcoming,
1242 When each of them a hundred knights must bring
1243 The combat to support, as I have told;
1244 And into Athens, covenant to uphold,
1245 Has each one ridden with his hundred knights,
1246 Well armed for war, at all points, in their might.
1247 And certainly, 'twas thought by many a man
1248 That never, since the day this world began,
1249 Speaking of good knights hardy of their hands,
1250 Wherever God created seas and lands,
1251 Was, of so few, so noble company.
1252 For every man that loved all chivalry,
1253 And eager was to win surpassing fame,
1254 Had prayed to play a part in that great game;
1255 And all was well with him who chosen was.
1256 For if there came tomorrow such a case,
1257 You know right well that every lusty knight
1258 Who loves the ladies fair and keeps his might,
1259 Be it in England, aye or elsewhere,
1260 Would wish of all things to be present there

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1261 To fight for some fair lady. Ben'cite!
1262 'Twould be a pleasant goodly sight to see!
1263 And so it was with those with Palamon.
1264 With him there rode of good knights many a one;
1265 Some would be armoured in a habergeon
1266 And in a breastplate, under light jupon;
1267 And some wore breast-and back-plates thick and large;
1268 And some would have a Prussian shield, or targe;
1269 Some on their very legs were armoured well,
1270 And carried axe, and some a mace of steel.
1271 There is no new thing, now, that is not old.
1272 And so they all were armed, as I have told,
1273 To his own liking and design, each one.
1274 There might you see, riding with Palamon,
1275 Lycurgus' self, the mighty king of Thrace;
1276 Black was his beard and manly was his face.
1277 The eyeballs in the sockets of his head,
1278 They glowed between a yellow and a red.
1279 And like a griffon glared he round about
1280 From under bushy eyebrows thick and stout.
1281 His limbs were large, his muscles hard and strong.
1282 His shoulders broad, his arms both big and long,
1283 And, as the fashion was in his country,
1284 High in a chariot of gold stood he,
1285 With four white bulls in traces, to progress.
1286 Instead of coat-of-arms above harness,
1287 With yellow claws preserved and bright as gold,
1288 He wore a bear-skin, black and very old.
1289 His long combed hair was hanging down his back,
1290 As any raven's feather it was black:
1291 A wreath of gold, arm-thick, of heavy weight,
1292 Was on his head, and set with jewels great,
1293 Of rubies fine and perfect diamonds.
1294 About his car there circled huge white hounds,
1295 Twenty or more, as large as any steer,
1296 To hunt the lion or the antlered deer;
1297 And so they followed him, with muzzles bound,
1298 Wearing gold collars with smooth rings and round.
1299 A hundred lords came riding in his rout,
1300 All armed at point, with hearts both stern and stout
1301 With Arcita, in tales men call to mind,
1302 The great Emetreus, a king of Ind,

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1303 Upon a bay steed harnessed all in steel,
1304 Covered with cloth of gold, all diapered well,
1305 Came riding like the god of arms, great Mars.
1306 His coat-of-arms was cloth of the Tartars,
1307 Begemmed with pearls, all white and round and great.
1308 Of beaten gold his saddle, burnished late;
1309 A mantle from his shoulders hung, the thing
1310 Close-set with rubies red, like fire blazing.
1311 His crisp hair all in bright ringlets was run,
1312 Yellow as gold and gleaming as the sun.
1313 His nose was high, his eyes a bright citrine,
1314 His lips were full, his colouring sanguine.
1315 And a few freckles on his face were seen,
1316 None either black or yellow, but the mean;
1317 And like a lion he his glances cast.
1318 Not more than five-and-twenty years he'd past.
1319 His beard was well beginning, now, to spring;
1320 His voice was as a trumpet thundering.
1321 Upon his brows he wore, of laurel green,
1322 A garland, fresh and pleasing to be seen.
1323 Upon his wrist he bore, for his delight,
1324 An eagle tame, as any lily white.
1325 A hundred lords came riding with him there,
1326 All armed, except their heads, in all their gear,
1327 And wealthily appointed in all things.
1328 For, trust me well, that dukes and earls and kings
1329 Were gathered in this noble company
1330 For love and for increase of chivalry.
1331 About this king there ran, on every side,
1332 Many tame lions and leopards in their pride.
1333 And in such wise these mighty lords, in sum,
1334 Were, of a Sunday, to the city come
1335 About the prime, and in the town did light.
1336 This Theseus, this duke, this noble knight,
1337 When he'd conducted them to his city,
1338 And quartered them, according to degree,
1339 He feasted them, and was at so much pains
1340 To give them ease and honour, of his gains,
1341 That men yet hold that never human wit,
1342 Of high or low estate, could better it.
1343 The minstrelsy, the service at the feast,
1344 The great gifts to the highest and the least,

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1345 The furnishings of Theseus, rich palace,
1346 Who highest sat or lowest on the dais,
1347 What ladies fairest were or best dandling,
1348 Or which of them could dance the best, or sing,
1349 Or who could speak most feelingly of love,
1350 Or what hawks sat upon the perch above,
1351 Or what great hounds were lying on the floor-
1352 Of all these I will make no mention more;
1353 But tell my tale, for that, I think, is best;
1354 Now comes the point, and listen if you've zest.
1355 That Sunday night, ere day began to spring,
1356 When Palamon the earliest lark heard sing,
1357 Although it lacked two hours of being day,
1358 Yet the lark sang, and Palamon sang a lay.
1359 With pious heart and with a high courage
1360 He rose, to go upon a pilgrimage
1361 Unto the blessed Cytherea's shrine
1362 (I mean Queen Venus, worthy and benign).
1363 And at her hour he then walked forth apace
1364 Out to the lists wherein her temple was,
1365 And down he knelt in manner to revere,
1366 And from a full heart spoke as you shall hear.
1367 Fairest of fair, O lady mine, Venus,
1368 Daughter of Jove and spouse to Vulcanus,
1369 Thou gladdener of the Mount of Citheron,
1370 By that great love thou borest to Adon,
1371 Have pity on my bitter tears that smart
1372 And hear my humble prayer within thy heart.
1373 Alas! I have no words in which to tell
1374 The effect of all the torments of my hell;
1375 My heavy heart its evils can't bewray;
1376 I'm so confused I can find naught to say.
1377 But mercy, lady bright, that knowest well
1378 My heart, and seest all the ills I feel,
1379 Consider and have ruth upon my sore
1380 As truly as I shall, for evermore,
1381 Well as I may, thy one true servant be,
1382 And wage a war henceforth on chastity.
1383 If thou wilt help, thus do I make my vow,
1384 To boast of knightly skill I care not now,
1385 Nor do I ask tomorrow's victory,
1386 Nor any such renown, nor vain glory

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1387 Of prize of arms, blown before lord and churl,
1388 But I would have possession of one girl,
1389 Of Emily, and die in thy service;
1390 Find thou the manner how, and in what wise.
1391 For I care not, unless it better be,
1392 Whether I vanquish them or they do me,
1393 So I may have my lady in my arms.
1394 For though Mars is the god of war's alarms,
1395 Thy power is so great in Heaven above,
1396 That, if it be thy will, I'll have my love.
1397 In thy fane will I worship always, so
1398 That on thine altar, where'er I ride or go,
1399 I will lay sacrifice and thy fires feed.
1400 And if thou wilt not so, O lady, cede,
1401 I pray thee, that tomorrow, with a spear,
1402 Arcita bear me through the heart, just here.
1403 For I'll care naught, when I have lost my life,
1404 That Arcita may win her for his wife.
1405 This the effect and end of all my prayer,
1406 Give me my love, thou blissful lady fair.
1407 Now when he'd finished all the orison,
1408 His sacrifice he made, this Palamon,
1409 Right piously, with all the circumstance,
1410 Albeit I tell not now his observance.
1411 But at the last the form of Venus shook
1412 And gave a sign, and thereupon he took
1413 This as acceptance of his prayer that day.
1414 For though the augury showed some delay,
1415 Yet he knew well that granted was his boon;
1416 And with glad heart he got him home right soon.
1417 Three hours unequal after Palamon
1418 To Venus' temple at the lists had gone,
1419 Up rose the sun and up rose Emily,
1420 And to Diana's temple did she hie.
1421 Her maidens led she thither, and with them
1422 They carefully took fire and each emblem,
1423 And incense, robes, and the remainder all
1424 Of things for sacrifice ceremonial.
1425 There was not one thing lacking; I'll but add
1426 The horns of mead, as was a way they had.
1427 In smoking temple, full of draperies fair,
1428 This Emily with young heart debonnaire,

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1429 Her body washed in water from a well;
1430 But how she did the rite I dare not tell,
1431 Except it be at large, in general;
1432 And yet it was a thing worth hearing all;
1433 When one's well meaning, there is no transgression;
1434 But it is best to speak at one's discretion.
1435 Her bright hair was unbound, but combed withal;
1436 She wore of green oak leaves a coronal
1437 Upon her lovely head. Then she began
1438 Two fires upon the altar stone to fan,
1439 And did her ceremonies as we're told
1440 In Statius' Thebaid and books as old.
1441 When kindled was the fire, with sober face
1442 Unto Diana spoke she in that place.
1443 O thou chaste goddess of the wildwood green,
1444 By whom all heaven and earth and sea are seen,
1445 Queen of the realm of Pluto, dark and low,
1446 Goddess of maidens, that my heart dost know
1447 For all my years, and knowest what I desire,
1448 Oh, save me from thy vengeance and thine ire
1449 That on Actaeon fell so cruelly.
1450 Chaste goddess, well indeed thou knowest that I
1451 Desire to be a virgin all my life,
1452 Nor ever wish to be man's love or wife.
1453 I am, thou know'st, yet of thy company,
1454 A maid, who loves the hunt and venery,
1455 And to go rambling in the greenwood wild,
1456 And not to be a wife and be with child.
1457 I do not crave the company of man.
1458 Now help me, lady, since thou may'st and can,
1459 By the three beings who are one in thee.
1460 For Palamon, who bears such love to me,
1461 And for Arcita, loving me so sore,
1462 This grace I pray thee, without one thing more,
1463 To send down love and peace between those two,
1464 And turn their hearts away from me: so do
1465 That all their furious love and their desire,
1466 And all their ceaseless torment and their fire
1467 Be quenched or turned into another place;
1468 And if it be thou wilt not show this grace,
1469 Or if my destiny be moulded so
1470 That I must needs have one of these same two,

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1471 Then send me him that most desires me.
1472 Behold, O goddess of utter chastity,
1473 The bitter tears that down my two cheeks fall.
1474 Since thou art maid and keeper of us all,
1475 My maidenhead keep thou, and still preserve,
1476 And while I live a maid, thee will I serve.
1477 The fires blazed high upon the altar there,
1478 While Emily was saying thus her prayer,
1479 But suddenly she saw a sight most quaint,
1480 For there, before her eyes, one fire went faint,
1481 Then blazed again; and after that, anon,
1482 The other fire was quenched, and so was gone.
1483 And as it died it made a whistling sound,
1484 As do wet branches burning on the ground,
1485 And from the brands' ends there ran out, anon,
1486 What looked like drops of blood, and many a one;
1487 At which so much aghast was Emily
1488 That she was near dazed, and began to cry,
1489 For she knew naught of what it signified;
1490 But only out of terror thus she cried
1491 And wept, till it was pitiful to hear.
1492 But thereupon Diana did appear,
1493 With bow in hand, like any right huntress,
1494 And said: My daughter, leave this heaviness.
1495 Among the high gods it has been affirmed,
1496 And by eternal written word confirmed,
1497 That you shall be the wife of one of those
1498 Who bear for you so many cares and woes;
1499 But unto which of them may not tell.
1500 I can no longer tarry, so farewell.
1501 The fires that on my altar burn incense
1502 Should tell you everything, ere you go hence,
1503 Of what must come of love in this your case.
1504 And with that word the arrows of the chase
1505 The goddess carried clattered and did ring,
1506 And forth she went in mystic vanishing;
1507 At which this Emily astonished was,
1508 And said she then: Ah, what means this, alas!
1509 I put myself in thy protection here,
1510 Diana, and at thy disposal dear.
1511 And home she wended, then, the nearest way.
1512 This is the purport; there's no more to say.

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1513 At the next hour of Mars, and following this,
1514 Arcita to the temple walked, that is
1515 Devoted to fierce Mars, to sacrifice
1516 With all the ceremonies, pagan-wise.
1517 With sobered heart and high devotion, on
1518 This wise, right thus he said his orison.
1519 O mighty god that in the regions cold
1520 Of Thrace art honoured, where thy lordships hold,
1521 And hast in every realm and every land
1522 The reins of battle in thy guiding hand,
1523 And givest fortune as thou dost devise,
1524 Accept of me my pious sacrifice.
1525 If so it be that my youth may deserve,
1526 And that my strength be worthy found to serve
1527 Thy godhead, and be numbered one of thine,
1528 Then pray I thee for ruth on pain that's mine.
1529 For that same pain and even that hot fire
1530 Wherein thou once did'st burn with deep desire,
1531 When thou did'st use the marvelous beauty
1532 Of fair young wanton Venus, fresh and free,
1533 And had'st her in thine arms and at thy will
1534 (Howbeit with thee, once, all the chance fell ill,
1535 And Vulcan caught thee in his net, whenas
1536 He found thee lying with his wife, alas!)-
1537 For that same sorrow that was in thy heart,
1538 Have pity, now, upon my pains that smart.
1539 I'm young, and little skilled, as knowest thou,
1540 With love more hurt and much more broken now
1541 Than ever living creature was, I'm sure;
1542 For she who makes me all this woe endure,
1543 Whether I float or sink cares not at all,
1544 And ere she'll hear with mercy when I call,
1545 I must by prowess win her in this place;
1546 And well I know, too, without help and grace
1547 Of thee, my human strength shall not avail
1548 Then help me, lord, tomorrow not to fail,
1549 For sake of that same fire that once burned thee,
1550 The which consuming fire so now burns me;
1551 And grant, tomorrow, I have victory.
1552 Mine be the toil, and thine the whole glory!
1553 Thy sovereign temple will I honour most
1554 Of any spot, and toil and count no cost

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1555 To pleasure thee and in thy craft have grace,
1556 And in thy fane my banner will I place,
1557 And all the weapons of my company;
1558 And evermore, until the day I die,
1559 Eternal fire shalt thou before thee find.
1560 Moreover, to this vow myself I bind:
1561 My beard, my hair that ripples down so long,
1562 That never yet has felt the slightest wrong
1563 Of razor or of shears, to thee I'll give,
1564 And be thy loyal servant while I live.
1565 Now, lord, have pity on my sorrows sore;
1566 Give me the victory. I ask no more.
1567 With ended prayer of Arcita the young,
1568 The rings that on the temple door were hung,
1569 And even the doors themselves, rattled so fast
1570 That this Arcita found himself aghast.
1571 The fires blazed high upon the altar bright,
1572 Until the entire temple shone with light;
1573 And a sweet odour rose up from the ground;
1574 And Arcita whirled then his arm around,
1575 And yet more incense on the fire he cast,
1576 And did still further rites; and at the last
1577 The armour of God Mars began to ring,
1578 And with that sound there came a murmuring,
1579 Low and uncertain, saying: Victory!
1580 For which he gave Mars honour and glory.
1581 And thus in joy and hope, which all might dare,
1582 Arcita to his lodging then did fare,
1583 Fain of the fight as fowl is of the sun.
1584 But thereupon such quarrelling was begun,
1585 From this same granting, in the heaven above,
1586 'Twixt lovely Venus, goddess of all love,
1587 And Mars, the iron god armipotent,
1588 That Jove toiled hard to make a settlement;
1589 Until the sallow Saturn, calm and cold,
1590 Who had so many happenings known of old,
1591 Found from his full experience the art
1592 To satisfy each party and each part.
1593 For true it is, age has great advantage;
1594 Experience and wisdom come with age;
1595 Men may the old out-run, but not out-wit.
1596 Thus Saturn, though it scarcely did befit

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1597 His nature so to do, devised a plan
1598 To quiet all the strife, and thus began:
1599 Now my dear daughter Venus, quoth Saturn,
1600 My course, which has so wide a way to turn,
1601 Has power more than any man may know.
1602 Mine is the drowning in sea below;
1603 Mine is the dungeon underneath the moat;
1604 Mine is the hanging and strangling by the throat;
1605 Rebellion, and the base crowd's murmuring,
1606 The groaning and the private poisoning,
1607 And vengeance and amercement—all are mine,
1608 While yet I dwell within the Lion's sign.
1609 Mine is the ruining of all high halls,
1610 And tumbling down of towers and of walls
1611 Upon the miner and the carpenter.
1612 I struck down Samson, that pillar shaker;
1613 And mine are all the maladies so cold,
1614 The treasons dark, the machinations old;
1615 My glance is father of all pestilence.
1616 Now weep no more. I'll see, with diligence,
1617 That Palamon, who is your own true knight,
1618 Shall have his lady, as you hold is right.
1619 Though Mars may help his man, yet none the less
1620 Between you two there must come sometime peace,
1621 And though you be not of one temperament,
1622 Causing each day such violent dissent,
1623 I am your grandsire and obey your will;
1624 Weep then no more, your pleasure I'll fulfill.
1625 Now will I cease to speak of gods above,
1626 Of Mars and Venus, goddess of all love,
1627 And tell you now, as plainly as I can,
1628 The great result, for which I first began.
1629 Explicit tercia pars.
1630 Sequitur pars quarta.
1631 Great was the fete in Athens on that day,
1632 And too, the merry season of the May
1633 Gave everyone such joy and such pleasance
1634 That all that Monday they'd but joust and dance,
1635 Or spend the time in Venus' high service.
1636 But for the reason that they must arise
1637 Betimes, to see the heralded great fight,
1638 All they retired to early rest that night.

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1639 And on the morrow, when that day did spring,
1640 Of horse and harness, noise and clattering,
1641 There was enough in hostelries about.
1642 And to the palace rode full many a rout
1643 Of lords, bestriding steeds and on palfreys.
1644 There could you see adjusting of harness,
1645 So curious and so rich, and wrought so well
1646 Of goldsmiths' work, embroidery, and of steel;
1647 The shields, the helmets bright, the gay trappings,
1648 The gold-hewn casques, the coats-of-arms, the rings,
1649 The lords in vestments rich, on their coursers,
1650 Knights with their retinues and also squires;
1651 The rivetting of spears, the helm-buckling,
1652 The strapping of the shields, and. thong-lacing-
1653 In their great need, not one of them was idle;
1654 The frothing steeds, champing the golden bridle,
1655 And the quick smiths, and armourers also,
1656 With file and hammer spurring to and fro;
1657 Yeoman, and peasants with short staves were out,
1658 Crowding as thick as they could move about;
1659 Pipes, trumpets, kettledrums, and clarions,
1660 That in the battle sound such grim summons;
1661 The palace full of people, up and down,
1662 Here three, there ten, debating the renown
1663 And questioning about these Theban knights,
1664 Some put it thus, some said, It's so by rights.
1665 Some held with him who had the great black beard,
1666 Some with the bald-heads, some with the thick haired;
1667 Some said, He looks grim, and he'll fight like hate;
1668 He has an axe of twenty pound in weight.
1669 And thus the hall was full of gossiping
1670 Long after the bright sun began to spring.
1671 The mighty Theseus, from sleep awakened
1672 By songs and all the noise that never slackened,
1673 Kept yet the chamber of this rich palace,
1674 Till the two Theban knights, with equal grace
1675 And honour, were ushered in with flourish fitting.
1676 Duke Theseus was at a window sitting,
1677 Arrayed as he were god upon a throne.
1678 Then pressed the people thitherward full soon,
1679 To see him and to do him reverence,
1680 Aye, and to hear commands of sapience.

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1681 A herald on a scaffold cried out Ho!
1682 Till all the people's noise was stilled; and so,
1683 When he observed that all were fallen still,
1684 He then proclaimed the mighty ruler's will.
1685 The duke our lord, full wise and full discreet,
1686 Holds that it were but wanton waste to meet
1687 And fight, these gentle folk, all in the guise
1688 Of mortal battle in this enterprise.
1689 Wherefore, in order that no man may die,
1690 He does his earlier purpose modify.
1691 No man, therefore, on pain of loss of life,
1692 Shall any arrow, pole-axe, or short knife
1693 Send into lists in any wise, or bring;
1694 Nor any shortened sword, for point-thrusting,
1695 Shall a man draw, or bear it by his side.
1696 Nor shall knight against opponent ride,
1697 Save one full course, with any sharp-ground spear;
1698 Unhorsed, a man may thrust with any gear.
1699 And he that's overcome, should this occur,
1700 Shall not be slain, but brought to barrier,
1701 Whereof there shall be one on either side;
1702 Let him be forced to go there and abide.
1703 And if by chance the leader there must go,
1704 Of either side, or slay his equal foe,
1705 No longer, then, shall tourneying endure.
1706 God speed you; go forth now, and lay on sure.
1707 With long sword and with maces fight your fill.
1708 Go now your ways; this is the lord duke's will.
1709 The voices of the people rent the skies,
1710 Such was the uproar of their merry cries:
1711 Now God save such a lord, who is so good
1712 He will not have destruction of men's blood!
1713 Up start the trumpets and make melody.
1714 And to the lists rode forth the company,
1715 In marshalled ranks, throughout the city large,
1716 All hung with cloth of gold, and not with serge.
1717 Full like a lord this noble duke did ride,
1718 With the two Theban knights on either side;
1719 And, following, rode the queen and Emily,
1720 And, after, came another company
1721 Of one and other, each in his degree.
1722 And thus they went throughout the whole city,

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1723 And to the lists they came, all in good time.
1724 The day was not yet fully come to prime
1725 When throned was Theseus full rich and high,
1726 And Queen Hippolyta and Emily,
1727 While other ladies sat in tiers about.
1728 Into the seats then pressed the lesser rout.
1729 And westward, through the gate of Mars, right hearty,
1730 Arcita and the hundred of his party
1731 With banner red is entering anon;
1732 And in that self-same moment, Palamon
1733 Is under Venus, eastward in that place,
1734 With banner white, and resolute of face.
1735 In all the world, searching it up and down,
1736 So equal were they all, from heel to crown,
1737 There were no two such bands in any way.
1738 For there was no man wise enough to say
1739 How either had of other advantage
1740 In high repute, or in estate, or age,
1741 So even were they chosen, as I guess.
1742 And in two goodly ranks, they did then dress.
1743 And when the name was called of every one,
1744 That cheating in their number might be none,
1745 Then were the gates closed, and the cry rang loud:
1746 Now do your devoir, all you young knights proud!
1747 The heralds cease their spurring up and down;
1748 Now ring the trumpets as the charge is blown;
1749 And there's no more to say, for east and west
1750 Two hundred spears are firmly laid in rest;
1751 And the sharp spurs are thrust, now, into side.
1752 Now see men who can joust and who can ride!
1753 Now shivered are the shafts on bucklers thick;
1754 One feels through very breast-bone the spear's prick;
1755 Lances are flung full twenty feet in height;
1756 Out flash the swords like silver burnished bright.
1757 Helmets are hewed, the lacings ripped and shred;
1758 Out bursts the blood, gushing in stern streams red.
1759 With mighty maces bones are crushed in joust.
1760 One through the thickest throng begins to thrust.
1761 There strong steeds stumble now, and down goes all.
1762 One rolls beneath their feet as rolls a ball.
1763 One flails about with club, being overthrown,
1764 Another, on a mailed horse, rides him down.

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1765 One through the body's hurt, and haled, for aid.
1766 Spite of his struggles, to the barricade,
1767 As compact was, and there he must abide;
1768 Another's captured by the other side.
1769 At times Duke Theseus orders them to rest,
1770 To eat a bite and drink what each likes best.
1771 And many times that day those Thebans two
1772 Met in the fight and wrought each other woe;
1773 Unhorsed each has the other on that day.
1774 No tigress in the vale of Galgophey,
1775 Whose little whelp is stolen in the light,
1776 Is cruel to the hunter as Arcite
1777 For jealousy is cruel to Palamon;
1778 Nor in Belmarie, when the hunt is on
1779 Is there a lion, wild for want of food,
1780 That of his prey desires so much the blood
1781 As Palamon the death of Arcite there.
1782 Their jealous blows fall on their helmets fair;
1783 Out leaps the blood and makes their two sides red.
1784 But sometime comes the end of every deed;
1785 And ere the sun had sunk to rest in gold,
1786 The mighty King Emetreus did hold
1787 This Palamon, as he fought with Arcite,
1788 And made his sword deep in the flesh to bite;
1789 And by the force of twenty men he's made,
1790 Unyielded, to withdraw to barricade.
1791 And, trying hard to rescue Palamon,
1792 The mighty King Lyburgus is borne down;
1793 And King Emetreus, for all his strength,
1794 Is hurled out of the saddle a sword's length,
1795 So hits out Palamon once more, or ere
1796 (But all for naught) he's brought to barrier.
1797 His hardy heart may now avail him naught;
1798 He must abide there now, being fairly caught
1799 By force of arms, as by provision known.
1800 Who sorrows now but woeful Palamon,
1801 Who may no more advance into the fight?
1802 And when Duke Theseus had seen this sight,
1803 Unto the warriors fighting, every one,
1804 He cried out: Hold! No more! For it is done!
1805 Now will I prove true judge, of no party.
1806 Theban Arcita shall have Emily,

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1807 Who, by his fortune, has her fairly won.
1808 And now a noise of people is begun
1809 For joy of this, so loud and shrill withal,
1810 It seems as if the very lists will fall.
1811 But now, what can fair Venus do above?
1812 What says she now? What does this queen of love
1813 But weep so fast, for thwarting of her will,
1814 Her tears upon the lists begin to spill.
1815 She said: Now am I shamed and over-flung.
1816 But Saturn said: My daughter, hold your tongue.
1817 Mars has his will, his knight has all his boon,
1818 And, by my head, you shall be eased, and soon.
1819 The trumpeters and other minstrelsy,
1820 The heralds that did loudly yell and cry,
1821 Were at their best for joy of Arcita.
1822 But hear me further while I tell you—ah!—
1823 The miracle that happened there anon.
1824 This fierce Arcita doffs his helmet soon,
1825 And mounted on a horse, to show his face,
1826 He spurs from end to end of that great place,
1827 Looking aloft to gaze on Emily;
1828 And she cast down on him a friendly eye
1829 (For women, generally speaking, go
1830 Wherever Fortune may her favor show)
1831 And she was fair to see, and held his heart.
1832 But from the ground infernal furies start,
1833 From Pluto sent, at instance of Saturn,
1834 Whereat his horse, for fear, began to turn
1835 And leap aside, all suddenly falling there;
1836 And Arcita before he could beware
1837 Was pitched upon the ground, upon his head,
1838 And lay there, moving not, as he were dead,
1839 His chest crushed in upon the saddle-bow.
1840 And black he lay as ever coal, or crow,
1841 So ran the surging blood into his face.
1842 Anon they carried him from out that place,
1843 With heavy hearts, to Theseus' palace.
1844 There was his harness cut away, each lace,
1845 And swiftly was he laid upon a bed,
1846 For he was yet alive and some words said,
1847 Crying and calling after Emily.
1848 Duke Theseus, with all his company,

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1849 Is come again to Athens, his city,
1850 With joyous heart and great festivity.
1851 And though sore grieved for this unhappy fall,
1852 He would not cast a blight upon them all.
1853 Men said, too, that Arcita should not die,
1854 But should be healed of all his injury.
1855 And of another thing they were right fain,
1856 Which was, that of them all no one was slain,
1857 Though each was sore, and hurt, and specially one
1858 Who'd got a lance-head thrust through his breastbone.
1859 For other bruises, wounds and broken arms,
1860 Some of them carried salves and some had charms;
1861 And medicines of many herbs, and sage
1862 They drank, to keep their limbs from hemorrhage.
1863 In all of which this duke, as he well can,
1864 Now comforts and now honours every man,
1865 And makes a revelry the livelong night
1866 For all these foreign lords, as was but right.
1867 Nor was there held any discomfiting,
1868 Save from the jousts and from the tourneying.
1869 For truly, there had been no cause for shame,
1870 Since being thrown is fortune of the game;
1871 Nor is it, to be led to barrier,
1872 Unyielded, and by twenty knights' power,
1873 One man alone, surrounded by the foe,
1874 Driven by arms, and dragged out, heel and toe,
1875 And with his courser driven forth with staves
1876 Of men on foot, yeomen and serving knaves-
1877 All this imputes to one no kind of vice,
1878 And no man may bring charge of cowardice.
1879 For which, anon, Duke Theseus bade cry,
1880 To still all rancour and all keen envy,
1881 The worth, as well of one side as the other,
1882 As equal both, and each the other's brother;
1883 And gave them gifts according to degree,
1884 And held a three days' feast, right royally;
1885 And then convoyed these kings upon their road
1886 For one full day, and to them honour showed.
1887 And home went every man on his right way.
1888 There was naught more but Farewell and Good-day.
1889 I'll say no more of war, but turn upon
1890 My tale of Arcita and Palamon.

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1891 Swells now Arcita's breast until the sore
1892 Increases near his heart yet more and more.
1893 The clotted blood, in spite of all leech-craft,
1894 Rots in his bulk, and there is must be left,
1895 Since no device of skillful blood-letting,
1896 Nor drink of herbs, can help him in this thing.
1897 The power expulsive, or virtue animal
1898 Called from its use the virtue natural,
1899 Could not the poison void, nor yet expel.
1900 The tubes of both his lungs began to swell,
1901 And every tissue in his breast, and down,
1902 Is foul with poison and all rotten grown.
1903 He gains in neither, in his strife to live,
1904 By vomiting or taking laxative;
1905 All is so broken in that part of him,
1906 Nature Tetains no vigour there, nor vim.
1907 And certainly, where Nature will not work,
1908 It's farewell physic, bear the man to kirk!
1909 The sum of all is, Arcita must die,
1910 And so he sends a word to Emily,
1911 And Palamon, who was his cousin dear;
1912 And then he said to them as you shall hear.
1913 Naught may the woeful spirit in my heart
1914 Declare one point of how my sorrows smart
1915 To you, my lady, whom I love the most;
1916 But I bequeath the service of my ghost
1917 To you above all others, this being sure
1918 Now that my life may here no more endure.
1919 Alas, the woe! Alas, the pain so strong
1920 That I for you have suffered, and so long!
1921 Alas for death! Alas, my Emily!
1922 Alas, the parting of our company!
1923 Alas, my heart's own queen! Alas, my wife!
1924 My soul's dear lady, ender of my life!
1925 What is this world? What asks a man to have?
1926 Now with his love, now in the cold dark grave
1927 Alone, with never any company.
1928 Farewell, my sweet foe! O my Emily!
1929 Oh, take me in your gentle arms, I pray,
1930 For love of God, and hear what I will say.
1931 I have here, with my cousin Palamon,
1932 Had strife and rancour many a day that's gone,

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1933 For love of you and for my jealousy.
1934 May Jove so surely guide my soul for me,
1935 To speak about a lover properly,
1936 With all the circumstances, faithfully-
1937 That is to say, truth, honour, and knighthood,
1938 Wisdom, humility and kinship good,
1939 And generous soul and all the lover's art-
1940 So now may Jove have in my soul his part
1941 As in this world, right now, I know of none
1942 So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
1943 Who serves you and will do so all his life.
1944 And if you ever should become a wife,
1945 Forget not Palamon, the noble man.
1946 And with that word his speech to fail began,
1947 For from his feet up to his breast had come
1948 The cold of death, making his body numb.
1949 And furthermore, from his two arms the strength
1950 Was gone out, now, and he was lost, at length.
1951 Only the intellect, and nothing more.
1952 Which dwelt within his heart so sick and sore,
1953 Began to fail now, when the heart felt death,
1954 And his eyes darkened, and he failed of breath.
1955 But on his lady turned he still his eye,
1956 And his last word was, Mercy, Emily!
1957 His spirit changed its house and went away.
1958 As I was never there, I cannot say
1959 Where; so I stop, not being a soothsayer;
1960 Of souls here naught shall I enregister;
1961 Nor do I wish their notions, now, to tell
1962 Who write of them, though they say where they dwell.
1963 Arcita's cold; Mars guides his soul on high;
1964 Now will I speak forthwith of Emily.
1965 Shrieked Emily and howled now Palamon,
1966 Till Theseus his sister took, anon,
1967 And bore her, swooning, from the corpse away.
1968 How shall it help, to dwell the livelong day
1969 In telling how she wept both night and morrow?
1970 For in like cases women have such sorrow,
1971 When their good husband from their side must go,
1972 And, for the greater part, they take on so,
1973 Or else they fall into such malady
1974 That, at the last, and certainly, they die.

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1975 Infinite were the sorrows and the tears
1976 Of all old folk and folk of tender years
1977 Throughout the town, at death of this Theban;
1978 For him there wept the child and wept the man;
1979 So great a weeping was not, 'tis certain,
1980 When Hector was brought back, but newly slain,
1981 To Troy. Alas, the sorrow that was there!
1982 Tearing of cheeks and rending out of hair.
1983 Oh why will you be dead, these women cry,
1984 Who had of gold enough, and Emily?
1985 No man might comfort then Duke Theseus,
1986 Excepting his old father, AEgeus,
1987 Who knew this world's mutations, and men's own.
1988 Since he had seen them changing up and down,
1989 Joy after woe, and woe from happiness:
1990 He showed them, by example, the process.
1991 Just as there never died a man, quoth he,
1992 But he had lived on earth in some degree,
1993 Just so there never lived a man, he said,
1994 In all this world, but must be sometime dead.
1995 This world is but a thoroughfare of woe,
1996 And we are pilgrims passing to and fro;
1997 Death is the end of every worldly sore.
1998 And after this, he told them yet much more
1999 To that effect, all wisely to exhort
2000 The people that they should find some comfort.
2001 Duke Theseus now considered and with care
2002 What place of burial he should prepare
2003 For good Arcita, as it best might be,
2004 And one most worthy of his high degree.
2005 And at the last concluded, hereupon,
2006 That where at first Arcita and Palamon
2007 Had fought for love, with no man else between,
2008 There, in that very grove, so sweet and green,
2009 Where he mused on his amorous desires
2010 Complaining of love's hot and flaming fires,
2011 He'd make a pyre and have the funeral
2012 Accomplished there, and worthily in all.
2013 And so he gave command to hack and hew
2014 The ancient oaks, and lay them straight and true
2015 In split lengths that would kindle well and burn.
2016 His officers, with sure swift feet, they turn

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2017 And ride away to do his whole intent.
2018 And after this Duke Theseus straightway sent
2019 For a great bier, and had it all o'er-spread
2020 With cloth of gold, the richest that he had.
2021 Arcita clad he, too, in cloth of gold;
2022 White gloves were on his hands where they did fold;
2023 Upon his head a crown of laurel green,
2024 And near his hand a sword both bright and keen.
2025 Then, having bared the dead face on the bier,
2026 The duke so wept, 'twas pitiful to hear.
2027 And, so that folk might see him, one and all,
2028 When it was day he brought them to the hall,
2029 Which echoed of their wailing cries anon.
2030 Then came this woeful Theban, Plamon,
2031 With fluttery beard and matted, ash-strewn hair,
2032 All in black clothes wet with his tears; and there,
2033 Surpassing all in weeping, Emily,
2034 The most affected of the company.
2035 And so that every several rite should be
2036 Noble and rich, and suiting his degree,
2037 Duke Theseus commanded that they bring
2038 Three horses, mailed in steel all glittering,
2039 And covered with Arcita's armour bright.
2040 Upon these stallions, which were large and white,
2041 There rode three men, whereof one bore the shield.
2042 And one the spear he'd known so well to wield;
2043 The third man bore his Turkish bow, nor less
2044 Of burnished gold the quiver than harness;
2045 And forth they slowly rode, with mournful cheer,
2046 Toward that grove, as you shall further hear.
2047 The noblest Greeks did gladly volunteer
2048 To bear upon their shoulders that great bier,
2049 With measured pace and eyes gone red and wet,
2050 Through all the city, by the wide main street,
2051 Which was all spread with black, and, wondrous high,
2052 Covered with this same cloth were houses nigh.
2053 Upon the right hand went old AEgeus,
2054 And on the other side Duke Theseus,
2055 With vessels in their hands, of gold right fine,
2056 All filled with honey, milk, and blood, and wine;
2057 And Palamon with a great company;
2058 And after that came woeful Emily,

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2059 With fire in hands, as use was, to ignite
2060 The sacrifice and set the pyre alight.
2061 Great labour and full great apparelling
2062 Went to the service and the fire-making,
2063 For to the skies that green pyre reached its top,
2064 And twenty fathoms did the arms out-crop,
2065 That is to say, the branches went so wide.
2066 Full many a load of straw they did provide.
2067 But how the fire, was made to climb so high;
2068 Or what names all the different trees went by.
2069 As oak, fir, birch, asp, alder, poplar, holm,
2070 Willow, plane, ash, box, chestnut, linden, elm,
2071 Laurel, thorn, maple, beech, yew, dogwood tree,
2072 Or how they were felled, sha'n't be told by me.
2073 Nor how the wood-gods scampered up and down,
2074 Driven from homes that they had called their own,
2075 Wherein they'd lived so long at ease, in peace,
2076 The nymphs, the fauns, the hamadryades;
2077 Nor how the beasts, for fear, and the birds, all
2078 Fled, when that ancient wood began to fall;
2079 Nor how aghast the ground was in the light,
2080 Not being used to seeing the sun so bright;
2081 Nor how the fire was started first with straw,
2082 And then with dry wood, riven thrice by saw,
2083 And then with green wood and with spicery,
2084 And then with cloth of gold and jewellery,
2085 And garlands hanging with full many a flower,
2086 And myrrh, and incense, sweet as rose in bower;
2087 Nor how Arcita lies among all this,
2088 Nor what vast wealth about his body is;
2089 Nor how this Emily, as was their way,
2090 Lighted the sacred funeral fire, that day,
2091 Nor how she swooned when men built up the fire,
2092 Nor what she said, nor what was her desire;
2093 No, nor what gems men on the fire then cast,
2094 When the white flame went high and burned so fast;
2095 Nor how one cast his shield, and one his spear,
2096 And some their vestments, on that burning bier,
2097 With cups of wine, and cups of milk, and blood,
2098 Into that flame, which burned as wild-fire would;
2099 Nor how the Greeks, in one huge wailing rout,
2100 Rode slowly three times all the fire about,

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2101 Upon the left hand, with a loud shouting,
2102 And three times more, with weapons clattering,
2103 While thrice the women there raised up a cry;
2104 Nor how was homeward led sad Emily;
2105 Nor how Arcita burned to ashes cold;
2106 Nor aught of how the lichwake they did hold
2107 All that same night, nor how the Greeks did play
2108 The Funeral Games, I will not say,
2109 Who, naked, wrestled best, with oil anointed,
2110 Nor who best bore himself in deeds appointed.
2111 I will not even tell how they were gone
2112 Home, into Athens, when the play was done;
2113 But briefly to the point, now, will I wend
2114 And make of this, my lengthy tale, an end.
2115 With passing in their length of certain years,
2116 All put by was the mourning and the tears
2117 Of Greeks, as by one general assent;
2118 And then it seems there was a parliament
2119 At Athens, upon certain points in case;
2120 Among the which points spoken of there was
2121 The ratifying of alliances
2122 That should hold Thebes from all defiances.
2123 Whereat this noble Theseus, anon,
2124 Invited there the gentle Palamon,
2125 Not telling him what was the cause, and why;
2126 But in his mourning clothes, and sorrowfully,
2127 He came upon that bidding, so say I.
2128 And then Duke Theseus sent for Emily.
2129 When they were seated and was hushed the place,
2130 And Theseus had mused a little space,
2131 Ere any word came from his full wise breast,
2132 His two eyes fixed on whoso pleased him best,
2133 Then with a sad face sighed he deep and still,
2134 And after that began to speak his will.
2135 The Primal Mover and the Cause above,
2136 When first He forged the goodly chain of love,
2137 Great the effect, and high was His intent;
2138 Well knew He why, and what thereof He meant;
2139 For with that goodly chain of love He bound
2140 The fire, the air, the water, and dry ground
2141 In certain bounds, the which they might not flee;
2142 That same First Cause and Mover, then quoth he,

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2143 Has stablished in this base world, up and down,
2144 A certain length of days to call their own
2145 For all that are engendered in this place,
2146 Beyond the which not one day may they pace,
2147 Though yet all may that certain time abridge;
2148 Authority there needs none, I allege,
2149 For it is well proved by experience,
2150 Save that I please to clarify my sense.
2151 Then may men by this order well discern
2152 This Mover to be stable and eterne.
2153 Well may man know, unless he be a fool,
2154 That every part derives but from the whole.
2155 For Nature has not taken his being
2156 From any part and portion of a thing,
2157 But from a substance perfect, stable aye,
2158 And so continuing till changed away.
2159 And therefore, of His Wisdom's Providence,
2160 Has He so well established ordinance
2161 That species of all things and all progressions,
2162 If they'd endure, it must be by successions,
2163 Not being themselves eternal, 'tis no lie:
2164 This may you understand and see by eye.
2165 Lo now, the oak, that has long nourishing
2166 Even from the time that it begins to spring,
2167 And has so long a life, as we may see,
2168 Yet at the last all wasted is the tree.
2169 Consider, too, how even the hard stone
2170 Under our feet we tread each day upon
2171 Yet wastes it, as it lies beside the way.
2172 And the broad river will be dry some day.
2173 And great towns wane; we see them vanishing.
2174 Thus may we see the end to everything.
2175 Of man and woman just the same is true:
2176 Needs must, in either season of the two,
2177 That is to say, in youth or else in age,
2178 All men perish, the king as well as page;
2179 Some in their bed, and some in the deep sea,
2180 And some in the wide field—as it may be;
2181 There's naught will help; all go the same way. Aye,
2182 Then may I say that everything must die.
2183 Who causes this but Jupiter the King?
2184 He is the Prince and Cause of everything,

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2185 Converting all back to that primal well
2186 From which it was derived, 'tis sooth to tell.
2187 And against this, for every thing alive,
2188 Of any state, avalls it not to strive.
2189 Then is it wisdom, as it seems to me,
2190 To make a virtue of necessity,
2191 And calmly take what we may not eschew,
2192 And specially that which to all is due.
2193 Whoso would balk at aught, he does folly,
2194 And thus rebels against His potency.
2195 And certainly a man has most honour
2196 In dying in his excellence and flower,
2197 When he is certain of his high good name;
2198 For then he gives to friend, and self, no shame.
2199 And gladder ought a friend be of his death
2200 When, in much honour, he yields up his breath,
2201 Than when his name's grown feeble with old age;
2202 For all forgotten, then, is his courage.
2203 Hence it is best for all of noble name
2204 To die when at the summit of their fame.
2205 The contrary of this is wilfulness.
2206 Why do we grumble? Why have heaviness
2207 That good Arcita, chivalry's fair flower,
2208 Is gone, with honour, in his best-lived hour.
2209 Out of the filthy prison of this life?
2210 Why grumble here his cousin and his wife
2211 About his welfare, who loved them so well?
2212 Can he thank them? Nay, God knows, not! Nor tell
2213 How they his soul and their own selves offend,
2214 Though yet they may not their desires amend.
2215 What may I prove by this long argument
2216 Save that we all turn to merriment,
2217 After our grief, and give Jove thanks for grace.
2218 And so, before we go from out this place,
2219 I counsel that we make, of sorrows two
2220 One perfect joy, lasting for aye, for you;
2221 And look you now, where most woe is herein,
2222 There will we first amend it and begin.
2223 Sister, quoth he, you have my full consent,
2224 With the advice of this my Parliament,
2225 That gentle Palamon, your own true knight,
2226 Who serves you well with will and heart and might,

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2227 And so has ever, since you knew him first-
2228 That you shall, of your grace, allay his thirst
2229 By taking him for husband and for lord:
2230 Lend me your hand, for this is our accord.
2231 Let now your woman's pity make him glad.
2232 For he is a king's brother's son, by gad;
2233 And though he were a poor knight bachelor,
2234 Since he has served you for so many a year,
2235 And borne for you so great adversity,
2236 This ought to weigh with you, it seems to me,
2237 For mercy ought to dominate mere right.
2238 Then said he thus to Palamon the knight:
2239 I think there needs but little sermoning
2240 To make you give consent, now, to this thing.
2241 Come near, and take your lady by the hand.
2242 Between them, then, was tied that nuptial band,
2243 Which is called matrimony or marriage,
2244 By all the council and the baronage.
2245 And thus, in all bliss and with melody,
2246 Has Palamon now wedded Emily.
2247 And God Who all this universe has wrought,
2248 Send him His love, who has it dearly bought.
2249 For now has Palamon, in all things, wealth,
2250 Living in bliss, in riches, and in health;
2251 And Emily loved him so tenderly,
2252 And he served her so well and faithfully,
2253 That never word once marred their happiness,
2254 No jealousy, nor other such distress.
2255 Thus ends now Palamon and Emily;
2256 And may God save all this fair company! Amen.