

# Cymbeline

Act V, sc. 3 (line 3)

## POSTHUMUS LEONATUS

No blame be to you, sir; for all was lost,  
But that the heavens fought: the king himself  
Of his wings destitute, the army broken,  
And but the backs of Britons seen, all flying  
Through a straight lane; the enemy full-hearted,  
Lolling the tongue with slaughtering, having work  
More plentiful than tools to do't, struck down  
Some mortally, some slightly touch'd, some falling  
Merely through fear; that the straight pass was damm'd  
With dead men hurt behind, and cowards living  
To die with lengthen'd shame.

*Lord*

*Where was this lane?*

## POSTHUMUS LEONATUS

Close by the battle, ditch'd, and wall'd with turf;  
Which gave advantage to an ancient soldier,  
An honest one, I warrant; who deserved  
So long a breeding as his white beard came to,  
In doing this for's country: athwart the lane,  
He, with two striplings-lads more like to run  
The country base than to commit such slaughter

With faces fit for masks, or rather fairer  
Than those for preservation cased, or shame--  
Made good the passage; cried to those that fled,  
'Our Britain's hearts die flying, not our men:  
To darkness fleet souls that fly backwards. Stand;  
Or we are Romans and will give you that  
Like beasts which you shun beastly, and may save,  
But to look back in frown: stand, stand.'  
These three,  
Three thousand confident, in act as many--  
For three performers are the file when all  
The rest do nothing--with this word 'Stand, stand,'  
Accommodated by the place, more charming  
With their own nobleness, which could have turn'd  
A distaff to a lance, gilded pale looks,  
Part shame, part spirit renew'd; that some, turn'd coward  
But by example--O, a sin in war,  
Damn'd in the first beginners!--gan to look  
The way that they did, and to grin like lions  
Upon the pikes o' the hunters. Then began  
A stop i' the chaser, a retire, anon  
A rout, confusion thick; forthwith they fly  
Chickens, the way which they stoop'd eagles; slaves,  
The strides they victors made: and now our cowards,

Like fragments in hard voyages, became  
The life o' the need: having found the backdoor open  
Of the unguarded hearts, heavens, how they wound!  
Some slain before; some dying; some their friends  
O'er borne i' the former wave: ten, chased by one,  
Are now each one the slaughter-man of twenty:  
Those that would die or ere resist are grown  
The mortal bugs o' the field.

*Lord*

*This was strange chance  
A narrow lane, an old man, and two boys.*

### **POSTHUMUS LEONATUS**

Nay, do not wonder at it: you are made  
Rather to wonder at the things you hear  
Than to work any. Will you rhyme upon't,  
And vent it for a mockery? Here is one:  
'Two boys, an old man twice a boy, a lane,  
Preserved the Britons, was the Romans' bane.'

*Lord*

*Nay, be not angry, sir.*

### **POSTHUMUS LEONATUS**

'Lack, to what end?  
Who dares not stand his foe, I'll be his friend;  
For if he'll do as he is made to do,  
I know he'll quickly fly my friendship too.  
You have put me into rhyme.