

Cymbeline

by William Shakespeare

Act V, sc. 3. Line 3 - Verse

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.