

# Cymbeline

## 5.5

*Enter Posthumus like a poor soldier, and a Briton Lord*

LORD

Cam'st thou from where they made the stand?

POSTHUMUS

I did,

Though you, it seems, come from the fliers.

LORD

Ay.

POSTHUMUS

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, 5  
And but the backs of Britons seen, all flying  
Through a strait lane; the enemy full-hearted,  
Lolling the tongue with slaught'ring, having work  
More plentiful than tools to do't, struck down  
Some mortally, some slightly touched, some falling 10  
Merely through fear, that the strait pass was dammed  
With dead men hurt behind, and cowards living  
To die with lengthened shame.

LORD

Where was this lane?

POSTHUMUS

Close by the battle, ditched, and walled with turf;  
Which gave advantage to an ancient soldier, 15  
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; 20  
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 harts die flying, not her men.  
To darkness fleet souls that fly backwards. Stand, 25  
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 30  
The rest do nothing±±with this word `Stand, stand',  
Accommodated by the place, more charming  
With their own nobleness, which could have turned  
A distaff to a lance, gilded pale looks;  
Part shame, part spirit renewed, that some, turned  
coward 35  
But by example±±O, a sin in war,  
Damned in the first beginners!±±gan to look  
The way that they did and to grin like lions  
Upon the pikes o'th' hunters. Then began  
A stop i'th' chaser, a retire. Anon 40  
A rout, confusion thick; forthwith they fly  
Chickens the way which they stooped eagles; slaves,  
The strides they victors made; and now our cowards,  
Like fragments in hard voyages, became  
The life o'th' need. Having found the back door open 45  
Of the unguarded hearts, heavens, how they wound!  
Some slain before, some dying, some their friends  
O'erborne i'th' former wave, ten chased by one,  
Are now each one the slaughterman of twenty.  
Those that would die or ere resist are grown 50  
The mortal bugs o'th' field.

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

**POSTHUMUS**  
Nay, do not wonder at it. Yet you are made  
Rather to wonder at the things you hear  
Than to work any. Will you rhyme upon't, 55  
And vent it for a mock'ry? 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** 'Lack, to what end?  
Who dares not stand his foe, I'll be his friend, 60  
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.

LORD

Farewell; you're angry.

*Exit*

POSTHUMUS

Still going? This a lord? O noble misery,  
To be i'th' field and ask 'What news?' of me! 65  
Today how many would have given their honours  
To have saved their carcasses±±took heel to do't,  
And yet died too! I, in mine own woe charmed,  
Could not find death where I did hear him groan,  
Nor feel him where he struck. Being an ugly monster, 70  
'Tis strange he hides him in fresh cups, soft beds,  
Sweet words, or hath more ministers than we  
That draw his knives i'th' war. Well, I will find him;  
For being now a favourer to the Briton,  
No more a Briton, I have resumed again 75  
The part I came in. Fight I will no more,  
But yield me to the veriest hind that shall  
Once touch my shoulder. Great the slaughter is  
Here made by th' Roman; great the answer be  
Britons must take. For me, my ransom's death, 80  
On either side I come to spend my breath,  
Which neither here I'll keep nor bear again,  
But end it by some means for Innogen.

*Enter two Briton Captains, and soldiers*

FIRST CAPTAIN

Great Jupiter be praised, Lucius is taken.  
'Tis thought the old man and his sons were angels. 85

SECOND CAPTAIN

There was a fourth man, in a seely habit,  
That gave th'affront with them.

FIRST CAPTAIN

So 'tis reported,  
But none of 'em can be found. Stand, who's there?

POSTHUMUS

A Roman,  
Who had not now been drooping here if seconds 90  
Had answered him.

SECOND CAPTAIN *(to soldiers)* Lay hands on him, a dog!

A leg of Rome shall not return to tell  
What crows have pecked them here. He brags his  
service

As if he were of note. Bring him to th' King.

*[Flourish.] Enter Cymbeline [and his train],  
Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus, Pisanio, and  
Roman captives. The Captains present Posthumus to  
Cymbeline, who delivers him over to a Jailer.  
Exeunt all but Posthumus and two Jailers, [who  
lock gyves on his legs]*

**FIRST JAILER**

You shall not now be stol'n. You have locks upon you, 95  
So graze as you find pasture.

**SECOND JAILER**

Ay, or a stomach.

*Exeunt Jailers*

**POSTHUMUS**

Most welcome, bondage, for thou art a way,  
I think, to liberty. Yet am I better  
Than one that's sick o'th' gout, since he had rather  
Groan so in perpetuity than be cured 100  
By th' sure physician, death, who is the key  
T'unbar these locks. My conscience, thou art fettered  
More than my shanks and wrists. You good gods give  
me

The penitent instrument to pick that bolt,  
Then free for ever. Is't enough I am sorry? 105  
So children temporal fathers do appease;  
Gods are more full of mercy. Must I repent,  
I cannot do it better than in gyves  
Desired more than constrained. To satisfy,  
If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take 110  
No stricter render of me than my all.

I know you are more clement than vile men  
Who of their broken debtors take a third,  
A sixth, a tenth, letting them thrive again  
On their abatement. That's not my desire. 115  
For Innogen's dear life take mine, and though  
'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life; you coined it.  
'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp;  
Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake;  
You rather mine, being yours. And so, great powers, 120  
If you will make this audit, take this life,  
And cancel these cold bonds. O Innogen,  
I'll speak to thee in silence!

*He sleeps. Solemn music. Enter, as in an apparition,  
Sicilius Leonatus (father to Posthumus, an old  
man), attired like a warrior, leading in his hand an  
ancient matron, his wife, and mother to  
Posthumus, with music before them.  
Then, after other music, follows the two young  
Leonati, brothers to Posthumus, with wounds as  
they died in the wars. They circle Posthumus round  
as he lies sleeping*

**SICILIUS**

No more, thou thunder-master, show  
Thy spite on mortal flies. 125  
With Mars fall out, with Juno chide,  
That thy adulteries  
Rates and revenges.  
Hath my poor boy done aught but well,  
Whose face I never saw? 130  
I died whilst in the womb he stayed,  
Attending nature's law,  
Whose father then±±as men report  
Thou orphans' father art±±  
Thou shouldst have been, and shielded him 135  
From this earth-vexing smart.

**MOTHER**

Lucina lent not me her aid,  
But took me in my throes,  
That from me was Posthumus ripped,  
Came crying 'mongst his foes, 140  
A thing of pity.

**SICILIUS**

Great nature like his ancestry  
Moulded the stuff so fair  
That he deserved the praise o'th' world  
As great Sicilius' heir. 145

**FIRST BROTHER**

When once he was mature for man,  
In Britain where was he  
That could stand up his parallel,  
Or fruitful object be  
In eye of Innogen, that best 150

Could deem his dignity?

**MOTHER**

With marriage wherefore was he mocked,  
To be exiled, and thrown  
From Leonati seat and cast  
From her his dearest one, 155  
Sweet Innogen?

**SICILIUS**

Why did you suffer Giacomo,  
Slight thing of Italy,  
To taint his nobler heart and brain  
With needless jealousy, 160  
And to become the geck and scorn  
O'th' other's villainy?

**SECOND BROTHER**

For this from stiller seats we come,  
Our parents and us twain,  
That striking in our country's cause 165  
Fell bravely and were slain,  
Our fealty and Tenantius' right  
With honour to maintain.

**FIRST BROTHER**

Like hardiment Posthumus hath  
To Cymbeline performed. 170  
Then, Jupiter, thou king of gods,  
Why hast thou thus adjourned  
The graces for his merits due,  
Being all to dolours turned?

**SICILIUS**

Thy crystal window ope; look out; 175  
No longer exercise  
Upon a valiant race thy harsh  
And potent injuries.

**MOTHER**

Since, Jupiter, our son is good,  
Take off his miseries. 180

**SICILIUS**

Peep through thy marble mansion. Help,  
Or we poor ghosts will cry  
To th' shining synod of the rest  
Against thy deity.

**BROTHERS**

Help, Jupiter, or we appeal, 185  
And from thy justice fly.

*Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning, sitting  
upon an eagle. He throws a thunderbolt. The ghosts  
fall on their knees*

**JUPITER**

No more, you petty spirits of region low,  
Offend our hearing. Hush! How dare you ghosts  
Accuse the thunderer, whose bolt, you know,  
Sky-planted, batters all rebelling coasts? 190  
Poor shadows of Elysium, hence, and rest  
Upon your never-withering banks of flowers.  
Be not with mortal accidents oppressed;  
No care of yours it is; you know 'tis ours.  
Whom best I love, I cross, to make my gift, 195  
The more delayed, delighted. Be content.  
Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift.  
His comforts thrive, his trials well are spent.  
Our Jovial star reigned at his birth, and in  
Our temple was he married. Rise, and fade. 200  
He shall be lord of Lady Innogen,  
And happier much by his affliction made.  
This tablet lay upon his breast, wherein  
Our pleasure his full fortune doth confine.  
*He gives the ghosts a tablet which they lay upon  
Posthumus' breast*  
And so away. No farther with your din 205  
Express impatience, lest you stir up mine.  
Mount, eagle, to my palace crystalline.

*He ascends into the heavens*

**SICILIUS**

He came in thunder. His celestial breath  
Was sulphurous to smell. The holy eagle  
Stooped, as to foot us. His ascension is 210  
More sweet than our blest fields. His royal bird  
Preens the immortal wing and claws his beak  
As when his god is pleased.

**ALL THE GHOSTS**

Thanks, Jupiter.

**SICILIUS**

The marble pavement closes, he is entered  
His radiant roof. Away, and, to be blest, 215  
Let us with care perform his great behest.

*The ghosts vanish*

*Posthumus awakes*

**POSTHUMUS**

Sleep, thou hast been a grandsire, and begot  
A father to me; and thou hast created  
A mother and two brothers. But, O scorn,  
Gone! They went hence so soon as they were born, 220  
And so I am awake. Poor wretches that depend  
On greatness' favour dream as I have done,  
Wake and find nothing. But, alas, I swerve.  
Many dream not to find, neither deserve,  
And yet are steeped in favours; so am I, 225  
That have this golden chance and know not why.  
What fairies haunt this ground? A book? O rare one,  
Be not, as is our fangled world, a garment  
Nobler than that it covers. Let thy effects  
So follow to be most unlike our courtiers, 230  
As good as promise.

*He reads*

'Whenas a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown,  
without seeking find, and be embraced by a piece of  
tender air; and when from a stately cedar shall be  
lopped branches which, being dead many years, shall 235  
after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly  
grow; then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain  
be fortunate and flourish in peace and plenty.'  
'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen  
Tongue, and brain not; either both, or nothing, 240  
Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such  
As sense cannot untie. Be what it is,  
The action of my life is like it, which I'll keep,  
If but for sympathy.

*Enter Jailer*

**JAILER** Come, sir, are you ready for death? 245

**POSTHUMUS** Over-roasted rather; ready long ago.

**JAILER** Hanging is the word, sir. If you be ready for that,  
you are well cooked.



**POSTHUMUS** So, if I prove a good repast to the spectators,  
the dish pays the shot. 250

**JAILER** A heavy reckoning for you, sir. But the comfort  
is, you shall be called to no more payments, fear no  
more tavern bills, which are as often the sadness of  
parting as the procuring of mirth. You come in faint  
for want of meat, depart reeling with too much drink, 255  
sorry that you have paid too much and sorry that you  
are paid too much; purse and brain both empty: the  
brain the heavier for being too light, the purse too  
light, being drawn of heaviness. Of this contradiction  
you shall now be quit. O, the charity of a penny cord! 260  
It sums up thousands in a trice. You have no true  
debtor and creditor but it: of what's past, is, and to  
come the discharge. Your neck, sir, is pen, book, and  
counters; so the acquittance follows.

**POSTHUMUS** I am merrier to die than thou art to live. 265

**JAILER** Indeed, sir, he that sleeps feels not the toothache;  
but a man that were to sleep your sleep, and a hangman  
to help him to bed, I think he would change places  
with his officer; for look you, sir, you know not which  
way you shall go. 270

**POSTHUMUS** Yes, indeed do I, fellow.

**JAILER** Your death has eyes in 's head, then. I have not  
seen him so pictured. You must either be directed by  
some that take upon them to know, or take upon  
yourself that which I am sure you do not know, or 275  
jump the after-enquiry on your own peril; and how  
you shall speed in your journey's end I think you'll  
never return to tell on.

**POSTHUMUS** I tell thee, fellow, there are none want eyes  
to direct them the way I am going but such as wink 280  
and will not use them.

**JAILER** What an infinite mock is this, that a man should  
have the best use of eyes to see the way of blindness!  
I am sure hanging's the way of winking.

*Enter a Messenger*

**MESSENGER** Knock off his manacles, bring your prisoner 285  
to the King.

**POSTHUMUS** Thou bring'st good news, I am called to be

made free.

**JAILER** I'll be hanged then.

**POSTHUMUS** Thou shalt be then freer than a jailer; no 290  
bolts for the dead.

**JAILER** (*aside*) Unless a man would marry a gallows and  
beget young gibbets, I never saw one so prone. Yet, on  
my conscience, there are verier knaves desire to live,  
for all he be a Roman; and there be some of them, too, 295  
that die against their wills; so should I if I were one. I  
would we were all of one mind, and one mind good.  
O, there were desolation of jailers and gallowses! I  
speak against my present profit, but my wish hath a  
preferment in't. 300

*Exeunt*