

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*

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“The Knight’s Tale”

‘Iamque domos patrias Scythice post aspera gentis prelia laurigero’ etc.

‘And now after fierce battles with the Scythian people (Theseus) nears home in his laurel-crowned (chariot) etc.’

(Statius: *Thebaid* XII, 519-520)

Here begins the Knight’s Tale.

Once on a time, as old stories tell us,
There was a Duke whose name was Theseus.
Of Athens he was lord and governor,
And in his time so great a conqueror
Mightier was there none under the sun.
Full many a rich land had he won,
What with his wisdom and his chivalry.
He conquered all the Amazon country,
That long ago was known as Scythia,
And wedded its queen Hippolyta,
And brought her home to his own country
With much glory and great festivity,
And also her young sister Emily.
And so with victory and melody
I’ll let this noble Duke to Athens ride
And all his host in arms him beside.
And were it not indeed too long to hear,
I would have told you fully of the manner
In which the Amazon kingdom was seized
By Theseus and by his chivalry,
And of the great battle on occasion
Twixt the Athenian and the Amazon,
And how he besieged Hippolyta,
The brave and lovely queen of Scythia,
And of the feast they had at their wedding
And of the tempest at their home-coming;
But all of that I must omit for now.
I have, God knows, a large field to plough,
Weak oxen pull my blade, the field is rough.
The remnant of my tale is long enough.
Likewise I’ll not delay us on the route;
Let every fellow tell his tale about,
And let us see who shall that supper win!

– Where I left off, I will again begin.
 This Duke of whom I now make mention,
 When he was almost come into the town,
 In all his splendour and his great pride,
 Became aware, as he glanced aside,
 That there kneeled in the highway
 Two by two, a company of ladies,
 One behind the other, in clothes black.
 But such a wail, such cries they made, alack,
 That in this world there is no creature living
 That ever heard another such lamenting.
 And this crying was not heard to cease
 Till they the reins of his bridle seized.
 ‘What folk are you that at my home-coming
 So disturb my feast with your crying?
 Quoth Theseus. ‘Do you so envy my
 Honour that thus you complain and cry?
 Who has maltreated you or offended?
 And tell me if what’s done may be amended,
 And why you are clothed thus all in black.’
 The eldest lady of them all spoke back,
 Swooning, so deathly-white she did appear,
 That it was pitiful to see and hear,
 And said: ‘Lord to whom Fortune doth give
 Victory, you who as a conqueror do live,
 We do not mourn your glory and honour,
 But we beseech your mercy and succour.
 Have mercy on our woe and our distress!
 Some drop of pity, in your graciousness,
 Upon us wretched women let it fall.
 For sure, my lord, there is none of us all
 That has not been a duchess or a queen.
 Now we are captives, as can well be seen,
 Thanks be to Fortune and her fickle wheel,
 That no estate lets full assurance feel.
 Indeed, lord, to attend your presence we
 In this divine temple of Clemency
 Have been waiting all this long fortnight.
 Now help us lord, since you possess the might!
 I, wretched Queen, that weep and wail thus
 Was once the wife of King Capaneus
 Who died at Thebes – accursed be the day! –
 And all of us in all our sad array
 Who are making this fond lamentation,
 We all lost our husbands in that town,
 While the siege thereabout it lay.
 And yet now old Creon, sad to say,
 That is now the lord of Thebes the city,
 Filled full with anger and iniquity,

He out of spite, and out of tyranny,
To do the dead bodies villainy
Of all our lords that have been slain,
Has all the bodies in a heap lain,
And will not give his order and assent
For them to be buried or be burnt,
But lets the dogs eat them, out of spite.’
And with that word, without more respite,
They fell prone and cried piteously:
Have on us wretched women some mercy,
And let our sorrow penetrate your heart!’

The noble Duke with pity gave a start,
Leapt from his horse as he heard her speak.
He thought that his own heart would break
At seeing such piteous victims of fate,
That had once been of such great estate.
And raised them in his arms, and then
Comforted them with generous intent,
And swore his oath, as being a true knight,
He would so vigorously apply his might
To the tyrant Creon, vengeance on him wreak,
That all the people of Greece would speak
Of how Theseus their Creon served,
As one whose death was richly deserved.
And at once, with little more delay,
He rode forth, his banner did display
Towards Thebes, and all his host beside.
No nearer Athens would he go or ride,
Nor rest at ease scarcely half a day,
But onward on his way that night he lay,
And sent, at once, the Queen, Hippolyta,
And Emily, her beautiful young sister,
To the town of Athens there to dwell,
And forth he rode; there is no more to tell.

The image of red Mars, with spear and shield
So shone on his white banners, in the field,
That all the meadows glittered up and down,
And with his banner, his pennon of renown,
Of gold full rich, on which there was a beast,
The Minotaur, whom he had slain in Crete.
So rode the Duke, so rode this conqueror,
And in his host of chivalry the flower,
Till he came to Thebes, there did alight,
Fair in a field, where he thought to fight.

But to speak briefly now of this thing,
With Creon, he that was of Thebes king,
He fought, and slew him like a manly knight
In open battle, and put the folk to flight.
And by assault he won the city after,

And razed the walls, every spar and rafter;
And to the ladies he restored again
The bones of their husbands that were slain,
To perform their obsequies, in usual guise.
Though it were all too long to devise
The great clamour and the sad lamenting
That the ladies made at the burning
Of the bodies, and the great honour
That Theseus the noble conqueror
Did the ladies, when their way they went;
For to speak briefly, such is my intent.

When that this worthy Duke, this Theseus,
Had slain Creon and conquered Thebes thus,
Still in the field he took all night his rest,
And with the country did as pleased him best.

To ransack the heaped bodies of the dead,
To strip them of armour, and clothes indeed,
The pillagers worked busily, with care,
After the battle and the victory there.
And it so befell that in the heap they found,
Pierced with many a grievous bloody wound,
Two young knights, lying side by side,
Both in like armour, richly wrought beside;
Of whom, Arcita was the name of one,
That of the other knight was Palamon.
Not fully quick nor fully dead they were,
But by their coats of arms and their gear
The heralds knew them, amongst them all,
And that they were of the blood royal
Of Thebes, and of two sisters born.
Out of the heap the pillagers have them borne
And gently carry them to Theseus' tent
And he at once has them swiftly sent
To Athens, to be confined in prison
Perpetually; allowing them no ransom.

And when the noble Duke had so done,
He took his horse and home he rode anon,
Crowned with laurel as a conqueror;
And there he lived in joy and in honour
All his life; what more need I say now?
And in a tower, in anguish and in woe,
Dwelled this Arcita and this Palamon,
For ever; no gold could buy their freedom.

So passed year on year, and day on day,
Until one morning in the month of May
Young Emily, she fairer to be seen
Than is the lily on its stalk of green,
And fresher than the May with flowers new –
For with the rose's colour strove her hue;

I know not which was finer of the two –
Ere it was day, as she was wont to do,
She has risen, and dressed at first light,
For May will have no slothfulness a-night,
The season pricks at every gentle heart,
And makes it from its sleep begin to start,
And says: 'Arise, perform your observance!'
And this made Emily rouse her remembrance
Of the honour due to May, and so to rise.
She was clothed fresh to watching eyes;
Her yellow hair was braided in a tress
Behind her back, a yard long, I guess.
And in the garden, as the sun up-rose,
She walked up and down, and as she chose
Gathered flowers, mingled, white and red,
To make a woven garland for her head,
And sang like an angel, as she went along.

The great tower, that was so thick and strong,
That of the castle was the chief dungeon,
In which the knights were imprisoned,
Of which I told, and will tell you all,
Was closely bonded to the garden wall
Near which this Emily did her walking.
Bright was the sun and clear that morning,
And Palamon, that woeful prisoner,
As was his wont, by leave of his gaoler,
Had risen and he roamed a room on high,
Where all the noble city met his eye,
And so the garden, full of branches green,
Where this fresh Emily the sweetly seen
Was at play, and she roamed up and down.
This sorrowful prisoner, this Palamon,
Pacing the chamber, roaming to and fro
And to himself complaining of his woe;
That he was born, he often cried 'alas!'
And so it befell, by chance or happenstance,
That through a window, thick with many a bar
Of iron large and square as any spar,
He cast his eye upon Emilia,
And thereupon he blanched, and cried 'Ah!'
As though he had been stung to the heart.
And with that cry Arcita gave a start
And said: 'My cousin, what aileth thee,
Who are so pale and death-like to see?
Why did you cry out? Who gives offence?
For God's love, show every patience
With our prison, not otherwise can it be!
Fortune has sent us this adversity.
Some weak aspect or disposition

Of Saturn, in some configuration,
Has yielded this, however we have sworn;
So stood the heavens when that we were born.
We must endure; that is the short and plain.'

And Palamon answered, and spoke again:
'Cousin, indeed, you are in confusion,
You are deceived in your imagination.
This gaol was not the reason for my cry,
But I was wounded now, through the eye
To the heart, it will be the death of me.
The beauty of that lady that I see
Yonder in the garden roaming to and fro
Is the cause of all my crying and my woe.
I know not if she be woman or a goddess,
But Venus she is in truth, I'd guess.'
And with that on his knees down he fell
And said: Venus, if it be your will
To appear before me in this figure
In that garden, a sorrowful wretched creature,
Out of this prison help us to escape.
And if my destiny is already shaped
By eternal word to die in prison,
On our lineage have some compassion,
That is brought so low by tyranny.'
And at that word Arcita chanced to see
This lady as she roamed to and fro,
And at the sight her beauty hurt him so,
That if Palamon had been wounded sore,
Arcita hurts as much as him or more.
And with a sigh he says piteously:
'The fresh beauty slays me suddenly
Of her that roams about in yonder place,
And but I have her mercy and her grace,
That I may see her, at the least, some way,
I am but dead; there is no more to say.'

Now Palamon when he heard these words,
Looked at him angrily and so answered:
'Say you this in earnest, or in play?'
'Nay,' quoth Arcita, 'in earnest, by my faith!
God help me so, I have no wish to play.'
Palamon began to knit his brow, and say:
'There accrues to you,' he quoth, 'no honour
In being false, or proving now a traitor
To me, who am your cousin and your brother
Deeply sworn, and each bound to the other,
That never, lest we both may die in pain,
Never, until death shall part us twain,
Shall either in love be hindrance to the other,
Nor in any other way, my dear brother,

Rather you should truly further me
In every case, as I shall further thee.
This was your oath and mine also, I say,
I know in truth you dare not it gainsay.
So are you my confidant, beyond doubt.
And now you will falsely be about
Loving my lady, whom I love and serve
And ever shall, as long as heart deserve.
Now indeed, false Arcita, you shall not so!
I loved her first, and told you of my woe
As my confidant, and my brother sworn
To further me, as I have said before.
By which you are bound as a true knight
To help me, if it lies within your might,
Or else you will prove false, I dare maintain!

Then Arcita proudly answered him again:
'You shall,' he quoth, 'rather be false than I.
And you are false, I tell you that outright;
For par amour I loved her first, not you.
What did you say? You scarcely knew
Whether she was a woman or a goddess?
Your is affection born of holiness,
And mine is love as for the creature,
And that is why I told you at a venture,
Being my cousin and my brother sworn.
Suppose it so that you loved her before:
Do you not know the old clerks' saw,
'Who shall bind a lover with the law?'
Love is a greater law, by head and hand,
Than is imposed by any earthly man.
And therefore social laws and such decrees
Are broken each day for love, by all degrees.
A man must love, despite himself, give heed;
He may not flee it though he die, indeed,
Be she a maid, a widow, or a wife.
And then you are little likely, in this life,
To stand in grace with her; no more shall I.
You know too well, yourself, and no lie,
That you and I are condemned to prison
Perpetually; and granted no ransom
We strive as the hounds did for the bone;
They fought all day and neither did it own.
There came a kite, while they were waxing wrath,
And carried off the bone between them both.
And therefore, at the king's court, my brother,
Each man for himself; law there's none other.
Love if you wish; I love, and ever shall.
And truly believe, brother, this is all:
Here in this prison must we endure;

And each of us our own chance assure.'

Great was the strife and long between the two,
If I had leisure to tell it all to you.

But to the point: it happened on a day,
To explain it as briefly as I may,
A worthy Duke, named Pirithous,
Who had been friends with Duke Theseus
Since the days when they were children,
Had come to Athens, visiting his friend,
And to amuse himself as he would do;
For in this world he loved no man so,
And he was loved as tenderly again.
So well they loved, as the old books say,
That when the one was dead, true to tell,
His friend went and sought him down in Hell.
But that is not the story I write here.

Duke Pirithous truly loved Arcita,
And knew him well at Thebes many a year,
And finally, at the request and prayer
Of Pirithous, without any ransom,
Duke Theseus let him out of prison,
To go free, wherever he might choose,
In such a guise as I shall tell to you.

This was the pledge, let me plainly write,
Between Theseus and Arcita, this I cite,
That if so be it Arcita was found,
Ever in life, by day or night, on ground
That in any way belonged to Theseus,
And he were caught, it was agreed thus:
That with a sword he should lose his head.
There was no other remedy be it said,
But to take his leave, and homeward step.
Let him beware; his pledge is now his neck.

How great a sorrow Arcita reveals!
The stroke of death in his heart he feels.
He weeps, he wails, he cries piteously;
He waits to slay himself secretly.
He says: 'Alas the day that I was born!
Now is my prison worse than before;
Now am I doomed eternally to dwell
Not in Purgatory, but in Hell.
Alas that ever I knew Pirithous!
Else I had dwelt with Theseus
Fettered in his prison, evermore so;
Then had I been in bliss, and not in woe.
Only the sight of she whom I serve,
Though that I never her grace may deserve,
Would have sufficed right enough for me.
'O dear cousin Palamon,' quoth he,

'Yours is the victory in this venture!
 Full blissfully in prison you endure –
 In prison? No, for sure, in Paradise.
 Well for you has Fortune cast the dice,
 You have sight of her, and I the absence.
 For it is possible, since you have her present,
 And are a knight, and one noble and able,
 That by chance, since Fortune's changeable,
 You may sometime your desire attain.
 But I that am exiled, destitute again
 Of all grace, and in such great despair
 That neither earth nor water, fire nor air,
 Nor creature that of them compounded is,
 May help me or comfort me in this,
 Now I must die in sadness and distress.
 Farewell my life, my joy, and my gladness!
 Alas, why do folk in general moan
 About God's providence or Fortune,
 That often yields to them in many a guise
 Much better fates than they themselves devise?
 Some man is so desirous of riches,
 They cause his murder, or a great sickness.
 Another man that would his freedom gain,
 Is freed, then by his own household slain.
 Infinite harm is hidden in this matter;
 We know not what it is we pray for here.
 We fare as one that drunk is as a mouse:
 A drunken man knows he has a house,
 But knows not the right way thither,
 And to a drunken man it's slide and slither.
 And that is how for sure in this world we
 Go searching hard to find felicity,
 But we go wrong so often, tell no lie.
 Thus may we all say, and so will I,
 That had gone and formed the grand opinion
 That if I might escape from prison,
 Then I would be in joy and perfect health,
 Where instead I am exiled from my wealth,
 Since that I may not see you, Emily.
 I am but dead; there is no remedy.'
 Now on the other hand Palamon,
 When he knew that Arcita had gone,
 Such sorrow made that the great tower
 Echoed to his yowling and his clamour.
 The very fetters on his shins yet
 Were with his bitter salt tears wet.
 'Alas,' quoth he, 'Arcita, cousin mine,
 Of all our strife, God knows, comes meagre wine!
 You walk now in Thebes at your large,

And with my woe you are little charged.
You may, possessing wisdom and manhood,
Assemble all the folk among our kindred,
And start so fierce a war in this city
That by some venture, or some treaty,
You may have her to be your lady wife
For whose sake I must needs lose my life.
For, as regards the possibility,
Since you are now at large, of prison free,
And are a lord, great is your advantage,
More than mine who starve here in a cage.
For I must weep and wail while I live,
With all the woe that prison life may give,
And with the pain that love grants also,
That doubles my torment and my woe.'

With that he felt the fire of envy start
Within his breast, and seize him by the heart,
So furiously he like was to behold
As box-wood, pale, or ashes dead and cold.
Then said he: 'O cruel goddess, that controls,
This world with your eternal words enfolds,
Engraving in your tables of adamant
The eternal destinies that you will grant,
What more is mankind to you of old
Than a flock of sheep cowering in a fold?
For man is slain as easily as any beast,
And dwells alike in prison, and is seized,
And suffers sickness, great adversity,
And often he is guiltless, indeed.
What justice is there in your prescience
That torments guiltless innocence?
And yet all my penance is increased:
For man is bound to do as he agreed,
For God's sake, in curbing of his will,
Whereas a beast may all its lust fulfil.
And when a beast is dead it feels no pain,
But man after death must weep again,
Though in this world he had care and woe;
Without a doubt, things may happen so.
The answer to this I leave to the divines;
But well I know that in this world man pines.
Alas, I see a serpent or a thief,
That to many a man has done mischief,
Go where he wishes, and at will return,
But I must be imprisoned through Saturn,
And Juno, jealous and furious, who would
Destroy well nigh all the Theban blood,
And Thebes itself, its ruined walls spread wide,
While Venus slays me from the other side,

For jealousy and fear of Arcita.'

Now will I turn from Palamon and here
Leave him in his prison now to dwell,
And of Arcita on the instant tell.

The summer passes, and the nights long
Increase in double wise the pains strong,
Both of the lover and the prisoner.
I know not which of them is the sadder:
For briefly for to tell, this Palamon
Is damned perpetually to prison,
In chains and fetters to his final breath;
Arcita is banished, on pain of death,
Exiled for evermore from that country,
And nevermore his lady shall he see.

You lovers, now I ask of you this question:
Who suffers worst, Arcita or Palamon?
The one may see his lady day by day,
But in prison he must dwell always;
The other where he wishes ride or go,
But he shall see his lady nevermore.
Judge as it pleases you, who know and can,
For I will finish that which I began.

(Part Two)

When that Arcita at Thebes arrived was,
All the day he languished, cried 'alas!'
For he shall see his lady nevermore.
And briefly to conclude all his woe,
So much sorrow had never a creature
That is or shall be while the world endures.
Of sleep, of meat, of drink, he is bereft,
So that he waxes dry as a spear-shaft;
His eyes hollow and grisly to behold,
His hue sallow and pale as ashes cold.
And solitary he was and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making his moan.
And if he heard a song or instrument,
Then he would weep, to infinite extent.
So feeble were his spirits and so low,
And changed so that no man might know
His speech, nor his voice, that they heard.
And in his manner for all the world he fared
As not only seized with lovers' malady
Of heroes, rather with the lunacy
Engendered by a humour melancholic
Up top, in his cerebrum fantastic.
And briefly, was so turned upside-down
In body and disposition, foot to crown,

Of this woeful lover, Sir Arcita
 Why write all day about his discomposure?
 When he had endured two years or so
 Of this cruel torment, this pain and woe,
 At Thebes, in his own country, as I said,
 Upon a night, asleep, and in his bed,
 He thought he saw the winged god Mercury
 Standing before him, bidding him be merry.
 His wand of sleep he bore in hand upright;
 A cap he wore upon his hair bright.
 Arrayed was this god, remarked Arcita,
 As he was when Argus was the sleeper;
 And he said thus: 'To Athens shall you wend,
 There to your woe there is ordained an end.'
 And these words woke Arcita with a start.
 'Now, truly, however much it pains my heart,'
 Quoth he, 'to Athens right now will I fare.
 Not even for dread of death will I despair
 But see my lady that I love and serve;
 In her presence from death I shall not swerve.'
 And with that word he seized a great mirror,
 And saw in it that changed was all his colour,
 And saw his visage all of another kind.
 And right away it came into his mind
 That, since his face was so disfigured
 From the sickness that he had endured,
 He might well if he kept a humble tone
 Live in Athens evermore unknown,
 And see his lady well nigh every day.
 And so at once he changed his array,
 And clad himself as does a labourer;
 And all alone, save only for a squire
 That knew his secrets and his cause,
 And was disguised as humbly as he was,
 To Athens is he gone the quickest way.
 And to the court he went upon a day,
 And at the gate offered his services,
 To drudge and draw, whatever men thought best.
 And briefly of this matter to explain,
 He started work for a chamberlain,
 The which was dwelling there with Emily,
 For he was wise and swiftly could espy
 The worth of every servant caught his eye.
 Arcita could hew wood well and water bear,
 For young and strong, appropriately grown,
 He was tall too, and mighty in the bone
 Fit for whatever any could devise.
 A year or two he laboured in this wise,
 Page of the chamber of Emily the bright,

And Philostrate he named himself aright.
And half so well-beloved a man as he
There never was at court, of his degree.
He was so noble in his low condition
That throughout the court ran his renown.
They said that it would be a charity
If Theseus were to heighten his degree,
And some nobler service then devise
Where he might his virtue exercise.
And thus in a while his name had sprung
To every lip, for deeds and courteous tongue,
So that Theseus advanced him higher
And of his chamber made him a squire,
And gave him gold to maintain his degree.
And men too brought him from his own country
Year by year, and secretly, his rent.
And secretly and honestly was it spent,
That no man wondered at what he had.
And three years in this wise this life he led,
And bore him so in peace and in war,
There was no man Theseus liked more.
And in this bliss I now will leave Arcita
And speak I will of Palamon the lover.

In that dark and horribly strong prison,
This seven-year has lived our Palamon,
Pining away in sorrow and distress.
Who feels a double grief and heaviness
But Palamon whom love tortures so
That he is almost maddened by his woe?
And moreover he is a prisoner
Perpetually, and not just for a year.
Who could rhyme in English properly
His martyrdom? Truly, it is not !!
Therefore I pass on lightly as I may.

It fell that in the seventh year, of May
The third night (as the old books say
That tell this story in a fuller way),
Whether by chance or by destiny –
As when a thing happens it must be –
That soon after midnight, Palamon
Helped by a friend, broke from the prison,
And fled the city as fast as he could go.
For he had given his gaoler drink, so
Of a honeyed cup of a certain wine,
With narcotics and Theban opium fine,
That all night, though men did him shake,
The gaoler slept; and no man could him wake.
Thus Palamon flees as fast as ever he may.
The night was short and it was near to day,

So of necessity he must him hide.
And into a grove there close beside
With fearful foot stalked our Palamon.
For, briefly, it was his opinion
That in the grove he might hide all day,
And then in the night be on his way
Towards Thebes, his friends there to pray
To arm themselves and Theseus to assail.
And, briefly, either he would lose his life,
Or win Emily to be his wife.
This is the gist and his intention plain.

Now will I turn to Arcita again,
Who little knew how soon he must prepare
For fate, till Fortune caught him in her snare.

The busy lark, the messenger of day,
Salutes, with song, the morning grey,
And fiery Phoebus rises up so bright
That all the Orient laughs with light,
And with his rays falling on the trees
Dries the silver droplets on the leaves.
And Arcita, that in the court so royal
Of Theseus is a squire, the principal,
Has risen, and regards the cheerful day,
And to offer his observances to May,
Remembering the object of his desire,
He on a courser, quivering like fire,
Rides out into the fields in play,
Our of the court, a mile or two away;
And towards the grove of which I told
By chance his intention did unfold
To make a garland such as one weaves
Either of hawthorn or of woodbine leaves.
And loud he sung in the sunlit scene:
'May, with all your flowers, so green,
Welcome to you, fairest freshest May,
In hopes that get some greenery I may.'
And from his courser, with a cheerful heart,
Into the grove full hastily, apart,
He entered, and there roamed up and down,
Where by that happenstance our Palamon
Was hiding in the bushes, that none might see,
For sore afraid of meeting death was he.
He had no way to know it was Arcita;
God knows he would have thought it any other!
But so is it said, and has been many a year,
'The fields have eyes, and the woods have ears.'
A man should practise equanimity,
For in unexpected places men may meet.
Little, Arcita knew of his friend in hiding

So near to him he could hear him singing,
For among the bushes he sat, perfectly still.

When of roaming Arcita has had his fill,
And has sung all his roundel gaily,
Into a reverie he falls suddenly,
As these lovers do, with their strange desires –
Now in the tree-tops, now among the briars,
Now up, now down, like a bucket in a well;
Just like a Friday, if truth be to tell,
Shining one moment, and then raining fast.
So is changeable Venus overcast
In her folks' hearts; and just as her day
Is changeable, so then is her array.
Seldom are Friday and other days alike.

When Arcita had sung, he began to sigh,
And sat himself down as if forlorn.
'Alas', quoth he, 'the day that I was born!
How long, Juno, in your cruelty
Will you make war against Thebes' city?
Alas, all things are brought to confusion
The royal blood of Cadmus and Amphion –
Of Cadmus, who was indeed the first man
To build at Thebes, and that town began,
And of that city was first crowned king.
Of his lineage am I, and his offspring,
By true line, and of the blood royal.
And now I am so slavish and in thrall
That he that is my mortal enemy
I serve him as his squire, all humbly.
Yet Juno does me a greater shame,
I dare not acknowledge my own name;
And where I once was Arcita by right,
Now I am Philostrate, not worth a mite.
Alas, you cruel Mars, alas Juno!
Thus has your anger shorn our lineage so,
Save only me and wretched Palamon,
Whom Theseus martyrs in his prison.
After all this, to slay me utterly,
Love has his fiery dart so burningly
Thrust through my true sorrowful heart,
That my death was shaped from the start.
Emily, you have slain me with your eye!
You are the reason that I have to die.
On all of the rest of my other cares
I'd set not the value of a heap of tares,
If I could only please you by some chance.'
And with these words he fell down in a trance
For a length of time, then gave a start.
Now Palamon, who thought that through his heart

He felt a cold sword suddenly glide,
Shook with anger; no longer would he hide.
And when he had heard Arcita's tale,
As if he were mad, face deathly pale,
He started up out of the bushy thicket,
And cried: 'Arcita, traitor false and wicked!
Now you are trapped, who love my lady so,
For whom I suffer all this pain and woe,
Who are of my blood, my friend or so you swore,
As I have told you many times before,
And here you have tricked Duke Theseus,
Falsely concealed your true name thus!
You will be killed, or else kill me;
You shall not have my lady Emily,
I alone will love her, no other so.
For I am Palamon, your, mortal foe,
And though I have no weapon in this place,
But out of prison am escaped by grace,
I doubt not you will be slain by me,
Or else forgo the love of Emily.
Choose as you will, you shall not depart!'

Then Arcita with a scornful heart,
When he knew him, and his tale had heard,
As fierce as a lion pulled out his sword
And said thus: 'By God that sits above,
Were it not you are sick and mad with love,
And have no weapon too in this place,
You would never out of this grove pace
Without you meeting death at my hand.
For I defy the pledge, and the bond
Which you say I have made with thee.
Fool that you are, bethink you, love is free,
And I will love her, despite all your might!
But inasmuch as you are a noble knight,
And willing to lay claim to her in battle,
Hear my word: tomorrow I will not fail,
For, without telling any man this night,
Here then I will be found, a true knight,
And I will bring armour enough for thee,
Choose you the best, and leave the worst for me.
And meat and drink this night will bring,
Enough for you, and clothes for bedding.
And if so happen that you my lady win
And slay me in this wood that I am in,
Then is the lady yours, if so it be.'

Then Palamon answered: 'I agree.'
And thus they parted till the morrow,
For each had pledged his word, I vow.

O Cupid, lacking in all charity!

O power that will share no sovereignty!
Truly is it said that love and lordship
Will not willingly brook fellowship;
Well known to Arcita and Palemon.
Arcita rode away towards the town;
And on the morrow, in the dawning light,
Two suits of armour readied for the fight,
Both sufficient and fitting to maintain
The battle in the field between the twain.
And on his horse, alone, as he was born,
He bore the weight of armour in the dawn.
And in the grove, at time and place as set,
This Arcita and Palamon were met.

A change had overtaken each man's face,
Just like a hunter in the realms of Thrace,
Who stands out in the open with a spear,
When on a hunt for lion or for bear,
And hears the beast come rushing through the trees,
Breaking all the branches and the leaves,
Thinks: 'Here comes my mortal enemy!
Without fail he must die, or death for me;
For either I must slay him in this gap,
Or he slays me if I should meet mishap.'
So both their complexions changed in hue.

As each of them his bold opponent knew,
There was no 'good day', no other greeting,
But straight away without word or rehearsing,
Each of them began to arm the other,
In as friendly a way as if it were his brother;
And after that with spears sharp and strong
They thrust at each other, wondrous long.
You would have thought that Palamon
In battle was indeed a raging lion,
A cruel tiger Arcita in the fight.
Like two wild boars that fiercely smite,
Frothing white with foam in angry mood;
Up to the ankles they fought in blood.
And in this guise I leaving them fighting well,
And once again of Theseus I will tell.

Destiny, that Minister-General,
Who executes on earth, over all,
The Providence that God saw long before,
Has such power that though all men swore
The contrary of a thing by yea or nay,
Yet there will come to pass upon a day
What will not happen in a thousand years.
For certainly our appetites down here,
Be they for war, or peace, hate or love,
All are ruled by the vision that's above.

This will explain why mighty Theseus,
Of hunting is so deeply desirous
And to chase the great stag in May,
That about his bed there dawns no day
When he's not clad and ready for the ride,
With huntsman, horn, and hounds at his side.
For in his hunting he takes such delight
That it is all his joy and appetite
To be himself the great stag's bane;
For after Mars he serves Diana's name.

Clear was the day, as I have told ere this,
And Theseus, full of joy and bliss
With his Hippolyta, the fair queen,
And Emily, clothed all in green,
Off to the hunt went riding royally.

And to the grove that stood close nearby,
In which there was a stag, so it was told,
Duke Theseus the nearest way he rode,
And to the clearing made his way outright,
For thither the stag would take his flight,
And over a brook, and so forth on his way.

The Duke will try a course or two today,
With hounds singled out at his command.
And when the Duke reached the open land,
Under the sun he gazed, and at once
Was aware of Arcita and Palamon,
Fighting like a pair of bulls, they go.
The bright swords flickered to and fro,
So hideously, that the slightest stroke
Seemed powerful enough to fell an oak.
But who they were, he could not know.

The Duke his courser with his spurs smote,
And in an instant was between the two,
And pulled out his sword, crying: 'Ho!
No more, punishment be on your heads!
By mighty Mars, he shall soon be dead
That smites one stroke that I shall see.
But tell me what kind of men you be,
Who are so bold to combat here
Without a judge or other officer,
As if you were in the lists, royally.'

The Palamon answered him speedily
And said, 'Sire, what more need words do?
Death we have deserved, both we two.
Two woeful wretches we, two captives,
That are burdened by our lives;
And as you are our rightful lord and judge,
Then show us neither mercy nor refuge;
But slay me first, for holy charity!

Then slay my fellow too, as well as me –
Or slay him first; though you do not know
This is Arcita, this your mortal foe,
Banished from your land, be it on his head,
For which alone he deserves to be dead.
For this is he who came to your gate,
And said that he was named Philostrate.
So has he deceived you many a year,
Yet you have made him your chief squire.
And this is he that loves Emily.
For since my death-day is come to me,
I make fully my confession
That I am that woeful Palamon
That broke from your prison wickedly.
I am your mortal foe, and it is I
Who love with passion Emily the bright,
That I would die this instant in her sight.
Therefore I ask for judgement and to die.
But slay my fellow in the same wise,
For we have both deserved to be slain.’

The noble Duke then answered them again
And said: ‘This is a brief conclusion!
Your own mouth, by your own confession,
Has condemned you, so I shall record.
There is no need for torture with the cord!
You shall die, by mighty Mars the red!’

At once the Queen, for very womanliness,
Began to weep, and so did Emily,
And all the ladies in their company.
Great pity was it, as they thought them all,
That ever such a mishap should befall,
For they were noblemen, of great estate,
And over love alone was this debate;
And saw their bloody wounds wide and sore,
And all cried out, both less and more,
‘Have mercy, lord, upon us women all!’
And on their bare knees they did fall,
And would have kissed his feet where he stood;
Till finally their weeping calmed his mood,
For pity is quick to rise in noble heart.
And though he shook with anger at the start,
He had considered swiftly, in a pause,
Their mutual trespass, and its cause,
And though his anger saw them both accused,
Yet with his reason he had both excused,
As thus: he well knew that every man
Will help himself to love if he can,
And also deliver himself from prison;
And then his heart filled with compassion

For women, for they weep ever as one:
And in his noble heart he thought anon,
And soft to himself he said: 'Fie
Upon a lord that sees his mercy die,
But is a lion, both in word and deed,
To him that repents and is in dread
As much as to a proud and haughty man,
Who will maintain what he at first began.
That lord has little true discretion
That twixt cases makes no distinction,
But weighs pride and humility as one.'
And soon as, thus, his anger had gone,
He began to look up, his eyes alight,
And spoke these words, as from a height:
'The God of Love, ah, Benedicite!
How mighty and how great a lord, I say!
Against his might there stand no obstacles.
He may be called a god by his miracles,
For he can make, as seems good in his eyes,
Of every heart whatever he might devise.
Lo, here is this Arcita, this Palamon,
That had their freedom from my prison,
And might have lived in Thebes royally,
And know I am their mortal enemy,
And that their death lies in my power too,
And yet has Love, despite their eyes two,
Brought them both hither for to die!
Now see, is that not surely folly's height?
Who is not a fool when he's in love?
Behold, for God's sake who sits above,
See how they bleed! Be they not well arrayed?
Thus has their lord, the God of Love, repaid
With such fees, their service that he buys!
And yet they proclaim themselves so wise
They that serve Love, whatever may befall.
But here is yet the best game of all,
That she for whom they play this lunacy,
Has no more cause to thank them than me!
She knows no more of all this hot affair,
By God, than does a cuckoo or a hare!
But all must be attempted, hot or cold;
A man must play the fool, young or old.
I know it of myself, in years now gone,
For in my time a servant I made one.
And therefore, since I know love's pain,
And how fierce the heart it can constrain,
As one who has been in the net, alas,
I forgive you wholly this trespass.
At the Queen's request who kneels here,

And for Emily too, my sister dear.
 And you at once shall both to me swear
 Never to harm my country, nor to war
 Against me, whether by night or day,
 But being friends to me, in all you may,
 I forgive you this trespass that befell.'

They swore as he requested fair and well,
 And him for lordship and for mercy prayed;
 And he granted them grace, and thus he said:
 'In terms of royal lineages and riches,
 Though she were a queen or a princess,
 Each of the two of you is worthy, doubtless,
 To wed in due time; yet nevertheless –
 I speak as for my sister Emily,
 The reason for your strife and jealousy –
 You know yourself she cannot wed both
 At once, though you fight forever so.
 That one of you, regardless of joy or grief,
 Must go play tunes upon an ivy-leaf.
 That is to say, she cannot now have both,
 However jealous you be, or wrath.
 And therefore I put it to you simply,
 That each of you shall seek his destiny
 As it is written, and listen in what wise;
 Lo here, your end, I shall now devise.
 My will is this, to bring all to conclusion,
 Without any kind of protestation –
 If you agree, accept it for the best:
 Each of you go where fate suggests,
 Freely without ransom or danger,
 And this day fifty weeks, no later,
 Each of you shall bring a hundred knights,
 Armed for the lists, prepared to fight,
 Ready to lay claim to her in battle.
 And this I promise you, without fail,
 Upon my truth, and as I am a knight,
 That whichever of you both has might –
 That is to say whether him or thou –
 May with his hundred, that I spoke of now,
 Slay his foe, or from the lists him drive,
 Then shall he have Emily to wife
 To whom Fortune gave so fair a grace.
 The tourney I will hold in this place;
 And God have mercy on my soul too
 If I am not a fair judge and true!
 No other agreement shall we make then
 But that one of you be dead or taken.
 And if you think this all well said,
 Be you content, and bow your head.

This is your end and your conclusion.’
Who looks cheerfully now but Palamon?
Who leaps up for joy but Arcita?
Who could tell or who could write here,
The joy that is revealed in that place,
Where Theseus has shown so fair a grace?
But down on their knees fell all in sight,
And thanked him with all their heart and might,
And especially the Thebans time on time.
And so with good hope, and hearts blithe,
They take their leave and homeward they ride
To Thebes with its walls old and wide.

(Part Three)

I know men would deem it negligence
If I forgot to tell of the expense
To Theseus, who goes so busily
To construct the lists royally,
That such a noble theatre it was,
I dare well say, as this world has.
The circuit a mile was about,
Walled with stone and ditched without.
Its shape was round, in manner of a compass,
Tier on tier, the height of sixty paces,
So that when a man was in his seat
The fellow sat above him still could see.
Eastward there stood a gate of marble white;
Westward another opposite upright.
And briefly to conclude, such a place
Was never on earth in so small a space.
For in the land was never a craftsman
No geometer, or arithmetician,
No painter or carver of images,
That Theseus gave not meat and wages
To create his theatre and devise,
And to observe his rite and sacrifice,
Eastward he had upon the gate above,
To worship Venus, Goddess of love,
Made an altar and an oratory;
And on the westward gate in memory
Of Mars, had made such another,
That cost a heap of gold, moreover.
And northward in a turret on the wall,
Of alabaster white and red coral
An oratory, rich indeed to see,
In worship of Diana of Chastity,
Theseus had wrought, in noble wise,
But yet have I forgotten to describe

The noble carving and the portraitures,
The shape, the countenance, and the figures
That adorned these oratories three.

First in the Temple of Venus, you might see,
Wrought on the wall, pitiful to behold,
The broken sleep, and sighs so cold,
The sacred tears, and the lamenting,
The fiery strokes of fond desiring
That Love's servants in this life endure;
The oaths that their covenants assure,
Pleasure and Hope, Desire, Foolhardiness,
Beauty and Youth, Riches and Joyfulness,
Charms and Force, Deceit and Flattery,
Extravagance, Intrigue, and Jealousy,
That wore of yellow gold a garland,
And a cuckoo sitting on their hand,
Feasts, and instruments, choirs and dance,
Lust and adornment, all the circumstance
Of Love, that I relate and shall, all
By order were portrayed on the wall,
And more of them than I can mention.
For in truth, all the Mount of Cithaeron,
Where Venus has her principal dwelling,
Was shown on the wall in the painting,
With all her garden and its joyfulness.
Nor was forgot the gateman, Idleness,
Nor Narcissus the fair, of times long gone,
Nor yet the folly of King Solomon,
Nor yet the mighty strength of Hercules,
Those enchantments of Medea, and Circe's,
Nor Turnus with courage fierce and hardy,
Rich Croesus, wretched in slavery.
Thus may you see no wisdom or riches,
Beauty or skill, strength or boldness,
May with Venus contend successfully,
For, as she wishes, so the world rules she.
Lo, all these folk into her net so passed,
That they for woe often cried 'alas!'
Suffice it these examples, one or two,
Though I could cite another thousand too.

The statue of Venus glorious to see,
Was naked, floating in the open sea,
And from the navel down all covered was
With waves green and bright as any glass.
A cithern in her right hand held she,
And on her head, full seemly for to see,
A rose garland, fresh and sweet smelling;
Above her head her doves flickering.
Before her stood her son Cupid too,

Upon his shoulders wings had he two,
And blind he was, as is often seen;
A bow he held and arrows bright and keen.

Why should I not as well tell you all
The portraiture appearing on the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the red?
All painted was the wall in length and breadth,
Like the recesses of that grisly place
They call the great temple of Mars in Thrace,
In that cold and frosty region
Where Mars has his sovereign mansion.

First on the wall was painted a forest,
In which there dwells nor man nor beast,
With knotty gnarled barren trees old,
Jagged stumps, and hideous to behold,
Through which there ran a roaring and a sigh
As if bough-breaking winds were passing by.
And down beneath a hilly grassed descent,
There stood the temple of Mars omnipotent
In war, wrought all of burnished steel, the gate
Was ghastly for to see, and long and straight.
And from it came a blast of wind, a quake
That made all the portal seem to shake.
The northern light in at the doors shone,
For window in the walls was there none
Through which men might any light discern.
The door was all of adamant eterne,
Riveted crosswise and along
With iron tough, and to make it strong,
Every pillar, to sustain the shrine
Thick as a barrel, of iron bright and fine.

There saw I first the dark imagining
Of felony, and all its deep conspiring;
Cruel Anger, glowing fierce and red,
The pick-purse, and after him pale Dread;
The smiler with the knife under his cloak;
The cattle-shed burning in black smoke;
Treason, and the murdering in bed;
Open war with wounds that sadly bled;
Contest with bloody knife and sharp Menace;
All filled with creaking was that sorry place.
The slayer of himself yet saw I there
His heart's blood had bathed all his hair;
The nail in the forehead in the night;
The cold death, with mouth gaping wide.
In the midst of the temple sat Mischance,
With comfortless and sorry countenance.

Yet saw I Madness cackling in his rage,
Armed Clamour, Outcry, and fierce Outrage.

The corpse in the bushes, with cut throat;
A thousand slain, and not by plague I note;
The tyrant with his prey by force bereft;
The town destroyed – there was nothing left.
Yet saw I burnt the dancing ships, and there
The hunter choked to death by wild bears;
The sow gnawing the child in the cradle;
The cook all scalded spite of his long ladle.
Naught was forgot, by influence of Mars,
The carter over-ridden by his cart;
Who beneath the wheel lay dying,
There were also of Mars' devising
The barber, the butcher, the smith who will
Forge you a sharp sword on his anvil.
And all above, depicted on a tower,
Saw I Conquest, seated in great honour,
With the sharp sword above his head
Hanging by a fine and subtle thread.
Depicted was the slaughter of Julius,
Of Nero and Marcus Antonius;
Though in those days they were still unborn,
Yet was their death depicted long before,
By menacing Mars in stars yet to configure.
So was it shown there in that portraiture,
As is revealed in the heavens above,
Who shall be slain, or else die of love.
Let one example do from stories old;
I cannot reckon all that might be told.

The statue of Mars upon a chariot stood,
Armed and grim, as he were mad enough,
And over his head there shone two figures
Of Geomancy, named in sundry scriptures
The one Puella, the other Rubeus.
This god of weapons was arrayed thus:
A wolf there stood before him at his feet,
With red eyes, and of a man he ate.
With subtle pencil was drawn all the story
In reverence to Mars and his glory.

Now to the temple of Diana chaste
As swiftly as I can I will make haste,
To give you all of the description.
Painted were the walls, up and down,
With hunting and shame-faced chastity.
There saw I how sad Callisto came to be,
When Diana was aggrieved with her,
Transformed from a woman to a bear,
And after turned into the polar stars.
Thus was it painted; I can tell no more.
Her son's in the stars too, as men may see.

There I saw Daphne turned into a tree;
I mean not the goddess, Diane, to name,
But Peneus' daughter, Daphne, the same.
There I saw Actaeon a stag created,
In punishment for seeing Diane naked.
I saw how his hounds Actaeon caught,
And devoured him when they knew him not.
Yet painted further on, a little more,
How Atalanta hunted the wild boar,
And Meleager, and many a man also,
For which Diana wrought him care and woe.
There saw I many a wondrous story,
Which I care not to recall to memory.

This goddess high on a stag did sit,
With slender hounds all about her feet,
And underneath her feet there was a moon;
Waxing it was and would be waning soon.
In yellow-green her statue clothed was,
With bow in hand, and arrows in a case,
Her eyes, as she rode, she cast down,
To where Pluto has his dark region.

A woman in travail lay on the ground;
And because her child was not yet born,
Full pitifully on Lucina she did call,
Crying: 'Help, for you can, best of all!'
He could paint to the life, that it wrought,
With many a florin he the colours bought.

Now the lists were made, and Theseus
Who at his great cost had created thus
The temples and the theatre, as I tell,
When it was done, liked it wondrous well.
But Theseus I will speak of later,
And pass to Palamon and Arcita.

The day approached for their returning,
When each a hundred knights should bring,
To fight their claim in battle, as I told,
And to Athens, their promise to uphold,
Each has brought with him a hundred knights,
Well armed for war and to maintain the right.
And assuredly it seemed to many a man
That never, since the world itself began,
In respect of fighting hand to hand,
As wide as God had made the sea and land,
Never so few made such true company.
For every fellow that loved chivalry,
And wished for more than a passing name,
Prayed he also might be of the game,
And fortunate for him that chosen was.
For if today there befell such a case,

You well know that every splendid knight
That loves his paramour, and is fit to fight,
Were it in England or indeed elsewhere,
He would be glad and eager to be there.
To fight for a lady, Benedicite!

That's a fine sight to see, on any day.

And so indeed it fared with Palamon.
With him went there knights many a one:
Some chose to be armed in coats of mail,
Worn with a breastplate and a surcoat frail,
While some their suits of plate armour filled,
And some chose bucklers or a Prussian shield,
Some wanted armour on their legs as well
Wielding an axe, and some a mace of steel.
There is no fashion new that is not old!
Armed they were indeed as I have told,
Every man after his own opinion.

There might you have seen with Palamon,
Lycurgus himself, the great King of Thrace.
Black was his beard and manly was his face.
The circles of the eyes set in his head,
Glowed between a yellow and a red,
And like a griffon he gazed round about,
With shaggy hair on his bushy brows.
His limbs were vast, his muscles hard and strong,
His shoulders broad, his arms round and long.
And as the custom was in his country
High on a chariot of gold stood he,
With four white bulls in the traces.
Instead of coat-armour over his harness,
Yellow with nails and bright as any gold,
He had a bear-skin, old and black as coal.
His long hair was combed behind his back;
As any raven's feather it shone black.
A wreath of gold, thick, and of great weight,
Upon his head sat, full of stones bright,
Of fine rubies and of diamonds.
About his chariot ran snow-white hounds,
Twenty or more, as big as any steer,
To chase after lions or the deer,
And followed him with muzzles tightly bound,
Collared in gold, with leash-rings around.
A hundred lords had he in his rout,
Fully armed, with hearts both stern and stout.

With Arcita, in story as men find,
The great Emetrius, the King of Inde,
On a bay steed, with trappings of steel,
And cloth of golden weave, haunch to heel,
Came Mars, like the god of weaponry

His surcoat was of cloth of Tartary,
Adorned with pearls, white, round and bold.
His saddle of pure freshly-beaten gold,
A short mantle on his shoulder hanging,
Dense with rubies red, like fire sparkling.
His crisp hair in clustered ringlets done,
And that was yellow, glittering like the sun.
Aquiline nose, his ochreous eyes glowing,
His lips were full, his colour was sanguine.
Some scattered freckles on his face, too
Betwixt black and yellow in their hue,
And like a lion he cast his gaze around.
Of five and twenty years his age, I vow.
His beard had made a good beginning;
His voice was like a trumpet thundering.
Upon his head he wore, of laurel green,
A garland fresh and pleasant to be seen.
Upon his hand he bore for his delight
An eagle tame, as any lily white.
A hundred lords he had with him there,
Armoured, save their heads, in all their gear,
Full richly in every manner of things.
For be assured, that dukes, earls, kings,
Were gathered in that noble company,
For love and in support of chivalry.
About this king there ran on every side
Many a lion and leopard in their pride.
And in this wise these lords, all and one,
Are on this Sunday to the city come,
At nine about, and in the town alight,
This Theseus, this Duke, this noble knight,
When he had led them into his city,
And housed them, in accord with their degree,
Feasted them, and applied so much labour
To entertaining them, doing them honour,
That men still think and say that no man's wit
However great could ever have bettered it.
The minstrelsy, the service at the feast,
The great gifts to the highest and least,
The rich adornment of Theseus' palace
Nor who sat first or last on the dais,
Which ladies fairest, or best at dancing,
Or which of them could best chant and sing,
Nor which could speak most feelingly of love,
What hawks were sitting on the perch above,
What hounds were lying on the ground –
Of all of this I make no mention now,
But all that came of it; that thinks me best.
Now here's the point, hearken if you wish.

That Sunday night ere day began to spring,
When Palamon the lark heard sing –
Though it was not yet day an hour or two
Yet sung the lark – and Palamon then flew,
With holy heart and with noble courage,
Rising at once to make his pilgrimage
To blissful Citherea the benign;
Venus I mean, honourable and divine.
And in her hour he walked out apace,
Towards the lists where her temple was,
And down he knelt, and humble did appear,
With sore heart, he spoke as you shall hear:
‘Fairest of Fair, O my lady Venus,
Daughter to Jove and spouse to Vulcanus,
Who gladden Cithaeron’s summit,
By that love you showed Adonis,
Have pity on my bitter tears’ smart,
And take my humble prayer to heart.
Alas, I neither language have to tell
Of the effects, nor torments of my hell,
My heart may my hurt not display;
I am so confused what can I say
But ‘Mercy, lady bright, who know indeed
My thoughts, and can see the hurt I feel!’
Consider all this, and pity me the more,
As surely as I shall, for evermore,
With all my power, your true servant be,
And evermore make war on chastity.’
This I vow, so long as you help me!
I wield not my weapons boastfully,
Nor do I ask tomorrow’s victory,
Nor for renown, nor for the vain glory
Of skill in arms proclaimed up and down;
But I would have complete possession
Of Emily, and die in your service.
Choose you the manner how, in what guise,
I care not, whether it better be,
To have victory of them or they of me,
If I but have my lady in my arms.
For though it be that Mars is god of arms,
Your power is so great in heaven above,
That if you wish it, I shall have my love.
At your temple I will worship evermore so,
And on your altars, wherever I ride or go,
I will make sacrifice, light fires at their feet.
And if you will not so, my lady sweet,
Then pray I that tomorrow with a spear
This Arcita may through my heart pierce.
Then care I not, when I have lost my life,

That Arcita may win her as his wife.
 This is the aim and end of my prayer:
 Give me my love, you blessed lady dear!
 When Palamon had made his orison,
 His sacrifice he made, and that anon,
 Devoutly and with a full observance,
 Though I tell not now all the circumstance.
 Yet at the last the statue of Venus shook
 And gave a sign, from which event he took
 Heart that his prayer accepted was that day.
 For though the sign revealed some delay,
 Yet well he knew that granted was his boon,
 And with glad heart he went him home full soon.
 In the third hour after Palamon
 To Venus' temple had upped and gone,
 Up rose the sun, and up rose Emily,
 Off to the temple of Diana she.
 The maidens that she thither with her led,
 Were all prepared for fires to be fed,
 Took incense, hangings, and the rest, all
 That to sacrificial rites may fall,
 Horns full of mead, as was the custom wise;
 They lacked naught to make their sacrifice,
 The temple incense-filled, the hangings fair.
 Then Emily with heart tender as air,
 Her body washed with water from the well,
 How she performed her rite I dare not tell,
 Unless it were but to speak in general –
 Yet it would be a pleasure to hear all!
 If a man means well who then should care;
 Rather it is good to wander everywhere.
 Her bright hair was combed, un-plaited all;
 Of Turkey-oak a green coronal
 Upon her head was placed, fair and fit.
 Two fires on the altar-hearth she set,
 And made her rite, as men are told
 By Statius, of Thebes, and books of old.
 When kindled was the fire, with piteous face,
 To Diana, as you may hear, she spake:
 'O chaste goddess of the woods green,
 By whom heaven and sea and earth are seen,
 Queen of the realm of Pluto dark below,
 Goddess of maidens, who my heart does know
 And has many a year, all that I desire,
 Keep me from your vengeance and your ire,
 That Actaeon paid for cruelly!
 Chaste goddess, well you know of me
 That I wish to live a maid all my life,
 Never will I be lover fond, or wife.

I am, you know, still of your company,
A maid, and love hunting and archery,
And to wander in the woodland wild,
Not to be made a wife and be with child.
Nor would I know the company of man.
Now help me lady, since you may and can,
By those three forms of you that in you be,
And Palamon, who has such love of me,
And Arcita too, who loves me sore.
This grace I pray you, and no more:
Send love and peace betwixt those two,
And turn their hearts away from me so,
That all their hot love and their desire,
And all their busy torment and their fire
Be quenched, or turned towards another face.
And if so be you will not grant me grace,
Or if my destiny be shaped, and you,
Rule I must yet have one of the two,
Then send me him that most desires me.
Behold, goddess of sacred chastity,
The bitter tears that down my cheeks fall!
Since you are maid and leader of us all,
My maidenhood protect and well conserve
And while I live, as maid I will you serve.'

The fires burned upon the altar clear
While Emily was thus in prayer,
But suddenly she saw a strange sight.
For all at once one of the fires died,
And quickened again, and then anon
The other fire quenched and was gone.
And as it died it made a whistling
As green brands do in their burning,
And at the brand's end out ran anon
As it were bloody drops, many a one.
Seeing this Emily was so terrified
That she, well nigh mad, began to cry;
For she knew not what it signified,
But only out of fear had she cried,
And wept so it was pitiful to hear.

And at this point Diana did appear,
With bow in hand, dressed as a huntress,
And said: 'Daughter, put away your sadness!
Among the gods on high it is affirmed,
And by eternal writ it is confirmed,
You shall be wedded to one of those
That suffer for you such pain and woe;
But unto which of them I may not tell.
I can remain no longer, fare you well.
The fires that on my altar dance

Shall declare to you, ere you go hence,
The outcome of your love, in this case.'
And with these words, the arrows in their case
The goddess wore rattled, quivering,
And off she went, swiftly vanishing,
At which our Emily astounded was,
And said: 'What means all this, alas?
I place myself under your protection
Diana, and I yield to your direction.'
And home she went anon the nearest way.
This the conclusion: and no more to say.

The next hour of Mars following this,
Arcita to the temple paid a visit,
To fiery Mars, to make his sacrifice,
With all the rites meet to pagan eyes.
With devout heart and true devotion,
To Mars himself he made this orison:
'O mighty god, that in the regions cold
Of Thrace honoured are, and lordship hold,
And have in every kingdom, every land
Of weapons all control in your hand,
And as you wish their fates devise –
Accept from me this pious sacrifice.
If it be victory my youth deserve,
And if my strength be worthy to serve
Your godhead, and I be one of thine,
Then I pray you, pity this pain of mine,
For this suffering and this hot fire
In which you once burned with desire,
When you once enjoyed the beauty
Of fair young Venus fresh and free,
And took her in your arms at will –
Though once upon a time it brought you ill,
When Vulcan caught you in his snare
And found you lying with his wife there,
By all the sorrow that was in your heart,
Have pity now on my pain and smart.
I am young, untutored as you know
And I am afflicted more, I vow,
Than ever was any living creature;
For she who makes me all this woe endure
Cares not whether I sink or swim.
And well I know, before her love I win,
I must gain her by strength in this place;
And well I know, without help or grace
Of yours my strength nothing will avail.
Then help me, lord, let my arm not fail,
Because of the fire that once burnt thee,
As fiercely as this fire that now burns me,

And let me tomorrow win the victory.
Mine let the effort be, and yours the glory!
Your sovereign temple will I honour
Above all places, and evermore labour
In your might arts, and at your pleasure.
And in your temple I will hang my banner,
And all the emblems of my company;
And till the day I die, continually
Eternal fire before you I will mind.
And to this also my word I bind:
My beard, my hair that hangs all a-down
That never yet the touch has known
Of razor or of shears, to you I'll give,
And be your true servant while I live.
Now, lord, have pity on my sorrows sore;
Give me the victory! I ask no more!

The prayer ceased of Arcita the strong.
The rings on the temple door ere long,
And then the doors, rattled too at last,
At all of which Arcita stood aghast.
The fires burned on the altar bright,
So that all the temple they did light.
A sweet smell rose from the ground,
And Arcita quickly raised his hand,
And into the fire more incense cast,
With other rites too; and at the last
The statue of Mars' mail-coat did ring,
And with that sound he heard a murmuring
Faint and low, that whispered: 'Victory!'
– For which he gave Mars honour and glory.
And so with joy, and hoping to do well,
Arcita's to his lodgings, as I tell,
As glad as is a bird for the bright sun.

Immediately such strife was begun
Over this granting of his prayer, above,
Between Venus, the Goddess of Love,
And Mars so sternly armed for a fight,
That Jove was busied setting it aright,
Till pale Saturn their father cold,
Who knew so many trials of old,
Searched the past, applied his artistry
So that he swiftly pleased either party;
As it is said 'Age has the advantage.'
In age is wisdom and ancient usage;
Men may the old out-run but not out-wit.
Saturn soon, to quell the strife a bit,
Although it is against his nature mind,
For all this strife sought remedy to find.

'My dear daughter Venus,' quoth Saturn,

'My orbit, that makes so wide a turn,
Has more power than is known to man.
Mine is the drenching in the sea so wan;
Mine is the dark cell deep as is the moat;
Mine the strangling, hanging by the throat,
The murmurings, and the serfs rebelling,
The muttering, and secret poisoning.
I do vengeance and exact correction
While I am in the sign of the Lion.
Mine is the ruin of the lofty hall,
The falling of the tower and the wall
Upon the miner or the carpenter.
I slew Samson when he shook the pillar,
And mine are those maladies cold,
Dark treason and plotting from of old;
My aspect is the father of pestilence.
Now weep no more; by my diligence
This Palamon, who is your own knight,
Shall have his lady as you swore he might.
Though Mars shall help his knight, nonetheless
Betwixt you two there must in time be peace,
Though you be not of one disposition;
Which causes every day this division.
I am your grandfather, ready to do your will.
Weep now no more; I will your wish fulfil.'
Now will I cease to speak of gods above,
Of Mars, and Venus, Goddess of Love,
And tell you as plainly as I can
The grand result, for which I first began.

(Part Four)

Great was the feast in Athens on that day;
And then the lively season of May
Put everyone in such good countenance
They all that Monday joust and dance,
Spend it in service fit for Venus' eyes.
And because they needed all to arise
At an early hour to view the great fight,
Unto their rest they went that night.
And in the dawn, when day began to spring,
Of horse and harness noise and rattling
There was in all the hostelries around.
And to the palace rode there, with the sound,
Hosts of lords, mounted on steeds and palfreys.
There you might see workmanship of harness,
So strange and rich, and wrought with zeal
Of goldsmith's art, embroidery and steel;
The shields bright, the casques and trappings,

Golden helms, mail, surcoats and trimmings,
 Lords in fine clothing on their coursers,
 Knights of the retinue, and also squires,
 Nailing of spears, and helmet-buckling,
 Strapping of shields, and thong-fastening.
 Where work was needed, no man was idle.
 The foaming steeds at golden bridle
 Gnawing, and armourers swift also
 With file and hammer pricking to and fro.
 Yeomen on foot, commoners in a throng,
 With short staves, all crowding there along;
 Pipes, trumpets, kettle-drums, clarions,
 That in the battle blow warlike songs;
 The palace full of people up and down,
 Here three, there ten, throwing it around,
 The matter of these Theban knights two.
 Some said thus, and some it shall be so;
 Some agreed with him of the black beard,
 Some with the bald, some the shaggy haired,
 Some said he looked grim, and he would fight;
 He has an axe that's twenty pounds in weight.
 Thus was the hall filled with speculating,
 Long after the sun had begun to spring.
 The great Theseus, from sleep awaking
 With the minstrelsy and noise they were making,
 Was yet in the chamber of his palace rich,
 Till the Theban knights, honoured each
 The same, were into the palace led.
 Duke Theseus was at a window set,
 Arrayed as a god seated on a throne.
 The people pressed thither and right soon
 To see him, and do him high reverence,
 And then to hear both his command and sentence.
 A herald on a scaffold shouted: 'Ho!'
 Till all the noise of people died below;
 And when he saw the people were all still,
 Thus he proclaimed the great Duke's will:
 'Our lord the Duke has, in his discretion,
 Decided that it would be mere destruction
 Of noble blood to fight in the guise
 Of mortal battle now in this assize.
 Wherefore to guarantee that none shall die,
 He will his former purpose modify.
 No man, therefore, on pain of his life,
 No kind of missile, pole-axe or short knife,
 Shall to the lists send or thither bring,
 No short sword, with point for biting,
 Shall any man draw, or bear at his side.
 Nor shall a man with his opponent ride

More than one course with sharp ground spear;
 But fence, if he wish, on foot himself to spare.
 And he that is defeated they shall take,
 Not slain, but brought to the upright stake
 That shall be set up by either side.
 And taken there by force, shall there abide.
 And if it so befalls the leader is taken
 On either side, or his opponent's slain,
 No longer then shall the tourney last.
 God speed you; go forth, lay on fast.
 With long sword and maces fight your fill!
 Go your ways now; this is your lord's will.'

The voices of the people rose to heaven,
 So loud they shouted with glad cries: 'Amen,
 God save a lord such as this, so good
 He wills no destruction of noble blood!'

Up rise the trumpets and the melody,
 And to the lists ride the company,
 By command through the city large,
 Hung with cloth of gold and no coarse serge,
 Full like a lord this noble Duke does ride,
 The two Thebans on his either side,
 And after ride the Queen and Emily,
 And after that another company
 Of all and sundry, according to degree,
 And thus they passed through the city,
 And at the lists they arrived in time –
 It was not of the day yet fully prime.

When Theseus had taken his high seat,
 With Hippolyta the Queen, and Emily,
 And other ladies in their ranks around,
 Towards the seats pressed the crowd,
 And westward through the gates under Mars,
 Arcita and his hundred men of war,
 With banner red has entered at once,
 And at the selfsame moment Palamon
 Beneath Venus eastward, to that place,
 With banner white and bold of face.
 In all the world of seeking up and down
 So even a contest could ne'er be found,
 Never such a pair of companies;
 For there was none so wise that could see
 That either of the other had advantage,
 In worthiness, nor in rank, nor age;
 So evenly were they matched, all guessed.
 And in two fair ranks they began to mass.
 When their names had been called everyone,
 To show that in their number guile was none,
 Then were the gates shut, and the cry was loud:

'Do your duty now, young knights so proud!
 The heralds left their pricking up and down;
 Now trumpets ring out and the clarion.
 There is no more to say, but east and west
 In go the spears firmly to their rests;
 In go the sharp spurs to the horses' side.
 There men see who can joust and who can ride;
 There shafts shiver on the shields thick;
 One through his midriff feels the prick.
 Up spring the spears twenty feet on high;
 Out sweep the swords, as silver bright.
 The helms they hew to pieces, cut to shreds;
 Out bursts the blood in stern streams red.
 With mighty maces the bones they smash;
 One through the thickest of the throng has passed.
 There the strong steeds stumble, down go all;
 One rolls underfoot just like a ball;
 One with a broken spear-shaft pounds,
 Another hurtles with his mount to ground.
 One through the body is hurt, him they take,
 Despite his struggles, drag him to the stake;
 As was agreed, and there he must abide.
 Another is laid there on the other side.
 And sometimes Theseus decrees a rest
 To drink if they wish, and be refreshed.
 Often this day have those Thebans two
 Met together, and hurt their enemy too;
 Each of the twain has unhorsed the other.
 No tiger in the vale of Gargaphia,
 When her whelp is stolen, when it's little,
 As Arcita on the hunt could be as cruel,
 Through jealousy at heart, to Palamon;
 Nor in Morocco is so fell a lion,
 That hunted is, by hunger driven mad,
 Nor of his prey desirous of the blood
 As Palamon to slay Arcita now, his foe.
 On their helmets bite the jealous strokes;
 Out runs the blood, both their sides bleed.
 Sometime an end there is of every deed;
 For ere the sun had gone unto his rest,
 The strong King Emetrius did arrest
 Palamon as with Arcita he did fight,
 And made his sword deep in his flesh to bite,
 And twenty men with all their strength take
 Him without surrendering, to the stake.
 And riding to rescue our Palamon
 Strong King Lycurgus is brought down,
 And King Emetrius for all his strength,
 Is hurled from his saddle a full sword's length,

So fiercely did Palamon his last stroke make.
But all for naught; he was dragged to the stake.
His bold heart could help him not;
He must abide, now that he was caught,
By force, and by their rules of competition.

Who sorrows now but woeful Palamon,
Who can no more go in again and fight?
And when Theseus had seen this sight,
Unto the folk that fought every one
He cried: 'Ho! No more, for it is done!
I will be true judge, no partisan
Theban Arcita shall have his Emily,
Whom, by his fate, he has fairly won.'
With that the crowd's rejoicing began
So loud and tumultuous withall
It seemed the very lists would fall.

What can fair Venus do now, above?
What can she say? What does the Queen of Love
But weep there, frustrated of her will,
Till that her tears onto the lists down fell.
She said then: 'I am ashamed, indeed.'

Saturn said: 'Daughter, hold your peace!
Mars has his way; his knight has all his boon.
But, by my head, you shall be solaced soon.'

The trumpeters with their loud minstrelsy,
The heralds that yell and cry as loudly,
Overflowed with joy for Sir Arcita.
But hearken to me, quench the noise a little,
At the miracle that there befell anon.

This fierce Arcita, helm no longer on,
Riding his courser, to show his face,
Cantering the whole length of the place,
Looking upward towards Emily;
And she to him shows an eye most friendly
(For women, to speak generally, will soon
Follow behind the favours of Fortune),
And she roused all the joy in his heart.

Out of the ground an infernal fury starts,
Sent from Pluto at request of Saturn;
From which his horse in fear tried to turn,
Leapt aside, but foundered as he leapt,
And before Arcita could protect
Himself, he pitched down on his head,
And lay there on the ground as he were dead,
His breast-bone shattered by the saddle-bow.
As black he lay as any coal or crow,
The blood had so mounted to his face.
Swiftly he was carried from the place,
Sorrowfully, to Theseus' palace.

There he was separated from his harness,
And carried to a bed, with care thy strive,
For he is yet in memory and alive,
And ever crying out for Emily.

Duke Theseus with all his company,
Came slowly home to Athens his city,
With full display and great solemnity,
Despite this mishap that had chanced to fall,
He wished not to dishearten them all.
And men said that Arcita should not die;
He would be healed of injury by and by.
And in another thing they joyed again:
That of them all no man had been slain,
Though some were sorely hurt, and one
Above all, pierced through the breast-bone.
Then for other wounds, and broken arms,
Some had salves, and some had charms;
Purgatives and herbs steeped to the brim
They drink, as they hope to save a limb.
Thus the noble Duke as best he can
Comforts and so honours every man,
And then makes revel all the long night
For the foreign princes as was their right.
Of defeat there was scarcely a feeling,
Except as befits a tourney's fighting.
For indeed they felt no discontent
As falling there was merely accident;
And then to be led by force to the stake,
Unyielding, by twenty knights that take
One person alone, and no more, though
Harried forth by arm, and foot, and toe,
And their steed too driven off with staves,
By footmen, both yeomen and their knaves –
Still was not counted a disgrace we see;
No man there could call it cowardly.
Therefore anon Duke Theseus decreed
To stifle all the rancour and jealousy,
The victory to one side and the other,
And either side as like as any brother.
And gave them gifts, according to degree,
And held a feast for fully days three,
And conveyed the kings worthily
Out of his town, some way on their journey.
And every man went home the nearest way;
There was no cry but: 'Farewell, and good day!'
With this battle I shall now have done,
But speak of Arcita and Palamon.

Arcita's breast swells, and the sore
Increases at his heart more and more.

The clotted blood, despite all leech-craft,
 Corrupts and festers in his blood, so that
 Neither the blood-letting nor the drinking,
 Of herbs are any help, nor the cupping.
 The 'expulsive virtue', dubbed 'animal',
 From the virtue that is known as 'natural'
 Cannot void the venom or it expel.
 The fibres of his lungs begin to swell,
 And every muscle of his breast down
 Is wasted by venom and corruption.
 He cannot profit, striving to live,
 From upward vomiting, downward laxative.
 All of him is shattered in that region;
 Nature there now has no dominion.
 And certainly, where Nature will not work,
 Farwell Physic! Go bear the man to church!
 This is the sum of all: Arcita must die.
 So he sent for Emily by and by,
 And Palamon that was his cousin dear.
 Then said he thus, as you shall now hear:
 'The woeful spirit, may not, within my heart
 Show one iota of my sorrowful smart
 To you, my lady, whom I love the most.
 But I bequeath you service of my ghost
 To you beyond every other creature
 Since my life may no longer linger.
 Alas the woe! Alas, the pains so strong
 That I for you have suffered, and so long!
 Alas, for death! Alas, my Emily!
 Alas, the parting of our company!
 Alas, my heart's queen! Alas, my wife,
 My heart's lady, ender of my life!
 What is this world? What can a man save?
 Now with his love, now in his cold grave,
 Lying alone, with none for company.
 Farewell, my sweet foe, my Emily!
 And soft take me in your arms, I pray,
 For love of God, and hark to what I say.
 I have to my cousin Palamon
 Shown strife and rancour, many a day gone,
 For love of you, and out of jealousy.
 Yet Jupiter, so wise, my soul give leave
 To speak of him, your servant, properly,
 In every dimension, full and truly –
 That is to say, truth, honour, knighthood,
 Wisdom, humility, and noble kindred,
 Generosity and all that is of that art –
 So may Jupiter take my soul's part,
 For in this world right now know I none

So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
 Who serves you, and will do all his life.
 And if that ever you shall be a wife,
 Forget not Palamon, the gentle man.'
 With these words his speech to fail began,
 For from his feet up to his breast was come,
 The cold of death, that had him overcome.
 And further yet, for in his arms two
 The vital strength is lost and gone also.
 Only the intellect, and nothing more,
 That dwelt in his heart, sick and sore,
 Was left to fail when the heart felt death.
 His two eyes dimmed, and failed his breath,
 But on his lady gazed while eye could see;
 His last word was: 'Mercy, Emily!'
 His spirit changed house, and vanished there,
 Where I have not been, so cannot say where.
 Therefore I pause; I am no minister.
 Of souls I find none in this register,
 Nor any speculations would I tell
 Of them, though some write where they dwell.
 Arcita is cold; may Mars his soul receive!
 Now will I speak concerning Emily.
 Emily shrieked, and howled Palamon,
 And Theseus took his sister up anon,
 And bore her swooning from the corpse away.
 What help is there in wasting all the day
 Telling how she wept both eve and morrow?
 For in such cases women feel such sorrow,
 When their husband from them shall go,
 That for the most part they sorrow so,
 Or else fall into such a malady,
 That at the last they die, the more surely.
 Infinite are the sorrows and the tears
 Of the old folk, and folk of tender years,
 Through the town, mourning for the Theban.
 For him there weeps both child and man.
 There was not such weeping, for certain
 When Hector was brought newly slain
 To Troy. Alas the pity that was there! –
 Rending of cheeks, and tearing of hair.
 'Why did you have to die?' the women weep,
 'Owning gold enough, and your Emily?'
 No man could bring cheer to Theseus,
 Save for his old father Aegeus,
 Who knew this world's transmutations,
 For up and down, had he seen alteration,
 Joy after woe, and woe after gladness;
 And gave him an example and a likeness.

'Just as there never died man,' quoth he,
'That had not life on earth, in his degree,
Just so there never lived a man,' he said,
'In all this world that will not come to death.
This world is but a thoroughfare of woe,
And we are pilgrims passing to and fro.
Death is an end of every worldly sore,'
And after this he said a great deal more
To this effect, full wisely to exhort
The people, that they might find comfort.
Duke Theseus, with all his busy care,
Cast about now where the sepulchre
Of good Arcita might best sited be,
Most honourable too, in its degree.
And at the last came to the conclusion
That since at first Arcita and Palamon
Had for love made battle there between
Each other, in the same grove sweet and green,
Where he had known his amorous desires,
His lament for love, his own hot fires,
He would make a fire in which the office
Of funeral rites he might there accomplish.
And gave at once commands to hack and hew
The ancient oaks and lay them in a row,
In pyres so arranged that they would burn.
His officers with swift foot soon return
Having executed his commandment.
And after this Theseus has sent
A bier after, and all overspread,
With cloth of gold, the richest to be had.
And clad Arcita in a similar wise;
Upon his hands he had gloves white,
Then on his head a crown of laurel green
And in his hand a sword full bright and keen.
He laid him, bare of face, upon the bier;
At that his cries were pitiful to hear.
And that the people might see him, all,
When it was day he brought him to the hall,
That echoed with the crying and the sound.
Then came the woeful Theban Palamon,
With fluttering beard and ragged ashy hair,
In clothes black all stained with tears,
And, weeping beyond others, Emily,
The saddest there of all the company.
Inasmuch as the service ought to be
The nobler and the richer in degree
Duke Theseus ordered them to bring
Three steeds trapped in steel all glittering,
And covered with the arms of Sir Arcita.

Upon these steeds, tall and white they were,
Folk were mounted, one man bore his shield,
Another his spear in his hands out-held;
The third he bore his bow, which was Turkish –
Of burnished gold the quiver and the harness –
And pacing slowly sorrowful they appeared,
Riding towards the grove, as you shall hear.
The noblest of the Greeks that were there
On their shoulders carried the bier,
With eyes red and wet, and slow their feet,
Through the city down the central street,
All spread with black and wondrous on high
With the same cloth blackened is the sky.
Upon the right hand went old Aegeus,
And on the other side Duke Theseus,
With vessels in their hands of gold full fine,
All full of honey, milk, and blood and wine;
And Palamon with his great company,
And after that came sorrowing Emily,
With fire in hand, as was then the practice,
To do the office of the funeral service.

Great labour and infinite preparing
Was at the service and the pyre-making,
That with its green top reached heavenward,
And its sides were twenty fathoms broad –
That is to say, the boughs stretched so wide.
With many a load of straw laid first beside –
But how the fire was built on a height,
Nor the names of all the trees alight –
Oak, fir, aspen, birch, linden, holm, and poplar,
Willow, elm, plane, ash, box, chestnut, laurel, alder,
Maple, thorn, beech, yew, hazel, cornel-tree,
How they were felled – will not be told by me;
Nor how up and down their divinities run,
All disinherited of their habitation,
In which they once dwelt in rest and peace –
The nymphs, and fawns, and hamadryades –
Nor how the creatures and the birds all
Fled in fright when trees began to fall;
Nor how the ground was fearful of the light,
That never used to know the sun so bright;
Nor how the fire was first laid with straw
And then dry sticks, cut three-ways with a saw,
And then with green wood and spiced leaf,
And then with cloth of gold and jewellery,
And garlands hanging, full of many a flower,
Myrrh and incense, with their great savour;
Nor how Arcita lay amongst all this;
Nor what richness about his body is;

Nor how Emily, as was the practice,
Thrust in the fire due the funeral service;
Nor how she swooned when men fed the fire;
Nor what she said, nor what was her desire,
Nor what jewels in the fire men cast,
When the fire was high and burning fast;
Nor how some cast their shields, some their spears,
Onto the pyre and the robes they wear,
And cups full of milk and wine and blood
To fan the flames, a maddened fiery flood;
Nor how the Greeks in a vast rout
Thrice rode round the fire, all about,
Widdershins, and all loudly shouting,
And thrice with their spears clattering,
And thrice how the ladies cry and weep,
And how homeward was lead our Emily;
Nor how Arcita is burnt to ashes cold;
Nor how the lyke-wake was held, all told,
Throughout the night; nor how the Greeks play
At funeral games, nor do I choose to say –
Who wrestled best, naked with oil anointed,
Nor who bore him best, was best appointed;
I will not tell how they all wandered home
To Athens when the funeral games were done,
But briefly to the point I will wend,
And make of my long tale an end.

By degrees, and some length of years,
All finished were the mourning and the tears
Of Greeks, by the general consent.
Then it seems they held a parliament
At Athens, on certain points and matters,
Among which points suggested was
Forging with certain countries an alliance,
Exacting the Thebans' full compliance.
For which this noble Theseus anon
Ordered them to send for Palamon,
He not knowing what the cause or why.
Yet in his black clothes with mournful eye
He came in haste, and right obediently,
And then Theseus sent for Emily.

When they were seated, hushed all the place,
And Theseus had waited for a space
Ere any word came from his wise breast,
His eyes resting whereabouts they wished,
With a sad visage he sighed till all were still
And after that, right thus he spoke his will:
'The First Mover of all cause above
When he first made the fair chain of love,
Great was the effect, noble his intent.

He knew well what he did, and what he meant.
 For with that chain of fairest love he bound
 The fire, the air, the water and the land,
 In certain boundaries that they not flee.
 That same prince and Mover,' quoth he,
 'Established in this world, a wretched one,
 A certain length of days and a duration
 To all that is engendered in this place,
 Beyond the which days they might not pace,
 Although they may well those days abridge.
 There is no need authorities to enlist,
 For it is proven by experience,
 Unless I need to clarify the sense
 So men may by this order well discern,
 That the Mover is established and eterne.
 And each man knows, unless he is a fool,
 That every part derives from this whole;
 For nature cannot take its beginning
 From some part or fragment of a thing,
 But from what is perfect and is stable,
 Descending so, until corruptible.
 And therefore, of his wise providence,
 He has so well proclaimed his intent,
 That species of things and their progression
 Shall only endure by succession
 And not eternally, I tell no lies,
 As you may comprehend with your eyes.
 Behold, the oak that has long nourishing,
 From the day it first begins to spring,
 And has so long a life, as we may see,
 Yet at the last wasted is the tree.
 Consider too how the hardest stone,
 Under our feet on which we ride and go,
 Yet wastes as it lies beside the way.
 The broad river sometime falls away;
 The great towns we see wane and wend.
 So you may see that all this thing has end.
 Of man and woman see we well also
 That of necessity in one of these terms two –
 That is to say, in youth or else in age –
 Die they must, the king as shall the page.
 Some in their beds, some in the deep sea,
 Some on the battlefield as you may see.
 There is no help – all goes the same way.
 So all this thing must die as I say.
 Who orders this but Jupiter the King,
 That is the prince and cause of everything,
 Turning all things back to their own source
 From which they derive, the true resource?

And against this no creature that's alive
Of any kind, can ever hope to strive.

So is it wisdom, it seems to me,
To make a virtue of necessity,
And make the best of what we did not choose,
And especially of what to all falls due.
And whoso grumbles at it, is a fool,
And is a rebel to him that all does rule.
And certainly, a man has most honour
Who dies in his prime, in the flower,
When he is assured of his good name.
Then has he done his friend and self no shame,
And gladder should a friend be of his death,
When with honour he yielded up his breath,
Than when his name enfeebled is by age,
And all forgotten are his knightly days.
Then is it best, to win a worthy fame,
To die when at the zenith of our name.

The contrary to all this is wilfulness.
Why do we grudge it? Why this heaviness,
That good Arcita, of chivalry the flower,
Departed in all honour, at his hour,
Out of the foul prison of this life?
Why grudge here, his cousin and his wife,
His welfare who loved them so well?
Can he thank them? God knows, no man shall!
– That both his soul and himself offend,
And yet their happiness cannot extend.

What can I conclude from this long story,
But after woe advise us to be merry,
And thank Jupiter for all his grace?
And ere that we depart from this place,
I suggest we make of sorrows two
One perfect joy, to last for ever too.
And look now, where most sorrow is herein,
There will I first bring comfort and begin.

Sister,' quoth he, 'this has my full assent,
With all the agreement of my parliament,
That gentle Palamon, your own true knight,
Who serves you with will, and heart, and might,
And always has, since you first him knew,
You shall take pity on with grace, and you
Shall take him for your husband and your lord.
Give me your hand, for this is our accord;
Let us now see your womanly pity.
He is a king's brother's son, indeed;
And though he were a poor bachelor,
Since he has served you for many a year,
And suffered for you such adversity,

He should be considered, believe me,
For gentle mercy ought to crown the right.'
Then said he thus to Palamon the knight:
'I think you need but little sermoning
To give your own assent to this thing!
Come near, and take your lady by the hand.'
Between them was made anon the bond
That we call matrimony or a marriage,
By all of the council and the peerage.
And thus with all joy and melody
Has Palamon wedded his Emily;
And God, that all this wide world has wrought,
Send him his love, who has it dearly bought!
For now is Palamon in all things well,
Living in bliss, riches, and in health.
And Emily loves him so tenderly,
And he serves her so courteously,
That there was never a word between them
Of jealousy, or other vexation.
So ends Palamon and Emily,
And God save all this fair company! Amen.

Here Ends the Knight's Tale