

CORIOLANUS*A line-by-line translation***Act 1, Scene 1****Shakespeare**

Enter a company of mutinous Citizens, with staves, clubs, and other weapons

FIRST CITIZEN

Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.

ALL

Speak, speak.

FIRST CITIZEN

You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?

ALL

Resolved. resolved.

FIRST CITIZEN

5 First, you know Caius Marcius is chief enemy to the people.

ALL

We know't, we know't.

FIRST CITIZEN

Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?

ALL

10 No more talking on't; let it be done: away, away!

SECOND CITIZEN

One word, good citizens.

FIRST CITIZEN

We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us: if they would yield us but the superfluity, while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely; but they think we are too dear: the leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularise their abundance; our sufferance is a gain to them. Let us revenge this with our pikes, ere we become rakes: for the gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge.

SECOND CITIZEN

Would you proceed especially against Caius Marcius?

ALL

Against him first: he's a very dog to the commonalty.

SECOND CITIZEN

25 Consider you what services he has done for his country?

Shakescleare Translation

*A company of mutinous **CITIZENS**, with staves, clubs, and other weapons, enter.*

 In a mutiny, a group of people rebel or revolt against a government or other authority. Here, common citizens are starving during a food shortage and believe the Roman senate is keeping all the resources for themselves.

FIRST CITIZEN

Before we go on, hear me out.

ALL

Go ahead. Talk.

FIRST CITIZEN

You are all committed to fight to the death rather than die by starvation?

ALL

Yes, we're committed.

FIRST CITIZEN

First, you know Caius Marcius is the people's greatest enemy.

ALL

We know it!

FIRST CITIZEN

Let's kill him and sell corn at a price we can decide. Do we have an agreement?

ALL

Enough talk; let it be done: let's go!

SECOND CITIZEN

Hold on: listen, good citizens.

FIRST CITIZEN

We are thought of as poor and worthless, while the senators are thought of as noble. Their leftovers would be enough for us. If they would only give us the scraps from their table, as long as it isn't spoiled, we'd think of it as generous; but they think that even this is asking too much. Our starvation, which makes us miserable, is the yardstick by which they measure their successes—they celebrate our suffering! Let us take revenge with our pikes, before we become as thin as they are: the gods know I say so out of hunger, not out of thirst for revenge.

SECOND CITIZEN

Should we focus our revenge on Caius Marcius?

ALL

Yes, him first: he's terrible to the common people.

SECOND CITIZEN

What about all he's done for this country?

FIRST CITIZEN

Very well; and could be content to give him good report fort, but that he pays himself with being proud.

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, but speak not maliciously.

FIRST CITIZEN

I say unto you, what he hath done famously, he did it to that end: though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country he did it to please his mother and to be partly proud; which he is, even till the altitude of his virtue.

SECOND CITIZEN

30 What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous.

FIRST CITIZEN

If I must not, I need not be barren of accusations; he hath faults, with surplus, to tire in repetition.

Shouts within

FIRST CITIZEN

40 What shouts are these? The other side o' the city is risen: why stay we prating here? to the Capitol!

ALL

Come, come.

FIRST CITIZEN

Soft! who comes here?

Enter MENENIUS AGRIPPA

SECOND CITIZEN

45 Worthy Menenius Agrippa; one that hath always loved the people.

FIRST CITIZEN

He's one honest enough: would all the rest were so!

MENENIUS

What work's, my countrymen, in hand? where go you With bats and clubs? The matter? speak, I pray you.

FIRST CITIZEN

50 Our business is not unknown to the senate; they have had inkling this fortnight what we intend to do, which now we'll show 'em in deeds. They say poor suitors have strong breaths: they shall know we have strong arms too.

MENENIUS

55 Why, masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbours, Will you undo yourselves?

FIRST CITIZEN

We cannot, sir, we are undone already.

MENENIUS

I tell you, friends, most charitable care Have the patricians of you. For your wants, 60 Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them Against the Roman state, whose course will on The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs Of more strong link asunder than can ever 65 Appear in your impediment. For the dearth,

FIRST CITIZEN

It's all well and good, and he ought to be satisfied with our admiration, but instead he rubs it in our faces.

SECOND CITIZEN

Come on, don't speak rudely of him.

FIRST CITIZEN

Listen: the things he's done for us, he's done only for the fame. Forgiving men might say he did it for his country, but really he did it only to please his mother and partly to be proud. However brave he is, it's only equal to his arrogance.

SECOND CITIZEN

You're condemning him for being who he is. You can't say he's greedy, after all.

FIRST CITIZEN

If he's not greedy, he's horrible in a hundred other ways; we'd grow exhausted listing all his faults.

Shouting is heard offstage.

FIRST CITIZEN

Where is that shouting from? Other parts of the city are in revolt already. Why are we standing here chattering? To the Capitol!

ALL

Come, come!

FIRST CITIZEN

Wait! Who is that?

MENENIUS AGRIPPA enters.

SECOND CITIZEN

Honorable Menenius Agrippa; a man who has always had the common people's interests in mind.

FIRST CITIZEN

He's an honest politician: if only the others were!

MENENIUS

What are you about to do, fellow citizens? Where are you going with these bats and clubs? What's going on? Please, tell me.

FIRST CITIZEN

The senate is well aware of our business; they've known for a month what we intend to do, and we'll show them now we meant it. They say the poor people coming to ask for help have only a strong odor to them, but we'll show them we have strong arms too.

MENENIUS

Sirs, good friends, honest neighbors, why? Are you trying to get yourselves killed?

FIRST CITIZEN

That would be pointless, sir, we're already dying.

MENENIUS

I tell you, friends, the senators care deeply about all of you. You may as well attack heaven with your sticks as try to fight Rome; it won't do anything to stop your starvation. Rome will go on as it always does, easily crushing ten thousand times what you can throw against it. As for the lack of food, it's not the senators' fault. Begging them for help will do more good than attacking them. Alas, this tragedy has driven you mad if you think that cursing the

The gods, not the patricians, make it, and
Your knees to them, not arms, must help. Alack,
You are transported by calamity
Thither where more attends you, and you slander
70 The helms o' the state, who care for you like fathers,
When you curse them as enemies.

FIRST CITIZEN

Care for us! True, indeed! They ne'er cared for us yet: suffer us to famish, and their store-houses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury, to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily, to chain up and restrain the poor. If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

MENENIUS

80 Either you must
Confess yourselves wondrous malicious,
Or be accused of folly. I shall tell you
A pretty tale: it may be you have heard it;
But, since it serves my purpose, I will venture
85 To stale 't a little more.

FIRST CITIZEN

Well, I'll hear it, sir: yet you must not think to fob off our disgrace with a tale: but, an't please you, deliver.

MENENIUS

There was a time when all the body's members
90 Rebell'd against the belly, thus accused it:
That only like a gulf it did remain
I' the midst o' the body, idle and unactive,
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
Like labour with the rest, where the other instruments
95 Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
And, mutually participate, did minister
Unto the appetite and affection common
Of the whole body. The belly answer'd—

FIRST CITIZEN

Well, sir, what answer made the belly?

MENENIUS

100 Sir, I shall tell you. With a kind of smile,
Which ne'er came from the lungs, but even thus—
For, look you, I may make the belly smile
As well as speak—it tauntingly replied
To the discontented members, the mutinous parts
105 That envied his receipt; even so most fitly
As you malign our senators for that
They are not such as you.

FIRST CITIZEN

Your belly's answer? What!
The kingly-crowned head, the vigilant eye,
110 The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,
Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter.
With other muniments and petty helps
In this our fabric, if that they—

MENENIUS

What then?
115 'Fore me, this fellow speaks! What then? what then?

senators, who care for you like your own parents, will make them more willing to help you.

FIRST CITIZEN

Care for us! Yeah, right! They've never cared for us: they will let us starve while their warehouses are full of food. They've supported laws which cheat us financially; every day they do more to protect the rich and hurt the poor. If the wars don't kill **us**, they will. *That's* how they show they love us.

2 Shakespeare's phrase "if the wars eat us not up" makes a dark pun on the twinned threats to Rome: war and famine. The common people have nothing to eat, and might instead be devoured by the destruction of wartime.

MENENIUS

Either you have to admit you're awfully cruel, or I must simply say you're wrong. Let me tell you a story. Maybe you've heard it before, but since it applies to this situation so well, allow me to tell it again.

FIRST CITIZEN

Well, I'll listen, sir: but you can't think to do away with our suffering with a story. Still, if you want, go ahead.

MENENIUS

Once upon a time, all the body's other parts rebelled against the belly 3 and accused it of being just a bottomless pit in the middle of the body that hoards all the food. It does nothing, while all the other parts of the body have a role: they see and hear, think, speak, walk, touch, and by working together, these parts contribute to the greater good of the whole body. The belly answered—

3 The "fable of the belly" is a metaphor for a political body (in this case, Rome) that would have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience. The gist of the metaphor is that Rome is like a human body, being composed of a belly (the senators) and many other parts (the common people). Menenius is saying that, like the belly, the senators collect Rome's resources and share them with the people. He is also defending the social hierarchy that operates in Rome—the system through which some citizens have more power than others. His method for quashing a rebellion is to convince the citizens that they need the senators just as much as the eyes, ears, and even big toe of the body benefit when the belly is well-fed.

FIRST CITIZEN

Well, sir? What did the belly answer?

MENENIUS

Sir, I shall tell you. With a belly laugh—the kind of laugh which never came from the lungs, but like this, see? [He laughs deeply] For look, I can make the belly laugh as well as rumble—it replied sarcastically to the other parts of the body, the parts which envied the belly's food—just the way you are criticizing our senators for being different from you.

FIRST CITIZEN

Well? What did your belly answer? The majestic head, the careful eye, the wise heart, the strong arm, the swift leg, the tongue which speaks. With other bits and minor assistants in this our skin, if they—

MENENIUS

What, then? You want to interrupt me and tell your own story? What then? What then?

FIRST CITIZEN

Should by the cormorant belly be restrain'd,
Who is the sink o' the body,—

MENENIUS

Well, what then?

FIRST CITIZEN

The former agents, if they did complain,
What could the belly answer?

120

MENENIUS

I will tell you
If you'll bestow a small—of what you have little—
Patience awhile, you'll hear the belly's answer.

FIRST CITIZEN

Ye're long about it.

MENENIUS

Note me this, good friend;
Your most grave belly was deliberate,
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answer'd:
'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,
'That I receive the general food at first,
130 Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
Because I am the store-house and the shop
Of the whole body: but, if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood,
Even to the court, the heart, to the seat o' the brain;
135 And, through the cranks and offices of man,
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins
From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live: and though that all at once,
You, my good friends,—this says the belly, mark me,—

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130

135

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FIRST CITIZEN

Ay, sir; well, well.

MENENIUS

'Though all at once cannot
See what I do deliver out to each,
Yet I can make my audit up, that all
From me do back receive the flour of all,
145 And leave me but the bran.' What say you to't?

145

FIRST CITIZEN

It was an answer: how apply you this?

MENENIUS

The senators of Rome are this good belly,
And you the mutinous members; for examine
Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
150 Touching the weal o' the common, you shall find
No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you
And no way from yourselves. What do you think,
You, the great toe of this assembly?

150

155

FIRST CITIZEN

I the great toe! why the great toe?

MENENIUS

For that, being one o' the lowest, basest, poorest,
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost:
Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,
Lead'st first to win some vantage.
160 But make you ready your stiff bats and clubs:
Rome and her rats are at the point of battle;
The one side must have bale.

160

Enter CAIUS MARCIUS

FIRST CITIZEN

If all those hard-working body parts are dragged down by
the greedy belly, that garbage-pit of the body—

MENENIUS

Well, what then?

FIRST CITIZEN

If those other parts did complain, what could the belly
possibly say in its defense?

MENENIUS

I'll tell you, if you can give me just a little bit of
patience—and I know you don't have much—you'll hear the
belly's answer.

FIRST CITIZEN

You're taking long enough.

MENENIUS

Listen to me, my friend. The belly was quite serious,
and careful in his answer—unlike his rowdy accusers—and
answered like this: "It's true, friends of my body," he said,
"That I receive the food we all depend on first, but of course
I do: I'm the body's storage and its grocery store. But don't
forget that I distribute nutrients into the rivers of your
blood, and to the heart, and to the brain; it is I who send
that energy everywhere, into all the working parts of a man.
Both the strongest nerves and the tiniest little veins get
their livelihood from me. And despite all of that, you really
want to say to me"—the belly says this, just to be clear—

FIRST CITIZEN

Sure, sir; go on.

MENENIUS

"Though you can't all see that I am giving out to you, I can
tally it up and show you that you are getting the best, while
I'm keeping just the leftovers for myself." What do you say
to all that?

FIRST CITIZEN

It was an answer, I guess, but what are you trying to say?

MENENIUS

The senators of Rome are this good belly, and you are the
rioting body parts. Just think about what the senators really
do—think also about what the common people do—and
you'll find that there's no good thing you receive that
doesn't come from them. What do you think of that, you,
big toe  of this group?

 By calling the First Citizen the "great toe" in the original text, Menenius is jokingly tying the long parable to what's really going on. If the senators are the belly, the first among the lowly, common folk is a big toe.

FIRST CITIZEN

Why am I the big toe?

MENENIUS

Well, because as one of the lowest and poorest of this most
wise rebellion, you go first. You, wretched man, who are the
lowest-born of this whole group, are trying to gain
something by leading them. Well, you'd better get your bats
and clubs ready: if you rats are really going to fight Rome,
one side is going to wind up hurt.

CAIUS MARCIUS enters.

MENENIUS

Hail, noble Marcius!

MARCUS

165 Thanks. What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Make yourselves scabs?

FIRST CITIZEN

We have ever your good word.

MARCUS

He that will give good words to thee will flatter
170 Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs,
That like nor peace nor war? the one affrights you,
The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;
Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,
175 Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue is
To make him worthy whose offence subdues him
And curse that justice did it.
Who deserves greatness
180 Deserves your hate; and your affections are
A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
Which would increase his evil. He that depends
Upon your favours swims with fins of lead
And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye?
185 With every minute you do change a mind,
And call him noble that was now your hate,
Him vile that was your garland. What's the matter,
That in these several places of the city
You cry against the noble senate, who,
190 Under the gods, keep you in awe, which else
Would feed on one another? What's their seeking?

MENENIUS

For corn at their own rates; whereof, they say,
The city is well stored.

MARCUS

Hang 'em! They say!
195 They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know
What's done i' the Capitol; who's like to rise,
Who thrives and who declines; side factions
and give out
Conjectural marriages; making parties strong
200 And feeble such as stand not in their liking
Below their cobbled shoes. They say there's
grain enough!
Would the nobility lay aside their ruff,
And let me use my sword, I'll make a quarry
205 With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high
As I could pick my lance.

MENENIUS

Nay, these are almost thoroughly persuaded;
For though abundantly they lack discretion,
Yet are they passing cowardly. But, I beseech you,
210 What says the other troop?

MARCUS

They are dissolved: hang 'em!
They said they were an-hungry; sigh'd forth proverbs,
That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,
That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent not
215 Corn for the rich men only: with these shreds
They vented their complainings; which being answer'd,
And a petition granted them, a strange one—
To break the heart of generosity,
And make bold power look pale—they threw their caps

MENENIUS

Welcome, honorable Marcius!

MARCUS

Thanks. What's the matter, you rebellious good-for-nothings, that, on the whim of your opinions, become troublemakers ⁵ like this?

⁵ In the original text, Marcius says that the common people have been "rubbing the poor itch of [their] opinion," making themselves into "scabs." He has taken up the punning on bodies and bodily functions that Menenius began.

FIRST CITIZEN

You always have the nicest things to say about us.

MARCUS

Anyone who would compliment you would flatter you terribly. What do you want, you dogs, that like neither peace nor war? War scares you, peace makes you too confident in yourselves. Anyone that trusts you finds cowards where they might hope for brave men. They find idiots where they might hope for scholars. You're about as reliable as a snowball on the sun, or a coal of fire on ice. The only thing you're good at is celebrating criminals and then cursing justice. You hate great men because they're great, and you indulge only in vices. Anyone relying on you is trying to swim with lead weights or cut down trees with grass; they only slow themselves down. Go hang yourselves! Trust you? With every minute you change your mind: you suddenly hate someone you loved, or want to honor someone you hated just moments ago. What's your problem now, that you're up in arms against the senate around the city—the very senate whose leadership, with the blessing of the gods, keeps you from killing each other?

[To MENENIUS] What do they want?

MENENIUS

They're asking to buy corn at a price they would determine. They say the city has plenty of it.

MARCUS

Oh, let them go hang themselves! They say? They'll sit by the fire in their homes, and presume to know what's going on in the Capitol. They think they know who's on the way up, who's succeeding and who's failing; they take sides and announce alliances, making political parties strong and weak at a whim. They say there's grain enough! I wish the senate would stop being so compassionate and let me use my sword to resolve this; I'd kill these idiots and make a pile of them as high as my sword.

MENENIUS

No, these men are almost completely persuaded to stand down. Although they are terribly rowdy and rude, they're also terribly cowardly. But what about the other rebellious groups?

MARCUS

They've all dispersed: hang 'em! They said they were very hungry, begged using frilly, proverbial language—that hunger broke stone walls, that even dogs must eat, that meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent corn for poor as well as rich—they complained with trash like this. When they were given an option—a strange option, and far too generous—they threw their hats in the air as though they meant to hang them on the horns of the moon ⁶, shouting in celebration.

⁶ The "horns" of the moon refer to the pointed ends of a crescent moon.

As they would hang them on the horns o' the moon,
Shouting their emulation.

MENENIUS

What is granted them?

MARCIUS

Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,
Of their own choice: one's Junius Brutus,
Sicinius Velutus, and I know not— 'Sdeath!
225 The rabble should have first unroof'd the city,
Ere so prevail'd with me: it will in time
Win upon power and throw forth greater themes
For insurrection's arguing.

MENENIUS

230 This is strange.

MARCIUS

Go, get you home, you fragments!

Enter a Messenger, hastily

MESSENGER

Where's Caius Marcius?

MARCIUS

Here: what's the matter?

MESSENGER

235 The news is, sir, the Volsces are in arms.

MARCIUS

I am glad on 't: then we shall ha' means to vent
Our musty superfluity. See, our best elders.

*Enter COMINIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, and other Senators; JUNIUS
BRUTUS and SICINIUS VELUTUS*

FIRST SENATOR

240 Marcius, 'tis true that you have lately told us;
The Volsces are in arms.

MARCIUS

They have a leader,
Tullus Aufidius, that will put you to 't.
I sin in envying his nobility,
And were I any thing but what I am,
245 I would wish me only he.

COMINIUS

You have fought together.

MARCIUS

Were half to half the world by the ears and he.
Upon my party, I'd revolt to make
Only my wars with him: he is a lion
250 That I am proud to hunt.

FIRST SENATOR

Then, worthy Marcius,
Attend upon Cominius to these wars.

COMINIUS

It is your former promise.

MENENIUS

What option were they given?

MARCIUS

Five representatives of their own choice to defend their
idiotic ideas. One is Junius Brutus, Sicinius Velutus, and I
don't know the rest. Forget it! The mob should've destroyed
the city before they ever got so much from me. It will be a
disaster, and only make more conflict in the senate.

MENENIUS

This is strange.

MARCIUS

Go, get out of here, you rabble-rousers!

MESSENGER enters hastily.

MESSENGER

Where's Caius Marcius?

MARCIUS

I'm here, what's the matter?

MESSENGER

The news is, sir, that the Volsces  are preparing to attack us.

 The Volsces are another Roman city-state. At this period in Roman history, the empire was divided into many competing parts.

MARCIUS

Good! It will give us a way to get rid of this moldy excess.
Here come our best senators.

*COMINIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, and other SENATORS enter;
JUNIUS BRUTUS and SICINIUS VELUTUS enter.*

FIRST SENATOR

Marcius, what you warned us about recently has come true:
it looks like the Volsces are getting ready to attack.

MARCIUS

They have a leader, Tullus Aufidius, that will really give you
a hard time. I know I shouldn't, but I admire his strength; if I
had to be anyone but myself, I would wish to be him .

 This is the first of many references to Marcius and Aufidius's odd obsession with one another.

COMINIUS

So you've fought him before?

MARCIUS

If the whole world were at war, and he were on my side, I
would change sides just to fight with him. He is the only
man worth fighting with.

FIRST SENATOR

Then, worthy Marcius, go with Cominius to war.

COMINIUS

It is what you promised before.

MARCIUS

Sir, it is;
 255 And I am constant. Titus Lartius, thou
 Shalt see me once more strike at Tullus' face.
 What, art thou stiff? stand'st out?

TITUS

No, Caius Marcius;
 I'll lean upon one crutch and fight with t'other,
 260 Ere stay behind this business.

MENENIUS

O, true-bred!

FIRST SENATOR

Your company to the Capitol; where, I know,
 Our greatest friends attend us.

TITUS

[To COMINIUS] Lead you on.
 265 [To MARCIUS] Follow Cominius; We must follow you;
 Right worthy you priority.

COMINIUS

Noble Marcius!

FIRST SENATOR

[To the Citizens] Hence to your homes; be gone!

MARCIUS

270 Nay, let them follow:
 The Volsces have much corn; take these rats thither
 To gnaw their garners. Worshipful mutiniers,
 Your valour puts well forth: pray, follow.

Citizens steal away. Exeunt all but SICINIUS and BRUTUS

SICINIUS

275 Was ever man so proud as is this Marcius?

BRUTUS

He has no equal.

SICINIUS

When we were chosen tribunes for the people,—

BRUTUS

Mark'd you his lip and eyes?

SICINIUS

Nay, but his taunts.

BRUTUS

280 Being moved, he will not spare to gird the gods.

SICINIUS

Be-mock the modest moon.

BRUTUS

The present wars devour him: he is grown
 Too proud to be so valiant.

SICINIUS

Such a nature,
 285 Tickled with good success, despairs the shadow
 Which he treads on at noon: but I do wonder
 His insolence can brook to be commanded
 Under Cominius.

MARCIUS

Sir, it is; and I will not break my promise. Titus Lartius, you'll
 see me fight with Tullus once again. What's wrong, are you
 dead? Are you upset?

TITUS

No, Caius Marcius; I'll lean upon one crutch and fight with
 the other, rather than stay behind while you are fighting.

MENENIUS

Oh, you pure-bred Roman!

FIRST SENATOR

Come with me to the Capitol, where, I know, our best
 friends are waiting for us.

TITUS

[To COMINIUS] Take us there.

[To MARCIUS] Follow Cominius, and we must follow you,
 who most deserve to lead us.

COMINIUS

Noble Marcius!

FIRST SENATOR

[To the citizens] Get to your homes; be gone!

MARCIUS

No, let them come along! The Volsces have plenty of corn;
 take these rats there to gnaw at it. Show us your bravery,
 you great rebels: pray, follow.

CITIZENS sneak away. All but SICINIUS and BRUTUS exit.

SICINIUS

Has there ever been anyone as arrogant as Marcius?

BRUTUS

No, he has no equal.

SICINIUS

When we were chosen as representatives for the people—

BRUTUS

Did you see his expressions?

SICINIUS

No, but I heard him taunt us.

BRUTUS

When he's angry, he would taunt the gods themselves.

SICINIUS

He'd mock the moon.

BRUTUS

The wars have completely ruined him: he's become too
 proud to be so brave.

SICINIUS

That kind of man, who has been flattered with success,
 looks down on everything, even his own shadow. I wonder
 if he can deal with being under Cominius's command.

BRUTUS

Fame, at the which he aims,
 290 In whom already he's well graced, can not
 Better be held nor more attain'd than by
 A place below the first: for what miscarries
 Shall be the general's fault, though he perform
 To the utmost of a man, and giddy censure
 295 Will then cry out of Marcius 'O if he
 Had borne the business!'

SICINIUS

Besides, if things go well,
 Opinion that so sticks on Marcius shall
 Of his demerits rob Cominius.

BRUTUS

300 Come:
 Half all Cominius' honours are to Marcius.
 Though Marcius earned them not, and all his faults
 To Marcius shall be honours, though indeed
 In aught he merit not.

SICINIUS

305 Let's hence, and hear
 How the dispatch is made, and in what fashion,
 More than his singularity, he goes
 Upon this present action.

BRUTUS

Lets along.
 310

*Exeunt***BRUTUS**

Actually, he's in the best position for acquiring fame—which is all he wants, and all he's ever wanted—because fame is most easily gotten as the second in command. The leader always has to take responsibility for what goes wrong, even if he does his best, and then Marcius will cry out, "If only I had been in charge!"

SICINIUS

Right—and then if things go well, Marcius will get all the credit Cominius deserves.

BRUTUS

Indeed: half of what Cominius does right will be attributed to Marcius even if he doesn't deserve it, and everything Cominius does wrong will be somehow made Marcius's honors, just the same.

SICINIUS

Lets go and hear how things are announced, and how—beyond just his strangeness—he takes action.

BRUTUS

Let's go.
All exit.

Act 1, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter TULLUS AUFIDIUS and certain Senators

FIRST SENATOR

So, your opinion is, Aufidius,
 That they of Rome are entered in our counsels
 And know how we proceed.

AUFIDIUS

Is it not yours?
 5 What ever have been thought on in this state,
 That could be brought to bodily act ere Rome
 Had circumvention? 'Tis not four days gone
 Since I heard thence; these are the words: I think
 I have the letter here; yes, here it is.

*Reads***AUFIDIUS**

10 'They have press'd a power, but it is not known
 Whether for east or west: the dearth is great;
 The people mutinous; and it is rumour'd,
 Cominius, Marcius your old enemy,
 Who is of Rome worse hated than of you,
 15 And Titus Lartius, a most valiant Roman,
 These three lead on this preparation
 Whither 'tis bent: most likely 'tis for you:
 Consider of it.'

FIRST SENATOR

Our army's in the field
 20 We never yet made doubt but Rome was ready
 To answer us.

Shakescleare Translation

TULLUS AUFIDIUS and a few SENATORS enter.

FIRST SENATOR

So, Aufidius—you think that the Romans have spies among us, and know what we're going to do?

AUFIDIUS

Don't you? When have we ever even thought of doing something that Rome didn't attempt to counter before we had the chance to even get started? Less than four days ago, I heard from Rome—this is what they said—I have the letter here somewhere . . . yes, here it is.

*AUFIDIUS reads aloud.***AUFIDIUS**

"They have sent out a battalion of soldiers, but it is not known whether they went east or west. The city's famine is serious, and the people are mutinous. There are rumours that three men lead the battalion: Cominius, Marcius your rival (whom Rome hates even more than they hate you), and Titus Lartius, a most valiant Roman. They are probably bound for you; be careful."

FIRST SENATOR

We've never yet sent out an army unless we were ready to have Rome fight with us.

AUFIDIUS

Nor did you think it folly
To keep your great pretences veil'd till when
They needs must show themselves; which
in the hatching,
25 It seem'd, appear'd to Rome. By the discovery
We shall be shorten'd in our aim, which was
To take in many towns ere almost Rome
Should know we were afoot.

SECOND SENATOR

30 Noble Aufidius,
Take your commission; hie you to your bands:
Let us alone to guard Corioli:
If they set down before 's, for the remove
Bring your army; but, I think, you'll find
35 They've not prepared for us.

AUFIDIUS

O, doubt not that;
I speak from certainties. Nay, more,
Some parcels of their power are forth already,
And only hitherward. I leave your honours.
40 If we and Caius Marcius chance to meet,
'Tis sworn between us we shall ever strike
Till one can do no more.

ALL

The gods assist you!

AUFIDIUS

And keep your honours safe!

FIRST SENATOR

45 Farewell.

SECOND SENATOR

Farewell.

ALL

Farewell.

Exeunt

AUFIDIUS

But at the same time, you've never thought it was a mistake to hide your warlike aims until the last possible second. This time, Rome seems to have known from the start, so that our initial plan—to conquer towns secretly, without Rome getting word—has been ruined.

SECOND SENATOR

Honorable Aufidius, here are your orders: go out to your soldiers, and leave us to guard the city of Corioli. If they besiege us, come at them from behind. Still, I think you'll find that they underestimate our strength.

AUFIDIUS

Oh, don't doubt for a minute that they plan to besiege Corioli. I am certain of it; some of their forces are headed this way already. I will leave you, sirs. If I meet Caius Marcius in battle, we have sworn to fight to the death.

ALL

May the gods assist you!

AUFIDIUS

May they keep you safe, sirs!

FIRST SENATOR

Goodbye.

SECOND SENATOR

Goodbye.

ALL

Goodbye.

All exit.

Act 1, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter VOLUMNIA and VIRGILIA. They set them down on two low stools, and sew

VOLUMNIA

I pray you, daughter, sing; or express yourself in a more comfortable sort: if my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love. When yet he was but tender-bodied and the only son of my womb, when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way, when for a day of kings' entreaties a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding, I, considering 5 how honour would become such a person—that it was no better than picture-like to hang by the wall—if renown made it not stir, was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

Shakescleare Translation

VOLUMNIA and VIRGILIA enter. They sit down on two stools and begin to sew.

VOLUMNIA

Why don't you sing, daughter, or at least speak cheerfully? If my son Caius Marcius were my husband, as he is yours, I would rejoice more when he is gone to win honor in battle than I would in his embrace when he would most show love. When he was just a baby, my first son, so young and beautiful that he won everyone's attention and was impossible to give up even for a moment—even then, thinking of his incredible potential, I sent him willingly to a cruel war. When he returned, he had gained resolve, and had already saved the life of another man. I tell you, my daughter, I was not more happy to know that I had born a son than I was in seeing that he had proven himself a man.

1 Note how weird this is on several levels. Marcius's mom (*Volumnia*) is talking to Marcius's wife (*Virgilia*). *Volumnia* says that if *Marcius* (again, *HER SON*) were her husband, she'd be happier when he was off winning glory in battle than when they were having sex.

VIRGILIA

But had he died in the business, madam; how then?

VOLUMNIA

Then his good report should have been my son; I
20 therein would have found issue. Hear me profess sincerely: had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike and none less dear than thine and my good Marcius, I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeited out of action.

Enter a Gentlewoman

GENTLEWOMAN

25 Madam, the Lady Valeria is come to visit you.

VIRGILIA

Beseech you, give me leave to retire myself.

VOLUMNIA

Indeed, you shall not.
Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum,
See him pluck Aufidius down by the hair,
30 As children from a bear, the Volscs shunning him:
Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:
'Come on, you cowards! you were got in fear,
Though you were born in Rome!' his bloody brow
With his mail'd hand then wiping, forth he goes,
35 Like to a harvest-man that's task'd to mow
Or all or lose his hire.

VIRGILIA

His bloody brow! O Jupiter, no blood!

VOLUMNIA

Away, you fool! it more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy: the breasts of Hecuba,
40 When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
At Grecian sword, contemning. Tell Valeria,
We are fit to bid her welcome.

Exit Gentlewoman

VIRGILIA

Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius!

VOLUMNIA

45 He'll beat Aufidius 'head below his knee
And tread upon his neck.

Enter VALERIA, with an Usher and Gentlewoman

VALERIA

My ladies both, good day to you.

VOLUMNIA

Sweet madam.

VIRGILIA

50 I am glad to see your ladyship.

VALERIA

How do you both? you are manifest house-keepers.
What are you sewing here? A fine spot, in good
faith. How does your little son?

VIRGILIA

I thank your ladyship; well, good madam.

VIRGILIA

But what if he had died in that war; how would you have felt then?

VOLUMNIA

Then the news of his bravery would have taken his place.
Listen; I'm being serious: if I had a dozen sons, each of them loved as much as I love our Marcius, I would rather have eleven die nobly for their country than one to die lazy and indulgent, doing nothing for the good of anyone.

A GENTLEWOMAN enters.

GENTLEWOMAN

Madam, the Lady Valeria has arrived to visit you.

VIRGILIA

Please excuse me; let me go and rest in my room.

VOLUMNIA

No, you may not. I can practically hear your husband's drum; I can imagine him pulling Aufidius down by his hair as a bear would kill children, the Volscs running in fear. I can see him striding forward and calling out: "Come on, you cowards! You were conceived by weaklings, though you were born in Rome!" He wipes his bloody brow with an armored hand, and there he goes, like a farmer at harvest driven to cut all the grain or lose his job.

VIRGILIA

His bloody brow! By the gods, no blood!

VOLUMNIA

Get away, you fool! Blood is more appropriate to a brave man than gold in his trophy. The breasts of Hecuba, mother of Hector ², were not more beautiful than Hector's forehead when it bled from the blow of a Greek sword.

[To the GENTLEWOMAN] Tell Valeria we're ready to greet her.

² Hecuba and Hector are characters from Greek mythology, and appear in Homer's *Iliad*. Hecuba was the queen of Troy during the Trojan war, while Hector is the eldest of her nineteen children and the greatest Trojan warrior. He was killed (in a very detailed scene in the *Iliad*) by Achilles.

GENTLEWOMAN exits.

VIRGILIA

Heaven protect my husband from the deadly Aufidius!

VOLUMNIA

He'll crush Aufidius's head beneath his knee and stomp on his neck.

VALERIA enters with a servant and GENTLEWOMAN.

VALERIA

My ladies, hello to you both.

VOLUMNIA

Sweet lady.

VIRGILIA

I am glad to see you, ma'am.

VALERIA

How are you? You are such perfect house-wives. What are you sewing? That's a great pattern, seriously. How is your little boy?

VIRGILIA

Thank you, ma'am. He's doing well.

VOLUMNIA

55 He had rather see the swords, and hear a drum, than look upon his school-master.

VALERIA

O' my word, the father's son: I'll swear,'tis a very pretty boy. O' my troth, I looked upon him o' Wednesday half an hour together: has such a 60 confirmed countenance. I saw him run after a gilded butterfly: and when he caught it, he let it go again; and after it again; and over and over he comes, and again; catched it again; or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it; O, I warrant it, how he mammocked it!

VOLUMNIA

One on 's father's moods.

VALERIA

Indeed, la, 'tis a noble child.

VIRGILIA

A crack, madam.

VALERIA

70 Come, lay aside your stitchery; I must have you play the idle husewife with me this afternoon.

VIRGILIA

No, good madam; I will not out of doors.

VALERIA

Not out of doors!

VOLUMNIA

She shall, she shall.

VIRGILIA

75 Indeed, no, by your patience; I'll not over the threshold till my lord return from the wars.

VALERIA

Fie, you confine yourself most unreasonably: come, you must go visit the good lady that lies in.

VIRGILIA

I will wish her speedy strength, and visit her with my prayers; but I cannot go thither.

VOLUMNIA

80 Why, I pray you?

VALERIA

'Tis not to save labour, nor that I want love.

VALERIA

You would be another Penelope: yet, they say, all the yarn she spun in Ulysses' absence did but fill Ithaca full of moths. Come; I would your cambric were sensible as your finger, that you might leave pricking it for pity. Come, you shall go with us.

VIRGILIA

No, good madam, pardon me; indeed, I will not forth.

VOLUMNIA

He would rather play with swords and hear a war drum than study.

VALERIA

Oh, my word ³, just like his father! I say, he's a very handsome boy. To be honest, I was watching him Wednesday for at least half an hour: he has such a bold look about him. I saw him run after a golden butterfly, and when he caught it, he let it go again, and then chased it again; over and over he comes, and again, caught it again, and then suddenly, maybe his stumble enraged him, or maybe—I don't know why—he chomped down on the butterfly with his teeth and tore it up; Oh, I do say, how he chewed upon it!

³ Valeria wildly overuses these phrases (*Oh, my word, I'll swear, etc.*) even for 1608, in a way which conveys that she is flighty and naive.

VOLUMNIA

He is moody and abrupt, just like his father.

VALERIA

Indeed, it's true: he's a magnificent child.

VIRGILIA

A good egg ⁴, ma'am.

⁴ This dialogue is full of playful, contemporary language: "a crack," in the original text, was slang for something skillful. We might still call someone "a crack shot," to convey that they are a really excellent marksman.

VALERIA

Come on, enough sewing; why don't you spend the afternoon with me?

VIRGILIA

No, ma'am; I can't go out.

VALERIA

You can't go out?

VOLUMNIA

Oh, she'll go, she'll go.

VIRGILIA

No, if you don't mind. I can't bear to leave the house until my husband gets back from the war.

VALERIA

Ugh, you're holding yourself down for no good reason: come on, go spend the afternoon with our pregnant friend.

VIRGILIA

I wish her the best, and please send her my prayers, but I simply can't go.

VOLUMNIA

Why not? Explain yourself.

VIRGILIA

It's not that I'm lazy, nor that I don't love her.

VALERIA

You want to be like Penelope ⁵? Think of the good waiting did her; they say all the yarn she spun while Ulysses was away just filled the island of Ithaca with moths. Come on, I wish your sewing linen could feel the pain of your needle, so that you'd leave it alone out of pity and come with us. Come on!

⁵ Penelope, a figure from Ancient Greek literature and myth, waited twenty years for her husband Ulysses (or Odysseus) to return from the war with Troy.

VIRGILIA

No, ma'am, pardon me; I truly will not go.

VALERIA

In truth, la, go with me; and I'll tell you
excellent news of your husband.

90

VIRGILIA

O, good madam, there can be none yet.

VALERIA

Verily, I do not jest with you; there came news from
him last night.

VIRGILIA

Indeed, madam?

VALERIA

In earnest, it's true; I heard a senator speak it.
Thus it is: the Volsces have an army forth; against
whom Cominius the general is gone, with one part of
our Roman power: your lord and Titus Lartius are set
down before their city Corioli; they nothing doubt
prevailing and to make it brief wars. This is true,
on mine honour; and so, I pray, go with us.

100

VIRGILIA

Give me excuse, good madam; I will obey you in every
thing hereafter.

VOLUMNIA

Let her alone, lady: as she is now, she will but
disease our better mirth.

105

VALERIA

In troth, I think she would. Fare you well, then.
Come, good sweet lady. Prithee, Virgilia, turn thy
solemnness out o' door, and go along with us.

VIRGILIA

No, at a word, madam; indeed, I must not. I wish
you much mirth.

110

VALERIA

Well, then, farewell.

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 4

Shakespeare

*Enter, with drum and colours, MARCIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, Captains and
Soldiers. To them a Messenger*

MARCIUS

Yonder comes news. A wager they have met.

LARTIUS

My horse to yours, no.

MARCIUS

'Tis done.

LARTIUS

Agreed.

MARCIUS

Say, has our general met the enemy?

Shakescleare Translation

*MARCIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, captains, and soldiers with
drums and flags enter from one door, as though before the
city of Corioli. From another door, a MESSENGER enters.*

MARCIUS

Here comes some news. I bet our other force has begun to
fight the Volsces.

LARTIUS

I bet my horse against yours they haven't.

MARCIUS

Done.

LARTIUS

Agreed.

MARCIUS

[To the MESSENGER] Hey, has our general started fighting?

MESSENGER

They lie in view; but have not spoke as yet.

LARTIUS

So, the good horse is mine.

MARCIUS

I'll buy him of you.

LARTIUS

No, I'll nor sell nor give him: lend you him I will

10 For half a hundred years. Summon the town.

MARCIUS

How far off lie these armies?

MESSENGER

Within this mile and half.

MARCIUS

Then shall we hear their 'larum, and they ours.

Now, Mars, I prithee, make us quick in work,

15 That we with smoking swords may march from hence,
To help our fielded friends! Come, blow thy blast.

They sound a parley. Enter two Senators with others on the walls

MARCIUS

Tutus Aufidius, is he within your walls?

FIRST SENATOR

No, nor a man that fears you less than he,

20 That's lesser than a little.

Drums afar off

FIRST SENATOR

Hark! our drums

Are bringing forth our youth. We'll break our walls,

Rather than they shall pound us up: our gates,

25 Which yet seem shut, we, have but pinn'd with rushes;
They'll open of themselves.

Alarum afar off

FIRST SENATOR

Hark you, far off!

There is Aufidius; list, what work he makes

Amongst your cloven army.

30

MARCIUS

O, they are at it!

LARTIUS

Their noise be our instruction. Ladders, ho!

Enter the army of the Volsces

MARCIUS

They fear us not, but issue forth their city.

35 Now put your shields before your hearts, and fight
With hearts more proof than shields. Advance,
brave Titus:

They do disdain us much beyond our thoughts,
Which makes me sweat with wrath. Come on, my fellows:

40 He that retires I'll take him for a Volsce,
And he shall feel mine edge.

MESSENGER

The two forces have seen each other, but haven't begun fighting yet.

LARTIUS

So, the good horse is mine.

MARCIUS

I'll just buy him back.

LARTIUS

No, I won't sell him or give him to you; I'll lend him to you for fifty years, though.

MARCIUS

How far away are their armies?

MESSENGER

No more than a mile and a half.

MARCIUS

Then we'll hear their trumpets, and they'll hear ours. To the god of war, I pray: make our work quick, so that with we may march to help our friends in the field before our swords have even cooled from our own battle! Go ahead, blow the trumpet.

They blow the trumpets to call a truce. Enter two SENATORS with others on the walls of the city.

MARCIUS

Is Tullus Aufidius in the city?

FIRST SENATOR

No, nor anyone less afraid of you than he is, which is very little.

Drums are heard in the distance.

FIRST SENATOR

Listen! Our drums are calling for our strong young men. We'll break our own walls rather than be locked in by you. The gates of the city, which might seem shut in fear, we've only barricaded with grass; they'll open easily to fight you.

Trumpets blow in the distance.

FIRST SENATOR

Listen! Hear that? That's Aufidius; listen—he's killing everyone in your divided army.

MARCIUS

Oh, they are fighting!

LARTIUS

Their trumpets might as well be ours, too! Put ladders to the wall!

The army of the Volsces enter.

MARCIUS

They aren't afraid of us; instead, they're attacking. Put your shields in front of your hearts, and fight with hearts stronger than those shields. Forward, brave Titus! Their boldness is disdainful, which makes me sweat with wrath. Come on, my soldiers; I'll treat anyone who takes a backward step like the enemy and promptly kill them.

Alarum. The Romans are beat back to their trenches. Re-enter MARCIUS cursing

MARCIUS

All the contagion of the south light on you,
You shames of Rome! you herd of—Boils and plagues
Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhor'd
Further than seen and one infect another
Against the wind a mile! You souls of geese,
That bear the shapes of men, how have you run
From slaves that apes would beat! Pluto and hell!
All hurt behind; backs red, and faces pale
With flight and agued fear! Mend and charge home,
Or, by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe
And make my wars on you: I look to't: come on;
If you'll stand fast, we'll beat them to their wives,
As they us to our trenches followed.

Another alarum. The Volsces fly, and MARCIUS follows them to the gates

MARCIUS

So, now the gates are ope: now prove good seconds:
'Tis for the followers fortune widens them,
Not for the fliers: mark me, and do the like.

Enters the gates

FIRST SOLDIER

Fool-hardiness; not I.

SECOND SOLDIER

Nor I.

MARCIUS is shut in

FIRST SOLDIER

See, they have shut him in.

ALL

To the pot, I warrant him.

Alarum continues

Re-enter TITUS LARTIUS

LARTIUS

What is become of Marcius?

ALL

Slain, sir, doubtless.

FIRST SOLDIER

Following the fliers at the very heels,
With them he enters; who, upon the sudden,
Clapp'd to their gates: he is himself alone,
To answer all the city.

70

LARTIUS

O noble fellow!
Who sensibly outdares his senseless sword,
And, when it bows, stands up. Thou art left, Marcius:
A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art,
Were not so rich a jewel. Thou wast a soldier
Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
Only in strokes; but, with thy grim looks and
The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds,
Thou madst thine enemies shake, as if the world
Were feverous and did tremble.

Trumpets sound, and over the course of a hard fight, the Romans are beaten back to their trenches. MARCIUS re-enters cursing.

MARCIUS

May all the diseases of the south wind poison you, you shames of Rome! you herd of—sores and plagues cover your whole body, that you'll be hated from even further than you can be seen, and so that you infect each other against the wind even a mile away! You cowards, more likely to fly than fight, you have run from wretches who even apes could defeat! The devil curse you! You've all been injured as you ran away—your backs are red with blood, and your faces white with cowardice and sickly fear! Pull yourselves together and charge back to the fight, or by the fires of heaven, I will stop fighting the Volsces and will turn to fight you! Don't think I'm joking; come on! If you can stand your ground, we'll beat them home to their wives, as they beat us to our trenches.

Another trumpet sounds. The Volsces retreat, and MARCIUS chases them to the gates of Corioli.

MARCIUS

So, now the gates are open; this looks like a good opportunity. Luck has opened them so that we can follow the Volsces into the city, not so that they can flee. Come with me!

MARCIUS enters the gates.

FIRST SOLDIER

That's foolish; I'm not going in.

SECOND SOLDIER

Me neither.

The gates close and MARCIUS is trapped inside Corioli.

FIRST SOLDIER

See, they have trapped him inside.

ALL

He's doomed, I'm sure.

Trumpets continue to blow.

TITUS LARTIUS re-enters.

LARTIUS

What's happened to Marcius?

ALL

He's been killed sir, surely.

FIRST SOLDIER

He followed the Volsces right into the city as they retreated, and they suddenly slammed the gates shut behind him. He's alone in Corioli against the entire city.

LARTIUS

Oh, that brave man! Who knowingly dares more than even his sword  would, and when it fails, he continues by force of will. You've left us, Marcius. A ruby as big as a man is not worth as much as you. You were a soldier to make our ancestors jealous—not just fierce and powerful in battle, but with your fearsome looks and the thunder-like sounds of your movements, you made your enemies shake in terror, as if the whole world had a fever and trembled.

 This is the first of many metaphors throughout the play which compare Caius Marcius (later Coriolanus) to strong objects in order to communicate that he is tougher than any man could be. We might say that someone is "as tough as a rock" in this same vein.

Re-enter MARCIUS, bleeding, assaulted by the enemy

FIRST SOLDIER

Look, sir.

LARTIUS

O'tis Marcus!
Let's fetch him off, or make remain alike.

They fight, and all enter the city

MARCIUS re-enters, bleeding, assaulted by the enemy.

FIRST SOLDIER

Look, sir.

LARTIUS

Oh my god, it's Marcus! Lets rescue him, or we'll find ourselves bleeding like he is.

They fight, and all enter the city.

Act 1, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Enter certain Romans, with spoils

FIRST ROMAN

This will I carry to Rome.

SECOND ROMAN

And I this.

THIRD ROMAN

A murrain on't! I took this for silver.

Alarum continues still afar off

Enter MARCIUS and TITUS LARTIUS with a trumpet

MARCIUS

5 See here these movers that do prize their hours
At a crack'd drachm! Cushions, leaden spoons,
Irons of a doit, doublets that hangmen would
Bury with those that wore them, these base slaves,
Ere yet the fight be done, pack up: down with them!
10 And hark, what noise the general makes! To him!
There is the man of my soul's hate, Aufidius,
Piercing our Romans: then, valiant Titus, take
Convenient numbers to make good the city;
Whilst I, with those that have the spirit, will haste
15 To help Cominius.

LARTIUS

Worthy sir, thou bleed'st;
Thy exercise hath been too violent for
A second course of fight.

MARCIUS

Sir, praise me not;
20 My work hath yet not warm'd me: fare you well:
The blood I drop is rather physical
Than dangerous to me: to Aufidius thus
I will appear, and fight.

LARTIUS

Now the fair goddess, Fortune,
25 Fall deep in love with thee; and her great charms
Misguide thy opposers' swords! Bold gentleman,
Prosperity be thy page!

MARCIUS

Thy friend no less
Than those she placeth highest! So, farewell.

LARTIUS

30 Thou worthiest Marcus!

Shakescleare Translation

A few ROMANS enter with loot from the city.

FIRST ROMAN

I'll take this back to Rome.

SECOND ROMAN

And I'll take this.

THIRD ROMAN

Oh, curse this! I thought this was silver.

Trumpeting still continues in the distance.

MARCIUS and TITUS LARTIUS enter to the sound of an especially grand trumpet.

MARCIUS

Look at these layabouts, who have no concern for all the time they waste! Cushions, lead spoons, third-rate swords, shirts that no one would ever want—these losers are plundering all of this junk before the fight is even over! To hell with them! But listen, that's Cominius's trumpet! We must go to him! That's where Aufidius, my worst enemy, is fighting against our men. Brave Titus, you stay here with enough men to secure the city, and I'll take whoever is brave enough to hurry to Cominius's aid.

LARTIUS

But brave sir, you're bleeding! You've already done far too much fighting to turn around and go to another part of the battle.

MARCIUS

Don't call me brave if that's what you'd expect of me. All that fighting has barely warmed me up; goodbye. My bleeding is good for me rather than dangerous. I'll face Aufidius just like this, blood and all.

LARTIUS

May Lady Luck go with you, and may she turn away the swords of your enemies! Brave soldier, may prosperity walk beside you!

MARCIUS

As much prosperity as anyone has ever won! So, goodbye.

LARTIUS

That brave Marcus.

*Exit MARCIUS**MARCIUS exits.***LARTIUS**

Go, sound thy trumpet in the market-place;
Call thither all the officers o' the town,
Where they shall know our mind: away!

35

*Exeunt***LARTIUS**

Go, blow your trumpets in the center of the city, and call its
leaders together so they can hear what we have to say. Go!

All exit.

Act 1, Scene 6

Shakespeare*Enter COMINIUS, as it were in retire, with soldiers***COMINIUS**

Breathe you, my friends: well fought;
we are come off
Like Romans, neither foolish in our stands,
Nor cowardly in retire: believe me, sirs,
5 We shall be charged again. Whilsts we have struck,
By interims and conveying gusts we have heard
The charges of our friends. Ye Roman gods!
Lead their successes as we wish our own,
That both our powers, with smiling
10 fronts encountering,
May give you thankful sacrifice.

10

*Enter a Messenger***Shakescleare Translation***COMINIUS enters, coming from battle with soldiers.***COMINIUS**

Relax for a moment, my friends, you fought well. We've lived up to our names as Romans—neither foolish in the fight nor cowardly in stepping back from it. Believe me, sirs, they'll charge at us again. As we've been fighting, we've heard the trumpets of our friends' fight over the wind. Oh, Roman gods! Give them success as we hope for our own, so that both our forces may willingly give you thankful sacrifice.

*A MESSENGER enters.***COMINIUS**

Thy news?

COMINIUS

What news do you have?

MESSENGER

The citizens of Corioli have issued,
15 And given to Lartius and to Marcus battle:
I saw our party to their trenches driven,
And then I came away.

MESSENGER

The citizens of Corioli have attacked the forces of [Titus] Lartius and Marcus. I saw our Romans driven back to their trenches just before I left.

COMINIUS

Though thou speak'st truth,
Methinks thou speak'st not well.
20 How long is't since?

COMINIUS

If you're telling the truth, it's a truth I don't much like. How long ago was this?

MESSENGER

Above an hour, my lord.

MESSENGER

More than an hour, sir.

COMINIUS

'Tis not a mile; briefly we heard their drums:
How couldst thou in a mile confound an hour,
And bring thy news so late?

COMINIUS

They're less than a mile away; we just heard their drums. How did it take you an hour to come a mile; why are you so late?

MESSENGER

Spies of the Volsces
Held me in chase, that I was forced to wheel
Three or four miles about, else had I, sir,
Half an hour since brought my report.

MESSENGER

Spies of the Volsces chased after me, and I had to run three or four miles extra in order to lose them. I'd have been here a half hour ago otherwise, sir.

COMINIUS

Who's yonder,
30 That does appear as he were flay'd? O gods
He has the stamp of Marcus; and I have
Before-time seen him thus.

COMINIUS

Who's that coming this way, covered in wounds? Oh my god, it must be Marcus; I've seen him like this before.

MARCIIUS*[Within] Come I too late?***MARCIIUS***[From offstage, shouting] Am I too late?*

COMINIUS

The shepherd knows not thunder from a tabour
 35 More than I know the sound of Marcius' tongue
 From every meaner man.

Enter MARCIUS

MARCUS

Come I too late?

COMINIUS

Ay, if you come not in the blood of others,
 40 But mantled in your own.

MARCUS

O, let me clip ye
 In arms as sound as when I woo'd, in heart
 As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
 And tapers burn'd to bedward!

COMINIUS

45 Flower of warriors,
 How is it with Titus Lartius?

MARCUS

As with a man busied about decrees:
 Condemning some to death, and some to exile;
 Ransoming him, or pitying, threatening the other;
 50 Holding Coriolani in the name of Rome,
 Even like a fawning greyhound in the leash,
 To let him slip at will.

COMINIUS

Where is that slave
 Which told me they had beat you to your trenches?
 55 Where is he? call him hither.

MARCUS

Let him alone;
 He did inform the truth: but for our gentlemen,
 The common file—a plague! tribunes for them!—
 The mouse ne'er shunn'd the cat as they did budge
 60 From rascals worse than they.

COMINIUS

But how prevail'd you?

MARCUS

Will the time serve to tell? I do not think.
 Where is the enemy? are you lords o' the field?
 If not, why cease you till you are so?

COMINIUS

65 Marcius,
 We have at disadvantage fought and did
 Retire to win our purpose.

MARCUS

How lies their battle? know you on which side
 They have placed their men of trust?

COMINIUS

70 As I guess, Marcius,
 Their bands i' the vaward are the Antiates,
 Of their best trust; o'er them Aufidius,
 Their very heart of hope.

COMINIUS

As the shepherd can distinguish between a tambourine and
 thunder, I can tell that is the sound of Marcius's voice rather
 than any lesser man.

MARCIUS enters.

MARCUS

Am I too late?

COMINIUS

Ha! If that's your blood and not the blood of your enemies,
 then yes.

MARCUS

Oh, let me wrap my arms around you like I would around a
 lover; I'm as happy as I was the day I was married, when the
candles had burned low. 

 Remember when Volumnia said that, if Marcius were her husband, she'd be happier when he was away fighting than when they were in bed together? Marcius feels much the same way. There's a strong sexual, homoerotic overture to this entire conversation. The implication here is that the candles have burned down during lovemaking after a wedding night.

COMINIUS

Greatest of warriors, how's it going with Titus Lartius in the
 other part of the battle?

MARCUS

It's going about as well as with a mayor, busy with running
 a city: condemning some to death, and some to exile;
 taking ransom from some, taking pity on others, and
 threatening still more. He holds Coriolani in the name of
 Rome, and the city is his like a greyhound on a leash, ready
 to race at his command.

COMINIUS

Where is that lowly messenger who told me that your force
 had been beaten to your trenches? Where is he? Get him
 over here.

MARCUS

Leave him alone. He was just telling the truth. A plague on
 our common soldiers! We'll have them court martialed! No
 mouse has ever fled a cat as they did flee from rascals even
 worse than themselves.

COMINIUS

So then how did you win?

MARCUS

Do we have time for an idle story? I don't think so. Where is
 the enemy? Have you won already? If not, why waste time
 until you have?

COMINIUS

Marcius, we've been fighting outnumbered, and we're
 regrouping now to make another go of it.

MARCUS

How are they organized? Do you know where they've
 placed their best soldiers?

COMINIUS

As far as I can tell, Marcius, the men in the front are the
 Antiates, their best soldiers. Aufidius, the very heart of their
 army, leads them.

MARCIUS

I do beseech you,
 75 By all the battles wherein we have fought,
 By the blood we have shed together, by the vows
 We have made to endure friends, that you directly
 Set me against Aufidius and his Antiates;
 And that you not delay the present, but,
 80 Filling the air with swords advanced and darts,
 We prove this very hour.

COMINIUS

Though I could wish
 You were conducted to a gentle bath
 And balms applied to, you, yet dare I never
 85 Deny your asking: take your choice of those
 That best can aid your action.

MARCIUS

Those are they
 That most are willing. If any such be here—
 As it were sin to doubt—that love this painting
 90 Wherein you see me smear'd; if any fear
 Lesser his person than an ill report;
 If any think brave death outweighs bad life
 And that his country's dearer than himself;
 Let him alone, or so many so minded,
 95 Wave thus, to express his disposition,
 And follow Marcius.

They all shout and wave their swords, take him up in their arms, and cast up their caps

MARCIUS

O, me alone! make you a sword of me?
 If these shows be not outward, which of you
 But is four Volsces? none of you but is
 100 Able to bear against the great Aufidius
 A shield as hard as his. A certain number,
 Though thanks to all, must I select
 from all: the rest
 Shall bear the business in some other fight,
 105 As cause will be obey'd. Please you to march;
 And four shall quickly draw out my command,
 Which men are best inclined.

COMINIUS

March on, my fellows:
 Make good this ostentation, and you shall
 Divide in all with us.

Exeunt

MARCIUS

Then I beg you: by all the battles we've fought together, by all the blood we've shed together, by our very friendship itself—send me directly against Aufidius and his Antiates, and lets not waste any time, but fill the air with our swords and arrows this very hour.

COMINIUS

Though I wish I could have you taken to recover in a spa and have medicine given to you, I can't deny what you ask. Take whatever soldiers you think will be best suited to help you.

MARCIUS

The best soldiers are the boldest. If anyone here—dare I even doubt it—loves the painting in which you see me smeared ²; if anyone fears death less than shame; if anyone thinks a brave death is better than a fearful life, and that cares more for his country than his life; let that man, or however many like that are here, raise your arms to show your commitment, and follow me!

² The "painting" in which Marcius is smeared is the blood of his enemies. This metaphor is one of several in the play which equate art and war.

They all shout and wave their swords, pick him up on their shoulders, and toss up their hats in enthusiasm.

MARCIUS

Oh, just me then! Make you a sword of me? ³ If your enthusiasm reflects your actual boldness, each of you is worth four of the Volsces! You're all a match for the great Aufidius himself. Thanks to all of you, but I'll have to take only a few of you. The rest of you will hold your own in another fight, as the situation requires. Lets get moving, and you four [indicating four men] quickly pick out the best men among you.

³ A dense metaphor, by which Marcius means to capture two opposing ideas. On one hand, he offers himself to his men as a weapon to be used; at the same time, he is suggesting that he will be the chief sword among them—that is, their leader.

COMINIUS

Good luck, my friends. Make good on your enthusiasm and we'll all share the rich prizes of war!

All exit.

Act 1, Scene 7

Shakespeare

TITUS LARTIUS, having set a guard upon Corioli, going with drum and trumpet toward COMINIUS and CAIUS MARCIUS, enters with Lieutenant, other Soldiers, and a Scout

LARTIUS

So, let the ports be guarded: keep your duties, As I have set them down. If I do send, dispatch Those centuries to our aid: the rest will serve For a short holding: if we lose the field,
 5 We cannot keep the town.

LIEUTENANT

Fear not our care, sir.

Shakescleare Translation

TITUS LARTIUS, having set men to guard Corioli, goes with drums and trumpets toward COMINIUS and CAIUS MARCIUS. TITUS enters with LIEUTENANT, other soldiers, and a scout.

LARTIUS

So, let the gates be guarded. Attend to the duties I've assigned to you. If I send word, send those soldiers [pointing] to help us. The rest will serve to hold the city while they are away. Anyway, if we lose the battle, we'll certainly lose the town.

LIEUTENANT

Don't worry about us, sir.

LARTIUS

Hence, and shut your gates upon's.
Our guider, come; to the Roman camp conduct us.

Exeunt

LARTIUS

All right, lets go; shut the gates behind us. Come on, guide,
take us to the other camp.

All exit.

Act 1, Scene 8

Shakespeare

Alarum as in battle. Enter, from opposite sides, MARCIUS and AUFIDIUS

MARCIUS

I'll fight with none but thee; for I do hate thee
Worse than a promise-breaker.

AUFIDIUS

We hate alike:
Not Afric owns a serpent I abhor
More than thy fame and envy. Fix thy foot.

MARCIUS

Let the first budger die the other's slave,
And the gods doom him after!

AUFIDIUS

If I fly, Marcius,
Holloa me like a hare.

MARCIUS

10 Within these three hours, Tullus,
Alone I fought in your Corioli walls,
And made what work I pleased: 'tis not my blood
Wherein thou seest me mask'd; for thy revenge
Wrench up thy power to the highest.

AUFIDIUS

15 Wert thou the Hector
That was the whip of your bragg'd progeny,
Thou shouldst not scape me here.

They fight, and certain Volsces come to the aid of AUFIDIUS. MARCIUS fights till they be driven in breathless

AUFIDIUS

Officious, and not valiant, you have shamed me
In your condemned seconds.

Exeunt

Shakescleare Translation

Trumpeting is heard as in battle. MARCIUS and AUFIDIUS enter from opposite sides.

MARCIUS

I'll fight with no one but you, for I hate you worse than a promise-breaker .

 With the implication of " betrayer" or "turncoat." This line foreshadows the very different conditions of their next meeting.

AUFIDIUS

I hate you just as much: there's not a snake in all of Africa I hate more than you and your fame. Stand and fight!

MARCIUS

Let the first man to budge die as the other's slave, and the gods doom him!

AUFIDIUS

If I run, Marcius, lasso me like a hare.

MARCIUS

Not three hours ago, Tullus, I fought alone inside Corioli, and did whatever I wanted. The blood you see on me is not my own, I'll tell you that—if you want revenge, you'll have to fight better than you ever have before.

AUFIDIUS

Even if you were  , the whip of your ancestors, you wouldn't escape me here.

 Romans claimed to be ancestors of the Trojans. Hector, the greatest soldier of the Trojans, was the scourge (the whip) of the Greeks.

They fight, and just as MARCIUS is about to strike a terrible blow, a few Volsces come to the aid of AUFIDIUS.

AUFIDIUS

[To the Volsces] You groveling, cowardly idiots! You've interfered in our fight and brought terrible shame on me.

All exit.

Act 1, Scene 9

Shakespeare

Flourish. Alarum. A retreat is sounded. Flourish. Enter, from one side, COMINIUS with the Romans; from the other side, MARCIUS, with his arm in a scarf

Shakescleare Translation

A chorus of trumpets are heard, then alarmed shouts. Trumpets sound a retreat, then another chorus. COMINIUS enters with the Romans from one side; from the other side, MARCIUS enters with his arm in a scarf.

COMINIUS

If I should tell thee o'er this thy day's work,
Thou'l dst not believe thy deeds: but I'll report it
Where senators shall mingle tears with smiles,
Where great patricians shall attend and shrug,
5 I' the end admire, where ladies shall be frighted,
And, gladly quaked, hear more; where the
dull tribunes,
That, with the fusty plebeians, hate thine honours,
Shall say against their hearts 'We thank the gods
10 Our Rome hath such a soldier.'
Yet camest thou to a morsel of this feast,
Having fully dined before.

Enter TITUS LARTIUS, with his power, from the pursuit

LARTIUS

O general,
Here is the steed, we the caparison:
15 Hadst thou beheld—

MARCIUS

Pray now, no more: my mother,
Who has a charter to extol her blood,
When she does praise me grieves me. I have done
As you have done; that's what I can; induced
20 As you have been; that's for my country:
He that has but effected his good will
Hath overta'en mine act.

COMINIUS

You shall not be
The grave of your deserving; Rome must know
25 The value of her own: 'twere a concealment
Worse than a theft, no less than a traducement,
To hide your doings; and to silence that,
Which, to the spire and top of praises vouch'd,
Would seem but modest: therefore, I beseech you
30 In sign of what you are, not to reward
What you have done— before our army hear me.

MARCIUS

I have some wounds upon me, and they smart
To hear themselves remember'd.

COMINIUS

Should they not,
35 Well might they fester 'gainst ingratitude,
And tent themselves with death. Of all the horses,
Whereof we have ta'en good and good store, of all
The treasure in this field achieved and city,
We render you the tenth, to be ta'en forth,
40 Before the common distribution, at
Your only choice.

MARCIUS

I thank you, general;
But cannot make my heart consent to take
A bribe to pay my sword: I do refuse it;
45 And stand upon my common part with those
That have beheld the doing.

A long flourish. They all cry 'Marcius! Marcius!' cast up their caps and lances: COMINIUS and LARTIUS stand bare

MARCIUS

May these same instruments, which you profane,
Never sound more! when drums and trumpets shall
I' the field prove flatterers, let courts and cities be
50 Made all of false-faced soothing!
When steel grows soft as the parasite's silk,

COMINIUS

If I told you again about the work you have already done today, you wouldn't believe your own deeds. Instead, I'll tell Rome's senators, who will laugh and cry, and the best among them will listen and shrug, but in the end they'll all admire you. Ladies will be scared and excited and will ask to hear more; the most average and the most senior men in the Senate, even if they're jealous, will say in spite of themselves: "We thank the gods our Rome has such a soldier." Yet all of this was just a snack for you; you ate earlier .

 Cominius is thanking Marcus for coming to his aid even though he had already won the battle in Coriolani. Coriolani was the "feast" of the original text, while the second battle was the "morsel" or post-meal snack.

Enter TITUS LARTIUS from the fight with his soldiers.

LARTIUS

Oh, general, here is the one who carried the fight; we're just his ornaments. If you'd seen  —

 Here, Titus Lartius prepares to repeat much of what Cominius has already said, telling Caius Marcius how brave he was. That Marcius stops him is a sign of humility or frustration.

MARCIUS

Please, no more: even my own mother, who has more right to praise me than anyone else, grieves me when she does. I have done as you have done: that is, I've done my best. I have the same reasons as you: that is, I love my country. Any man who has acted as well as he can has done the same as me.

COMINIUS

You shall not silence your own praise; Rome needs to know how valuable you are to our republic. Not to praise you would be worse than stealing your praise; it would be nothing less than to lie about your reputation, to hide your actions. Please, let me review your actions before our men, not as a reward, but simply in acknowledgement of who you are.

MARCIUS

I have some wounds upon me, and they hurt when I'm reminded of them.

COMINIUS

If they didn't, they might as well infect themselves against ingratitude and welcome death. In reward, take a tenth of all the horses, and all the goods plundered from the battle and the city. You and you alone will choose your tenth first, before the rest of us.

MARCIUS

I thank you, general, but I couldn't bear to accept payment for this fighting. I must refuse and stand with all the other soldiers who were there to see me fight.

An elaborate trumpet sounds. The soldiers all cry "Marcius! Marcius!" and throw their hats and weapons in the air. COMINIUS and LARTIUS stand bare-headed to show respect.

MARCIUS

May these very trumpets, which you misuse by praising me, never blow again! When drums and trumpets are used for flattery at war, courts and cities will be home to calm deceit! When our weapons grow soft as spider's silk, may that silk be like a blanket for the wars. No more, I say!

Let him be made a coverture for the wars!
No more, I say! For that I have not wash'd
My nose that bled, or foil'd some debile wretch.—
55 Which, without note, here's many else have done,—
You shout me forth
In acclamations hyperbolical;
As if I loved my little should be dieted
In praises sauced with lies.

COMINIUS

60 Too modest are you;
More cruel to your good report than grateful
To us that give you truly: by your patience,
If 'gainst yourself you be incensed, we'll put you,
Like one that means his proper harm, in manacles,
65 Then reason safely with you. Therefore, be it known,
As to us, to all the world, that Caius Marcius
Wears this war's garland: in token of the which,
My noble steed, known to the camp, I give him,
With all his trim belonging; and from this time,
70 For what he did before Corioli, call him,
With all the applause and clamour of the host,
CAIUS MARCIUS CORIOLANUS! Bear
The addition nobly ever!

Flourish. Trumpets sound, and drums

ALL

Caius Marcius Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS

75 I will go wash;
And when my face is fair, you shall perceive
Whether I blush or no: howbeit, I thank you.
I mean to stride your steed, and at all times
To undercrest your good addition
80 To the fairness of my power.

COMINIUS

So, to our tent;
Where, ere we do repose us, we will write
To Rome of our success. You, Titus Lartius,
Must to Corioli back: send us to Rome
85 The best, with whom we may articulate,
For their own good and ours.

LARTIUS

I shall, my lord.

CORIOLANUS

The gods begin to mock me. I, that now
Refused most princely gifts, am bound to beg
90 Of my lord general.

COMINIUS

Take't; 'tis yours. What is't?

CORIOLANUS

I sometime lay here in Corioli
At a poor man's house; he used me kindly:
He cried to me; I saw him prisoner;
95 But then Aufidius was with in my view,
And wrath o'erwhelm'd my pity: I request you
To give my poor host freedom.

COMINIUS

O, well begg'd!
Were he the butcher of my son, he should
100 Be free as is the wind. Deliver him, Titus.

LARTIUS

Marcius, his name?

Merely because I haven't cleaned my bloody nose, or
because I killed some foolish wretch—which many others
here have done—you shout these wild praises of me, as if I
enjoyed having what little praise I am entitled to covered up
with lies.

COMINIUS

You are too modest, and your modesty only tarnishes your
reputation. Please, if you truly think so little of yourself,
we'll restrain you like one restrains a man who wants to
hurt himself—then we can talk reasonably with you.
Therefore, be it known to all the world as it is clear to us,
that Caius Marcius wears this war's garland  . In token of
his victory, I give him my noble steed along with his
luxurious saddle and bridle, known to everyone in the
camp. From this time forward, for what he did in Corioli, let
us all call him—with the applause and approval of the
whole army—*[shouting, as though to the whole army]* Caius
Marcius Coriolanus! Bear that name nobly forever!

 A garland is a ring of leaves and flowers awarded to the victor in a contest. Cominius is comparing the battle to a competition in which Caius Marcius has been the greatest competitor.

A chorus of trumpets and drumming is heard.

ALL

Caius Marcius Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS

I will go wash, and when my face is clean, you will all see
whether I blush or not. Either way, I thank you. I will try to
ride your horse, and at all times to live up to the name you
have given me as much as I can.

COMINIUS

So, to our tent, where before we rest, we will write to Rome
of our success. You, Titus Lartius, must return to Corioli.
From there, send the best of the Volscians to Rome so that
we can negotiate the terms of their surrender, for their own
good and ours.

LARTIUS

I will, my lord.

CORIOLANUS

The gods begin to mock me. I, who just refused the most
lavish gifts, now have to beg something of my lord general.

COMINIUS

Take it; whatever you want is yours. What is it?

CORIOLANUS

During the fight here in Corioli I hid for a bit in a poor man's
house, and he was kind to me. When I saw Aufidius, wrath
overwhelmed whatever pity I had, and so although the man
begged me to be merciful, I made him a prisoner. Please,
give my poor host his freedom.

COMINIUS

O, well begged! Were he to murder my own son, he would
be free as the wind. Free him, Titus.

LARTIUS

Marcius, what's his name?

CORIOLANUS

By Jupiter! forgot.
I am weary; yea, my memory is tired.
Have we no wine here?

COMINIUS

105 Go we to our tent:
The blood upon your visage dries; 'tis time
It should be look'd to: come.

*Exeunt***CORIOLANUS**

By god! I've forgotten. I am tired; even my memory is tired.
Don't we have any wine?

Sudden change of topic implies that mercy is not worth Coriolanus' time or attention.

COMINIUS

Lets go to our tent. The blood is drying on your face; it's
time we dealt with it. Come on.

All exit.

Act 1, Scene 10

Shakespeare

A flourish. Cornets. Enter TULLUS AUFIDIUS, bloody, with two or three Soldiers

AUFIDIUS

The town is ta'en!

FIRST SOLDIER

'Twill be deliver'd back on good condition.

AUFIDIUS

Condition!
I would I were a Roman; for I cannot,
5 Being a Volsce, be that I am. Condition!
What good condition can a treaty find
I' the part that is at mercy? Five times, Marcius,
I have fought with thee: so often hast thou beat me,
And wouldest do so, I think, should we encounter
10 As often as we eat. By the elements,
If e'er again I meet him beard to beard,
He's mine, or I am his: mine emulation
Hath not that honour in't it had; for where
I thought to crush him in an equal force,
15 True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way
Or wrath or craft may get him.

FIRST SOLDIER

He's the devil.

AUFIDIUS

Bolder, though not so subtle. My valour's poison'd
With only suffering stain by him; for him
20 Shall fly out of itself: nor sleep nor sanctuary,
Being naked, sick, nor fane nor Capitol,
The prayers of priests nor times of sacrifice,
Embarquements all of fury, shall lift up
Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst
25 My hate to Marcius: where I find him, were it
At home, upon my brother's guard, even there,
Against the hospitable canon, would I
Wash my fierce hand in's heart. Go you to the city;
Learn how 'tis held; and what they are that must
30 Be hostages for Rome.

FIRST SOLDIER

Will not you go?

AUFIDIUS

I am attended at the cypress grove: I pray you—
'Tis south the city mills— bring me word thither
How the world goes, that to the pace of it
35 I may spur on my journey.

Shakescleare Translation

A chorus of trumpets sounds. TULLUS AUFIDIUS enters, bloody, with two or three soldiers.

AUFIDIUS

The town has been captured!

FIRST SOLDIER

They'll let us have it back once we negotiate the terms of our surrender.

AUFIDIUS

Surrender! I wish I were a Roman, because I cannot be a Volscian if men like you, talking of surrender, are Volscians. Surrender? What good terms can we get from a treaty when we are the ones who have lost?

[As though to CORIOLANUS] Five times, Marcius, I have fought with you, and five times I've lost. You'd defeat me, I think, if we were to fight as often as we eat.

[To the SOLDIERS] By earth and sun, if ever again I meet him beard to beard, he will be mine or I will be his. Our rivalry, which so far has been fought in fair and open terms, will turn dirty: where before I thought to beat him sword to sword, I'll do anything now; I'll thrust at him however I can. If not by wrath, I'll kill him by cleverness.

This implies a fight to the death, with strong undertones of respect and maybe even desire.

FIRST SOLDIER

He's the devil.

AUFIDIUS

Bolder than the devil, though not as clever. My honor has been poisoned by all the times he has defeated me. To kill him, I will sacrifice that honor and be devilish. I will kill him anywhere, at any time, honorable or not: if he is sleeping, or naked, or takes refuge in a temple or in Rome; neither the prayers of priests nor their sacrifices will stop my revenge against Marcius. Even if I found him in my home, guarded by my own brother—even there, against all decency and hospitality, I would wash my avenging hand in his heart's blood. Go you to the city; find out how it's holding up, and who is being sent as hostages to Rome.

FIRST SOLDIER

Won't you go?

AUFIDIUS

People are waiting for me at the cypress grove. Please, find me there—it's south the city mills—and bring me word of how the world goes, so that the news may inspire me on my journey.

FIRST SOLDIER

I shall, sir.

Exeunt

FIRST SOLDIER

I shall, sir.

All exit.

Act 2, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter MENENIUS with the two Tribunes of the people, SICINIUS and BRUTUS.

MENENIUS

The augurer tells me we shall have news to-night.

BRUTUS

Good or bad?

MENENIUS

Not according to the prayer of the people, for they love not Marcius.

SICINIUS

5 Nature teaches beasts to know their friends.

MENENIUS

Pray you, who does the wolf love?

SICINIUS

The lamb.

MENENIUS

Ay, to devour him; as the hungry plebeians would the noble Marcius.

BRUTUS

10 He's a lamb indeed, that baes like a bear.

MENENIUS

He's a bear indeed, that lives like a lamb. You two are old men: tell me one thing that I shall ask you.

BOTH

Well, sir.

MENENIUS

In what enormity is Marcius poor in, that you two have not in abundance?

BRUTUS

He's poor in no one fault, but stored with all.

SICINIUS

Especially in pride.

BRUTUS

And topping all others in boasting.

MENENIUS

This is strange now: do you two know how you are censured here in the city, I mean of us o' the right-hand file? do you?

Shakescleare Translation

Enter MENENIUS with the two senators of the people, SICINIUS and BRUTUS.

MENENIUS

The prophet tells me we will get news tonight.

BRUTUS

Good or bad?

MENENIUS

Well, not the good news the people are praying for, since they don't like Marcius.

SICINIUS

Nature teaches beasts to know their friends.

 This was a common saying in early modern English. Sicinius is implying that the people of Rome instinctively know what's good for them, and Marcius isn't it.

MENENIUS

Tell me then, who does the wolf love?

SICINIUS

The lamb.

MENENIUS

Right—to devour him: as the hungry people would like to devour noble Marcius.

BRUTUS

If he's a lamb, he's one that baas like a bear.

MENENIUS

He's a bear that lives like a lamb. You two are old men; answer me one question.

BOTH

Go ahead, sir.

MENENIUS

What small flaw does Marcius have that you two do not have twice over?

BRUTUS

It's not that he has one fault, but all of them.

SICINIUS

He has pride, especially.

BRUTUS

And his boasting is worse than all his other flaws.

MENENIUS

Well that's weird: do you two know how you are thought of in the city, I mean by those of us in the higher class? Do you?

BOTH

Why, how are we censured?

MENENIUS

Because you talk of pride now,—will you not be angry?

BOTH

Well, well, sir, well.

MENENIUS

Why, 'tis no great matter; for a very little thief of occasion will rob you of a great deal of patience: give your dispositions the reins, and be angry at your pleasures; at the least if you take it as a pleasure to you in being so. You blame Marcius for being proud?

30

BRUTUS

We do it not alone, sir.

MENENIUS

I know you can do very little alone; for your helps are many, or else your actions would grow wondrous single: your abilities are too infant-like for doing much alone. You talk of pride: O that you could turn your eyes toward the napes of your necks, and make but an interior survey of your good selves! O that you could!

35

BRUTUS

What then, sir?

MENENIUS

Why, then you should discover a brace of unmeriting, proud, violent, testy magistrates, alias fools, as any in Rome.

40

SICINIUS

Menenius, you are known well enough too.

MENENIUS

I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in't; said to be something imperfect in favouring the first complaint; hasty and tinder-like upon too trivial motion; one that converses more with the buttock of the night than with the forehead of the morning: what I think I utter, and spend my malice in my breath. Meeting two such wealsmen as you are—I cannot call you Lycurguses—if the drink you give me touch my palate adversely, I make a crooked face at it. I can't say your worships have delivered the matter well, when I find the ass in compound with the major part of your syllables: and though I must be content to bear with those that say you are reverend grave men, yet they lie deadly that tell you you have good faces. If you see this in the map of my microcosm, follows it that I am known well enough too? what barm can your bisson conjecturites glean out of this character, if I be known well enough too?

50

55

60

BRUTUS

Come, sir, come, we know you well enough.

MENENIUS

You know neither me, yourselves nor any thing. You are ambitious for poor knaves' caps and legs: you wear out a good wholesome forenoon in hearing a cause between an orange wife and a fosset-seller; and then rejourn the controversy of three pence to a

70

BOTH

Why, what do they say about us?

MENENIUS

Because you're talking of pride, now—you won't be angry if I tell you, will you?

BOTH

Come on, sir, come on.

MENENIUS

It's no big deal. A small occasion will rob you of a great deal of patience: if you let your emotions lead you, you'll be angry at your pleasures if you take pleasure in being angry.

You blame Marcius for being proud?

2 Menenius is being intentionally confusing here in order to demonstrate how emotions can get tied up and contradict themselves.

BRUTUS

We're not the only ones who do, sir.

MENENIUS

I know you can do very little alone, for you need a lot of help, or your actions would be awfully small. Your abilities are too much like an infant's for doing much by yourself. You talk of pride: if only you could turn your eyes inward and see yourselves! If only you could!

BRUTUS

What would we see, sir?

MENENIUS

Why, you would find a couple of unworthy, proud, violent, grumpy middle-managers³—that is, fools—as bad as anyone in Rome.

3 Technically, all three men are Roman tribunes—senators—of equal rank. By calling them magistrates in the original text, Menenius belittles them.

SICINIUS

Menenius, there's plenty said about you too.

MENENIUS

I am known to be a light-hearted politician—a man who loves a mulled wine with not a drop of water in it; said to be a bit imperfect in taking the first side I hear presented; I can be hasty over small things; I stay up too late and sleep in too long; I say what I think and hold back no mean words. Meeting two statesmen like you—I cannot call you politicians—if you give me a bad drink, I'll scowl at it. I can't say you two have done well if you are mixing up your head and your ass: and though I have to deal with those who say you are serious, great men, they are lying if they say you are pleasant to look at. If you see this in my face, don't you think I know myself? What can your dim wits see in me, if I am known well enough too?

BRUTUS

Come, sir, come, we know you well enough.

MENENIUS

You don't know me; you don't know anything! You are in politics simply so men will bow to you; you will waste a whole morning listening to a dispute between a fruit seller and a liquor man, and then call that minor dispute back for another wasted day. When you are listening to an argument

second day of audience. When you are hearing a matter between party and party, if you chance to be pinched with the colic, you make faces like mummers; set up the bloody flag against all patience; and, in roaring for a chamber-pot, dismiss the controversy bleeding the more entangled by your hearing: all the peace you make in their cause is, calling both the parties knaves. You are a pair of strange ones.

75

BRUTUS

Come, come, you are well understood to be a perfecter giber for the table than a necessary bencher in the Capitol.

80

MENENIUS

Our very priests must become mockers, if they shall encounter such ridiculous subjects as you are. When you speak best unto the purpose, it is not worth the wagging of your beards; and your beards deserve not so honourable a grave as to stuff a botcher's cushion, or to be entombed in an ass's pack-saddle. Yet you must be saying, Marcius is proud; who in a cheap estimation, is worth predecessors since Deucalion, though peradventure some of the best of 'em were hereditary hangmen. God-den to your worships: more of your conversation would infect my brain, being the herdsmen of the beastly plebeians: I will be bold to take my leave of you.

85

90

BRUTUS and SICINIUS go aside

Enter VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, and VALERIA

MENENIUS

How now, my as fair as noble ladies,—and the moon, were she earthly, no nobler,—whither do you follow your eyes so fast?

VOLUMNIA

Honourable Menenius, my boy Marcius approaches; for the love of Juno, let's go.

MENENIUS

Ha! Marcius coming home!

VOLUMNIA

Ay, worthy Menenius; and with most prosperous approbation.

MENENIUS

Take my cap, Jupiter, and I thank thee. Hoo! Marcius coming home!

VIRGILIA

Nay,'tis true.

VOLUMNIA

Look, here's a letter from him: the state hath another, his wife another; and, I think, there's one at home for you.

MENENIUS

I will make my very house reel tonight: a letter for me!

VIRGILIA

Yes, certain, there's a letter for you; I saw't.

between two citizens, if you let loose a fart, you twist your faces ignorantly so everyone knows; you make war on everyone's patience, and in roaring that you need to shit, dismiss disputes unfinished and even worse than when they started. The only thing you accomplish is to call everyone dishonest. You're a pair of strange men.

BRUTUS

Come, come, you are well known as a better comedian than a politician.

MENENIUS

Our very priests must start to mock, if they encounter men as ridiculous as you. When you finally do address important matters, that conversation is worse than if you'd kept quiet and simply wagged your beards. 4 Your beards don't even deserve to stuff a seamstress's needle-cushion, or to stuff a donkey's saddle-pillow. Yet here are you are saying Marcius is proud; a man who is worth all your ancestors since Deucalion 5, though probably many of them were just lowly executioners. Good evening to you; to continue talking with you would make me dumber, you shepherds of ignorant plebeians 6. I will be rude enough to leave you.

4 To wag one's beard is to nod silently in approval.

5 Deucalion is the mythical ancestor of all Greeks.

6 Plebeians, the lower class, are opposed to patricians, the upper class.

BRUTUS and SICINIUS step aside.

VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, and VALERIA enter.

MENENIUS

How are you, my ladies, as beautiful as you are noble—the moon set down on Earth would be no nobler—what are you looking for so urgently?

VOLUMNIA

Honorable Menenius, my son Marcius is coming into Rome; for the love of God, let's go meet him!

MENENIUS

What? Marcius is coming home?

VOLUMNIA

Yes, worthy Menenius; and with most incredible praise!

MENENIUS

[Throws his hat in the air] Take my cap, great gods, and praise be! Hoo! Marcius coming home!

VIRGILIA

It's true.

VOLUMNIA

Look, here's a letter from him. Another went to the Senate, and another to his wife, and I bet there's another one at home for you.

MENENIUS

I will make such a celebration that my very house will reel tonight: a letter for me!

VIRGILIA

Yes, there's certainly a letter for you: I saw it.

MENENIUS

A letter for me! it gives me an estate of seven years' health; in which time I will make a lip at the physician: the most sovereign prescription in Galen is but empiricotic, and, to this preservative, of no better report than a horse-drench. Is he not wounded? he was wont to come home wounded.

115

VIRGILIA

O, no, no, no.

VOLUMNIA

O, he is wounded; I thank the gods for't.

MENENIUS

So do I too, if it be not too much: brings a' victory in his pocket? the wounds become him.

120

VOLUMNIA

On's brows: Menenius, he comes the third time home with the oaken garland.

MENENIUS

Has he disciplined Aufidius soundly?

VOLUMNIA

Titus Lartius writes, they fought together, but Aufidius got off.

125

MENENIUS

And 'twas time for him too, I'll warrant him that: an he had stayed by him, I would not have been so fidiused for all the chests in Corioli, and the gold that's in them. Is the senate possessed of this?

130

VOLUMNIA

Good ladies, let's go. Yes, yes, yes; the senate has letters from the general, wherein he gives my son the whole name of the war: he hath in this action outdone his former deeds doubly

VALERIA

135

In troth, there's wondrous things spoke of him.

MENENIUS

Wondrous! ay, I warrant you, and not without his true purchasing.

VIRGILIA

The gods grant them true!

VOLUMNIA

True! pow, wow.

MENENIUS

140

True! I'll be sworn they are true. Where is he wounded?

[To the Tribunes] God save your good worships! Marcius is coming home: he has more cause to be proud. Where is he wounded?

145

VOLUMNIA

I' the shoulder and i' the left arm there will be large cicatrices to show the people, when he shall stand for his place. He received in the repulse of Tarquin seven hurts i' the body.

MENENIUS

A letter for me! It will give seven years of life, at which point I will stick out my tongue at the physician. The most powerful medicine in Galen ⁷ is quack medicine, and compared to this, no better than horse pills! Is he not wounded? He always seems to come home wounded.

⁷ An ancient medical authority still standard in 1608. Galen actually lived six centuries after Coriolanus.

VIRGILIA

[With fear and anxiety] Oh, no, no, no.

VOLUMNIA

Yes, he is wounded, thank the gods.

MENENIUS

So long as he is not too wounded; he brings a victory with him? If so, the wounds suit him.

VOLUMNIA

He bears a victory on his brows like a wreath; he comes home with the oaken garland ⁸ for the third time.

⁸ As explained in Act 1, Scene 9, the garland is awarded to the greatest fighter of a victorious battle.

MENENIUS

Has he beaten Aufidius thoroughly?

VOLUMNIA

Titus Lartius writes that they fought together, but Aufidius escaped.

MENENIUS

That's just like him, I'll give him that. I'd bet all the treasure in Corioli against Aufidius ever finishing a fight with our man Marcius. Does the senate know yet?

VOLUMNIA

Good ladies, let's go. Yes, yes, yes, the senate has letters from the general in which he honors my son with the name of the whole war: my son has outdone himself this time.

VALERIA

Honestly; they are saying wonderful things about him that are almost hard to believe.

MENENIUS

Hard to believe! Yes, I bet, but not without him really doing these things.

VIRGILIA

May the gods make these reports true!

VOLUMNIA

True, pfff. ⁹

⁹ Volumnia is expressing her disdain for the idea that the reports might not be true.

MENENIUS

True! I'd bet my life they're true. Where is he wounded?

[Yelling across the stage to the two senators] God save both of you! Marcius is coming home with even more reason to be proud!

[To the women] Where is he wounded?

VOLUMNIA

In the shoulder and in his left arm there will be large scars to show the people when he stands before them. In addition, he has seven other scars from the siege of Tarquin. ¹⁰

¹⁰ Caius Marcius' first military experience was in an early war with the Roman tyrant Tarquin.

MENENIUS

150 One i' the neck, and two i' the thigh,—there's nine that I know.

VOLUMNIA

He had, before this last expedition, twenty-five wounds upon him.

MENENIUS

Now it's twenty-seven: every gash was an enemy's grave.

155

A shout and flourish

MENENIUS

Hark! the trumpets.

VOLUMNIA

These are the ushers of Marcius: before him he carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears:
160 Death, that dark spirit, in 's nervy arm doth lie; Which, being advanced, declines, and then men die.

A sennet. Trumpets sound. Enter COMINIUS the general, and TITUS LARTIUS; between them, CORIOLANUS, crowned with an oaken garland; with Captains and Soldiers, and a Herald

HERALD

Know, Rome, that all alone Marcius did fight Within Corioli gates: where he hath won, With fame, a name to Caius Marcius; these In honour follows Coriolanus.
165 Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!

Flourish

ALL

Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS

No more of this; it does offend my heart: Pray now, no more.

COMINIUS

170 Look, sir, your mother!

CORIOLANUS

O, You have, I know, petition'd all the gods For my prosperity!

Kneels

VOLUMNIA

175 Nay, my good soldier, up; My gentle Marcius, worthy Caius, and By deed-achieving honour newly named,— What is it?— Coriolanus must I call thee?— But O, thy wife!

CORIOLANUS

180 My gracious silence, hail! Wouldst thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd home, That weep'st to see me triumph? Ay, my dear, Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear, And mothers that lack sons.

MENENIUS

185 Now, the gods crown thee!

MENENIUS

Also, he has one in the neck and two in the thigh—there are nine scars I know of.

VOLUMNIA

He had, before this last battle, twenty-five wounds on him.

MENENIUS

Now it's twenty-seven, and every gash was an enemy's grave. 11

11 By this remarkable metaphor Menenius means that for every wound Caius Marcius has received, he has killed the man who wounded him.

A shout and chorus of trumpets is heard.

MENENIUS

Listen! The trumpets!

VOLUMNIA

They must be welcoming Marcius: he carries the sounds of trumpets with him and leaves tears behind him. Death, that dark spirit, lies deep within his arm: it is raised, then falls, and men die. 12

12 One of many metaphors which make Caius Marcius Coriolanus out to be a force of nature or a god.

A ceremonial chorus of trumpets sounds. COMINIUS the general and TITUS LARTIUS enter; between them is CORIOLANUS, crowned with an oaken garland, with captains and soldiers, and a HERALD.

HERALD

Know, Rome, that Marcius fought alone inside the gates of Corioli. There, he has won a new name to go with his fame: welcome to Rome, famed Coriolanus!

A chorus of trumpets sounds.

ALL

Welcome to Rome, famed Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS

No more of this; I am embarrassed by all this. Please, no more.

COMINIUS

Look, sir, your mother!

CORIOLANUS

Oh, you have, I know, prayed to all the gods for my success!

CORIOLANUS kneels before VOLUMNIA.

VOLUMNIA

No, my good soldier, stand up. My gentle Marcius, worthy Caius, and by your deeds newly named—what is it I am supposed to call you now? Coriolanus? But oh, your wife!

CORIOLANUS

My gracious silence 13, greetings! You are crying over my victory; would you have laughed if I came home in a coffin? Oh, my dear, the widows in Corioli have eyes like yours, eyes like mothers who lack sons.

13 Coriolanus is actually referring to his wife, Valeria, as "my gracious silence." The metaphor implies that she is polite, perhaps timid, and of course silent. As he immediately notes, she is in fact weeping.

MENENIUS

Now, the gods crown you!

CORIOLANUS

And live you yet?

CORIOLANUS

O my sweet lady, pardon.

VOLUMNIA

190 I know not where to turn: O, welcome home:
And welcome, general: and ye're welcome all.

MENENIUS

A hundred thousand welcomes. I could weep
And I could laugh, I am light and heavy. Welcome.
A curse begin at very root on's heart,
195 That is not glad to see thee! You are three
That Rome should dote on: yet, by the faith of men,
We have some old crab-trees here
at home that will not
Be grafted to your relish. Yet welcome, warriors:
200 We call a nettle but a nettle and
The faults of fools but folly.

COMINIUS

Ever right.

CORIOLANUS

Menenius ever, ever.

HERALD

Give way there, and go on!

CORIOLANUS

205 [To VOLUMNIA and VIRGILIA] Your hand, and yours:
Ere in our own house I do shade my head,
The good patricians must be visited;
From whom I have received not only greetings,
But with them change of honours.

VOLUMNIA

210 I have lived
To see inherited my very wishes
And the buildings of my fancy: only
There's one thing wanting, which I doubt not but
Our Rome will cast upon thee.

CORIOLANUS

215 Know, good mother,
I had rather be their servant in my way,
Than sway with them in theirs.

COMINIUS

On, to the Capitol!

Flourish. Cornets. Exeunt in state, as before. BRUTUS and SICINIUS come forward

BRUTUS

220 All tongues speak of him, and the bleared sights
Are spectacled to see him: your prattling nurse
Into a rapture lets her baby cry
While she chats him: the kitchen malkin pins
Her richest lockram 'bout her reechy neck,
225 Clambering the walls to eye him: stalls, bulks,
windows,
Are smother'd up, leads fill'd, and ridges horsed
With variable complexions, all agreeing
In earnestness to see him: seld-shown flamens
230 Do press among the popular throngs and puff
To win a vulgar station: or veil'd dames
Commit the war of white and damask in
Their nicely-gawded cheeks to the wanton spoil
Of Phoebus' burning kisses: such a pother

CORIOLANUS

[To MENENIUS] And you're still around?

CORIOLANUS

[To VALERIA] Oh my sweet lady, forgive me.

VOLUMNIA

I don't know where to turn; oh, welcome home, and
welcome general, welcome all!

MENENIUS

A hundred thousand welcomes. I could weep and I could
laugh, I am light and heavy hearted. Welcome. Curse
anyone who is not glad to see you! You are three men that
Rome should honor; yet, by the nature of men, we have
some old grumps here at home that will not be join in our
celebration. Nevertheless welcome, warriors. We call thorns
just thorns, and the mistakes of fools just foolishness.

COMINIUS

As we should.

CORIOLANUS

As we should, Menenius, as we should.

HERALD

[Yelling as though at a gathering crowd] Clear a way for
them!

CORIOLANUS

[To VOLUMNIA and VIRGILIA] Let me take your hand, and
yours. Before I can return to our home, I must visit the good
senators from whom I have had not just a letter, but also a
new set of honors.

VOLUMNIA

I have lived to see my dreams made into reality. There's
only one thing missing, which I have no doubt our Rome
will honor you with.

CORIOLANUS

Know, good mother, I had rather serve Rome my way than
rule Rome in theirs.

COMINIUS

Let's go, to the Capitol!

*A chorus of trumpets is heard. All exit in a stately
procession. BRUTUS and SICINIUS come forward.*

BRUTUS

Everyone speaks of him, and every eye is turned to see him.
The gossiping nurse lets her baby cry itself into a fit while
she talks about him; the kitchen wench pins her finest
blouse around her filthy neck just to climb a wall and see
him from afar. Stalls, walls, and windows are covered in
people, and men of all sorts watch from hilltops to see him.
Seldom-seen priests press in among the crowds of common
people and exhaust themselves just to get a glimpse. Veiled
and perfumed ladies war with their own beauty and throw
themselves into the burning sun. It's such an insane
commotion one might think that Coriolanus had become a
kind of god.

As if that whatsoever god who leads him
Were sily crept into his human powers
And gave him graceful posture.

SICINIUS

On the sudden,
I warrant him consul.

BRUTUS

240 Then our office may,
During his power, go sleep.

SICINIUS

He cannot temperately transport his honours
From where he should begin and end, but will
Lose those he hath won.

BRUTUS

245 In that there's comfort.

SICINIUS

Doubt not
The commoners, for whom we stand, but they
Upon their ancient malice will forget
With the least cause these his new honours, which
250 That he will give them make I as little question
As he is proud to do't.

BRUTUS

I heard him swear,
Were he to stand for consul, never would he
Appear i' the market-place nor on him put
255 The napless vesture of humility;
Nor showing, as the manner is, his wounds
To the people, beg their stinking breaths.

SICINIUS

'Tis right.

BRUTUS

It was his word: O, he would miss it rather
260 Than carry it but by the suit of the gentry to him,
And the desire of the nobles.

SICINIUS

I wish no better
Than have him hold that purpose and to put it
In execution.

BRUTUS

265 'Tis most like he will.

SICINIUS

It shall be to him then as our good wills,
A sure destruction.

BRUTUS

So it must fall out
To him or our authorities. For an end,
270 We must suggest the people in what hatred
He still hath held them; that to's power he would
Have made them mules, silenced their pleaders and
Dispropertied their freedoms, holding them,
In human action and capacity,
275 Of no more soul nor fitness for the world
Than camels in the war, who have their provand

SICINIUS

All of a sudden, I can believe he might become consul¹⁴.

¹⁴ The position of consul doesn't really have an equivalent in modern political systems. Because Rome was a city-state during this period, a consul is both the mayor of the city and the leader of the senate.

BRUTUS

If he gains power, we may lose all our authority.

SICINIUS

But he cannot possibly maintain his cool throughout the nomination process for consul, and so he will lose whatever praise he's won.

BRUTUS

In that there's comfort.

SICINIUS

Don't doubt that the commoners we represent still hate him, and that they'll use any excuse to forget these news honors. There's no question he'll crack, and as little question that he'll be proud to crack when he does.

BRUTUS

I heard him swear that—were he to be nominated as consul—he would never appear in the market, nor ever lower himself to be humble; nor would he show his wounds to the people¹⁵ to beg for their approval.

¹⁵ Coriolanus must show his wounds to the people to make it clear how virtuous he has been in fighting on behalf of Rome, and as a sign of modesty or vulnerability. He has suffered for the people, and they want to see the proof.

SICINIUS

That's right.

BRUTUS

That's what he said, anyway—that he would rather not be consul if it required him to do anything but appeal to the gentry and the desires of the nobles.

SICINIUS

I want nothing more than for him to remain committed to that.

BRUTUS

It's likely that he will.

SICINIUS

That impulse will surely destroy him, as will our good wills¹⁶

¹⁶ In speaking of his and Brutus's "good wills" toward Coriolanus, Sicinius is being sarcastic. They strongly dislike Coriolanus and want him to fail.

BRUTUS

So he'll be destroyed either by himself or by us. In order to be certain of this, we should tell the people that he still hates them; that if he could've, he'd have made them slaves, silenced their representatives and stolen their freedoms. We will tell them that he holds them, in deed and spirit, to be no better than beasts in war, good only for bearing burdens and being whipped.

Only for bearing burdens, and sore blows
For sinking under them.

SICINIUS

This, as you say, suggested
At some time when his soaring insolence
Shall touch the people — which time shall not want,
If he be put upon 't; and that's as easy
As to set dogs on sheep— will be his fire
To kindle their dry stubble; and their blaze
Shall darken him for ever.

280

285

Enter a Messenger

BRUTUS

What's the matter?

MESSENGER

You are sent for to the Capitol. 'Tis thought
That Marcus shall be consul:
I have seen the dumb men throng to see him and
The blind to bear him speak: matrons flung gloves,
290 Ladies and maids their scarfs and handkerchers,
Upon him as he pass'd: the nobles bended,
As to Jove's statue, and the commons made
A shower and thunder with their caps and shouts:
295 I never saw the like.

290

295

BRUTUS

Let's to the Capitol;
And carry with us ears and eyes for the time,
But hearts for the event.

SICINIUS

Have with you.

300

Exeunt

SICINIUS

And we'll suggest all this some time when his high-and-mighty attitude will have an impact on the people—there will be many opportunities if we goad him, and that's as easy as making a dog herd sheep. His reaction will set their beards aflame, and their fury will ruin him forever.

A MESSENGER enters.

BRUTUS

What's the matter?

MESSENGER

Someone in the Capitol has sent for you. There is word that Marcus will be consul; I have seen speechless men crowd around him and blind men beg to hear him speak. Widows threw gloves, ladies and maids threw scarves and handkerchiefs upon him as he passed. Nobles bowed as though to a god's statue, and the commoners thundered with applause and approval. I've never seen anything like it.

BRUTUS

Let's go to the Capitol, and though we might act attentive to what's going on, keep our hearts set on our plan to ruin him.

SICINIUS

I'm with you.

All exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter two Officers, to lay cushions

FIRST OFFICER

Come, come, they are almost here. How many stand for consulships?

SECOND OFFICER

Three, they say: but 'tis thought of every one Coriolanus will carry it.

FIRST OFFICER

5 That's a brave fellow; but he's vengeance proud, and loves not the common people.

SECOND OFFICER

Faith, there had been many great men that have flattered the people, who ne'er loved them; and there be many that they have loved, they know not 10 wherefore: so that, if they love they know not why, they hate upon no better a ground: therefore, for Coriolanus neither to care whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has in their disposition; and out of his noble carelessness lets them plainly see't.

Shakescleare Translation

Enter two OFFICERS to lay cushions on the floor (on which SENATORS will sit).

FIRST OFFICER

Come, come, they are almost here. How many are up for the consulship?

SECOND OFFICER

Three, they say, but everyone thinks Coriolanus will win it.

FIRST OFFICER

He's an extraordinary fellow, but he's also so proud, and doesn't love the common people.

SECOND OFFICER

Oh come on, there have been many great men who have flattered the people but not loved them, and there have been many people have loved without reason. Whoever they love, they don't know why, and they hate with the same ignorance: therefore, for Coriolanus not to care whether they love or hate him is just an example that he knows the people well, and out of his nobility he lets the people plainly see that.

FIRST OFFICER

If he did not care whether he had their love or no,
he waved indifferently 'twixt doing them neither
good nor harm: but he seeks their hate with greater
devotion than can render it him; and leaves
nothing undone that may fully discover him their
opposite. Now, to seem to affect the malice and
displeasure of the people is as bad as that which he
dislikes, to flatter them for their love.

SECOND OFFICER

He hath deserved worthily of his country: and his
ascent is not by such easy degrees as those who,
having been supple and courteous to the people,
bonneted, without any further deed to have them at
an into their estimation and report: but he hath so
planted his honours in their eyes, and his actions
in their hearts, that for their tongues to be
silent, and not confess so much, were a kind of
ingrateful injury; to report otherwise, were a
malice, that, giving itself the lie, would pluck
reproof and rebuke from every ear that heard it.

FIRST OFFICER

No more of him; he is a worthy man: make way, they
are coming.

*A sennet. Enter, with actors before them, COMINIUS the consul,
MENENIUS, CORIOLANUS, Senators, SICINIUS and BRUTUS. The
Senators take their places; the Tribunes take their Places by
themselves. CORIOLANUS stands*

MENENIUS

Having determined of the Volsces and
To send for Titus Lartius, it remains,
As the main point of this our after-meeting,
To gratify his noble service that
Hath thus stood for his country: therefore,
please you,
Most reverend and grave elders, to desire
The present consul, and last general
In our well-found successes, to report
A little of that worthy work perform'd
By Caius Marcus Coriolanus, whom
We met here both to thank and to remember
With honours like himself.

FIRST SENATOR

Speak, good Cominius:
Leave nothing out for length, and make us think
Rather our state's defective for requital
Than we to stretch it out.
[To the Tribunes]
Masters o' the people,
We do request your kindest ears, and after,
Your loving motion toward the common body,
To yield what passes here.

SICINIUS

We are convented
Upon a pleasing treaty, and have hearts
Inclinalbe to honour and advance
The theme of our assembly.

BRUTUS

Which the rather
We shall be blest to do, if he remember
A kinder value of the people than
He hath hereto prized them at.

MENENIUS

That's off, that's off;
I would you rather had been silent. Please you
To hear Cominius speak?

FIRST OFFICER

If he didn't care whether they loved him or not, he'd be
indifferent to them, but that's not what he does; instead, he
seems to seek their hate with greater devotion than he can
possibly win it, and does everything he can to show how he
is different from them. To attract the hatred of the people is
just as bad as flattering them, which he says he dislikes.

SECOND OFFICER

He has earned much from his country, and his rise to power
has not been easy, as it is for those who are kind and
courteous to the people, who tip their hats and then, doing
nothing else, win the people's favor. But Coriolanus has so
demonstrated his honor that if they were to be silent it
would be a kind of betrayal. To say other than that he is
worthy would be a cruelty, a lie that would call for denial
from everyone who heard it.

FIRST OFFICER

No more of him; he is an admirable man: make way, they
are coming.

*Ceremonial trumpets are heard. COMINIUS the consul,
MENENIUS, CORIOLANUS, SENATORS, SICINIUS and
BRUTUS enter with officials before them. The SENATORS
take their places. CORIOLANUS stands.*

MENENIUS

Now that we've decided what to do with the Volsces and
are sending for Titus Lartius, the remaining point of this
meeting is to reward the noble service of the man who has
stood for his country. Therefore, most serious elders, please
allow Cominius, our current consul and recent general, to
report a little of that worthy work performed by Caius
Marcus Coriolanus, whom we met here both to thank and
to award with honors.

FIRST SENATOR

Speak, good Cominius. Leave nothing out; make us feel as
though we do not have enough reward for him rather than
that he has not done enough to earn rewards.

*[To the TRIBUNES] Masters of the people, we do request
your kindest ears, and after, that you generously report to
those you represent, the commoners, what happens here.*

SICINIUS

We are brought together on a happy occasion, and our
hearts are ready to honor and continue the theme of this
discussion.

BRUTUS

Which we'll be better prepared to do if Coriolanus would
acknowledge that the common people are better than he's
been saying they are.

MENENIUS

Lay off, lay off; I wish you had kept silent. Please, let's hear
Cominius speak.

BRUTUS

Most willingly;
But yet my caution was more pertinent
Than the rebuke you give it.

75

MENENIUS

He loves your people
But tie him not to be their bedfellow.
Worthy Cominius, speak.

*CORIOLANUS offers to go away***BRUTUS**

Of course, but my hesitation is worth more than to be
brushed away by you.

MENENIUS

He loves your people, but don't tie him down to be their
lover. Worthy Cominius, speak.

*CORIOLANUS stands and starts to leave.*1

1 Coriolanus begins to leave in
order not to hear praise, which, as he
has demonstrated already, makes him
uncomfortable.

MENENIUS

80 Nay, keep your place.

FIRST SENATOR

Sit, Coriolanus; never shame to hear
What you have nobly done.

CORIOLANUS

Your honor's pardon:
85 I had rather have my wounds to heal again
Than hear say how I got them.

BRUTUS

Sir, I hope
My words disbench'd you not.

CORIOLANUS

No, sir: yet oft,
90 When blows have made me stay, I fled from words.
You soothed not, therefore hurt not: but
your people,
I love them as they weigh.

MENENIUS

Pray now, sit down.

CORIOLANUS

95 I had rather have one scratch my head i' the sun
When the alarm were struck than idly sit
To hear my nothings monster'd.

*Exit***MENENIUS**

Masters of the people,
100 Your multiplying spawn how can he flatter—
That's thousand to one good one— when you now see
He had rather venture all his limbs for honour
Than one on's ears to hear it? Proceed, Cominius.

COMINIUS

I shall lack voice: the deeds of Coriolanus
105 Should not be utter'd feebly. It is held
That valour is the chiefest virtue, and
Most dignifies the haver: if it be,
The man I speak of cannot in the world
Be singly counterpoised. At sixteen years,
110 When Tarquin made a head for Rome, he fought
Beyond the mark of others: our then dictator,
Whom with all praise I point at, saw him fight,
When with his Amazonian chin he drove
The bristled lips before him: be bestrid
115 An o'er-press'd Roman and i' the consul's view
Slew three opposers: Tarquin's self he met,
And struck him on his knee: in that day's feats,
When he might act the woman in the scene,
He proved best man i' the field, and for his meed
120 Was brow-bound with the oak. His pupil age

BRUTUS

Of course, but my hesitation is worth more than to be
brushed away by you.

MENENIUS

He loves your people, but don't tie him down to be their
lover. Worthy Cominius, speak.

*CORIOLANUS stands and starts to leave.*1

1 Coriolanus begins to leave in
order not to hear praise, which, as he
has demonstrated already, makes him
uncomfortable.

MENENIUS

No, stay where you are.

FIRST SENATOR

Sit, Coriolanus, don't be ashamed to hear about your noble
deeds.

CORIOLANUS

Pardon me, your honor. I would rather be wounded all over
again than hear someone recite how I got them.

BRUTUS

Sir, I hope my words didn't upset you.2

2 Brutus is taunting Coriolanus
here. He is, as usual, being sarcastic.

CORIOLANUS

No, sir, although often when I had rather take action, people
want to talk. You did not belittle me, therefore you haven't
hurt me. As for your common people, I love them for what
they're worth.

MENENIUS

Please, sit down.

CORIOLANUS

I'd rather sit ignorantly in the sun while the city is attacked
than sit here and hear my minor actions twisted into
marvelous deeds.

*CORIOLANUS exits.***MENENIUS**

Masters of the people, how can he flatter the masses of the
people—with one good man to a thousand others who
aren't so good—when you see that he had rather risk his life
for honor than risk an ear to hear about it? Go ahead,
Cominius.

COMINIUS

I will barely be able to tell what he has done.3 The deeds
of Coriolanus should not be uttered weakly. They say that
bravery is the most important virtue: if so, the man I speak
of has no equal in the world. When he was sixteen years old
and Tarquin attempted to conquer Rome, he fought far
behind enemy lines, beyond the reach of others. [Pointing
into the senate at an elder statesman] Our leader at the
time, who with all praise I point at, saw him fight, when
with his Amazonian chin.4 He drove grown men to flee
him. He stood over a fallen Roman and in the view of the
consul, killed three men to defend him. He met Tarquin
himself, and struck him on the knee. In that battle, he was
so young he could have acted the woman in the scene,5
instead he proved the best man in the fight, and for his
bravery was awarded the oaken garland. He advanced from
boy to man this way, swelling like the sea, and in the midst
of seventeen battles since he cheated everyone else of the

3 This long narrative speech grows
convoluted and rushed in order to
reflect the pace of battle. By the end,
the actor and audience/readers
should feel as though they too have
endured a battle.

4 Like an Amazon—a mythical
warrior woman—Coriolanus, at
sixteen and so quite young, had no
beard.

5 "When he might act the woman in
the scene" in the original text is an
allusion to the way boy actors played
women's parts in early modern
London.

Man-enter'd thus, he waxed like a sea,
And in the brunt of seventeen battles since
He lurch'd all swords of the garland. For this last,
Before and in Corioli, let me say,
125 I cannot speak him home: he stopp'd the fliers;
And by his rare example made the coward
Turn terror into sport: as weeds before
A vessel under sail, so men obey'd
And fell below his stem: his sword, death's stamp,
130 Where it did mark, it took; from face to foot
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
Was timed with dying cries: alone he enter'd
The mortal gate of the city, which he painted
With shunless destiny; aidless came off,
135 And with a sudden reinforcement struck
Corioli like a planet: now all's his:
When, by and by, the din of war gan pierce
His ready sense; then straight his doubled spirit
Re-quicken'd what in flesh was fatigate,
140 And to the battle came he; where he did
Run reeking o'er the lives of men, as if
'Twere a perpetual spoil: and till we call'd
Both field and city ours, he never stood
To ease his breast with panting.

MENENIUS

145 Worthy man!

FIRST SENATORHe cannot but with measure fit the honours
Which we devise him.**COMINIUS**

Our spoils he kick'd at,
And look'd upon things precious as they were
150 The common muck of the world: he covets less
Than misery itself would give; rewards
His deeds with doing them, and is content
To spend the time to end it.

MENENIUS155 He's right noble:
Let him be call'd for.**FIRST SENATOR**

Call Coriolanus.

OFFICER

He doth appear.

*Re-enter CORIOLANUS***MENENIUS**160 The senate, Coriolanus, are well pleased
To make thee consul.**CORIOLANUS**I do owe them still
My life and services.**MENENIUS**It then remains
That you do speak to the people.**CORIOLANUS**165 I do beseech you,
Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot
Put on the gown, stand naked and entreat them,
For my wounds' sake, to give their suffrage: please you
That I may pass this doing.

garland. For this last fight, just now in Corioli, let me say there is no praise sufficient. He kept our men from fleeing, and by his incredible example made our cowardly men confident. As weeds bend away from a ship at sail, so men obeyed and fell beneath his force; his sword was death itself: where it struck, it killed; from face to foot he was a thing of blood as in a dance, a man whose every movement was timed to dying cries. Alone, he entered the gates of Corioli and painted it with the blood of his victims like Fate itself; without aid he did this, as though suddenly strengthened, and struck Corioli like a planet. Now everything is his: when sounds of war returned him to awareness as from a trance, he braced himself and by his own power made himself alive again; he came to the battle outside the city and ran like a war machine over the lives of men, as though it were a game, a slaughter, and until we called both the battle and the city ours, he did not stand to take a breath.

MENENIUS

Excellent man!

FIRST SENATOR

We must measure our honors to fit his deeds.

COMINIUSHe kicked at the spoils of war, Corioli's treasure, and looked upon precious things as though they were the common trash of the world. He desires less than misery gives freely, thinks of his deeds as their own reward, and is content to spend the time to end it.⁶

⁶ A very thick metaphor, again marking out how Coriolanus is closer to a god than a man. Like a Greek Stoic philosopher, he seems to want nothing more than to act and exist. He is content to ask nothing even of the passing of time itself—except that time pass.

MENENIUS

He is truly noble. Call him in.

FIRST SENATOR

Call Coriolanus.

OFFICER

He doth appear.

*CORIOLANUS re-enters.***MENENIUS**

Coriolanus, the senate is ready to make you consul.

CORIOLANUS

Nothing has changed: I owe them, as always, my life and service.

MENENIUS

Then the only thing left is that you speak to the people.

CORIOLANUS

I ask you, let me skip that custom: I can't put on a beggar's gown, stand naked and plead with them to vote for me based on my scars. Please, let me avoid that.

SICINIUS

170 Sir, the people
Must have their voices; neither will they bate
One jot of ceremony.

MENENIUS

Put them not to't:
Pray you, go fit you to the custom and
175 Take to you, as your predecessors have,
Your honour with your form.

CORIOLANUS

It is apart
That I shall blush in acting, and might well
Be taken from the people.

BRUTUS

180 Mark you that?

CORIOLANUS

To brag unto them, thus I did, and thus;
Show them the unaching scars which I should hide,
As if I had received them for the hire
Of their breath only!

MENENIUS

185 Do not stand upon't.
We recommend to you, tribunes of the people,
Our purpose to them: and to our noble consul
Wish we all joy and honour.

SENATORS

To Coriolanus come all joy and honour!

190 *Flourish of cornets. Exeunt all but SICINIUS and BRUTUS*

BRUTUS

You see how he intends to use the people.

SICINIUS

May they perceive's intent! He will require them,
As he did contemn what he requested
Should be in them to give.

BRUTUS

195 Come, we'll inform them
Of our proceedings here: on the marketplace,
I know, they do attend us.

Exeunt

Both exit.

SICINIUS

Sir, the people must have their say; they will not miss even
a moment of ceremony.

MENENIUS

Don't anger them, Coriolanus. Please, engage in the custom
and show, as your predecessors have, the honor of your
body's scars.

CORIOLANUS

It is a part that I will blush to act, and I don't really need to
do it.

BRUTUS

[To SICINIUS] Hear that?

CORIOLANUS

To brag to them, "I did this, and this," showing them old
scars which I should hide, as though I had received those
scars only in order to get their votes!

MENENIUS

Don't let this one thing bother you. Tribunes of the people,
present our purpose to them, and to our noble consul, we
wish you joy and honor.

SENATORS

To Coriolanus, all joy and honor!

Ceremonial trumpets are heard. All exit but SICINIUS and BRUTUS.

BRUTUS

You see how he intends to treat the people.

SICINIUS

May they see it too! He will ask for their favor as though
scornful that they could ever give him anything.

BRUTUS

Come, let's tell them of what's happened here. The people
are waiting in the marketplace for us.

Act 2, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter seven or eight Citizens

FIRST CITIZEN

Once, if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny
him.

SECOND CITIZEN

We may, sir, if we will.

THIRD CITIZEN

We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a
power that we have no power to do; for if he show us

Shakescleare Translation

Seven or eight CITIZENS enter.

FIRST CITIZEN

[As though in the middle of a debate] In short, if he needs
us to vouch for him, we shouldn't deny him.

SECOND CITIZEN

We may, if we want to.

THIRD CITIZEN

We have the authority to do it, but it is a power that is not
ours to wield alone. If he shows us his wounds and tells us

his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them; so, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful, were to make a monster of the multitude: of the which we being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members.

FIRST CITIZEN

And to make us no better thought of, a little help will serve; for once we stood up about the corn, he himself stuck not to call us the many-headed multitude.

THIRD CITIZEN

We have been called so of many; not that our heads are some brown, some black, some auburn, some bald, but that our wits are so diversely coloured: and truly I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, north, south, and their consent of one direct way should be at once to all the points o' the compass.

SECOND CITIZEN

Think you so? Which way do you judge my wit would fly?

THIRD CITIZEN

Nay, your wit will not so soon out as another man's will; 'tis strongly wedged up in a block-head, but if it were at liberty, 'twould, sure, southward.

SECOND CITIZEN

Why that way?

THIRD CITIZEN

To lose itself in a fog, where being three parts melted away with rotten dews, the fourth would return for conscience sake, to help to get thee a wife.

SECOND CITIZEN

You are never without your tricks: you may, you may.

THIRD CITIZEN

Are you all resolved to give your voices? But that's no matter, the greater part carries it. I say, if he would incline to the people, there was never a worthier man.

Enter CORIOLANUS in a gown of humility, with MENENIUS

THIRD CITIZEN

Here he comes, and in the gown of humility: mark his behavior. We are not to stay all together, but to come by him where he stands, by ones, by twos, and by threes. He's to make his requests by particulars; wherein every one of us has a single honour, in giving him our own voices with our own tongues: therefore follow me, and I direct you how you shall go by him.

ALL

Content, content.

Exeunt Citizens

MENENIUS

O sir, you are not right: have you not known The worthiest men have done't?

his deeds, only then are we to let those wounds inspire us to speak for him. So, if he tells us his noble deeds, it's our position to nobly accept them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and if the common people were to be ungrateful it would make a monster of our republic—we, being members of that republic, would make monsters of ourselves.

FIRST CITIZEN

And it won't take much to make us seem monstrous, after all. When we protested about the corn, he certainly didn't hesitate to call us a "many-headed multitude."

THIRD CITIZEN

We've been called that by many, even though we're clearly individuals: some of us with brown hair, some with black, auburn, or bald, and our minds equally diverse. I truly think that even if all our minds were contained in one skull, our thoughts would fly east, west, north, south, and any consent we would reach would be to all directions at once.

SECOND CITIZEN

You think so? Which way do you think my thoughts would fly?

THIRD CITIZEN

No, your thoughts won't fly out like another man's might, because of your thick head! But if your thoughts could fly, surely they'd fly south.

SECOND CITIZEN

Why that way?

THIRD CITIZEN

To lose themselves in a fog, where most of them would melt away with plague, and only a fourth would return for conscience's sake to help you get a wife.

SECOND CITIZEN

You're never without these jokes—go on, then.

THIRD CITIZEN

Are you all ready to vote on Coriolanus? *[As if to count, then deciding not to]* But that's no matter, the majority is obvious. As far as I'm concerned, if Coriolanus would simply acknowledge the people, there would be no better choice for consul.

CORIOLANUS enters in a beggar's gown, accompanied by MENENIUS.

THIRD CITIZEN

Here he comes in the gown of humility  ; look at how he behaves. In this ceremony, we're supposed to approach him where he stands, in groups of two or three. He will make his requests individually, so that every one of us has the honor of giving him our votes with our own tongues. Therefore, follow me and I'll organize this.

ALL

We agree.

All CITIZENS exit.

 Candidates for public office in Rome wore plain white togas.

MENENIUS

[In the midst of debate] Oh, sir, you're not right: don't you know that the worthiest men have done this?

CORIOLANUS

50 What must I say?
 'I Pray, sir—Plague upon't! I cannot bring
 My tongue to such a pace:—'Look, sir, my wounds!
 I got them in my country's service, when
 Some certain of your brethren roar'd and ran
 55 From the noise of our own drums.'

MENENIUS

O me, the gods!
 You must not speak of that: you must desire them
 To think upon you.

CORIOLANUS

Think upon me! hang 'em!
 60 I would they would forget me, like the virtues
 Which our divines lose by 'em.

MENENIUS

You'll mar all:
 I'll leave you: pray you, speak to 'em, I pray you,
 In wholesome manner.

65

*Exit***CORIOLANUS**

Bid them wash their faces
 And keep their teeth clean.

*Re-enter two of the Citizens***CORIOLANUS**

So, here comes a brace.

70

*Re-enter a third Citizen***CORIOLANUS**

You know the cause, air, of my standing here.

THIRD CITIZEN

We do, sir; tell us what hath brought you to't.

CORIOLANUS

Mine own desert.

SECOND CITIZEN

75 Your own desert!

CORIOLANUS

Ay, but not mine own desire.

THIRD CITIZEN

How not your own desire?

CORIOLANUS

No, sir,'twas never my desire yet to trouble the
 poor with begging.

80 You must think, if we give you any thing, we hope to
 gain by you.

CORIOLANUS

Well then, I pray, your price o' the consulship?

FIRST CITIZEN

The price is to ask it kindly.

CORIOLANUS

What am I going to say? "I beg you, sir"—to hell with it! I
 cannot bring myself to say this kind of thing: "Look sir, my
 wounds! I got them in the service of my country, when
 people like you cried and ran away from the sound of our
 own drums."

MENENIUS

Oh my god, you can't say that. You need to convince them
 to consider you.

CORIOLANUS

Consider me? Damn them! I wish they would forget me, like
 they forget every virtue we try to teach them.

MENENIUS

You'll ruin everything. I must leave you: please, speak to
 them, I beg you, in a kind way.

*MENENIUS exits.***CORIOLANUS**

[Grumbling to himself] I'll tell them to wash their faces and
 keep their teeth clean.

*Two of the CITIZENS re-enter.***CORIOLANUS**

So, here comes a pair.

*A third CITIZEN re-enters.***CORIOLANUS**

You know the reason, sir, I am standing here.

THIRD CITIZEN

We do, sir, but please tell us yourself what's brought you
 here.

CORIOLANUS

That which I deserve.

SECOND CITIZEN

That which you deserve?

CORIOLANUS

Yes, but not that which I desire.

THIRD CITIZEN

How is it not what you desire?

CORIOLANUS

No, sir, I've never wanted to trouble the poor by begging.

THIRD CITIZEN

You must know that we will only give you anything if we
 have something to gain by you.

CORIOLANUS

Well then, tell me, what's the price of consulship?

FIRST CITIZEN

The price is simply to ask it kindly.

CORIOLANUS

Kindly! Sir, I pray, let me ha't: I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private. Your good voice, sir; what say you?

SECOND CITIZEN

You shall ha' it, worthy sir.

CORIOLANUS

A match, sir. There's in all two worthy voices begged. I have your alms: adieu.

THIRD CITIZEN

90 But this is something odd.

SECOND CITIZEN

An 'twere to give again,—but 'tis no matter.

Exeunt the three Citizens

Re-enter two other Citizens

CORIOLANUS

Pray you now, if it may stand with the tune of your voices that I may be consul, I have here the customary gown.

FOURTH CITIZEN

95 You have deserved nobly of your country, and you have not deserved nobly.

CORIOLANUS

Your enigma?

FOURTH CITIZEN

You have been a scourge to her enemies, you have been a rod to her friends; you have not indeed loved the common people.

100

CORIOLANUS

You should account me the more virtuous that I have not been common in my love. I will, sir, flatter my sworn brother, the people, to earn a dearer estimation of them; 'tis a condition they account gentle: and since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have my hat than my heart, I will practise the insinuating nod and be off to them most counterfeited; that is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man and give it bountiful to the desirers. Therefore, beseech you, I may be consul.

110

FIFTH CITIZEN

We hope to find you our friend; and therefore give you our voices heartily.

FOURTH CITIZEN

You have received many wounds for your country.

CORIOLANUS

115 I will not seal your knowledge with showing them. I will make much of your voices, and so trouble you no further.

BOTH CITIZENS

The gods give you joy, sir, heartily!

Exeunt

CORIOLANUS

Kindly! Sir, listen, let me have it. I have wounds to show you, which I will show in private. 

 *Coriolanus displays his wounds mostly naked and so behind a curtain where the audience cannot see him.*

SECOND CITIZEN

You shall have it, worthy sir.

CORIOLANUS

Fair enough, sir. So that's two worthy voices begged, then. I am in your debt; good-bye.

THIRD CITIZEN

This sure is bizarre.

SECOND CITIZEN

If I could do it over—but forget it.

The three CITIZENS all exit.

Re-enter two other CITIZENS.

CORIOLANUS

Please, if it is acceptable to you that I be consul, I have the customary gown here.

FOURTH CITIZEN

On one hand, you have been noble for your country, but you have also not been noble.

CORIOLANUS

What do you mean?

FOURTH CITIZEN

You have been a torment to Rome's enemies and made trouble for her friends; but you have not loved the common people.

CORIOLANUS

You should think of me as more virtuous for not giving out my love to just anyone. I will, sir, flatter those to whom I am devoted—that is the people—to earn their respect.  They call this being "gentle," and since they had rather have a tip of my hat than the labor of my heart, I will practice the nod and show deference most falsely. That is, sir, I will act starstruck like some normal man and serve up this performance to whoever wants it. Is this good enough for you to make me consul?

 *Throughout this scene, it is hard to tell whether Coriolanus is earnestly trying to win the respect of the citizens or whether he is mocking them. The truth is probably somewhere in between, and different productions of the play have taken it both ways.*

FIFTH CITIZEN

We hope you'll be our friend, and give you our votes gladly with that in mind.

FOURTH CITIZEN

You have received many wounds for your country.

CORIOLANUS

I will not confirm your knowledge by displaying them. I am already making much of your votes, and do not want to trouble you further.

BOTH CITIZENS

The gods give you joy, sir, great joy!

All exit.

CORIOLANUS

120 Most sweet voices!
Better it is to die, better to starve,
Than crave the hire which first we do deserve.
Why in this woolvish toge should I stand here,
To beg of Hob and Dick, that do appear,
125 Their needless vouches? Custom calls me to't:
What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
And mountainous error be too highly heapt
For truth to o'er-peer. Rather than fool it so,
130 Let the high office and the honour go
To one that would do thus. I am half through;
The one part suffer'd, the other will I do.

Re-enter three Citizens more

CORIOLANUS

Here come more voices.
Your voices: for your voices I have fought;
135 Watch'd for your voices; for Your voices bear
Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six
I have seen and heard of; for your voices have
Done many things, some less, some more your voices:
Indeed I would be consul.

SIXTH CITIZEN

140 He has done nobly, and cannot go without any honest
man's voice.

SEVENTH CITIZEN

Therefore let him be consul: the gods give him joy,
and make him good friend to the people!

ALL CITIZENS

Amen, amen. God save thee, noble consul!

145

Exeunt

CORIOLANUS

Worthy voices!

Re-enter MENENIUS, with BRUTUS and SICINIUS

MENENIUS

You have stood your limitation; and the tribunes
Endue you with the people's voice: remains
150 That, in the official marks invested, you
Anon do meet the senate.

CORIOLANUS

Is this done?

SICINIUS

The custom of request you have discharged:
The people do admit you, and are summon'd
155 To meet anon, upon your approbation.

CORIOLANUS

Where? at the senate-house?

SICINIUS

There, Coriolanus.

CORIOLANUS

May I change these garments?

SICINIUS

You may, sir.

CORIOLANUS

These sweet voices! It is better to die, better to starve, than
to crave to get what we already deserve. Why must I stand
here in this wooly, ratty toga, to beg of Hob and Dick 4, or
whoever shows up, their meaningless favor? Because of
custom; if we did everything custom called for, the dust on
antique time would never be cleaned off 5, and we would
make error after error until they piled up like mountains,
too high for truth to reach. Rather than be so foolish, let the
public positions and honor go to those who will be
honorable! I am half finished; now that I have suffered the
first half, I will suffer the other half as well.

4 Hob and Dick are disparaging peasant names like "Jack and Jill," "Tom, Dick, and Harry," or even "Tweedledee and Tweedledum."

5 This metaphor about "dust on antique time" is both domestic—like dusting in a home—and historic, in that it alludes to long-standing practices which become outdated over time as societies and cultures change.

Three more CITIZENS re-enter.

CORIOLANUS

Here come more voices 6. Your voices: for your voices I
have fought; stood guard over Rome for your voices; for
your voices I've been wounded two dozen times or more;
three times six battles I have seen and heard; for your
voices I have done many things—some less, some more.
Your voices? Indeed I would be consul.

6 This is an example of synecdoche, a poetic technique in which a part of something stands for all of it. "Voices" for whole people, "arms" to describe soldiers, or "a nice set of wheels" to refer to a car.

SIXTH CITIZEN

He has done nobly, and should not be denied the vote of
any honest man.

SEVENTH CITIZEN

Therefore let him be consul. The gods give him joy, and
make him a good friend to the people!

ALL CITIZENS

Amen, amen. God save you, noble consul!

All exit.

CORIOLANUS

Worthy voices!

MENENIUS re-enters with BRUTUS and SICINIUS.

MENENIUS

You have done this as long as you need to, and the tribunes
approve that you have the voice of the people. The only
thing left for you to do is to meet with the Senate in your
official robes.

CORIOLANUS

So it's over?

SICINIUS

You have done your duty according to the custom. The
people accept you, and you are summoned to meet later,
upon your approval.

CORIOLANUS

Where? In the senate?

SICINIUS

Yes, Coriolanus.

CORIOLANUS

May I change these garments?

SICINIUS

You may, sir.

CORIOLANUS

160 That I'll straight do; and, knowing myself again,
Repair to the senate-house.

MENENIUS

I'll keep you company. Will you along?

BRUTUS

We stay here for the people.

SICINIUS

Fare you well.

165

Exeunt CORIOLANUS and MENENIUS

SICINIUS

He has it now, and by his looks methink
'Tis warm at's heart.

BRUTUS

With a proud heart he wore his humble weeds.
170 will you dismiss the people?

Re-enter Citizens

SICINIUS

How now, my masters! have you chose this man?

FIRST CITIZEN

He has our voices, sir.

BRUTUS

We pray the gods he may deserve your loves.

SECOND CITIZEN

175 Amen, sir: to my poor unworthy notice,
He mock'd us when he begg'd our voices.

THIRD CITIZEN

Certainly
He flouted us downright.

FIRST CITIZEN

No, 'tis his kind of speech: he did not mock us.

SECOND CITIZEN

180 Not one amongst us, save yourself, but says
He used us scornfully: he should have show'd us
His marks of merit, wounds received for's country.

SICINIUS

Why, so he did, I am sure.

CITIZENS

No, no; no man saw 'em.

THIRD CITIZEN

185 He said he had wounds, which he could show
in private;
And with his hat, thus waving it in scorn,
'I would be consul,' says he: 'aged custom,
But by your voices, will not so permit me;
190 Your voices therefore.' When we granted that,
Here was 'I thank you for your voices: thank you:
Your most sweet voices: now you have left
your voices,
I have no further with you.' Was not this mockery?

CORIOLANUS

Then I'll do that right away, and once I recognize myself again, will head to the senate.

MENENIUS

I'll keep you company.

[To the TRIBUNES] Will you come along?

BRUTUS

We stay here for the people.

SICINIUS

Good-bye.

CORIOLANUS and MENENIUS exit.

SICINIUS

That's that—it looks to me like he found all of this heart-warming.

BRUTUS

He wore his humble robes with a proud heart. Will you dismiss the people?

CITIZENS re-enter.

SICINIUS

What's the deal, friends? Have you chosen that man?

FIRST CITIZEN

He has our voices, sir.

BRUTUS

We pray to the gods he may deserve the love you give him.

SECOND CITIZEN

Amen sir: it seemed to me, though I'm unworthy, that he mocked us when he begged for our voices.

THIRD CITIZEN

Certainly. He was downright sarcastic.

FIRST CITIZEN

No, that's just how he talks; he did not mock us.

SECOND CITIZEN

Everyone among us but you says he used us scornfully. He should have shown us his marks of merit—the wounds he received for his country.

SICINIUS

Why, surely he did.

CITIZENS

No, no, no one saw them.

THIRD CITIZEN

He said he had wounds, which he could show in private.
[Waves hat] And he did this with his hat, waving it scornfully. "I would be consul," he said, "but by old custom, I cannot be until I have your voices—thus, give me your voices." When we granted them, he was like "I thank you for your voices, thank you: your most sweet voices—now you have no voices left, I have no need for you." Wasn't he mocking us?

The citizen's impersonation of Coriolanus includes a few colloquialisms and brisk phrases.

SICINIUS

195 Why either were you ignorant to see't,
Or, seeing it, of such childish friendliness
To yield your voices?

BRUTUS

Could you not have told him
As you were lesson'd, when he had no power,
200 But was a petty servant to the state,
He was your enemy, ever spake against
Your liberties and the charters that you bear
I' the body of the weal; and now, arriving
A place of potency and sway o' the state,
205 If he should still malignantly remain
Fast foe to the plebeii, your voices might
Be curses to yourselves? You should have said
That as his worthy deeds did claim no less
Than what he stood for, so his gracious nature
210 Would think upon you for your voices and
Translate his malice towards you into love,
Standing your friendly lord.

SICINIUS

Thus to have said,
As you were fore-advised, had touch'd his spirit
215 And tried his inclination; from him pluck'd
Either his gracious promise, which you might,
As cause had call'd you up, have held him to
Or else it would have gall'd his surly nature,
Which easily endures not article
220 Tying him to aught; so putting him to rage,
You should have ta'en the advantage of his choler
And pass'd him unelected.

BRUTUS

Did you perceive
He did solicit you in free contempt
225 When he did need your loves, and do you think
That his contempt shall not be bruising to you,
When he hath power to crush? Why, had your bodies
No heart among you? or had you tongues to cry
Against the rectorship of judgment?

SICINIUS

230 Have you
Ere now denied the asker? and now again
Of him that did not ask, but mock, bestow
Your sued-for tongues?

THIRD CITIZEN

He's not confirm'd; we may deny him yet.

SECOND CITIZEN

235 And will deny him:
I'll have five hundred voices of that sound.

FIRST CITIZEN

I twice five hundred and their friends to piece 'em.

BRUTUS

Get you hence instantly, and tell those friends,
They have chose a consul that will from them take
240 Their liberties; make them of no more voice
Than dogs that are as often beat for barking
As therefore kept to do so.

SICINIUS

Let them assemble,
And on a safer judgment all revoke
245 Your ignorant election; enforce his pride,
And his old hate unto you; besides, forget not
With what contempt he wore the humble weed,
How in his suit he scorn'd you; but your loves,
Thinking upon his services, took from you

SICINIUS

You were either ignorant of it or, seeing it, why were you so
childishly friendly? Why give him your voices?

BRUTUS

Could you not have told him as you were taught? When he
was powerless, just a servant to the state, he was your
enemy; he always spoke out against your liberties and the
rights of the people in our republic. And now that he has a
position of power, what if he remains a foe to the
people—won't your voices be curses to yourselves? You
should have said that just as his deeds were worth no less
than what he stood for, so he ought to think upon your
voices and change his hate for you into love, and thus be
friendly to you.

SICINIUS

If you'd said that, as you we told you to ahead of time, you
would have gotten to the core of things and seen what he
was really like. You'd either have gotten a gracious promise
from him—which you then could have called up in the
future—or it would have been easy to see his unfriendly
nature and made him furious. Seeing his rage, you could
have taken advantage of his short temper and then let him
go unelected.

BRUTUS

Did you see how he asked for your approval with such
contempt when he needed your love? Do you really think
that his contempt will not be far, far worse when he has
power and no longer needs you? Did not a single one of you
have an ounce of boldness? Did no tongue cry out to guide
you with good judgement?

SICINIUS

Have you ever before denied someone who asked? And
now, even of one who mocked instead of asking, you still
bestow whatever he requests?

THIRD CITIZEN

He's not confirmed; we could still deny him.

SECOND CITIZEN

And we will deny him. I'll have five hundred voices of *that*.

FIRST CITIZEN

I'll have double five hundred, and their friends alongside!

BRUTUS

Then leave, instantly, and tell those friends that they have
approved a consul who will take their freedoms, a man who
will care less about what they have to say than about dogs
beaten for barking—dogs kept just to be beaten.

SICINIUS

Assemble the people and be more reasonable: revoke this
ignorant election. Remind the people of his pride and long-
standing hate for them, and don't forget the contempt with
which he wore his humble toga—how even as he asked you
for approval, he scorned you. Your good nature, thinking on
his service, blinded you to the way he behaved in that

The apprehension of his present portance,
Which most gibingly, ungravely, he did fashion
After the inveterate hate he bears you.

BRUTUS

Lay
A fault on us, your tribunes; that we laboured,
255 No impediment between, but that you must
Cast your election on him.

SICINIUS

Say, you chose him
More after our commandment than as guided
By your own true affections, and that your minds,
260 Preoccupied with what you rather must do
Than what you should, made you against the grain
To voice him consul: lay the fault on us.

BRUTUS

Ay, spare us not. Say we read lectures to you.
How youngly he began to serve his country,
265 How long continued, and what stock he springs of,
The noble house o' the Marcians, from whence came
That Ancus Marcius, Numa's daughter's son,
Who, after great Hostilius, here was king;
Of the same house Publius and Quintus were,
270 That our beat water brought by conduits hither;
And [Censorinus,] nobly named so,
Twice being [*by the people chosen*] censor,
Was his great ancestor.

SICINIUS

One thus descended,
275 That hath beside well in his person wrought
To be set high in place, we did commend
To your remembrances: but you have found,
Scaling his present bearing with his past,
That he's your fixed enemy, and revoke
280 Your sudden approbation.

BRUTUS

Say, you ne'er had done't—
Harp on that still—but by our putting on;
And presently, when you have drawn your number,
Repair to the Capitol.

ALL

285 We will so: almost all
Repent in their election.

Exeunt Citizens

BRUTUS

Let them go on;
This mutiny were better put in hazard,
290 Than stay, past doubt, for greater:
If, as his nature is, he fall in rage
With their refusal, both observe and answer
The vantage of his anger.

SICINIUS

To the Capitol, come:
We will be there before the stream o' the people;
295 And this shall seem, as partly 'tis, their own,
Which we have goaded onward.

Exeunt

moment, which so reflected the deep-seated hate he has for you.

BRUTUS

Blame your choice on us, your representatives. Say that it was we who insisted you elect him.

SICINIUS

Say you chose him more because we commanded it than out of your own true feelings, and that your minds, preoccupied with what you *had* to do rather than what you *should* do made you go against yourselves to name him consul. Blame us.

BRUTUS

Right, don't leave us out of it. Say we lectured you. That we reminded you how young he was when he began to serve his country, how he has done so ever since, that he comes from a strong people, the noble family of the Marcians—the family of Ancus Marcius, Numa's daughter's son, who was king of Rome after the great Hostilius, and of Publius and Quintus, who built our aqueducts; even Censorinus, nobly named for being twice elected censor, was his great ancestor.

SICINIUS

We commanded that you remember he was a man from that family, with many great qualities which make him suited for public service. But you have realized, thinking on his behavior just now and in the past, that he is determined to be your enemy, and you take back your sudden vote.

BRUTUS

Just keep repeating that you would never have supported him unless we had demanded it. So, when you have enough people, go to the Capitol.

ALL

We will do just that. Nearly everyone regrets their vote.

All exit.

BRUTUS

Let's just let them do it. It will be better for us to take a risk and let them mutiny than to try to guarantee it ourselves. If, as usual, Coriolanus rages at their refusal, we will be there to observe and respond to that situation.

SICINIUS

Let's go to the Capitol. We will be there before the crowd of the people, so that this uprising which we have shaped will seem like their idea, which it partly is.

Both exit.

Act 3, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Cornets. Enter CORIOLANUS, MENENIUS, all the Gentry, COMINIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, and other Senators

CORIOLANUS

Tullus Aufidius then had made new head?

LARTIUS

He had, my lord; and that it was which caused Our swifter composition.

CORIOLANUS

So then the Volsces stand but as at first,
Ready, when time shall prompt them, to make road.
Upon's again.

COMINIUS

They are worn, lord consul, so,
That we shall hardly in our ages see
Their banners wave again.

CORIOLANUS

Saw you Aufidius?

LARTIUS

On safe-guard he came to me; and did curse
Against the Volsces, for they had so vilely
Yielded the town: he is retired to Antium.

CORIOLANUS

Spoke he of me?

LARTIUS

He did, my lord.

CORIOLANUS

How? what?

LARTIUS

How often he had met you, sword to sword;
That of all things upon the earth he hated
Your person most, that he would pawn his fortunes
To hopeless restitution, so he might
Be call'd your vanquisher.

CORIOLANUS

At Antium lives he?

LARTIUS

At Antium.

CORIOLANUS

I wish I had a cause to seek him there,
To oppose his hatred fully. Welcome home.

Enter SICINIUS and BRUTUS

Shakescleare Translation

Trumpets sound. CORIOLANUS, MENENIUS, all the Roman noblemen, COMINIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, and other SENATORS enter.

CORIOLANUS

[Already in the midst of debate] So Tullus Aufidius had assembled a new army?

LARTIUS

He had, my lord, which was what urged us to make our peace so quickly.

CORIOLANUS

So then the Volsces are back to where they started: ready, whenever the time comes, to attack us again.

COMINIUS

They are so worn out, lord consul, that I can't imagine we'll see them wave their banners again in our lifetimes.

CORIOLANUS

[To LARTIUS] Did you see Aufidius?

LARTIUS

He came to me in a truce, and cursed his own Volsces for so easily surrendering Corioli. He has gone back to Antium.

CORIOLANUS

Did he speak of me?

LARTIUS

He did, my lord.

CORIOLANUS

How? What?

LARTIUS

How he had often met you in battle, sword to sword; that of all things on earth he hated you most; that he would give anything he owned, hopelessly, to be known as the one who defeated you.

CORIOLANUS

And he lives at Antium?

LARTIUS

At Antium.

CORIOLANUS

I wish I had a reason to seek him out there, and to oppose his hatred fully.

[Directed toward the TRIBUNES, approaching from a distance, though said to LARTIUS] Welcome back.

 Throughout the play, Coriolanus' declarations are often both abstract and full of specific action. His desire to fight Aufidius is clear and simple, but the phrase "oppose his hatred fully" suggests that Coriolanus' enmity extends beyond just the physical realm and also targets the soul of his opponent.

SICINIUS and BRUTUS enter.

CORIOLANUS

Behold, these are the tribunes of the people,
The tongues o' the common mouth: I do despise them;
For they do prank them in authority,
Against all noble sufferance.

30

SICINIUS

Pass no further.

CORIOLANUS

Ha! what is that?

BRUTUS

It will be dangerous to go on: no further.

CORIOLANUS

What makes this change?

MENENIUS

35

The matter?

COMINIUS

Hath he not pass'd the noble and the common?

BRUTUS

Cominius, no.

CORIOLANUS

Have I had children's voices?

FIRST SENATOR

Tribunes, give way; he shall to the market-place.

BRUTUS

40

The people are incensed against him.

SICINIUS

Stop,
Or all will fall in broil.

CORIOLANUS

Are these your herd?
Must these have voices, that can yield them now
45 And straight disclaim their tongues? What are
your offices?
You being their mouths, why rule you not their teeth?
Have you not set them on?

MENENIUS

Be calm, be calm.

CORIOLANUS

50 It is a purposed thing, and grows by plot,
To curb the will of the nobility:
Suffer't, and live with such as cannot rule
Nor ever will be ruled.

BRUTUS

Call't not a plot:
55 The people cry you mock'd them, and of late,
When corn was given them gratis, you repined;
Scandal'd the suppliants for the people, call'd them
Time-pleasers, flatterers, foes to nobleness.

CORIOLANUS

Why, this was known before.

BRUTUS

60

Not to them all.

CORIOLANUS

Look, those are the tribunes of the people, their
spokespeople. I do despise them, for they take on unearned
authority beyond anyone's patience.

SICINIUS

[To CORIOLANUS] Stop here.

CORIOLANUS

What? What is that?

BRUTUS

It will be dangerous to go on: no further.

CORIOLANUS

Why, what's changed?

MENENIUS

What's the matter?

COMINIUS

Hasn't Coriolanus won the approval of nobles and
commoners alike?

BRUTUS

No, Cominius.

CORIOLANUS

Were the people back there children, then, whose voices
don't count?

FIRST SENATOR

Move, tribunes: Coriolanus *will* go to the marketplace.

BRUTUS

The people are furious with him.

SICINIUS

Stop here, or everything will go to pieces.

CORIOLANUS

These furious people, did you herd them together? Do we
listen to these voices, which only now are gotten together
and make declarations on command? What is your role in
this? If you are their spokesmen, why don't you control
their impulses? Isn't it *you* who have put them up to this?

MENENIUS

Be calm, be calm.

CORIOLANUS

This is intentional; it's part of their plot to weaken the
authority of the senate. If we don't push back, we'll not be
fit to rule, nor will the people ever let themselves be ruled.

BRUTUS

Don't call it a plot. The people say you mocked them, and
that just recently, when they were given corn, you
complained it was a scandal for the people to depend on
the government. You called them lazy, flatterers, the
enemies of the state.

CORIOLANUS

Why, this is old news.

BRUTUS

Not to them all.

CORIOLANUS

Have you inform'd them sithence?

BRUTUS

How! I inform them!

CORIOLANUS

You are like to do such business.

BRUTUS

Not unlike,
65 Each way, to better yours.

CORIOLANUS

Why then should I be consul? By yond clouds,
Let me deserve so ill as you, and make me
Your fellow tribune.

SICINIUS

You show too much of that
70 For which the people stir: if you will pass
To where you are bound, you must inquire your way,
Which you are out of, with a gentler spirit,
Or never be so noble as a consul,
Nor yoke with him for tribune.

MENENIUS

75 Let's be calm.

COMINIUS

The people are abused; set on. This paltering
Becomes not Rome, nor has Coriolanus
Deserved this so dishonour'd rub, laid falsely
I' the plain way of his merit.

CORIOLANUS

80 Tell me of corn!
This was my speech, and I will speak't again—

MENENIUS

Not now, not now.

FIRST SENATOR

Not in this heat, sir, now.

CORIOLANUS

Now, as I live, I will. My nobler friends,
85 I crave their pardons:
For the mutable, rank-scented many, let them
Regard me as I do not flatter, and
Therein behold themselves: I say again,
In soothing them, we nourish 'gainst our senate
90 The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
Which we ourselves have plough'd for, sow'd,
and scatter'd,
By mingling them with us, the honour'd number,
Who lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that
95 Which they have given to beggars.

MENENIUS

Well, no more.

FIRST SENATOR

No more words, we beseech you.

CORIOLANUS

How! no more!
As for my country I have shed my blood,
100 Not fearing outward force, so shall my lungs
Coin words till their decay against those measles,
Which we disdain should tatter us, yet sought
The very way to catch them.

CORIOLANUS

Oh, so you've informed them then?

BRUTUS

Who, me? I inform them?

CORIOLANUS

You are the sort of person who would.

BRUTUS

I'm not unlike you, but that I'm better in every way.

CORIOLANUS

Why then should I be consul? By heaven, let me be as lowly
as you and just be a tribune instead.

SICINIUS

You show too much pride, which the people hate. If you
want to continue on this path, you will need to ask for the
people's approval more gently, or you'll never be either
consul nor tribune.

MENENIUS

Let's be calm.

COMINIUS

The people are abused; they've been put up to this. This
backstabbing does not suit Rome, nor has Coriolanus
deserved this dishonorable treatment, laid against his clear
merit.

CORIOLANUS

Corn again? Tell me about it. Here's what I said, I'll say it
again—

MENENIUS

Not now, not now.

FIRST SENATOR

Not in this conflict, sir, not now.

CORIOLANUS

Now. As I live, I will speak now. To my noble friends, I beg
your pardon. As for the disgusting, fickle masses, let them
see me speak honestly, and in that speech see themselves. I
say again in soothing these masses, we are merely stirring
up the forces of rebellion against the senate which we
ourselves have plowed for, seeded, and tended . By
treating them too well, we nobles are robbed of our virtue
and power by beggars.

 In this agricultural metaphor of
having "plough'd for, sow'd, and
scatter'd," Coriolanus says that all the
groundwork and preparation of
building the government's authority
will be for nothing if the people get
what they want.

MENENIUS

Fine, enough.

FIRST SENATOR

No more words, we beg you.

CORIOLANUS

Oh! No more? Just as I have shed blood for my country with
no fear of opposition, I'll speak here until my lungs decay
from an infection we have brought upon ourselves.

BRUTUS

You speak o' the people,
105 As if you were a god to punish, not
A man of their infirmity.

SICINIUS

'Twere well
We let the people know't.

MENENIUS

What, what? his choler?

CORIOLANUS

110 Choler!
Were I as patient as the midnight sleep,
By Jove, 'twould be my mind!

SICINIUS

It is a mind
That shall remain a poison where it is,
115 Not poison any further.

CORIOLANUS

Shall remain!
Hear you this Triton of the minnows? mark you
His absolute 'shall'?

COMINIUS

'Twas from the canon.

CORIOLANUS

120 'Shall!'
O good but most unwise patricians! why,
You grave but reckless senators, have you thus
Given Hydra here to choose an officer,
That with his peremptory 'shall,' being but
125 The horn and noise o' the monster's, wants not spirit
To say he'll turn your current in a ditch,
And make your channel his? If he have power
Then vail your ignorance; if none, awake
Your dangerous lenity. If you are learn'd,
130 Be not as common fools; if you are not,
Let them have cushions by you. You are plebeians,
If they be senators: and they are no less,
When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste
Most palates theirs. They choose their magistrate,
135 And such a one as he, who puts his 'shall,'
His popular 'shall' against a graver banch
Than ever frown in Greece. By Jove himself!
It makes the consuls base: and my soul aches
To know, when two authorities are up,
140 Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take
The one by the other.

COMINIUS

Well, on to the market-place.

CORIOLANUS

Whoever gave that counsel, to give forth
145 The corn o' the storehouse gratis, as 'twas used
Sometime in Greece,—

MENENIUS

Well, well, no more of that.

CORIOLANUS

Though there the people had more absolute power,
I say, they nourish'd disobedience, fed
150 The ruin of the state.

BRUTUS

You speak of the people as if you were a vengeful god, not a mortal man like them.

SICINIUS

We'd better let the people know.

MENENIUS

Know what—his fury?

CORIOLANUS

Fury? If I were as patient as a man asleep, by god, it would still be in my mind!

SICINIUS

It is a mind that shall remain poisonous, but which we will not allow to poison others.

CORIOLANUS

Shall remain! Do you hear this god of the minnows? Did you hear him declare "shall?" 3

3 Coriolanus is playing on the grammatical distinction between the subjunctive future and future tenses. "Shall" implies a command, while Sicinius could have just said "will," which merely refers to the future.

COMINIUS

It was out of line.

CORIOLANUS

"Shall!" Oh good but unwise senators! Why, you serious but reckless senators, have you allowed monstrous Hydra 4 here to choose a leader, that with his rude "shall," only the monster's voice, already has the boldness to say he'll ruin your power and make your authority his? If he has power, then push down your ignorance; if he does not, awake from your dangerous politeness. If you are educated, don't behave like common fools; if you are not, let them sit beside you in the Senate. You are commoners, if they are senators, and if your voices are heard together, it is they who set the tastes of Rome. They choose their leaders, and and one like this, who puts his "shall," his commoner's "shall," against a more senior group of senators than ever served in Greece. By god himself! This makes the consuls common, and my soul aches to know how soon a system will break down when two groups have equal authority.

4 The Hydra is a mythical beast with eight heads which grew back when cut off. Commonly used as a metaphor for the people of a republic, the "crowd," or the "many-headed multitude."

COMINIUS

Well, let's go to the market then.

CORIOLANUS

Whoever gave that advice, to give out the storehouse's corn for free, as they did sometimes in Greece—

MENENIUS

Come on, come on, enough of that.

CORIOLANUS

There in Greece, where the people had more power, they grew disobedient and brought on the ruin of the state.

BRUTUS

Why, shall the people give
One that speaks thus their voice?

CORIOLANUS

I'll give my reasons,
More wortier than their voices. They know the corn
Was not our recompense, resting well assured
That ne'er did service for't: being press'd to the war,
Even when the navel of the state was touch'd,
They would not thread the gates. This kind of service
Did not deserve corn gratis. Being i' the war
155 Their mutinies and revolts, wherein they show'd
Most valour, spoke not for them: the accusation
Which they have often made against the senate,
All cause unborn, could never be the motive
Of our so frank donation. Well, what then?
160 How shall this bisson multitude digest
The senate's courtesy? Let deeds express
What's like to be their words: 'we did request it;
We are the greater poll, and in true fear
They gave us our demands.' Thus we debase
165 The nature of our seats and make the rabble
Call our cares fears; which will in time
Break ope the locks o' the senate and bring in
The crows to peck the eagles.

MENENIUS

Come, enough.

BRUTUS

175 Enough, with over-measure.

CORIOLANUS

No, take more:
What may be sworn by, both divine and human,
Seal what I end withal! This double worship,
Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
180 Insult without all reason, where gentry, title, wisdom,
Cannot conclude but by the yea and no
Of general ignorance,—it must omit
Real necessities, and give way the while
To unstable slightness: purpose so barr'd,
185 it follows,
Nothing is done to purpose. Therefore, beseech you,—
You that will be less fearful than discreet,
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on't, that prefer
190 A noble life before a long, and wish
To jump a body with a dangerous physic
That's sure of death without it, at once pluck out
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
The sweet which is their poison: your dishonour
195 Mangels true judgment and bereaves the state
Of that integrity which should become't,
Not having the power to do the good it would,
For the in which doth control'l.

BRUTUS

Has said enough.

SICINIUS

200 Has spoken like a traitor, and shall answer
As traitors do.

CORIOLANUS

Thou wretch, despite o'erwhelm thee!
What should the people do with these bald tribunes?
On whom depending, their obedience fails
205 To the greater banch: in a rebellion,
When what's not meet, but what must be, was law,
Then were they chosen: in a better hour,
Let what is meet be said it must be meet,
And throw their power i' the dust.

BRUTUS

What, should the people really wish to be ruled by a man
who thinks of their voices this way?

CORIOLANUS

I'll give my reasons, far better than their voices. They know
the corn was not payment to them; they know every well
they did nothing to deserve it. At war, even when the enemy
was at our gates, they would not stand to fight. This kind of
service does not earn corn out of generosity. And in the war,
they showed the most bravery in their mutinies and revolts;
these did not speak well of them. The accusations which
they constantly make against the Senate, all without
reason, could never be the reason behind giving them corn.
So why did we? What do you think the public has learned
from this? Here's what they are probably saying to
themselves: "We asked for it, and since there are more of
us, they gave in to our demands in true fear." By doing this,
we weaken our own position and make the rabble call our
generosity fear. In time, this will break the senate open and
bring in crows to peck the eagles.

MENENIUS

Come on, enough.

BRUTUS

Enough, and more than enough.

CORIOLANUS

No, take more—I'm not done. By everything, both god and
man, I swear it. This double worship, in which the nobles
disdain the people with good reason, the people insult the
nobles without any reason—in which neither rank, title, nor
wisdom can act without getting a yes or no from general
ignorance—it must leave out what really matters, and
instead give way to instability and whims. When good work
is so restricted, it follows that no good work will be done.
Therefore, I beg you—whoever would rather be careful than
fearful, whoever loves the foundations of the state more
than you doubt it is changing, whoever prefers a noble life
more than a long, and would revive a dying man with
dangerous medicine rather than do nothing—rob the public
rabble of their voices⁵. Do not let them lick the poison
which they love: to dishonor yourselves mangles good
judgement and cuts off the state from that integrity it ought
to have, and those who would most benefit rob the state of
the power to do good.

⁵ Note that Coriolanus is saying that the common people shouldn't have a say in how Rome is governed by having elected tribunes.

BRUTUS

He's said enough.

SICINIUS

He has spoken like a traitor, and shall answer as traitors do.

CORIOLANUS

You wretch; misery o'erwhelm you! What should the people
do with these shameless tribunes? The more they depend
on you, the less they will respect the Senate. These tribunes
were chosen in the midst of a rebellion, when necessity
prevailed over decency. Let us now say that time has
passed, and take away their power.

BRUTUS

210 Manifest treason!

SICINIUS

This a consul? no.

BRUTUS

The aediles, ho!

Enter an AEdile

BRUTUS

Let him be apprehended.

215

SICINIUS

Go, call the people:
[Exit AEdile]

220

In whose name myself
Attach thee as a traitorous innovator,
A foe to the public weal: obey, I charge thee,
And follow to thine answer.

CORIOLANUS

Hence, old goat!

225

COMINIUS

Aged sir, hands off.

CORIOLANUS

Hence, rotten thing! or I shall shake thy bones
Out of thy garments.

SICINIUS

Help, ye citizens!

230

Enter a rabble of Citizens (Plebeians), with the AEdiles

MENENIUS

On both sides more respect.

SICINIUS

Here's he that would take from you all your power.

BRUTUS

Seize him, AEdiles!

CITIZENS

Down with him! down with him!

235

SECOND SENATOR

Weapons, weapons, weapons!

[They all bustle about Coriolanus]

Tribunes, Patricians, Citizens, what ho!
Sicinius, Brutus, Coriolanus, citizens!

all

Peace, peace, peace! Stay, hold, peace!

MENENIUS

What is about to be? I am out of breath;
Confusion's near; I cannot speak. You, tribunes
To the people! Coriolanus, patience!
Speak, good Sicinius.

240

SICINIUS

Hear me, people; peace!

BRUTUS

That, right there—that's treason!

SICINIUS

Is this the behavior of a consul? No.

BRUTUS

Soldiers, seize him!

High-ranking city guards enter.

BRUTUS

Let him be taken away.

SICINIUS

Go, call the people. *[The guards exit].*

[To CORIOLANUS] As for you, I call you a plotting traitor, a
foe to the public good. Obey, I demand it, and go to your
own trial.

CORIOLANUS

Get out of here, you old fart!

COMINIUS

[To SICINIUS] Hands off, old man!

CORIOLANUS

Get out here, you rotten thing, or I will shake your bones
out of your clothes.

SICINIUS

Citizens, help me!

Enter a rabble of CITIZENS (plebeians), with the guards.

MENENIUS

All of you, calm down!

SICINIUS

[Pointing at CORIOLANUS] Here's the man who would take
all your power!

BRUTUS

Seize him, guards!

CITIZENS

Down with him, down with him!

SECOND SENATOR

Weapons, weapons, weapons!

[They all move nervously around CORIOLANUS for safety]

Tribunes, patricians, citizens, what are you doing! Sicinius,
Brutus, Coriolanus, citizens!

ALL

Peace, peace, peace! Stop it! Calm down!

 This is a scene of utter chaos in which multiple people are shouting at the same time. We can't be sure who is calling for peace and who is angry.

MENENIUS

What is going on? I am out of breath, this is near a riot; I am
not loud enough. You, tribunes to the people! Coriolanus,
patience! Speak, good Sicinius.

SICINIUS

Hear me, people; calm down!

CITIZENS

Let's hear our tribune: peace Speak, speak, speak.

SICINIUS

You are at point to lose your liberties:
245 Marcius would have all from you; Marcius,
Whom late you have named for consul.

MENENIUS

Fie, fie, fie!
This is the way to kindle, not to quench.

FIRST SENATOR

To unbuild the city and to lay all flat.

SICINIUS

250 What is the city but the people?

CITIZENS

True,
The people are the city.

BRUTUS

By the consent of all, we were establish'd
The people's magistrates.

CITIZENS

255 You so remain.

MENENIUS

And so are like to do.

COMINIUS

That is the way to lay the city flat;
To bring the roof to the foundation,
And bury all, which yet distinctly ranges,
260 In heaps and piles of ruin.

SICINIUS

This deserves death.

BRUTUS

Or let us stand to our authority,
Or let us lose it. We do here pronounce,
Upon the part o' the people, in whose power
265 We were elected theirs, Marcius is worthy
Of present death.

SICINIUS

Therefore lay hold of him;
Bear him to the rock Tarpeian, and from thence
Into destruction cast him.

BRUTUS

270 AEdiles, seize him!

CITIZENS

Yield, Marcius, yield!

MENENIUS

Hear me one word;
Beseech you, tribunes, hear me but a word.

AEDILE

Peace, peace!

MENENIUS

275 [To BRUTUS] Be that you seem, truly your
country's friend,
And temperately proceed to what you would
Thus violently redress.

CITIZENS

Let's hear our tribune. Peace. Speak, speak, speak.

SICINIUS

You are at risk of losing all your freedom. Marcius  wants everything you have; Marcius, the man you just named consul.

 Note that Sicinius does not use Marcius's new name, Coriolanus.

MENENIUS

No, no, no! This the way to start a fire, not to put one out.

FIRST SENATOR

The way to unbuild the city and flatten it.

SICINIUS

What is the city if not the people?

CITIZENS

True, the people *are* the city

BRUTUS

By the republic's agreement, we were made the people's representatives.

CITIZENS

You still are!

MENENIUS

And you will continue to be.

COMINIUS

That is the way to flatten the city, to bring the roof crashing down and to bury us all in heaps and piles of ruin.

SICINIUS

[Referring to CORIOLANUS] He deserves to be executed.

BRUTUS

Either let us stand up with our authority or we'll lose it. We hereby pronounce, by the power of the people by whom we were elected, that Marcius deserves to be executed.

 Murders and traitors in ancient Rome were, for a time, executed by being thrown off a cliff.

SICINIUS

Therefore grab him, and take him to the Tarpeian rock,  and there throw him to his death.

BRUTUS

Guards, seize him!

CITIZENS

Give yourself up, Marcius!

MENENIUS

Just listen, tribunes, I beg you, listen!

Guard

Peace, peace!

MENENIUS

[To BRUTUS] Be what you say you are—truly your country's friend—and proceed reasonably with this, rather than violently.

BRUTUS

Sir, those cold ways,
280 That seem like prudent helps, are very poisonous
Where the disease is violent. Lay hands upon him,
And bear him to the rock.

CORIOLANUS

No, I'll die here. *[Drawing his sword]* There's some
among you have beheld me fighting:
285 Come, try upon yourselves what you have seen me.

MENENIUS

Down with that sword! Tribunes, withdraw awhile.

BRUTUS

Lay hands upon him.

COMINIUS

Help Marcus, help,
You that be noble; help him, young and old!

CITIZENS

290 Down with him, down with him!

In this mutiny, the Tribunes, the AEdiles, and the People, are beat in

MENENIUS

Go, get you to your house; be gone, away!
All will be naught else.

SECOND SENATOR

Get you gone.

COMINIUS

295 Stand fast;
We have as many friends as enemies.

MENENIUS

Sham it be put to that?

FIRST SENATOR

The gods forbid!
I prithee, noble friend, home to thy house;
300 Leave us to cure this cause.

MENENIUS

For 'tis a sore upon us,
You cannot tent yourself: be gone, beseech you.

COMINIUS

Come, sir, along with us.

CORIOLANUS

I would they were barbarians—as they are,
Though in Rome litter'd—not Romans—as they are not,
Though calved i' the porch o' the Capitol—
305

MENENIUS

Be gone;
Put not your worthy rage into your tongue;
One time will owe another.

CORIOLANUS

310 On fair ground
I could beat forty of them.

BRUTUS

Sir: that slow actions which might seem reasonable are
actually poisonous when things are bad enough. Lay hands
upon him, and take him to the rock.

CORIOLANUS

No, I'll die here. *[Drawing his sword]* Some of you have seen
me fight. Come on, go ahead and subject yourselves to
what you've seen me do to others.

MENENIUS

Put your sword away! Tribunes, just lay off a while.

BRUTUS

Capture him.

COMINIUS

All of you who are noble, help Marcus! Young and old, help
him!

CITIZENS

Down with him, down with him!

*Amid the chaos, the nobles and their soldiers push the
TRIBUNES, the guards, and the people offstage into the
wings.*

MENENIUS

Go, go to your house, be gone, go away! We'll lose
everything if we can't get rid of them.

SECOND SENATOR

Get out of here!

COMINIUS

Don't run! We have as many friends as enemies.

MENENIUS

Is our situation so dire that we should count our friends?

FIRST SENATOR

God forbid!

[To CORIOLANUS] Please, noble friend, get home to your
house; leave us to fix this.

MENENIUS

This is our problem; you can't cure your own disease. Go,
please.

COMINIUS

Come, sir, come along with us.

CORIOLANUS

I wish they were barbarians—I mean, they are barbarians,
just scattered through Rome—not Romans—no, they're
not Romans, though born like animals on the steps of the
capital—
315

 Coriolanus is overcome with rage,
and is having a hard time articulating
his hatred for the people.

MENENIUS

Go, don't talk about how angry you are; we'll deal with this
on another occasion.

CORIOLANUS

I could beat forty of them in a fair fight.

COMINIUS

I could myself
Take up a brace o' the best of them; yea, the
two tribunes:
315 But now 'tis odds beyond arithmetic;
And manhood is call'd foolery, when it stands
Against a falling fabric. Will you hence,
Before the tag return? whose rage doth rend
Like interrupted waters and o'erbear
320 What they are used to bear.

MENENIUS

Pray you, be gone:
I'll try whether my old wit be in request
With those that have but little: this must be patch'd
With cloth of any colour.

COMINIUS

325 Nay, come away.

Exeunt CORIOLANUS, COMINIUS, and others

A PATRICIAN

This man has marr'd his fortune.

MENENIUS

His nature is too noble for the world:
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
330 Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth:
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
And, being angry, does forget that ever
He heard the name of death.

A noise within

MENENIUS

Here's goodly work!

335

SECOND PATRICIAN

I would they were abed!

MENENIUS

I would they were in Tiber! What the vengeance!
Could he not speak 'em fair?

Re-enter BRUTUS and SICINIUS, with the rabble

SICINIUS

340 Where is this viper
That would depopulate the city and
Be every man himself?

MENENIUS

You worthy tribunes,—

SICINIUS

345 He shall be thrown down the Tarpeian rock
With rigorous hands: he hath resisted law,
And therefore law shall scorn him further trial
Than the severity of the public power
Which he so sets at nought.

FIRST CITIZEN

He shall well know
350 The noble tribunes are the people's mouths,
And we their hands.

CITIZENS

He shall, sure on't.

COMINIUS

I'd be happy to beat up a bunch of the best of them—those two tribunes, particularly. But this is well beyond a matter of odds, and boldness is called foolishness when it stands against a crumbling city. Will you get out of here, before the crowd returns? Their rage is like the deep sea and overwhelms them.

MENENIUS

I beg you, leave. I'll see if my old humor is still good for something with the poor. We must try everything in this situation.

COMINIUS

[CORIOLANUS looks after the crowd as though hoping to fight them] No, come on; let's go.

CORIOLANUS, COMINIUS, and others exit.

Senator

This man has ruined himself.

MENENIUS

He is too noble for this world. He would not flatter Neptune¹⁰ for his riches, or Jupiter¹¹ for thunderous power. He speaks whatever is in his heart; whatever feelings he has, he can't help but declare, and when he is angry, he forgets there's such a thing as death.

¹⁰ Neptune is the Roman god of the sea (Poseidon in Greek).

¹¹ Jupiter is the chief god in the Roman pantheon; the god of thunder and lightning (Zeus in Greek).

A noise from offstage is heard.

MENENIUS

[Sarcastically] That sounds promising!

SECOND PATRICIAN

I wish they'd sleep this off!

MENENIUS

I wish they were underwater! What a roar from them.
Couldn't Coriolanus just be polite?

BRUTUS and SICINIUS re-enter with the crowd.

SICINIUS

Where is that viper who wants everyone in the city either dead or like himself?

MENENIUS

My dear tribunes—

SICINIUS

He'll be thrown down the Tarpeian rock yet! He has resisted the law, and therefore the law will deny him any more trial than the strength of the public itself, of which he thinks so little.

FIRST CITIZEN

He will know that the tribunes are the people's mouths, and we their hands.

CITIZENS

He will, that's for sure.

MENENIUS

Sir, sir,—

SICINIUS

Peace!

MENENIUS

355 Do not cry havoc, where you should but hunt
With modest warrant.

SICINIUS

Sir, how comes't that you
Have holp to make this rescue?

MENENIUS

Hear me speak:
360 As I do know the consul's worthiness,
So can I name his faults,—

SICINIUS

Consul! what consul?

MENENIUS

The consul Coriolanus.

BRUTUS

He consul!

CITIZENS

365 No, no, no, no, no.

MENENIUS

If, by the tribunes' leave, and yours, good people,
I may be heard, I would crave a word or two;
The which shall turn you to no further harm
Than so much loss of time.

SICINIUS

370 Speak briefly then;
For we are peremptory to dispatch
This viperous traitor: to eject him hence
Were but one danger, and to keep him here
Our certain death: therefore it is decreed
375 He dies to-night.

MENENIUS

Now the good gods forbid
That our renowned Rome, whose gratitude
Towards her deserved children is enroll'd
In Jove's own book, like an unnatural dam
380 Should now eat up her own!

SICINIUS

He's a disease that must be cut away.

MENENIUS

O, he's a limb that has but a disease;
Mortal, to cut it off; to cure it, easy.
What has he done to Rome that's worthy death?
385 Killing our enemies, the blood he hath lost—
Which, I dare vouch, is more than that he hath,
By many an ounce—he dropp'd it for his country;
And what is left, to lose it by his country,
Were to us all, that do't and suffer it,
390 A brand to the end o' the world.

SICINIUS

This is clean kam.

BRUTUS

Merely awry: when he did love his country,
It honour'd him.

MENENIUS

Sir, sir—

SICINIUS

Silence!

MENENIUS

Do not let loose entirely, when you should still restrain
yourselves.

SICINIUS

Sir, how is it that you hope to rescue this situation?

MENENIUS

Listen: just as I know the consul's worthiness, I'm well
aware of his flaws.

SICINIUS

Consul! What consul?

MENENIUS

The consul Coriolanus.

BRUTUS

Him? Consul?

CITIZENS

No, no, no, no, no.

MENENIUS

If you, tribunes, and you, good people, will simply allow me
to speak, I only need a moment or two; my words will do far
less harm to you than that which you already pursue.

SICINIUS

Speak briefly then, for we are more than ready to be rid of
this poisonous traitor. To throw him out of power is just a
moment of danger, and to keep him here would mean our
certain death. Therefore, it is decided he should die tonight.

MENENIUS

God forbid that Rome, which has famously done so much
for her people, should now eat up her own child!

SICINIUS

He's a diseased limb that must be cut off.

MENENIUS

Sure, then: he's Rome's diseased limb. To cut it off will kill
all of Rome; to cure the disease, though, is easy. What has
he done to Rome that makes him deserve death? In killing
our enemies, the blood he has lost—which I bet is more
than he has left—he shed that blood for his country.
Whatever's left, if Rome were to take it from him, it would
be to all of us as though the end of the world.

SICINIUS

What twisted logic.

BRUTUS

It's simply nonsense. When he did love his country, it
honored him.

MENENIUS

The service of the foot
395 Being once gangrened, is not then respected
For what before it was.

BRUTUS

We'll hear no more.
Pursue him to his house, and pluck him thence:
Lest his infection, being of catching nature,
400 Spread further.

MENENIUS

One word more, one word.
This tiger-footed rage, when it shall find
The harm of unscann'd swiftness, will too late
Tie leaden pounds to's heels. Proceed by process;
405 Lest parties, as he is beloved, break out,
And sack great Rome with Romans.

BRUTUS

If it were so,—

SICINIUS

What do ye talk?
Have we not had a taste of his obedience?
410 Our aediles smote? ourselves resisted? Come.

MENENIUS

Consider this: he has been bred i' the wars
Since he could draw a sword, and is ill school'd
In bolted language; meal and bran together
He throws without distinction. Give me leave,
415 I'll go to him, and undertake to bring him
Where he shall answer, by a lawful form,
In peace, to his utmost peril.

FIRST SENATOR

Noble tribunes,
It is the humane way: the other course
420 Will prove too bloody, and the end of it
Unknown to the beginning.

SICINIUS

Noble Menenius,
Be you then as the people's officer.
Masters, lay down your weapons.

BRUTUS

425 Go not home.

SICINIUS

Meet on the market-place. We'll attend you there:
Where, if you bring not Marcius, we'll proceed
In our first way.

MENENIUS

I'll bring him to you.
430 [To the senators]
Let me desire your company. He must come,
or what is worst will follow.

FIRST SENATOR

435 Pray you, let's to him.

Exeunt

MENENIUS

The use of a diseased food is not judged equal to what it
was in the past.

BRUTUS

We'll hear no more. Chase him to his house, and pull him
out of it, or his infection will spread further.

MENENIUS

One more word, one word. This wild and hasty rage will
prove dangerous, and when it does, it will be too late to
slow down. Slow down while you still can, or an opposing
side will break out into conflict, and it will be Romans
pillaging Rome.

BRUTUS

So what?—

SICINIUS

What are you talking about? Haven't we felt his wrath
already? Our guards attacked, and us resisting? Come on.

MENENIUS

Just consider: he has been a child of war since he was old
enough to draw a sword, and is poorly schooled in polite
language. He does not make fine distinctions. Just leave
him alone; I'll go to him, and do my best to bring him to the
senate so he can answer all this lawfully and without
violence.

FIRST SENATOR

Noble tribunes, this is the humane way to do it. The other
course of action would prove too bloody, and who knows
what would come of it.

SICINIUS

Noble Menenius, you will then act as the people's
representative. Sirs, lay down your weapons.

BRUTUS

But don't go home.

SICINIUS

Meet in the market. We'll find you there. If you do not bring
Marcius, we'll go back and try the other way.

MENENIUS

I'll bring him to you.

[To the SENATORS] Please, come with me. Coriolanus must
come, or things will only get worse.

FIRST SENATOR

Yes, let's go.

All exit.

Act 3, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Shakescleare Translation

Enter CORIOLANUS with Patricians

CORIOLANUS

Let them puff all about mine ears, present me
Death on the wheel or at wild horses' heels,
Or pile ten hills on the Tarpeian rock,
That the precipitation might down stretch
5 Below the beam of sight, yet will I still
Be thus to them.

A PATRICIAN

You do the nobler.

CORIOLANUS

I muse my mother
Does not approve me further, who was wont
10 To call them woollen vassals, things created
To buy and sell with groats, to show bare heads
In congregations, to yawn, be still and wonder,
When one but of my ordinance stood up
To speak of peace or war.

Enter VOLUMNIA

CORIOLANUS

15 I talk of you:
Why did you wish me milder? would you have me
False to my nature? Rather say I play
The man I am.

VOLUMNIA

O, sir, sir, sir,
20 I would have had you put your power well on,
Before you had worn it out.

CORIOLANUS

Let go.

VOLUMNIA

You might have been enough the man you are,
With striving less to be so; lesser had been
25 The thwartings of your dispositions, if
You had not show'd them how ye were disposed
Ere they lack'd power to cross you.

CORIOLANUS

Let them hang.

A PATRICIAN

Ay, and burn too.

30

Enter MENENIUS and Senators

MENENIUS

Come, come, you have been too rough, something
too rough;
You must return and mend it.

35

FIRST SENATOR

There's no remedy;
Unless, by not so doing, our good city
Cleave in the midst, and perish.

40

VOLUMNIA

Pray, be counsell'd:
I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage.

CORIOLANUS enters with SENATORS.

CORIOLANUS

Let them say what they will. They can threaten me with
death on the rack or threaten to drag me behind wild
horses, or pile ten hills on top of the Tarpeian cliff so that
the rain stretches down out of sight, but still I will resist
them.

SeNator

In doing so, you are honorable.

CORIOLANUS

I wonder why my mother isn't even more proud of me. She
always called the people dumb servants, machines made to
buy and sell, just bodies in the room, which yawn and
silently wonder when someone with my strength stood up
to speak of peace or war.

VOLUMNIA enters.

CORIOLANUS

I'm talking about you: why did you urge me to calm down?
Would you have me be someone I'm not? Rather say I play
the man I am.

 "Rather say I play the man I am" is an allusion, of course, to theatrical performance in general, but also foreshadows Coriolanus' use of costumed disguise in the next act.

VOLUMNIA

Oh, sir, sir, sir, I wish you'd actually *gotten* power before
you'd used it up.

CORIOLANUS

Leave off.

VOLUMNIA

You'd be just as much the man you are if you wouldn't try
so hard to be that man. People wouldn't work so hard
against you if you hadn't shown them how you felt while
they still had the power to stop you.

CORIOLANUS

To hell with them.

Senator

Yeah, and let them burn, too.

MENENIUS enters with SENATORS.

MENENIUS

Come on, you have been too rude to them, far too rude; you
have to go back and apologize.

FIRST SENATOR

There's no use; except that if he doesn't, our city will divide
itself in half and be destroyed.

VOLUMNIA

Please, listen: although my heart is not as strong as yours, I
have a brain to guide my fury into better advantages for us.

MENENIUS

Well said, noble woman?
Before he should thus stoop to the herd, but that
The violent fit o' the time craves it as physic
For the whole state, I would put mine armour on,
45 Which I can scarcely bear.

CORIOLANUS

What must I do?

MENENIUS

Return to the tribunes.

CORIOLANUS

Well, what then? what then?

MENENIUS

Repent what you have spoke.

CORIOLANUS

50 For them! I cannot do it to the gods;
Must I then do't to them?

VOLUMNIA

You are too absolute;
Though therein you can never be too noble,
But when extremities speak. I have heard you say,
55 Honour and policy, like unsever'd friends,
I' the war do grow together: grant that, and tell me,
In peace what each of them by the other lose,
That they combine not there.

CORIOLANUS

Tush, tush!

MENENIUS

60 A good demand.

VOLUMNIA

If it be honour in your wars to seem
The same you are not, which, for your best ends,
You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse,
That it shall hold companionship in peace
65 With honour, as in war, since that to both
It stands in like request?

CORIOLANUS

Why force you this?

VOLUMNIA

Because that now it lies you on to speak
To the people; not by your own instruction,
70 Nor by the matter which your heart prompts you,
But with such words that are but rooted in
Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
Of no allowance to your bosom's truth.
Now, this no more dishonours you at all
75 Than to take in a town with gentle words,
Which else would put you to your fortune and
The hazard of much blood.
I would dissemble with my nature where
My fortunes and my friends at stake required
80 I should do so in honour: I am in this,
Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles;
And you will rather show our general louts
How you can frown than spend a fawn upon 'em,
For the inheritance of their loves and safeguard
85 Of what that want might ruin.

MENENIUS

Noble lady!
Come, go with us; s peak fair: you may salve so,
Not what is dangerous present, but the loss

MENENIUS

Well said, noble woman. Before Coriolanus should bow to
the crowd—which he should never do unless these violent
times absolutely required it—I feel as though I should put
my armor on, which pains me.

CORIOLANUS

What must I do?

MENENIUS

Return to the tribunes.

CORIOLANUS

Well, what then? What then?

MENENIUS

Apologize for what you've said.

CORIOLANUS

To them? I cannot apologize to the gods, and you want me
to apologize to them?

VOLUMNIA

You are too stubborn. In this you are also noble, except in
bizarre situations like this. I've heard you say before that
honor and judgement become inseparable friends in the
course of war. Think of that, and tell me how you have not
lost both by failing to combine them here, in peacetime.

CORIOLANUS

Nonsense!

MENENIUS

She makes a good point.

VOLUMNIA

If it's honorable at war to adapt yourself to your conditions,
how is it worse that you should do the same—be
flexible—in a time of peace?

CORIOLANUS

Why are you forcing this point?

VOLUMNIA

Because the pressure is now on you to speak to the people,
and to do so not the way you normally might, nor just
however your heart tells you to, but to speak useful words,
even if you don't truly believe them. This is no more
dishonor to you than to use gentle words to capture a town
which would otherwise risk the lives of many men to
capture. If I had to be someone I wasn't when my friends
and fortunes were at stake, it would be honorable for me to
do so. In this case, I am your wife, your son, these senators,
the nobles; would you rather show the common people
that you can frown than just once compliment them for
Rome's sake?

 Volumnia uses a poetic technique called metonymy to capture two ideas at once. She "is," or stands in for, Coriolanus's wife/son/senators/etc., but there is a quiet implication that she actually "is" all those figures in that she is the only thing Coriolanus appears to care about.

MENENIUS

Noble lady! Come along with us. Talk to him: if you can
calm him so, we might avoid not only the dangerous
present but also deal with our past conflict.

Of what is past.

VOLUMNIA

I prithee now, my son,
Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand;
And thus far having stretch'd it—here be with them—
Thy knee bussing the stones—for in such business
Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant
More learned than the ears—waving thy head,
Which often, thus, correcting thy stout heart,
Now humble as the ripest mulberry
That will not hold the handling: or say to them,
Thou art their soldier, and being bred in broils
Hast not the soft way which, thou dost confess,
Were fit for thee to use as they to claim,
In asking their good loves, but thou wilt frame
Thyself, forsooth, hereafter theirs, so far
As thou hast power and person.

MENENIUS

This but done,
Even as she speaks, why, their hearts were yours;
For they have pardons, being ask'd, as free
As words to little purpose.

VOLUMNIA

Prithee now,
Go, and be ruled: although I know thou hadst rather
Follow thine enemy in a fiery gulf
Than flatter him in a bower. Here is Cominius.

Enter COMINIUS

COMINIUS

I have been i' the market-place; and, sir,'tis fit
You make strong party, or defend yourself
By calmness or by absence: all's in anger.

MENENIUS

Only fair speech.

COMINIUS

I think 'twill serve, if he
Can thereto frame his spirit.

VOLUMNIA

He must, and will
Prithee now, say you will, and go about it.

CORIOLANUS

Must I go show them my unbarbed sconce?
Must I with base tongue give my noble heart
A lie that it must bear? Well, I will do't:
Yet, were there but this single plot to lose,
This mould of Marcius, they to dust should grind it
And throw't against the wind. To the market-place!
You have put me now to such a part which never
I shall discharge to the life.

COMINIUS

Come, come, we'll prompt you.

VOLUMNIA

I prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said
My praises made thee first a soldier, so,
To have my praise for this, perform a part
Thou hast not done before.

CORIOLANUS

Well, I must do't:
Away, my disposition, and possess me
Some harlot's spirit! my throat of war be turn'd,
Which quired with my drum, into a pipe

VOLUMNIA

I beg you, my son, [*She mimics the action of humbly fidgeting with a peasant's cap*] go along with this hat in your hand, and having stretched it—do it like this—with your knees on the ground—for in this kind of thing, your behavior is everything, and idiots care more about what they see than what they hear—shaking your head like this a few times, as humble as the ripest mulberry  from a tree ready to be picked. Then say to them that you are a soldier in their service, and that since you grew up in the war, you're not very polite, which you confess is really better for this situation. In asking for their approval, just wilt your body like this—seriously—and say that you'll be their servant forever as long as you live.

 Metaphor for the motion she's describing; she wants him to hang his head low and wobble it like a fruit on a mulberry tree.

MENENIUS

If you can do this, as she says, they will accept you. They will freely pardon you, if you ask.

VOLUMNIA

Please now, go and be humble, although I know you'd rather follow an enemy into hell than flatter him in a garden. Here comes Cominius.

COMINIUS enters.

COMINIUS

I've been in the market, sir, and you'd better go either with a strong guard or defend yourself by calmness or by not going at all: they're pretty angry.

MENENIUS

Just be polite.

COMINIUS

I think that would work, if he could actually do it.

VOLUMNIA

He must, and will. Listen: say you'll do it, and do it.

CORIOLANUS

I have to go bare my uncovered head to them? I have to put a lie upon my conscience? Well, I'll do it. Yet if this were the only land for which I ever fought, let them take my body, grind it to dust, and throw it to the wind. To the market! You're insisting now I play a part which I don't know how I'll ever make believable.

COMINIUS

Come, come, we'll help you.

VOLUMNIA

Please, sweet son, as you have said my praise was what made you a soldier, have my praise for this too and perform a part you've not played before.

CORIOLANUS

Well, I guess I have to do it. Farewell, my self, and let me take on prostitute-like spirit! I'll turn my voice of war, like a drum, into a tiny pipe like the virgin voice that would lull babies to sleep. I'll smile fake smiles, and I'll cry

Small as an eunuch, or the virgin voice
That babies lulls asleep! the smiles of knaves
140 Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up
The glasses of my sight! a beggar's tongue
Make motion through my lips, and my arm'd knees,
Who bow'd but in my stirrup, bend like his
That hath received an alms! I will not do't,
145 Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

VOLUMNIA

At thy choice, then:
To beg of thee, it is my more dishonour
150 Than thou of them. Come all to ruin; let
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death
With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list
Thy valianthood was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,
155 But owe thy pride thyself.

CORIOLANUS

Pray, be content:
Mother, I am going to the market-place;
Chide me no more. I'll mountebank their loves,
Cog their hearts from them, and come home beloved
160 Of all the trades in Rome. Look, I am going:
Commend me to my wife. I'll return consul;
Or never trust to what my tongue can do
I' the way of flattery further.

VOLUMNIA

Do your will.
165

*Exit***COMINIUS**

Away! the tribunes do attend you: arm yourself
To answer mildly; for they are prepared
With accusations, as I hear, more strong
Than are upon you yet.

CORIOLANUS

170 The word is 'mildly.' Pray you, let us go:
Let them accuse me by invention, I
Will answer in mine honour.

MENENIUS

Ay, but mildly.

CORIOLANUS

Well, mildly be it then. Mildly!

175

Exeunt

schoolboy's tears. I'll speak like a beggar, and my knees,
which until now have only bent in my stirrups, will bend like
a man asking for money in the street! [Having briefly
considered this, he wavers] I can't do this, or I'll have to
betray my own truth and my body will teach my mind to be
evil.

VOLUMNIA

It's up to you, then. It's more dishonorable for me to beg
you than for you to beg them. Let the world burn; let your
mother be the heart of your pride rather than the victim of
your foolish stubbornness, for I am as invincible as you. But
do whatever you want. Your bravery was mine—you sucked
it from me—but your pride is your own.

CORIOLANUS

Enough. Mother, I am going to the market, stop scolding
me. I'll lie for their love, cheat their hearts from them, and
come home loved by people of every profession in Rome.
Look, I'm going; give my best to my wife. I'll return consul if
my tongue has any power at all to flatter.

VOLUMNIA

Go ahead.

*VOLUMNIA exits.***COMINIUS**

Go! The tribunes are waiting for you. Prepare to answer
gently, for they are ready with accusations, I think, even
stronger than you've heard so far.

CORIOLANUS

Like you said, "gently." Please, lets go. Let them make up
whatever they want, I'll answer honorably.

MENENIUS

Sure, but gently.

CORIOLANUS

Whatever, gently then. Gently!

Both exit.

Act 3, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter SICINIUS and BRUTUS

BRUTUS

In this point charge him home, that he affects
Tyrannical power: if he evade us there,
Enforce him with his envy to the people,
And that the spoil got on the Antiates
Was ne'er distributed.

5

*Enter an AEdile***Shakescleare Translation**

SICINIUS and BRUTUS enter.

BRUTUS

Let's drive this point home: he wants to be a tyrant. If he
manages to evade that, lets accuse him of being greedy,
and say that he never distributed the spoils of war from the
Antiates. 

 The battle against the Antiates
was a major earlier battle in the war
between the Romans and the
Volscians.

A GUARD enters.

BRUTUS

What, will he come?

AEDILE

He's coming.

BRUTUS

How accompanied?

AEDILE

With old Menenius, and those senators
That always favour'd him.

SICINIUS

Have you a catalogue
Of all the voices that we have procured
Set down by the poll?

AEDILE

I have; 'tis ready.

SICINIUS

Have you collected them by tribes?

AEDILE

I have.

SICINIUS

Assemble presently the people hither;
And when they bear me say 'It shall be so
I' the right and strength o' the commons,' be it either
For death, for fine, or banishment, then let them
If I say fine, cry 'Fine;' if death, cry 'Death.'
Insisting on the old prerogative
And power i' the truth o' the cause.

AEDILE

I shall inform them.

BRUTUS

And when such time they have begun to cry,
Let them not cease, but with a din confused
Enforce the present execution
Of what we chance to sentence.

AEDILE

Very well.

SICINIUS

Make them be strong and ready for this hint,
When we shall hap to give 't them.

BRUTUS

Go about it.

Exit AEdele

BRUTUS

Put him to choler straight: he hath been used
Ever to conquer, and to have his worth
Of contradiction: being once chafed, he cannot
Be rein'd again to temperance; then he speaks
What's in his heart; and that is there which looks
With us to break his neck.

SICINIUS

Well, here he comes.

Enter CORIOLANUS, MENENIUS, and COMINIUS, with Senators and Patricians

BRUTUS

Well, is he coming?

guard

He's coming.

BRUTUS

Who accompanies him?

Guard

Just old Menenius, and the senators who've always been on
his side.

SICINIUS

Do you have a list of all the votes we've gotten?

Guard

I do, it's ready.

SICINIUS

And you've organized them by group?

Guard

I have.

SICINIUS

Assemble everyone here. And when they hear me say "This
is how it will be in the name and the strength of our
people," whether I say either for death, fine, or banishment,
have them yell accordingly: "Fine," if it's a fine; "Death," if
it's for death. We'll insist on the old reasons and the power
of truth.

Guard

I'll inform them.

BRUTUS

And when they've begun to shout, make sure they don't
stop; instead, make sure they wildly cheer whatever we
happen to decide on.

Guard

Very well.

SICINIUS

Make sure they're really ready when we give them the sign.

BRUTUS

Go to it.

GUARD exits.

BRUTUS

Lets get him angry right away. He's so used to conquering,
and to seeing value only in contradiction. Once we irritate
him, he'll never calm down, and he'll speak what's in his
heart. What's in there will be what we need to break his
neck.

SICINIUS

All right; here he comes.

*CORIOLANUS, MENENIUS, and COMINIUS enter with
SENATORS.*

MENENIUS

Calmly, I do beseech you.

CORIOLANUS

Ay, as an ostler, that for the poorest piece
 45 Will bear the knave by the volume. The honour'd gods
 Keep Rome in safety, and the chairs of justice
 Supplied with worthy men! plant love among 's!
 Throng our large temples with the shows of peace,
 And not our streets with war!

FIRST SENATOR

50 Amen, amen.

MENENIUS

A noble wish.

Re-enter AEdile, with Citizens

SICINIUS

Draw near, ye people.

AEDILE

List to your tribunes. Audience: peace, I say!

CORIOLANUS

55 First, hear me speak.

BOTH TRIBUNES

Well, say. Peace, ho!

CORIOLANUS

Shall I be charged no further than this present?
 Must all determine here?

SICINIUS

I do demand,
 60 If you submit you to the people's voices,
 Allow their officers and are content
 To suffer lawful censure for such faults
 As shall be proved upon you?

CORIOLANUS

I am content.

MENENIUS

65 Lo, citizens, he says he is content:
 The wartlike service he has done, consider; think
 Upon the wounds his body bears, which show
 Like graves i' the holy churchyard.

CORIOLANUS

Scratches with briers,
 70 Scars to move laughter only.

MENENIUS

Consider further,
 That when he speaks not like a citizen,
 You find him like a soldier: do not take
 His rougher accents for malicious sounds,
 75 But, as I say, such as become a soldier,
 Rather than envy you.

COMINIUS

Well, well, no more.

CORIOLANUS

What is the matter
 That being pass'd for consul with full voice,
 80 I am so dishonour'd that the very hour
 You take it off again?

MENENIUS

[To CORIOLANUS] Calmly, please.

CORIOLANUS

Sure, like a stableboy, who will take any amount of abuse
 for a penny. May the honored gods keep Rome safe, and
 positions of justice be held by worthy men! May we all love
 one another! Fill our temples with peaceful demonstrations
 and our streets with war!

FIRST SENATOR

Indeed, indeed.

MENENIUS

A noble wish.

GUARD re-enters with CITIZENS.

SICINIUS

Come here, people.

Guard

Listen to your tribunes. Attention: silence, I say!

CORIOLANUS

First, hear me speak.

BOTH TRIBUNES

Sure, go ahead. Silence, everyone.

CORIOLANUS

Will this be my last trial? Will everything come down to this?

SICINIUS

I insist upon it, so long as you will submit to the people's
 vote, abide by their representatives, and are willing to deal
 with lawful condemnation for the verdict which is reached?

CORIOLANUS

I am content with these terms.

MENENIUS

Hear that, citizens, he says he is content! Consider the
 military service he has done; think about all the wounds on
 his body, huge scars which look like graves in a churchyard.

CORIOLANUS

Just scratches. Laughable scars, really.

MENENIUS

Take into account that when he speaks, he is speaking as a
 soldier. Don't take his roughness the wrong way; he's not
 being cruel, but like I said, he's just being soldier rather
 than trying to pretend to be like you.

COMINIUS

Good, good, enough.

CORIOLANUS

[To the CITIZENS] How can it be that after I was voted in as
 consul with your full approval, I've fallen so far within an
 hour that you revoke your vote?

SICINIUS

Answer to us.

CORIOLANUS

Say, then: 'tis true, I ought so.

SICINIUS

We charge you, that you have contrived to take
85 From Rome all season'd office and to wind
Yourself into a power tyrannical;
For which you are a traitor to the people.

CORIOLANUS

How! traitor!

MENENIUS

Nay, temperately; your promise.

CORIOLANUS

90 The fires i' the lowest hell fold-in the people!
Call me their traitor! Thou injurious tribune!
Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,
In thy hand clutch'd as many millions, in
Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say
95 'Thou liest' unto thee with a voice as free
As I do pray the gods.

SICINIUS

Mark you this, people?

CITIZENS

To the rock, to the rock with him!

SICINIUS

Peace!

100 We need not put new matter to his charge:
What you have seen him do and heard him speak,
Beating your officers, cursing yourselves,
Opposing laws with strokes and here defying
Those whose great power must try him; even this,
105 So criminal and in such capital kind,
Deserves the extremest death.

BRUTUS

But since he hath
Served well for Rome,—

CORIOLANUS

What do you prize of service?

BRUTUS

110 I talk of that, that know it.

CORIOLANUS

You?

MENENIUS

Is this the promise that you made your mother?

COMINIUS

Know, I pray you,—

CORIOLANUS

I know no further:
115 Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,
Vagabond exile, raying, pent to linger
But with a grain a day, I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word;
Nor cheque my courage for what they can give,
120 To have't with saying 'Good Morrow.'

SICINIUS

Answer to us.

CORIOLANUS

Go on, then: it's true, I ought to answer to you.

SICINIUS

We charge you with attempted tyranny, with the plan to
take over all of Rome's offices, for which you are a traitor to
the people.

CORIOLANUS

What? A traitor?

MENENIUS

No, gently; you promised to respond gently.

CORIOLANUS

The lowest circles of hell take in these people! You're calling
me their traitor? You ruinous tribune! If you could deal me
twenty thousand deaths, held twenty million deaths in your
hand, and with your tongue could deal as many over again,
I would say "you lie" to you with a voice as free as the one I
use to pray to the gods.

SICINIUS

Do you hear this, people?

CITIZENS

To the rock , to the rock with him!

 "The rock" is the Tarpeian rock, or execution cliff.

SICINIUS

Silence! We do not need to go through this again. What you
have seen him do and heard him say—beating your officers,
cursing you, opposing laws with grand gestures and here
defying even to be tried—even this, so criminal and so
serious—deserves the most extreme death.

BRUTUS

But since he has served Rome well—

CORIOLANUS

What would you know of service?

BRUTUS

I only speak of what I know.

CORIOLANUS

You?

MENENIUS

Is this the promise that you made your mother?

COMINIUS

Listen, I beg you—

CORIOLANUS

I know only this: let them condemn me to a steep Tarpeian
death. As a vagabond exile, made to beg for grains, I would
not buy a word of their mercy, nor stop by boldness for
anything they could give me to be had with saying "Good
day."

SICINIUS

For that he has,
As much as in him lies, from time to time
Envied against the people, seeking means
To pluck away their power, as now at last
125 Given hostile strokes, and that not in the presence
Of dreaded justice, but on the ministers
That do distribute it; in the name o' the people
And in the power of us the tribunes, we,
Even from this instant, banish him our city,
130 In peril of precipitation
From off the rock Tarpeian never more
To enter our Rome gates: i' the people's name,
I say it shall be so.

CITIZENS

It shall be so, it shall be so; let him away:
135 He's banish'd, and it shall be so.

COMINIUS

Hear me, my masters, and my common friends,—

SICINIUS

He's sentenced; no more hearing.

COMINIUS

Let me speak:
I have been consul, and can show for Rome
140 Her enemies' marks upon me. I do love
My country's good with a respect more tender,
More holy and profound, than mine own life,
My dear wife's estimate, her womb's increase,
And treasure of my loins; then if I would
145 Speak that,—

SICINIUS

We know your drift: speak what?

BRUTUS

There's no more to be said, but he is banish'd,
As enemy to the people and his country:
It shall be so.

CITIZENS

150 It shall be so, it shall be so.

CORIOLANUS

You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate
As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you;
155 And here remain with your uncertainty!
Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts!
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
Fan you into despair! Have the power still
To banish your defenders; till at length
160 Your ignorance, which finds not till it feels,
Making not reservation of yourselves,
Still your own foes, deliver you as most
Abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows! Despising,
165 For you, the city, thus I turn my back:
There is a world elsewhere.

Exeunt CORIOLANUS, COMINIUS, MENENIUS, Senators, and Patricians

AEDILE

The people's enemy is gone, is gone!

CITIZENS

Our enemy is banish'd! he is gone! Hoo! hoo!

SICINIUS

For crimes against the people—seeking to pluck away their power, and now at the end for his hostile blows in the presence not only of the judges but of the people themselves—in the name of the people and by the power vested in us as tribunes we, from this instant onward, banish him from our city, Rome. If he ever again enters our gates, he will be thrown off the Tarpeian rock. In the people's name, I say it shall be so.

CITIZENS

It shall be so, it shall be so; let him go. He's banished, and it shall be so.

COMINIUS

Hear me, sirs, and my friends, the people—

SICINIUS

His sentence has been passed; there will be no more "hearing."

COMINIUS

Let me speak. I have been consul, and can show for Rome her enemies' scars upon me. I love my country tenderly, more profoundly than my own life, my own dear wife, or the fruits of her very womb, my own treasured children; if I would say that—

SICINIUS

We get it; if you would say what?

BRUTUS

There's no more to be said except that he is banished. He's an enemy to the people and his country; that's it.

CITIZENS

It shall be so, it shall be so.

CORIOLANUS

You common junkyard dogs, whose breath I hate like the reeking of a rotten swamp, whose love I hold equal to the bloated carcasses of unburied dead men, the stink of which corrupts my air, *I banish you*. Remain here with your uncertainty! Let every feeble rumor shake your hearts! May your enemies' smallest motions drive you into despair! May you keep this power to banish your defenders, until your ignorance, with no sense of your own self-preservation, delivers you as slaves to some nation who will conquer you without a single blow. I despise Rome, for you're in it, and turn my back. There is a world elsewhere.

CORIOLANUS, COMINIUS, MENENIUS and SENATORS exit all at once.

GUARD

The people's enemy is gone; he's gone!

CITIZENS

Our enemy is banished; he is gone, hooray!

Shouting, and throwing up their caps

SICINIUS

170 Go, see him out at gates, and follow him,
As he hath followed you, with all despite;
Give him deserved vexation. Let a guard
Attend us through the city.

CITIZENS

Come, come; let's see him out at gates; come.
175 The gods preserve our noble tribunes! Come.

Exeunt

CITIZENS shout and throw their hats in the air.

SICINIUS

Go, follow him out to the gates, and follow him, as he has followed you, with all your bitterness. Give him the torment he deserves. We will have a guard take us through the city.

CITIZENS

Come, lets follow him to the gates. The gods preserve our noble tribunes! Come.

All exit.

Act 4, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter CORIOLANUS, VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, MENENIUS, COMINIUS, with the young Nobility of Rome

CORIOLANUS

Come, leave your tears: a brief farewell: the beast With many heads butts me away. Nay, mother, Where is your ancient courage? you were used To say extremity was the trier of spirits; 5 That common chances common men could bear; That when the sea was calm all boats alike Show'd mastership in floating; fortune's blows, When most struck home, being gentle wounded, craves A noble cunning: you were used to load me 10 With precepts that would make invincible The heart that conn'd them.

VIRGILIA

O heavens! O heavens!

CORIOLANUS

Nay! prithee, woman,—

VOLUMNIA

Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,
15 And occupations perish!

CORIOLANUS

What, what, what!
I shall be loved when I am lack'd. Nay, mother. Resume that spirit, when you were wont to say, If you had been the wife of Hercules, 20 Six of his labours you'd have done, and saved Your husband so much sweat. Cominius, Droop not; adieu. Farewell, my wife, my mother: I'll do well yet. Thou old and true Menenius, Thy tears are salter than a younger man's, 25 And venomous to thine eyes. My sometime general, I have seen thee stem, and thou hast oft beheld Heart-hardening spectacles; tell these sad women 'Tis fond to wail inevitable strokes, As 'tis to laugh at 'em. My mother, you wot well 30 My hazards still have been your solace: and Believe't not lightly—though I go alone, Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen— your son Will or exceed the common or be caught 35 With cautious baits and practise.

VOLUMNIA

My first son.
Whither wilt thou go? Take good Cominius With thee awhile: determine on some course,

Shakescleare Translation

CORIOLANUS, VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, MENENIUS, and COMINIUS enter with the young nobility of Rome.

CORIOLANUS

Come on, stop crying. A brief farewell is enough; the beast with many heads [1] butts me away. Mother, no—where is your courage? You used to say that challenge was the spirit's forge, that average men could bear average events, that when the sea was calm all boats were good at floating. The true blows of bad luck, when they really hit home, call for more than average men. You gave me all these sayings that, to believe them, would make a man invincible.

[1] "The beast with many heads" is the people of the republic. As noted earlier, "the crowd" was often regarded, metaphorically, as monstrous: a hydra, a "many-headed multitude," or here, more simply, a beast.

VIRGILIA

Oh, heavens! Oh, heavens!

CORIOLANUS

Stop it, please woman—

VOLUMNIA

May the plague strike everyone in Rome, and all the workers perish!

CORIOLANUS

Hear, hear, hear! They'll miss me once I'm gone. Mother, come back to that spirit when you used to say that if you'd been the wife of Hercules, you'd have done six of his labors [2] and saved your husband the trouble. Cominius, don't look so sad; good-bye. Farewell, my wife, my mother: I'll be fine. Old and true Menenius, your tears are saltier than a younger man's would be, and poisonous to your eyes. Cominius, my old general, you've often seen spectacles that would harden the heart; tell these sad women it's as good to laugh at fate as to cry. Mother, you know well that my risks have always been your comfort, and believe me, although I go alone like a lonely dragon—whose terrifying surroundings make him more feared and talked about than seen—your son will as always be better than average; never caught by baits or cleverness.

[2] Hercules, a half-son of Zeus, was famously given twelve labors by the King of Mycenae.

VOLUMNIA

My first son. Where will you go? Take good Cominius with you for a while, and choose some course. Don't just go wildly toward whatever chance waits for you daily.

More than a wild exposure to each chance
That starts i' the way before thee.

CORIOLANUS
O the gods!

COMINIUS
I'll follow thee a month, devise with thee
Where thou shalt rest, that thou mayst hear of us
And we of thee: so if the time thrust forth
A cause for thy repeal, we shall not send
O'er the vast world to seek a single man,
And lose advantage, which doth ever cool
I' the absence of the needer.

CORIOLANUS
Fare ye well:
Thou hast years upon thee; and thou art too full
Of the wars' surfeits, to go rove with one
That's yet unbruised: bring me but out at gate.
Come, my sweet wife, my dearest mother, and
My friends of noble touch, when I am forth,
Bid me farewell, and smile. I pray you, come.
While I remain above the ground, you shall
Hear from me still, and never of me aught
But what is like me formerly.

MENENIUS
That's worthily
As any ear can hear. Come, let's not weep.
If I could shake off but one seven years
From these old arms and legs, by the good gods,
I'd with thee every foot.

CORIOLANUS
Give me thy hand: Come.

65 *Exeunt*

CORIOLANUS
Oh, gods!

COMINIUS
I'll travel behind you for a month and help you figure out
where you can stay, so that you can hear of us and vice
versa, so if by any chance this vote is reversed, we will not
have to seek everywhere for a single man, and lose
whatever advantage we would've had to find you when we
most need you.

CORIOLANUS
Good-bye, no. You are old, and are too beaten up by the
harshness of war to go wander with someone still
unbruised; just walk me about of the gate. Come, my sweet
wife, my dearest mother, and my noble friends: when I go,
just bid me farewell and smile. Please, come. While I live,
you'll hear from me, and I will always be what I have always
been.

MENENIUS
That's as good as we could ever ask. Come on, let's not
weep. If were just seven years younger, by the good gods,
I'd accompany you every step of the way.

CORIOLANUS
Give me your hand; come.

All exit.

Act 4, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter SICINIUS, BRUTUS, and an AEdile

SICINIUS
Bid them all home; he's gone, and we'll no further.
The nobility are vex'd, whom we see have sided
In his behalf.

BRUTUS
Now we have shown our power,
Let us seem humbler after it is done
Than when it was a-doing.

SICINIUS
Bid them home:
Say their great enemy is gone, and they
Stand in their ancient strength.

BRUTUS
10 Dismiss them home.

Exit AEdile

BRUTUS
Here comes his mother.

Shakescleare Translation

SICINIUS, BRUTUS, and a GUARD enter.

SICINIUS
Tell them all to head home. He's gone, and we're done here.
The nobility, who we see have taken his side, are very
upset.

BRUTUS
Now that we've shown them how powerful we are, let's act
humbler now that it's done than while we were doing it.

SICINIUS
Tell them to go home. Say their great enemy is gone, and
they stand as strong as ever.

BRUTUS
Dismiss them to their homes.

GUARD exits.

BRUTUS
Here comes his mother.

SICINIUS

Let's not meet her.

BRUTUS

15 Why?

SICINIUS

They say she's mad.

BRUTUS

They have ta'en note of us: keep on your way.

Enter VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, and MENENIUS

VOLUMNIA

O, ye're well met: the hoarded plague o' the gods
20 Requite your love!

MENENIUS

Peace, peace; be not so loud.

VOLUMNIA

If that I could for weeping, you should hear,—
Nay, and you shall hear some.

25 [TO BRUTUS]

Will you be gone?

VIRGILIA

[To SICINIUS] You shall stay too: I would I had the power
To say so to my husband.

SICINIUS

30 Are you mankind?

VOLUMNIA

Ay, fool; is that a shame? Note but this fool.
Was not a man my father? Hadst thou foxship
To banish him that struck more blows for Rome
Than thou hast spoken words?

SICINIUS

35 O blessed heavens!

VOLUMNIA

More noble blows than ever thou wise words;
And for Rome's good, I'll tell thee what; yet go:
Nay, but thou shalt stay too: I would my son
Were in Arabia, and thy tribe before him,
40 His good sword in his hand.

SICINIUS

What then?

VIRGILIA

What then!
He'd make an end of thy posterity.

VOLUMNIA

Bastards and all.
45 Good man, the wounds that he does bear for Rome!

MENENIUS

Come, come, peace.

SICINIUS

I would he had continued to his country
As he began, and not unknit himself

SICINIUS

Let's avoid her.

BRUTUS

Why?

SICINIUS

They say she's a madwoman.

BRUTUS

They've seen us! Just stay calm.

VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, and MENENIUS enter.

VOLUMNIA

Oh, am I glad to see you: may the great plagues of the gods
return your love!

MENENIUS

Quiet, quiet, don't be so loud.

VOLUMNIA

If I just went and wept, you would still hear me—and
indeed, you will hear some weeping.

[To BRUTUS] Will you get out of here?

VIRGILIA

[To SICINIUS] You shall stay—I wish I had the power to say
so to my husband.

SICINIUS

Are you women or animals? 

 Throughout this scene, Volumnia and Virgilia are nearly mad with grief. Their dialogue jumps from one thing to another, often in contradiction, in order to express how they are feeling emotionally.

VOLUMNIA

Ugh, you fool—is that a problem? Look at this fool. Wasn't
my father a man? By what clever betrayal have you
banished a man from Rome who struck more blows in our
city's service than you have spoken words?

SICINIUS

Oh, dear god!

VOLUMNIA

More noble blows than you've said wise words—and for
Rome's good. I'll tell you what: go, go on. No, but you'll stay,
won't you? I wish my son were in Arabia , and your whole
tribe before him with one good sword in his hand.

 "In Arabia" means, in other words,
"I wish you were in a desert with
nowhere to hide."

SICINIUS

What then?

VIRGILIA

What then! He'd kill you and all your family.

VOLUMNIA

Bastards, all of them. Good man, the wounds that he bears
for Rome's sake!

MENENIUS

Come on, come on, calm down.

SICINIUS

I wish Coriolanus had continued to serve his country the
way he started, and not ruined himself.

The noble knot he made.

BRUTUS

50 I would he had.

VOLUMNIA

'I would he had!' 'Twas you incensed the rabble:
Cats, that can judge as fitly of his worth
As I can of those mysteries which heaven
Will not have earth to know.

BRUTUS

55 Pray, let us go.

VOLUMNIA

Now, pray, sir, get you gone:
You have done a brave deed. Ere you go, hear this:—
As far as doth the Capitol exceed
The meanest house in Rome, so far my son—
60 This lady's husband here, this, do you see—
Whom you have banish'd, does exceed you all.

BRUTUS

Well, well, we'll leave you.

SICINIUS

Why stay we to be baited
With one that wants her wits?

VOLUMNIA

65 Take my prayers with you.

Exeunt Tribunes

VOLUMNIA

I would the gods had nothing else to do
But to confirm my curses! Could I meet 'em
But once a-day, it would unclog my heart
70 Of what lies heavy to't.

MENENIUS

You have told them home;
And, by my troth, you have cause. You'll sup with me?

VOLUMNIA

Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself,
And so shall starve with feeding. Come, let's go:
75 Leave this faint puling and lament as I do,
In anger, Juno-like. Come, come, come.

MENENIUS

Fie, fie, fie!

Exeunt

BRUTUS

I wish he had.

VOLUMNIA

"I wish he had!" It was *you* who started the riot! You are
cats, as fit to be the judge of Coriolanus as I am to know the
mysteries of heaven which are forbidden to those on earth.

BRUTUS

Please, lets go.

VOLUMNIA

Now, please sir, get out of here. What you've done is brave
indeed. Before you go, listen to me. As much as the Capitol
is better than the lowliest house in Rome—that's how much
my son, this lady's husband here, *here*, do you see
her?—whom you have banished, is better than all of you.

BRUTUS

Sure, sure; we'll leave.

SICINIUS

Why should we stand here to be yelled at by a madwoman?

VOLUMNIA

[Sarcastically] My prayers go with you.

TRIBUNES exit.

VOLUMNIA

I wish the gods had nothing else to do but curse them! If I
could meet them³ just once a day, it would clear my heart
of all its baggage.

³ To "meet" with someone is often
to do them violence; Coriolanus uses
this phrase often when describing
fighting.

MENENIUS

You've driven them home. And my god, do you have a good
reason to. Will you get dinner with me?

VOLUMNIA

Anger's my meat; I feed upon myself, and so will starve.⁴
Come, lets go. Leave this quiet weeping and grieve the way I
do, deep in fury like a god. Come, come, come.

⁴ Volumnia, in an unresolvable but
immediately identifiable metaphor, is
declaring that she feeds on her own
fury and so does not need to eat or
cry. She needs nothing but her anger.

MENENIUS

Damn, damn, damn!

All exit.

Act 4, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter a Roman and a Volsce, meeting

ROMAN

I know you well, sir, and you know
me: your name, I think, is Adrian.

Shakescleare Translation

A ROMAN¹ and a VOLSCHE enter from different sides of the stage.

¹ This Roman, Nicanor, is a double
agent—a spy for the Volsces based in
Rome.

ROMAN

I know you well, sir, and you know me: your name, I think, is
Adrian.

VOLSCE

It is so, sir: truly, I have forgot you.

ROMAN

I am a Roman; and my services are,
as you are, against 'em: know you me yet?

VOLSCE

Nicanor? no.

ROMAN

The same, sir.

VOLSCE

You had more beard when I last saw you; but your favour is well approved by your tongue. What's the news in Rome? I have a note from the Volscian state, to find you out there: you have well saved me a day's journey.

ROMAN

There hath been in Rome strange insurrections; the people against the senators, patricians, and nobles.

VOLSCE

Hath been! Is it ended, then? Our state thinks not so: they are in a most warlike preparation, and hope to come upon them in the heat of their division.

ROMAN

The main blaze of it is past, but a small thing would make it flame again: for the nobles receive so to heart the banishment of that worthy Coriolanus, that they are in a ripe aptness to take all power from the people and to pluck from them their tribunes for ever. This lies glowing, I can tell you, and is almost mature for the violent breaking out.

VOLSCE

Coriolanus banished!

ROMAN

Banished, sir.

VOLSCE

You will be welcome with this intelligence, Nicanor.

ROMAN

The day serves well for them now. I have heard it said, the fittest time to corrupt a man's wife is when she's fallen out with her husband. Your noble Tullus Aufidius will appear well in these wars, his great opposer, Coriolanus, being now in no request of his country.

VOLSCE

He cannot choose. I am most fortunate, thus accidentally to encounter you: you have ended my business, and I will merrily accompany you home.

ROMAN

I shall, between this and supper, tell you most strange things from Rome; all tending to the good of their adversaries. Have you an army ready, say you?

VOLSCE

A most royal one; the centurions and their charges, distinctly billeted, already in the entertainment, and to be on foot at an hour's warning.

VOLSCE

It is, sir. To be honest, though, I have forgotten your name.

ROMAN

I am a Roman, but I work—as you do—against Rome. Do you still not know me?

VOLSCE

Nicanor? No, it can't be you!

ROMAN

It is, sir.

VOLSCE

You had more beard when I last saw you, but your voice does sound like Nicanor's. What's the news in Rome? I have a note for you from the Volscians; it's saved me a day's journey to meet you here.

ROMAN

There has been a strange insurrection in Rome: the people have risen up against the senators, patricians, and nobles.

VOLSCE

Has been! Is it over, then? The Volscians wouldn't say so: they're preparing for war, and are hoping to catch Rome in the midst of this turmoil.

ROMAN

The main conflict is over, but almost anything would make it start again. The nobles have really taken the banishment of worthy Coriolanus to heart, and they are on the verge of taking power from the people and robbing them of their representatives forever. Their action lies glowing like an ember, believe me, and is ready to burst into flame.

VOLSCE

Coriolanus has been banished?!

ROMAN

Banished, sir.

VOLSCE

The Volscians will welcome you with this news, Nicanor.

ROMAN

Things are good for them for now. I've heard it said that the best time to seduce a man's wife is when she and the husband are fighting. Your noble Tullus Aufidius will do well in these wars now that Coriolanus, the only man strong enough to oppose him, can't be called upon by Rome.

VOLSCE

He has no choice. It is really lucky that I've encountered you like this; my business is over now, and I'll merrily accompany you home.

ROMAN

Between now and supper, I'll tell you some very strange things from Rome, all of which will be good for their enemies. You have an army ready, you say?

VOLSCE

A very powerful one. The centurions  and their battalions, stationed all about, are ready to be on the march within an hour.

 Centurions were military officers who commanded large groups of soldiers, on the order of a 21st century army's captain or major.

ROMAN

I am joyful to hear of their readiness, and am the
man, I think, that shall set them in present action.
So, sir, heartily well met, and most glad of your
company.

VOLSCE

You take my part from me, sir; I have the most cause
to be glad of yours.

ROMAN

Well, let us go together.

Exeunt

ROMAN

I'm glad to hear they're ready, and I think my news will send
them into action. So, sir, it's great to meet you here, and I'm
glad to have your company.

VOLSCE

You've taken the words right out of my mouth, sir; I am the
one who is glad of your company.

ROMAN

Well, let us go together.

Both exit.

Act 4, Scene 4

Shakespeare

Enter CORIOLANUS in mean apparel, disguised and muffled

CORIOLANUS

A goodly city is this Antium. City,
'Tis I that made thy widows: many an heir
Of these fair edifices 'fore my wars
Have I heard groan and drop: then know me not,
Lest that thy wives with spits and boys with stones
In puny battle slay me.

Enter a Citizen

CORIOLANUS

Save you, sir.

CITIZEN

And you.

CORIOLANUS

10 Direct me, if it be your will,
Where great Aufidius lies: is he in Antium?

CITIZEN

He is, and feasts the nobles of the state
At his house this night.

CORIOLANUS

Which is his house, beseech you?

CITIZEN

15 This, here before you.

CORIOLANUS

Thank you, sir: farewell.

Exit Citizen

CORIOLANUS

O world, thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
20 Whose house, whose bed, whose meal, and exercise,
Are still together, who twin, as 'twere, in love
Unseparable, shall within this hour,
On a dissension of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity: so, fellest foes,
Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep,
25 To take the one the other, by some chance,
Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends

Shakescleare Translation

CORIOLANUS enters in commoner's clothes, disguised and in a hood.

CORIOLANUS

This Antium place is not so bad. *[As though speaking to the city]* City, I was the one who widowed your women; I killed many of the men who lived in your fair buildings. Do not know me, or your wives will spit on me and your boys will attack me with stones.

A CITIZEN enters.

CORIOLANUS

God save you, sir.

CITIZEN

And you.

CORIOLANUS

Could you please direct me to where the great Aufidius stays? Is he in Antium?

CITIZEN

He is, indeed, and is having a feast for nobles at his house tonight.

CORIOLANUS

Please tell me, which is his house?

CITIZEN

This one, right here.

CORIOLANUS

Thank you, sir, good-bye.

CITIZEN exits.

CORIOLANUS

Oh, world, your unexpected twists and turns! Even now there are best friends—friends so close they seem to have the same heart; friends whose house, whose bed, whose meal, whose hobbies are always the same, like inseparable twins—who within this very hour, over a tiny argument, will become the most bitter enemies. In the same way, the most dire foes, men who have lost sleep planning plots to take one another by some chance, some trick worth almost nothing, will become dear friends and work together. So it is with me. I hate my birthplace, and I love this enemy town.

And interjoin their issues. So with me:
My birth-place hate I, and my love's upon
This enemy town. I'll enter: if he slay me,
He does fair justice; if he give me way,
I'll do his country service.

30

Exit

I'll enter Aufidius's house; if he slays me, that's fair; if he lets me stay, I'll fight on the Volscian side.

CORIOLANUS exits.

Act 4, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Music within. Enter a Servingman

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Wine, wine, wine! What service
is here! I think our fellows are asleep.

Exit

Enter a second Servingman

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Where's Catos? my master calls
for him. Catos!

5

Exit

Enter CORIOLANUS

CORIOLANUS

A goodly house: the feast smells well; but I
Appear not like a guest.

Re-enter the first Servingman

FIRST SERVINGMAN

10 What would you have, friend? whence are you?
Here's no place for you: pray, go to the door.

Exit

CORIOLANUS

I have deserved no better entertainment,
In being Coriolanus.

15

Re-enter second Servingman

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Whence are you, sir? Has the porter his eyes in his
head; that he gives entrance to such companions?
Pray, get you out.

CORIOLANUS

Away!

20

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Away! get you away.

CORIOLANUS

Now thou'rt troublesome.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Are you so brave? I'll have you talked with anon.

Enter a third Servingman. The first meets him

Shakescleare Translation

Music is heard from offstage. A SERVINGMAN enters into the kitchen or pantry of a large house.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Wine, wine, wine! They want so much! It's like the other servants are asleep.

FIRST SERVINGMAN exits.

SECOND SERVINGMAN enters.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Where's Catos? My master is calling for him. Catos!

SECOND SERVINGMAN exits.

CORIOLANUS enters.

CORIOLANUS

This place is great: the feast smells wonderful, but I'm not dressed to be a noble guest.

FIRST SERVINGMAN re-enters.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

What do you need, friend? Where did you come from? You don't belong here; please leave.

FIRST SERVINGMAN exits.

CORIOLANUS

I deserve no better welcome, being who I am.

SECOND SERVINGMAN re-enters.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Where did you come from, sir? Does the doorman even have eyes in his head, if he's letting people like you in? Please, get out.

CORIOLANUS

You get out!

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Away, get away!

CORIOLANUS

Now you're being troublesome.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Are you really this bold? I'll get someone to take care of you in a minute.

A THIRD SERVINGMAN enters, who speaks with the second.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What fellow's this?

FIRST SERVINGMAN

25 A strange one as ever I looked on: I cannot get him out of the house: prithee, call my master to him.

Retires

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What have you to do here, fellow? Pray you, avoid the house.

CORIOLANUS

30 Let me but stand; I will not hurt your hearth.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What are you?

CORIOLANUS

A gentleman.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

A marvellous poor one.

CORIOLANUS

True, so I am.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

35 Pray you, poor gentleman, take up some other station; here's no place for you; pray you, avoid: come.

CORIOLANUS

Follow your function, go, and batten on cold bits.

Pushes him away

THIRD SERVINGMAN

40 What, you will not? Prithee, tell my master what a strange guest he has here.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

And I shall.

Exit

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Where dwellest thou?

CORIOLANUS

45 Under the canopy.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Under the canopy!

CORIOLANUS

Ay.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Where's that?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

[Referring to CORIOLANUS] Who's this guy?

FIRST SERVINGMAN

As strange a person as I've ever seen. I can't get him out of the house. Please, call my master in to take care of him.

FIRST SERVINGMAN moves to the back of the stage, or exits.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What are you doing here? Please, get out of this house.

CORIOLANUS

Just let me stand here; I won't get in your way.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What's your deal?

CORIOLANUS

I am a gentleman.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

An awfully poor one, then.

CORIOLANUS

That's true enough, so I am.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Then please, poor gentleman, go interfere with some other house; this is no place for you. [Pulling CORIOLANUS toward the door] Please, leave, come on.

CORIOLANUS

Go do your thing, and batten on cold bits. !

! "Batten on cold bits" is a marvelous insult—on the order of the slightly more modern "go suck an egg"—and means literally "go stuff yourself with cold leftovers," with the implication that the servingman isn't good enough to have hot food to himself.

CORIOLANUS pushes him away.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What, will you really not leave?

[To the other SERVINGMAN] Go tell my master what a strange guest we have here.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

And I shall.

SECOND SERVINGMAN exits.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Where do you live?

CORIOLANUS

Under the stars.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Under the stars!

CORIOLANUS

Yeah.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Where's that?

CORIOLANUS

I' the city of kites and crows.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

50 I' the city of kites and crows! What an ass it is!
Then thou dwellest with daws too?

CORIOLANUS

No, I serve not thy master.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

How, sir! do you meddle with my master?

CORIOLANUS

Ay; 'tis an honest service than to meddle with thy
mistress. Thou protest, and protest; serve with thy
trencher, hence!

Beats him away. Exit third Servingman

Enter AUFIDIUS with the second Servingman

AUFIDIUS

Where is this fellow?

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Here, sir: I'd have beaten him like a dog, but for
disturbing the lords within.

Retires

AUFIDIUS

Whence comest thou? what wouldest thou? thy name?
Why speak'st not? speak, man: what's thy name?

CORIOLANUS

If, Tullus,

65

AUFIDIUS

What is thy name?

CORIOLANUS

A name unmusical to the Volscians' ears,
And harsh in sound to thine.

AUFIDIUS

Say, what's thy name?

70 Thou hast a grim appearance, and thy face
Bears a command in't; though thy tackle's torn.
Thou show'st a noble vessel: what's thy name?

CORIOLANUS

Prepare thy brow to frown: know'st
thou me yet?

AUFIDIUS

75 I know thee not: thy name?

CORIOLANUS

My name is Caius Marcius, who hath done
To thee particularly and to all the Volscians
Great hurt and mischief; thereto witness may
My surname, Coriolanus: the painful service,
80 The extreme dangers and the drops of blood
Shed for my thankless country are requited

CORIOLANUS

In the city of [kites](#) and crows.

 Kites are a type of small hawk common to England.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

In the city of kites and crows! What an ass you are! So you
live with [daws](#), too?

 Daws, or jackdaws, are a small gray crow infamous for their silly inquisitiveness. The term is an insult to someone's intelligence.

CORIOLANUS

No, I don't serve your master.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

What?! Are you messing with my master?

CORIOLANUS

Sure; it's more honest than screwing with your mistress.
You talk and talk; go do your job, go!

Beats him away. Exit THIRD SERVINGMAN.

Enter AUFIDIUS with SECOND SERVINGMAN.

AUFIDIUS

Where is this guy?

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Here he is, sir. I would've beaten him like a dog, but I didn't
want to disturb the lords feasting.

*SECOND SERVINGMAN steps to the back of the stage or
exits.*

AUFIDIUS

Where have you come from? What do you want? What's
your name? Why don't you speak? Speak, man: what's your
name?

CORIOLANUS

[Pulling back his hood] If, Tullus, you do not know me yet,
and seeing me, don't recognize me for who I am, then I
suppose I will have to tell you.

AUFIDIUS

What is your name?

CORIOLANUS

A name unmusical to the Volscian's ears, and even worse to
yours.

AUFIDIUS

Tell me, what's your name? You have a grim look, and a
commanding face, though your clothes are torn. You have
the stature of a nobleman. What's your name?

CORIOLANUS

Prepare to frown—you still don't recognize me?

AUFIDIUS

I do not know you. What's your name?

CORIOLANUS

My name is Caius Marcius, the man who has done great
damage to you and to all the Volscians. From that damage
comes my surname, Coriolanus. That surname is the only
thing left of the painful service, extreme dangers, and all
the blood I shed for my thankless country. It is a memorial
to the hatred you should have for me—only that name

But with that surname; a good memory,
And witness of the malice and displeasure
Which thou shouldst bear me: only that name remains;
85 The cruelty and envy of the people,
Permitted by our dastard nobles, who
Have all forsook me, hath devour'd the rest;
And suffer'd me by the voice of slaves to be
Whoop'd out of Rome. Now this extremity
90 Hath brought me to thy hearth; not out of hope—
Mistake me not—to save my life, for if
I had fear'd death, of all the men i' the world
I would have 'voided thee, but in mere spite,
To be full quit of those my banishers,
95 Stand I before thee here. Then if thou hast
A heart of wreak in thee, that wilt revenge
Thine own particular wrongs and stop those maims
Of shame seen through thy country, speed
thee straight,
100 And make my misery serve thy turn: so use it
That my revengeful services may prove
As benefits to thee, for I will fight
Against my canker'd country with the spleen
Of all the under fiends. But if so be
105 Thou darest not this and that to prove more fortunes
Thou'rt tired, then, in a word, I also am
Longer to live most weary, and present
My throat to thee and to thy ancient malice;
Which not to cut would show thee but a fool,
110 Since I have ever follow'd thee with hate,
Drawn tuns of blood out of thy country's breast,
And cannot live but to thy shame, unless
It be to do thee service.

AUFIDIUS

O Marcus, Marcus!
115 Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart
A root of ancient envy. If Jupiter
Should from yond cloud speak divine things,
And say 'Tis true,' I'd not believe them more
Than thee, all noble Marcus. Let me twine
120 Mine arms about that body, where against
My grained ash an hundred times hath broke
And scarr'd the moon with splinters: here I clip
The anvil of my sword, and do contest
As hotly and as nobly with thy love
125 As ever in ambitious strength I did
Contend against thy valour. Know thou first,
I loved the maid I married; never man
Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart
130 Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold. Why, thou Mars! I tell thee,
We have a power on foot; and I had purpose
Once more to hew thy target from thy brawn,
Or lose mine arm fort: thou hast beat me out
135 Twelve several times, and I have nightly since
Dreamt of encounters 'twixt thyself and me;
We have been down together in my sleep,
Unbuckling helms, fisting each other's throat,
And waked half dead with nothing. Worthy Marcus,
140 Had we no quarrel else to Rome, but that
Thou art thence banish'd, we would muster all
From twelve to seventy, and pouring war
Into the bowels of ungrateful Rome,
Like a bold flood o'er-bear. O, come, go in,
145 And take our friendly senators by the hands;
Who now are here, taking their leaves of me,
Who am prepared against your territories,
Though not for Rome itself.

CORIOLANUS

You bless me, gods!

remains. The cruelty and envy of the common people, which our idiot nobles allowed, has devoured all of Rome. The people yelled me out of Rome. This difficult situation has brought me to your home, not out of hope to save my life—don't get me wrong; if I feared death I would have avoided you more than anyone else—but out of spite, to fully condemn those who banished me. That's why I'm here. If you have a heart filled with rage, and you would like to avenge the wrongs which Rome has done to your country, Volscian, take advantage of my misery: use me, in my spirit of revenge, for your own war; I will fight against my poisoned country with the rage of every devil in hell. But if you don't dare to do this, and are tired of fighting, then I must admit to you that I am also just as tired of living; here is my throat, the object of your hatred, which you would be a fool not to cut—since we have always been enemies and I have spilled tons of blood from your country, to leave me living would only bring you shame—unless you take me into your service.

AUFIDIUS

Oh Marcus, Marcus! Every word you've spoken has pulled from my heart a root of ancient hatred. If god himself were to speak from behind a cloud, and say "It's true!" I wouldn't believe him any more than you, noble Marcus. Let me throw my arms around that body ⁴, against which I have broke my weapon a hundred times, and scarred the moon with splinters. [Forcefully hugs Marcus] ⁵ I embrace the anvil of my sword ⁶, and would fight as hard for your love as I have fought against you in the past for valor. You must know that I loved the woman I married—no one has said a truer thing—but now that I see you here—you noble thing!—my heart dances, entranced, more than when I first saw my bride in her dress. Why, you are Mars himself ⁷! I tell you, I have an army in the field, and if I had good reason to fight with you once more I'd give my right arm to do it. You've beaten me a dozen times, and I have dreamed every night since of encounters between us: we've been wrestling together in my sleep, unbuckling our helmets, grasping at each other's throat. Every time, I wake with nothing. Worthy Marcus, if we had no other bone to pick with Rome except that you were banished, we would muster every man between the ages of twelve and seventy, and we would pour war like boiling oil into the stomach of ungrateful Rome—like a flood we would drown her. Oh, come, go in, and shake hands with the friendly senators who are here bidding me good luck to move against your territories, though not until now Rome itself.

⁴ As when Coriolanus spoke of Aufidius, this speech is filled with words and phrases that could describe love as well as war. Indeed, both men say explicitly that they feel more strongly about their would-be enemy than they do about their wives.

⁵ In many modern performances, the relationship between Marcus and Aufidius is played as homoerotic.

⁶ Aufidius calls Coriolanus "the anvil of my sword" because Aufidius has struck Coriolanus's armor many times, just as a hammer strikes an anvil (a steel or iron block on which metal is struck, hammered, and shaped). One implication is that Coriolanus and Aufidius shape and affect each other, and are strongly connected.

⁷ Yet another instance in which Coriolanus is described as a god, this time the Roman god of war, "Mars" (to the Greeks, Ares).

CORIOLANUS

You bless me, gods!

AUFIDIUS

Therefore, most absolute sir, if thou wilt have
The leading of thine own revenges, take
The one half of my commission; and set down—
As best thou art experienced, since thou know'st
Thy country's strength and weakness,— thine own ways;
Whether to knock against the gates of Rome,
Or rudely visit them in parts remote,
To fright them, ere destroy. But come in:
Let me command thee first to those that shall
Say yea to thy desires. A thousand welcomes!
And more a friend than e'er an enemy;
Yet, Marcius, that was much. Your hand: most welcome!

Exeunt CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS. The two Servingmen come forward

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Here's a strange alteration!

SECOND SERVINGMAN

By my hand, I had thought to have stricken him with
a cudgel; and yet my mind gave me his clothes made a
false report of him.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

What an arm he has! he turned me about with his
finger and his thumb, as one would set up a top.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Nay, I knew by his face that there was something in
him: he had, sir, a kind of face, methought,—I
cannot tell how to term it.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

He had so; looking as it were—would I were hanged,
but I thought there was more in him than I could think.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

So did I, I'll be sworn: he is simply the rarest
man i' the world.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

I think he is: but a greater soldier than he you wot
on.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Who, my master?

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Nay, it's no matter for that.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Worth six on him.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Nay, not so neither: but I take him to be the
greater soldier.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Faith, look you, one cannot tell how to say that:
for the defence of a town, our general is excellent.

AUFIDIUS

Therefore, most respected sir, if you would like to lead your
own revenge, take half of the leadership with me. We can
chart out—since you're the best experienced—the country's
strengths and weaknesses, your own strategies: whether to
knock directly on the gates of Rome, or to strike remote
towns, to frighten them before we destroy them. But come
in, let me introduce you first to the men who will approve
all of this. A thousand welcomes! More a friend now than
you ever were an enemy, and believe me, Marcius, you were
quite an enemy. Your hand—most welcome!

CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS exit toward the banquet. The two SERVINGMEN come forward from the back of the room, or just offstage.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Well, that's quite a change!

SECOND SERVINGMAN

And to think I would've hit him with a club; but it was
because his clothes made him seem different than he is.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

What an arm he has! He turned me around with his finger
and his thumb, like one would spin a top.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

No, I knew by his face § that there was something noble in
him. He had, sir, a kind of face, I thought—I don't know how
to put it.

§ This conversation might confirm
that there really is something
extraordinary about Coriolanus that
they could see even when he was
disguised; it might also illustrate the
opposite—that the servingmen didn't
see anything special about him
initially, and they are now foolishly
attempting to explain to themselves
that he did not look like a normal man
when, in fact, he did.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

[Making expressions] He had this sort of—looking like
this—kill me, but I thought there was something more to
him than met the eye.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

So did I, I swear! He's the most marvelous man in the world.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

I think he is, but we know of a greater soldier than him.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Who, my master Tullus Aufidius?

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Definitely, there's no doubt about that.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

He's worth six Coriolanuses.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Well, I wouldn't say that, but I do think he's the better
soldier.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Listen, there's no real basis for saying that; for the defense
of a town, our general is excellent.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Ay, and for an assault too.

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Re-enter third Servingman

THIRD SERVINGMAN

O slaves, I can tell you news,—news, you rascals!

SECOND SERVINGMAN

What, what, what? let's partake.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

I would not be a Roman, of all nations; I had as lieve be a condemned man.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Wherefore? wherefore?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Why, here's he that was wont to thwack our general, Caius Marcius.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Why do you say 'thwack our general'?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

I do not say 'thwack our general;' but he was always good enough for him.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Come, we are fellows and friends: he was ever too hard for him; I have heard him say so himself.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

He was too hard for him directly, to say the troth on't: before Coriolani he scotched him and notched him like a carbon ado.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

An he had been cannibally given, he might have broiled and eaten him too.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

But, more of thy news?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Why, he is so made on here within, as if he were son and heir to Mars; set at upper end o' the table; no question asked him by any of the senators, but they stand bald before him: our general himself makes a mistress of him: sanctifies himself with's hand and turns up the white o' the eye to his discourse. But the bottom of the news is that our general is cut i' the middle and but one half of what he was yesterday; for the other has half, by the entreaty and grant of the whole table. He'll go, he says, and sowl the porter of Rome gates by the ears: he will mow all down before him, and leave his passage polled.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

And he's as like to do't as any man I can imagine.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Do't! he will do't; for, look you, sir, he has as many friends as enemies; which friends, sir, as it were, durst not, look you, sir, show themselves, as we term it, his friends whilst he's in directitude.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Yeah, and for an assault too.

THIRD SERVINGMAN re-enters.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Guys, I have news for you—news, you rascals!

SECOND SERVINGMAN

What, what, what? Tell us.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

I would rather be of any nation rather than of Rome right now; to be Roman is to be a man condemned to death.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Why? Why?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Why, here's the man that's been beating our general around, Caius Marcius.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Why do you say "beating our general around"?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Well, not "beating him," but he was always a good match for Aufidius.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Come, we are friends here—Coriolanus was always too hard for Aufidius; I have heard Aufidius say so himself.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Coriolanus was too hard for him, to be brutally honest. In the field at Corioli, Marcius scotched him and notched him like a piece of meat.

9 "Scotched him and notched him" refers to a way of preparing meat to be broiled or grilled. One often cuts grooves so the oil and fat and come out.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

And had Coriolanus been into cannibalism, he might have cooked and eaten him, too.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

But, what other news?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Well, he's been welcomed as though he were the son and heir to Mars. He sits at the head of the table, and the senators question him with their caps in their hands, respectfully; our general himself acts like his mistress. He treats the touch of his hand as holy, and devotedly listens to his every word. But the big news is that our general has been cut into half of what he was yesterday, for Coriolanus has taken half the army, at the request and approval of the whole table. He'll go, he says, and drag the guards of Rome's gate out by the ears. He'll mow down everything in his way, and leave wreckage in his path.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

And he's as able to do that as any man I can imagine.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Do that! 10 He will do it. Look you, sir, he has as many friends as enemies. Those friends, sir, as it were, dare not—look you sir—show themselves, as we call it, "his friends," while he's in directitude.

10 These lines are deliberately convoluted; the servingmen have worked themselves into a cheerful mood and are acting a bit bizarre.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Directitude! what's that?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

But when they shall see, sir, his crest up again,
and the man in blood, they will out of their
burrows, like conies after rain, and revel all with
him.

225

FIRST SERVINGMAN

But when goes this forward?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

To-morrow; to-day; presently; you shall have the
drum struck up this afternoon: 'tis, as it were, a
parcel of their feast, and to be executed ere they
wipe their lips.

230

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Why, then we shall have a stirring world again.
This peace is nothing, but to rust iron, increase
tailors, and breed ballad-makers.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Let me have war, say I; it exceeds peace as far as
day does night; it's spritely, waking, audible, and
full of vent. Peace is a very apoplexy, lethargy;
mulled, deaf, sleepy, insensible; a getter of more
bastard children than war's a destroyer of men.

235

SECOND SERVINGMAN

'Tis so: and as war, in some sort, may be said to
be a ravisher, so it cannot be denied but peace is a
great maker of cuckolds.

240

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Ay, and it makes men hate one another.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Reason; because they then less need one another.
The wars for my money. I hope to see Romans as cheap
as Volscians. They are rising, they are rising.

245

ALL

In, in, in, in!

Exeunt

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Directitude! What's that? 11

11 Directitude means "disgrace."

THIRD SERVINGMAN

But when they see, sir, his flag up again, and the man
covered in blood, they will flee out of their burrows like
rabbits after rain, and celebrate with him 12.

12 This metaphor about "conies" or
rabbits leaving their homes means
that Coriolanus's Roman friends will
rush to his side when he returns
triumphantly.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

But when will they move out?

THIRD SERVINGMAN

Tomorrow, today even, this very moment! You'll hear the
drums this afternoon. It's practically a part of their dinner,
and will be done before they wipe their lips and finish.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

Why, then we'll have an exciting world again. This peace is
good for nothing but to rust iron, to make tailors rich, and
encourage artists.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Let me have war, I say. War's as much better than peace as
day is better than night; it's energetic, awake, loud, full of
energy. Peace is like a coma: speechless, deaf, sleepy; more
bastard children are born in peacetime than men die in war.

SECOND SERVINGMAN

It's true: and as war might be said to be a rapist, peace must
be said to make men cuckolds 13.

13 A "cuckold" is a man whose wife is
cheating on him.

FIRST SERVINGMAN

Yeah, and it makes men hate one another.

THIRD SERVINGMAN

The reason is that, in peace, they need one another less. I'll
put my money on the wars! I hope to see Romans brought
down to our level. [Looking toward the banquet] They are
rising, they are rising!

ALL

In, in, in, in!

All exit.

Act 4, Scene 6

Shakespeare

Enter SICINIUS and BRUTUS

SICINIUS

We hear not of him, neither need we fear him;
His remedies are tame i' the present peace
And quietness of the people, which before
Were in wild hurry. Here do we make his friends
5 Blush that the world goes well, who rather had,
Though they themselves did suffer by't, behold
Dissentious numbers pestering streets than see
Our tradesmen with in their shops and going
About their functions friendly.

5

BRUTUS

10 We stood to't in good time.

Shakescleare Translation

SICINIUS and BRUTUS enter.

SICINIUS

We hear no news of him, and we shouldn't fear him. He
can't do anything while the people are peaceful and quiet,
when before they were rioting. We make his friends blush
that everything is going so well; they would rather have
crowds of dissenting people in the streets, even if it caused
them problems, than they would see our tradesmen in their
shops doing their jobs happily.

BRUTUS

We did the right thing at the right time.

*Enter MENENIUS***BRUTUS**

Is this Menenius?

SICINIUS

'Tis he,'tis he: O, he is grown most kind of late.

BOTH TRIBUNES

15 Hail sir!

MENENIUS

Hail to you both!

SICINIUSYour Coriolanus
Is not much miss'd, but with his friends:
The commonwealth doth stand, and so would do,
20 Were he more angry at it.**MENENIUS**All's well; and might have been much better, if
He could have temporized.**SICINIUS**

Where is he, hear you?

MENENIUSNay, I hear nothing: his mother and his wife
25 Hear nothing from him.*Enter three or four Citizens***CITIZENS**

The gods preserve you both!

SICINIUS

God-den, our neighbours.

BRUTUS

God-den to you all, god-den to you all.

FIRST CITIZEN30 Ourselves, our wives, and children, on our knees,
Are bound to pray for you both.**SICINIUS**

Live, and thrive!

BRUTUSFarewell, kind neighbours: we wish'd Coriolanus
Had loved you as we did!**CITIZENS**

35 Now the gods keep you!

BOTH TRIBUNES

Farewell, farewell.

*Exeunt Citizens***SICINIUS**This is a happier and more comely time
Than when these fellows ran about the streets,
40 Crying confusion.*MENENIUS enters.***BRUTUS**

Is this Menenius?

SICINIUS

It's him, it's him. Oh, he's grown very kind lately.

BOTH TRIBUNES

Hello there!

MENENIUS

Hello to you both!

SICINIUSNo one but his friends seem to miss your Coriolanus. The
commonwealth stands, and would even were he more
angry at it.

 Although this is the first appearance of the word "commonwealth", this play has been constantly questioning the nature of "the commonwealth," a near-synonym of "country," that also carries implications of the people's interest. Calling Rome a commonwealth makes it sound like England of 1608, and packages the people in with the statesmen.

MENENIUSAll is well. It might have been much better, though, if he
could have been calmed.**SICINIUS**

Where is he, have you heard?

MENENIUSNo, I have heard nothing. His mother and his wife hear
nothing from him.*Three or four CITIZENS enter.***CITIZENS**

The gods save you both!

SICINIUS

Good evening, neighbours.

BRUTUS

Good evening, good evening to you all.

FIRST CITIZENWe, and our wives and children, pray for you both on our
knees.**SICINIUS**

Live, and thrive!

BRUTUSFarewell, kind neighbors. We wish Coriolanus had loved you
as we did!**CITIZENS**

Gods bless you!

BOTH TRIBUNES

Good-bye, good-bye.

*All CITIZENS exit.***SICINIUS**People are happier and more prosperous now than when
these sort of people ran around in the street, rioting.

BRUTUS

Caius Marcius was
A worthy officer i' the war; but insolent,
O'ercome with pride, ambitious past all thinking,
Self-loving,—

SICINIUS

45 And affecting one sole throne,
Without assistance.

MENENIUS

I think not so.

SICINIUS

We should by this, to all our lamentation,
If he had gone forth consul, found it so.

BRUTUS

50 The gods have well prevented it, and Rome
Sits safe and still without him.

Enter an AEdele

AEDILE

Worthy tribunes,
There is a slave, whom we have put in prison,
55 Reports, the Volsces with two several powers
Are enter'd in the Roman territories,
And with the deepest malice of the war
Destroy what lies before 'em.

MENENIUS

'Tis Aufidius,
60 Who, hearing of our Marcius' banishment,
Thrusts forth his horns again into the world;
Which were inshell'd when Marcius stood for Rome,
And durst not once peep out.

SICINIUS

Come, what talk you
65 Of Marcius?

BRUTUS

Go see this rumourer whipp'd. It cannot be
The Volsces dare break with us.

MENENIUS

Cannot be!
We have record that very well it can,
70 And three examples of the like have been
Within my age. But reason with the fellow,
Before you punish him, where he heard this,
Lest you shall chance to whip your information
And beat the messenger who bids beware
75 Of what is to be dreaded.

SICINIUS

Tell not me:
I know this cannot be.

BRUTUS

Not possible.

Enter a Messenger

MESSENGER

80 The nobles in great earnestness are going
All to the senate-house: some news is come
That turns their countenances.

BRUTUS

Caius Marcius was a worthy officer in the war, but he was also insolent, overcome with pride, ambitious beyond imagination, self-absorbed—

SICINIUS

And he desired complete power.

MENENIUS

I do not think so.

SICINIUS

Well, had he become consul, we would have found that he did want complete power, and then much to our dismay.

BRUTUS

The gods have done well to prevent that, and Rome sits safe and sound without him.

A GUARD enters.

Guard

Worthy tribunes: there is a slave in prison reporting that the Volsces have entered Roman territories with several battalions, and with the deep hatred of war, destroy everything that lies before them.

MENENIUS

It must be Aufidius. He's heard of Marcius' banishment, and now he flexes his muscles; when Marcius stood to protect Rome, he wouldn't have dared to peep out of his hole.

SICINIUS

What? Why are you talking about Marcius?

BRUTUS

Go make sure this gossiping prisoner gets whipped. There's no way the Volsces would dare to fight with us.

MENENIUS

No way! We have every reason to believe there is a way, and there are three examples of it within my lifetime. Just talk to the prisoner before you punish him. Find out where he heard this, or you will risk losing information and beating a messenger who warns us for good reason.

SICINIUS

Don't talk to me; I know this can't be true.

BRUTUS

It's not possible.

A MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

The nobles are all going to the senate with great urgency. Some news has come which made them all frown.

SICINIUS

'Tis this slave;—
Go whip him, 'fore the people's eyes:—his raising;
Nothing but his report.

85

MESSENGER

Yes, worthy sir,
The slave's report is seconded; and more,
More fearful, is deliver'd.

SICINIUS

What more fearful?

MESSENGER

It is spoke freely out of many mouths—
How probable I do not know—that Marcus,
Join'd with Aufidius, leads a power 'gainst Rome,
And vows revenge as spacious as between
The young'st and oldest thing.

90

SICINIUS

This is most likely!

BRUTUS

Raised only, that the weaker sort may wish
Good Marcus home again.

SICINIUS

The very trick on't.

MENENIUS

This is unlikely:
He and Aufidius can no more atone
Than violentest contrariety.

Enter a second Messenger

SECOND MESSENGER

You are sent for to the senate:
A fearful army, led by Caius Marcus
Associated with Aufidius, rages
Upon our territories; and have already
O'erborne their way, consumed with fire, and took
What lay before them.

105

Enter COMINIUS

COMINIUS

O, you have made good work!

MENENIUS

What news? what news?

COMINIUS

You have holp to ravish your own daughters and
To melt the city leads upon your pates,
To see your wives dishonour'd to your noses,—

110

MENENIUS

What's the news? what's the news?

COMINIUS

Your temples burned in their cement, and
Your franchises, whereon you stood, confined
Into an auger's bore.

SICINIUS

It's this prisoner! Go whip him before their very eyes. He has nothing but this report.

MESSENGER

Yes, worthy sir, the slave's report has been backed up by another, and others, even more fearful, have been delivered.

SICINIUS

What do you mean, more fearful?

MESSENGER

All the people are saying—I don't know if it's true—that Marcus has joined forces with Aufidius to lead an army against Rome, vowing revenge as spacious as between the youngest and oldest things.

2 "Revenge as spacious between the young'st and oldest thing" means a revenge as ancient as the world, and as huge.

SICINIUS

Yeah, right!

BRUTUS

This rumor has been spread only so that weak people will wish to have good Marcus home again.

SICINIUS

That's the trick of it.

MENENIUS

This news is unlikely. He and Aufidius could never work together, no more than the most violent opposites.

A SECOND MESSENGER enters.

SECOND MESSENGER

The senate sends for you. A fearful army, led by Caius Marcus, who is allied with Aufidius, rages upon our territories. They have already crushed everyone in their path, burned towns and villages, and took everything that lay before them.

COMINIUS enters.

COMINIUS

[To the TRIBUNES] Oh, look what you have done!

MENENIUS

What's the news?

COMINIUS

[To the TRIBUNES] You have helped to rape your own daughters, to melt the city's lead roofs, down onto your heads, and to see your wives raped while you watch.

3 The "city leads," in the original text, refers to the fact that European cities around 1600 often used lead tiles for the roofs of major buildings.

MENENIUS

What's the news? What's the news?

COMINIUS

[Ignoring MENENIUS, still directed at the TRIBUNES] Your temples will burn on their foundations, and your freedoms, on which you so insisted, made into machinery of your own misery.

MENENIUS

Pray now, your news?
You have made fair work, I fear me.—Pray, your news?—
120 If Marcus should be join'd with Volscians,—

COMINIUS

If!
He is their god: he leads them like a thing
Made by some other deity than nature,
That shapes man better; and they follow him,
125 Against us brats, with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies.

MENENIUS

You have made good work,
You and your apron-men; you that stood so up much
130 on the voice of occupation and
The breath of garlic-eaters!

COMINIUS

He will shake
Your Rome about your ears.

MENENIUS

As Hercules
135 Did shake down mellow fruit.
You have made fair work!

BRUTUS

But is this true, sir?

COMINIUS

Ay; and you'll look pale
Before you find it other. All the regions
140 Do smilingly revolt; and who resist
Are mock'd for valiant ignorance,
And perish constant fools. Who is't can blame him?
Your enemies and his find something in him.

MENENIUS

We are all undone, unless
145 The noble man have mercy.

COMINIUS

Who shall ask it?
The tribunes cannot do't for shame; the people
Deserve such pity of him as the wolf
Does of the shepherds: for his best friends, if they
150 Should say 'Be good to Rome,' they charged him even
As those should do that had deserved his hate,
And therein show'd like enemies.

MENENIUS

'Tis true:
If he were putting to my house the brand
155 That should consume it, I have not the face
To say 'Beseech you, cease!' You have made fair hands,
You and your crafts! you have crafted fair!

COMINIUS

You have brought
A trembling upon Rome, such as was never
160 So incapable of help.

BOTH TRIBUNES

Say not we brought it.

MENENIUS

[To COMINIUS] Pray now, what news? [To the TRIBUNES]
You have done something terrible, I'm afraid. Please, your
news? If Marcus has joined with the Volscians—

COMINIUS

If! He is their god. He leads them like a thing made by some other deity than nature, that shapes man better. A And they follow him against us, children that we are, with all the confidence of boys pursuing summer butterflies 5, or butchers killing flies.

4 A "thing made by some other deity than nature" means that Coriolanus is something more than a man—a god himself, perhaps, or a machine; not a "natural" creation.

5 When reading this description of "summer butterflies," recall the description of Coriolanus' son "mammocking"—chewing on—a butterfly in Act 1, Scene 3.

MENENIUS

You've done it now, you and your lowly laborers, you tribunes that carried on about the votes of the working, garlic-eating 6 common man!

6 The commoners are referred to insultingly as "garlic-eaters." Garlic was associated with the lower class in the early modern period, who used it both for flavor and as a sort of medicine.

COMINIUS

He will, like an earthquake, shake your Rome around your ears.

MENENIUS

As Hercules did shake down ripened fruit 7. You've done it now!

7 Hercules shaking down "mellow fruit" refers to the eleventh labor of the mythical hero, which involved defeating a guardian dragon and bringing back golden apples.

BRUTUS

But is this true, sir?

COMINIUS

Yes, and you'll look pale 8 before you find it false. All our territories willingly revolt against Rome, and the ones that resist are mocked for their brave stupidity and then perish like fools. And who can blame him, Coriolanus? Even your enemies find something worthy in him.

8 "Pale," here, means white with fear, and also as pale as a corpse—bloodless and dead.

MENENIUS

We're all doomed, unless that noble Coriolanus will be merciful.

COMINIUS

Who can ask mercy of him? The disgraced tribunes cannot do it; the people deserve his pity no more than shepherds deserve the pity of a wolf. As for his best friends, if they tell him "be good to Rome," they're asking of him the same thing his enemies would ask, and so they too would show themselves to be enemies.

MENENIUS

It's true. If he were burning my own house, I don't have the right to say "Please, stop." You tribunes have made something extraordinary, you and your cleverness—you've made a clever thing indeed!

COMINIUS

You have brought a trembling upon Rome, a terror which nothing can stop.

BOTH TRIBUNES

Don't say we brought it.

MENENIUS

How! Was it we? we loved him but, like beasts
And cowardly nobles, gave way unto your clusters,
Who did hoot him out o' the city.

COMINIUS

165 But I fear
They'll roar him in again. Tullus Aufidius,
The second name of men, obeys his points
As if he were his officer: desperation
Is all the policy, strength and defence,
170 That Rome can make against them.

Enter a troop of Citizens

MENENIUS

Here come the clusters.
And is Aufidius with him? You are they
That made the air unwholesome, when you cast
Your stinking greasy caps in hooting at
175 Coriolanus' exile. Now he's coming;
And not a hair upon a soldier's head
Which will not prove a whip: as many coxcombs
As you threw caps up will he tumble down,
And pay you for your voices. 'Tis no matter;
180 if he could burn us all into one coal,
We have deserved it.

CITIZENS

Faith, we hear fearful news.

FIRST CITIZEN

For mine own part,
When I said, banish him, I said 'twas pity.

SECOND CITIZEN

185 And so did I.

THIRD CITIZEN

And so did I; and, to say the truth, so did very
many of us: that we did, we did for the best; and
though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet
it was against our will.

COMINIUS

190 Ye re goodly things, you voices!

MENENIUS

You have made
Good work, you and your cry! Shall's to the Capitol?

COMINIUS

O, ay, what else?

Exeunt COMINIUS and MENENIUS

SICINIUS

195 Go, masters, get you home; be not dismay'd:
These are a side that would be glad to have
This true which they so seem to fear. Go home,
And show no sign of fear.

FIRST CITIZEN

The gods be good to us! Come, masters, let's home.
200 I ever said we were i' the wrong when we banished
him.

SECOND CITIZEN

So did we all. But, come, let's home.

Exeunt Citizens

MENENIUS

What?! Did we bring on this terror, then? We loved him, but
like dumb animals and cowardly nobles, we let you and
your crowds throw him out of the city.

COMINIUS

I'm afraid they'll drag him in again. Tullus Aufidius, the
second strongest man, obeys Coriolanus as though he were
the leader. Desperation is the only plan, the only strength,
and the only defense that Rome has left.

A large group of CITIZENS enter.

MENENIUS

Here come the crowds. So is Aufidius with Coriolanus?

[To the CITIZENS] You are to blame for poisoning the air
when you threw your stinking greasy hats up, hooting and
celebrating Coriolanus's exile. Now he's coming back, and
there's not a hair on his head which will not be like a whip
for your backs. He'll pay you for your voices now: as many
caps as you threw up, that many heads will he cut off. But
no matter. If he could burn us all into ashes and shape us
into a coal, we would deserve it.

CITIZENS

Oh, that's fearful news.

FIRST CITIZEN

As far as I'm concerned, when I said he had to be banished, I
thought it was a shame.

SECOND CITIZEN

And so did I.

THIRD CITIZEN

And so did I; to tell the truth, so did many of us. We did it
because we thought it was for the best, and though we
willingly agreed to his banishment, it was not what we
really wanted.

COMINIUS

[Sarcastically] You're wonderful people, you voices!

MENENIUS

You've gone and done it now, you and your crying! Shall we
go to the Capitol?

COMINIUS

Oh, yes, what else can we do?

COMINIUS and MENENIUS exit.

SICINIUS

Go, sirs, go home. Don't worry. Those two are actually
hoping for what they seem to be afraid of. Go home, and
show no sign of fear.

FIRST CITIZEN

May the gods be good to us! Come, friends, let's go home.
I've always said we were making a mistake to banish him.

SECOND CITIZEN

We all did. But come on, let's go home.

CITIZENS all exit.

BRUTUS

I do not like this news.

SICINIUS

205 Nor I.

BRUTUS

Let's to the Capitol. Would half my wealth
Would buy this for a lie!

SICINIUS

Pray, let us go.

Exeunt

BRUTUS

I do not like this news.

SICINIUS

Neither do I.

BRUTUS

Let's get to the Capitol. I'd give half of what I own  for this to be a lie!

 The irony in Brutus saying he'd give "half his wealth" is that he stands to lose everything, including his life, if the Volscians and Coriolanus attack.

SICINIUS

Yeah, let's go.

All exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Shakespeare

Enter AUFIDIUS and his Lieutenant

AUFIDIUS

Do they still fly to the Roman?

LIEUTENANT

I do not know what witchcraft's in him, but
Your soldiers use him as the grace 'fore meat,
Their talk at table, and their thanks at end;
5 And you are darken'd in this action, sir,
Even by your own.

AUFIDIUS

I cannot help it now,
Unless, by using means, I lame the foot
Of our design. He bears himself more proudlier,
10 Even to my person, than I thought he would
When first I did embrace him; yet his nature
In that's no changeling; and I must excuse
What cannot be amended.

LIEUTENANT

Yet I wish, sir,—
15 I mean for your particular,—you had not
Join'd in commission with him; but either
Had borne the action of yourself, or else
To him had left it solely.

AUFIDIUS

I understand thee well; and be thou sure,
20 when he shall come to his account, he knows not
What I can urge against him. Although it seems,
And so he thinks, and is no less apparent
To the vulgar eye, that he bears all things fairly.
And shows good husbandry for the Volscian state,
25 Fights dragon-like, and does achieve as soon
As draw his sword; yet he hath left undone
That which shall break his neck or hazard mine,
Whene'er we come to our account.

LIEUTENANT

Sir, I beseech you, think you he'll carry Rome?

Shakescleare Translation

Enter AUFIDIUS and his LIEUTENANT.

AUFIDIUS

Are our men still flocking to Coriolanus?

LIEUTENANT

I don't know what magic he has, but your soldiers treat him like the prayer before a meal, their conversation over dinner, and their thanks at the meal's end.  You are made to look weaker by all this sir, even in the eyes of your own men.

AUFIDIUS

I can't help it now without shooting myself in the foot and ruining our plans. He carries himself more proudly, even to me, than I thought he would when I first welcomed him. But, to be fair, it's not as though he's acting any differently now than he did then, and I must excuse what can't be changed.

LIEUTENANT

Yet I wish, sir—I mean, for your sake—that you hadn't given him half your authority, but either kept control to entirely yourself or given it entirely to him.

AUFIDIUS

I understand what you mean, and believe me, when push comes to shove, he doesn't know what I can bring to bear against him, even though it seems—and so he and others think—that everything is going well for him. But he is taking good care of the Volscian nation, fights dragon-like, and wins battles just by drawing his sword. He hasn't done anything which would break his neck or cause me to risk mine, whenever we are put to the test.

LIEUTENANT

Sir, tell me, do you think he'll conquer Rome?

AUFIDIUS

30 All places yield to him ere he sits down;
And the nobility of Rome are his:
The senators and patricians love him too:
The tribunes are no soldiers; and their people
Will be as rash in the repeal, as hasty
35 To expel him thence. I think he'll be to Rome
As is the osprey to the fish, who takes it
By sovereignty of nature. First he was
A noble servant to them; but he could not
Carry his honours even: whether 'twas pride,
40 Which out of daily fortune ever taints
The happy man; whether defect of judgment,
To fail in the disposing of those chances
Which he was lord of; or whether nature,
Not to be other than one thing, not moving
45 From the casque to the cushion, but commanding peace
Even with the same austerity and garb
As he controll'd the war; but one of these—
As he hath splices of them all, not all,
For I dare so far free him— made him fear'd,
50 So hated, and so banish'd: but he has a merit,
To choke it in the utterance. So our virtues
Lie in the interpretation of the time:
And power, unto itself most commendable,
Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
55 To extol what it hath done.
One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail;
Rights by rights falter, strengths by strengths do
fail.
Come, let's away. When, Caius, Rome is thine,
60 Thou art poor'st of all; then shortly art thou mine.

*Exeunt***AUFIDIUS**

All places surrender to him before he's done. The nobility of Rome support him; the senators and patricians love him too. The tribunes aren't soldiers, and their people will be as quick in welcoming him back as they were hasty to get rid of him in the first place. I think he'll be to Rome like an osprey ² to a fish—he'll conquer it by his very nature. First he was a noble servant to them, but even then they wouldn't give him honor. It's hard to say why they rejected him—whether it was his pride, which taints otherwise good men; whether it was his poor judgement in not seizing the opportunities he was given; or whether it was his nature, which is to be one thing only, unable to take of a soldier's helmet and sit on a statesman's cushion, attempting to command a city at peace the way he would have commanded an army at war. Somehow, one of these—and he has bits of all of them, though he doesn't embody any one fully—made him so feared and so hated that they banished him. But he has other merits so great a man will choke ³ attempting to utter them. Our virtues are subject to interpretation, and power, which in itself seems good, is doomed to fall into a tomb as much as to be talked about. *[Reciting a common axiom]* "One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail; rights by rights falter, strengths by strengths do fail." Let's go.

² An "osprey" is a bird of prey which eats fish common to North America and England.

³ "To choke it in the utterance" means that it won't fit through one's throat to say the words.

[As though to Coriolanus.] When Rome falls, Caius, you'll be the poorest of them all. Shortly after, you'll be mine.

All exit.

Act 5, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter MENENIUS, COMINIUS, SICINIUS, BRUTUS, and others

MENENIUS

No, I'll not go: you hear what he hath said
Which was sometime his general; who loved him
In a most dear particular. He call'd me father:
But what o' that? Go, you that banish'd him;
5 A mile before his tent fall down, and knee
The way into his mercy: nay, if he coy'd
To hear Cominius speak, I'll keep at home.

COMINIUS

He would not seem to know me.

MENENIUS

Do you hear?

COMINIUS

10 Yet one time he did call me by my name:
I urged our old acquaintance, and the drops
That we have bled together. Coriolanus
He would not answer to: forbud all names;
He was a kind of nothing, titleless,
15 Till he had forged himself a name o' the fire
Of burning Rome.

MENENIUS

Why, so: you have made good work!
A pair of tribunes that have rack'd for Rome,
To make coals cheap,—a noble memory!

Shakescleare Translation

MENENIUS, COMINIUS, SICINIUS, BRUTUS, and others enter.

MENENIUS

No, I will not go. You've heard what he said to someone who was once his general, someone who dearly loved him. He called me "father," but so what? You, who banished him, should go; fall to your knees a mile from his tent, and crawl into his mercy. No, if he wouldn't hear Cominius speak, there's no use in me going.

COMINIUS

He acted as though he did not know me.

MENENIUS

Hear that?

COMINIUS

Just once, he called me by my name. I reminded him of our old friendship, and the blood that we've spilled together. He refused to answer to the name "Coriolanus"—in fact, he wouldn't answer to anything. He was a kind of nothing, as though nameless until he'd make himself a name in the fires of burning Rome.

MENENIUS

Why, there it is!

[To the TRIBUNES] You've done it now! A pair of tribunes

COMINIUS

20 I minded him how royal 'twas to pardon
When it was less expected: he replied,
It was a bare petition of a state
To one whom they had punish'd.

MENENIUS

Very well:
25 Could he say less?

COMINIUS

I offer'd to awaken his regard
For's private friends: his answer to me was,
He could not stay to pick them in a pile
30 Of noisome musty chaff: he said 'twas folly,
For one poor grain or two, to leave unburnt,
And still to nose the offence.

MENENIUS

For one poor grain or two!
I am one of those; his mother, wife, his child,
And this brave fellow too, we are the grains:
35 You are the musty chaff; and you are smelt
Above the moon: we must be burnt for you.

SICINIUS

Nay, pray, be patient: if you refuse your aid
In this so never-needed help, yet do not
Upbraid's with our distress. But, sure, if you
40 Would be your country's pleader, your good tongue,
More than the instant army we can make,
Might stop our countryman.

MENENIUS

No, I'll not meddle.

SICINIUS

Pray you, go to him.

MENENIUS

45 What should I do?

BRUTUS

Only make trial what your love can do
For Rome, towards Marcius.

MENENIUS

Well, and say that Marcius
Return me, as Cominius is return'd,
50 Unheard; what then?
But as a discontented friend, grief-shot
With his unkindness? say't be so?

SICINIUS

Yet your good will
must have that thanks from Rome, after the measure
55 As you intended well.

MENENIUS

I'll undertake 't:
I think he'll hear me. Yet, to bite his lip
And hum at good Cominius, much unhearts me.
He was not taken well; he had not dined:
60 The veins unfill'd, our blood is cold, and then
We pout upon the morning, are unapt
To give or to forgive; but when we have stuff'd
These and these conveyances of our blood

that have destroyed Rome, and for what?—what a nice memorial you leave behind!

COMINIUS

I reminded him how it is noble to be merciful when mercy is least expected. He replied that this was a pathetic request from a country to a man it had punished.

MENENIUS

Fair enough; what else could he say?

COMINIUS

I tried to remind him of his respect for his personal friends, and his answer to me was that he could not be bothered to pick them out of a pile of stinking, rotting wheat. He said it would be a mistake to leave the grain unburnt for the sake of one poor grain or two [2], and thus to have to bear the stink of the rest.

[1] In this agricultural metaphor of separating the wheat from the "chaff" or worthless bits of a plant, Coriolanus says that he can't be bothered to spare Rome just for a few good men and women. The rest of the populace is worthless to him, so he will treat the entire city as trash to be burned.

MENENIUS

For one poor grain or two! I am one of those; his mother, his wife, his child, and Cominius here too. We are the grains, *[To the TRIBUNES]* you are the rotting waste, and you stink to high heaven. We will be burned because of you.

SICINIUS

No, please, be calm. If you refuse to help now, when we need help more than ever, you have no right to yell at us. But if you would go plead to Coriolanus on behalf of your country, your good voice will be worth more than whatever army we can call to arms.

MENENIUS

No, I won't interfere.

SICINIUS

Please, go to him.

MENENIUS

And what should I say?

BRUTUS

Only ask what your love toward Marcius can do for Rome.

MENENIUS

Sure, and what if Marcius sends me back without listening—what then? I'll just be crushed, a friend shot through with grief by his unkindness; is that what you want?

SICINIUS

But your efforts will win great thanks from Rome, simply because we know you have tried.

MENENIUS

I'll do it. I think he'll listen to me. Yet, to bite his lip and hum [2] at good Cominius—this disheartens me. Maybe he was just feeling ill, or he hadn't eaten. When we are ill or unfed, our blood is cold and then we are grumpy—then we are unlikely to be kind and forgive. But perhaps when we are full of food and wine, and our blood runs more easily, we are more easily convinced of mercy than in our priest-like

[2] "To bite his lip and hum" means that Coriolanus had to keep from speaking in fury, and also to avoid hearing anything Cominius had to say.

[3] In the original text a "priest-like fast" refers to how priests would often refrain from eating as a means of demonstrating devotion and separation from material needs.

With wine and feeding, we have suppler souls
 65 Than in our priest-like fasts: therefore I'll watch him
 Till he be dieted to my request,
 And then I'll set upon him.

BRUTUS

You know the very road into his kindness,
 And cannot lose your way.

MENENIUS

70 Good faith, I'll prove him,
 Speed how it will. I shall ere long have knowledge
 Of my success.

*Exit**MENENIUS exits.***COMINIUS**

He'll never hear him.

SICINIUS

75 Not?

COMINIUS

I tell you, he does sit in gold, his eye
 Red as 'twould burn Rome; and his injury
 The gaoler to his pity. I kneel'd before him;
 'Twas very faintly he said 'Rise;' dismiss'd me
 80 Thus, with his speechless hand: what he would do,
 He sent in writing after me; what he would not,
 Bound with an oath to yield to his conditions:
 So that all hope is vain.
 Unless his noble mother, and his wife;
 85 Who, as I hear, mean to solicit him
 For mercy to his country. Therefore, let's hence,
 And with our fair entreaties haste them on.

*Exeunt**All exit.*

Act 5, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Two Sentinels on guard. Enter to them, MENENIUS.

FIRST SENATOR

Stay: whence are you?

SECOND SENATOR

Stand, and go back.

MENENIUS

You guard like men; 'tis well: but, by your leave,
 I am an officer of state, and come
 5 To speak with Coriolanus.

FIRST SENATOR

From whence?

MENENIUS

From Rome.

FIRST SENATOR

You may not pass, you must return: our general
 Will no more hear from thence.

Shakescleare Translation

Two SENTINELS stand guard. MENENIUS enters and speaks to them.

FIRST Sentinel

Stop. Where are you from?

SECOND SENTINEL

Stop where you are and go back.

MENENIUS

You are bold guards, as you should be. But please, hear me out—I am a statesman, and come to speak with Coriolanus.

FIRST SENTINEL

From where?

MENENIUS

From Rome.

FIRST SENTINEL

You may not pass, and you must return. Our general will not hear anything more from Rome.

SECOND SENATOR

10 You'll see your Rome embraced with fire before
You'll speak with Coriolanus.

MENENIUS

Good my friends,
If you have heard your general talk of Rome,
And of his friends there, it is lots to blanks,
15 My name hath touch'd your ears it is Menenius.

FIRST SENATOR

Be it so; go back: the virtue of your name
Is not here passable.

MENENIUS

I tell thee, fellow,
The general is my lover: I have been
20 The book of his good acts, whence men have read
His name unparallel'd, haply amplified;
For I have ever verified my friends,
Of whom he's chief, with all the size that verity
Would without lapsing suffer: nay, sometimes,
25 Like to a bowl upon a subtle ground,
I have tumbled past the throw; and in his praise
Have almost stamp'd the leasing: therefore, fellow,
I must have leave to pass.

FIRST SENATOR

Faith, sir, if you had told as many lies in his
30 behalf as you have uttered words in your own, you
should not pass here; no, though it were as virtuous
to lie as to live chastely. Therefore, go back.

MENENIUS

Prithee, fellow, remember my name is Menenius,
always factionary on the party of your general.

SECOND SENATOR

35 Howsoever you have been his liar, as you say you
have, I am one that, telling true under him, must
say, you cannot pass. Therefore, go back.

MENENIUS

Has he dined, canst thou tell? for I would not
speak with him till after dinner.

FIRST SENATOR

40 You are a Roman, are you?

MENENIUS

I am, as thy general is.

FIRST SENATOR

Then you should hate Rome, as he does. Can you,
when you have pushed out your gates the very
defender of them, and, in a violent popular
45 ignorance, given your enemy your shield, think to
front his revenges with the easy groans of old
women, the virginal palms of your daughters, or with
the palsied intercession of such a decayed dotant as
you seem to be? Can you think to blow out the
50 intended fire your city is ready to flame in, with
such weak breath as this? No, you are deceived;
therefore, back to Rome, and prepare for your
execution: you are condemned, our general has sworn
you out of reprieve and pardon.

MENENIUS

55 Sirrah, if thy captain knew I were here, he would
use me with estimation.

SECOND SENTINEL

You'll see Rome embraced with fire before you'll speak with
Coriolanus.

MENENIUS

Good friends, if you have heard your general talk about
Rome, and of his friends there, by all odds you'll have heard
him mention my name—it is Menenius.

FIRST SENTINEL

Even so, go back. The virtue of your name does not win you
passage here.

MENENIUS

Sir, listen—the general loves me. I have often talked of him
publicly as a man without equal; I've sung his praises
loudly. I have always spoken well of my friends—and he's
my best friend—with all the generosity that truth would
allow. Even, sometimes, like a bowler carried along with the
ball, I have praised him so much it's almost gone too far.
Therefore, please, men, you must let me pass.

FIRST SENTINEL

Honestly, sir, if you had lied as many times for him as you
have uttered words for yourself—even then, you couldn't
pass here; no, even if lying were as virtuous as to live
peacefully. Therefore, go back.

MENENIUS

Please, my good man, remember my name is Menenius; I
have always been on Coriolanus's side.

SECOND SENTINEL

Even if you've lied on his behalf—as you say you have—I am
one that, telling the truth on his behalf, must say you
cannot pass. Therefore, go back.

MENENIUS

Has he dined, do you know? I'd rather not speak with him
until after dinner.

FIRST SENTINEL

You are a Roman, right?

MENENIUS

I am, as your general is.

FIRST SENTINEL

Then you should hate Rome, as he does. When you have
banished your defender and in a violent foolishness given
your enemy your shield, do you really think you can stop his
revenge with the groans of old women, the pleas of your
daughters, or with whatever kind of old requests from a
decaying corpse as you seem to be? Do you think you can
blow out the impending fire your city is ready to flame in
with breath this weak? No, you're lying to yourself.
Therefore, back to Rome, and prepare for your execution.
You are condemned. Our general has sworn that you cannot
be pardoned.

MENENIUS

You fool , if your captain knew I were here, he would be
more respectful.

 "Sirrah" in the original text,
although it looks like "sir," is in fact
used to distinguish someone as of low
rank, insultingly.

SECOND SENATOR

Come, my captain knows you not.

MENENIUS

I mean, thy general.

FIRST SENATOR

My general cares not for you. Back, I say, go; lest
60 I let forth your half-pint of blood; back,—that's
the utmost of your having: back.

MENENIUS

Nay, but, fellow, fellow,—

Enter CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS

CORIOLANUS

What's the matter?

MENENIUS

Now, you companion, I'll say an errand for you:
65 You shall know now that I am in estimation; you shall
perceive that a Jack guard cannot office me from
my son Coriolanus: guess, but by my entertainment
with him, if thou standest not i' the state of
hanging, or of some death more long in
70 spectatorship, and crueler in suffering; behold now
presently, and swoon for what's to come upon thee.
[To CORIOLANUS]
75 The glorious gods sit in hourly synod
about thy particular prosperity and love thee no worse
than thy old father Menenius does. O my son, my son!
Thou art preparing fire for us. Look thee, here's water
to quench it. I was hardly moved to come to thee but,
80 being assured none but myself could move thee, I have
been blown out of gates with sighs and conjure
thee to pardon Rome and they petitionary countrymen.
The good gods assuage thy wrath and turn the dregs
of it upon this varlet here—
85 this, who like a block hath denied my access to thee.

CORIOLANUS

Away!

MENENIUS

How! away!

CORIOLANUS

Wife, mother, child, I know not. My affairs
90 Are servanted to others: though I owe
My revenge properly, my remission lies
In Volscian breasts. That we have been familiar,
Ingrate forgetfulness shall poison, rather
Than pity note how much. Therefore, be gone.
95 Mine ears against your suits are stronger than
Your gates against my force. Yet, for I loved thee,
Take this along; I writ it for thy sake
And would have rent it. Another word, Menenius,
I will not hear thee speak. This man, Aufidius,
100 Was my beloved in Rome: yet thou behold'st!

AUFIDIUS

You keep a constant temper.

Exeunt CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS

FIRST SENATOR

Now, sir, is your name Menenius?

SECOND SENATOR

'Tis a spell, you see, of much power: you know the
105 way home again.

SECOND SENTINEL

[Mockingly] Come on, my captain doesn't know you.

MENENIUS

Your general, I mean.

FIRST SENTINEL

My general doesn't care about you. Back, I say, go, before I
let out a half-pint of your blood. Back; that's all you're going
to get from me: back!

MENENIUS

No, but—

CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS enter.

CORIOLANUS

What is all this?

MENENIUS

Now, buddy, I'll give you a chore: now you'll know that I'm
respected. You'll see that some Jack guard can't send me
away from my son Coriolanus. Just guess, by the way he
treats me, if you're not going to be hanged for this, or
maybe something even worse and more cruel. Watch,
watch this, and try not to faint in fear about what will
happen to you.

[To CORIOLANUS] The glorious gods are even now talking
about your extraordinary prosperity, and love you just as
your old father Menenius does! Oh, my son, my son! You're
preparing fire for us. But look, I offer you water to quench it.
I almost didn't come to you, but since I was told no one but
me could convince you, I have come out of Rome's gates
sighing sadly to beg you to pardon Rome, and your
countrymen. May the good gods calm your wrath, and turn
what's left of it upon this evil man here—*[pointing to the
GUARD]* who, like a stone, denied my access to you.

CORIOLANUS

Go away!

MENENIUS

Wait, what? Away?

CORIOLANUS

I do not know wife, mother, or child. I am the servant of
others, and though I too am owed revenge, my debt is with
the Volscians. Cruel forgetfulness shall poison any memory
that you and I were once friends, rather than pity remember
that friendship. Therefore, be gone. I will resist anything
you have to say more strongly than Rome's gates will resist
my force. Yet, as I did love you once, take this along. I wrote
it for you *[hands MENENIUS a letter]* and otherwise would
have torn it up. Menenius, do not speak another word.

[To AUFIDIUS] This man was my beloved in Rome—but you
see how I treat him!

AUFIDIUS

You maintain your temper.

CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS exit.

FIRST SENTINEL

[Mockingly] Now, sir, is your name Menenius?

SECOND SENTINEL

You see Coriolanus is greatly committed to our cause. You
know the way home again.

FIRST SENATOR

Do you hear how we are shent for keeping your greatness back?

SECOND SENATOR

What cause, do you think, I have to swoon?

MENENIUS

I neither care for the world nor your general: for such things as you, I can scarce think there's any, ye're so slight. He that hath a will to die by himself fears it not from another: let your general do his worst. For you, be that you are, long; and your misery increase with your age! I say to you, as I was said to, Away!

110
115*Exit***FIRST SENATOR**

A noble fellow, I warrant him.

SECOND SENATOR

The worthy fellow is our general: he's the rock, the oak not to be wind-shaken.

*Exeunt***FIRST SENTINEL**

Do you hear how we are punished for keeping your greatness back?

SECOND SENTINEL

Why, exactly, do you think I will faint?

MENENIUS

I care neither for the world nor your general—as for you, I can barely even think of you, you matter so little. A man who wants to die fears nothing from other men. Let your general do his worst. For you, stay your miserable selves, and may your misery increase with age! I say to you, as it was said to me, go away!

*MENENIUS exits.***FIRST SENTINEL**

He seems like a noble man, honestly.

SECOND SENTINEL

The worthy man is our general. He's like a rock, an oak unshaken by the wind.

Both exit.

Act 5, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter CORIOLANUS, AUFIDIUS, and others

CORIOLANUS

We will before the walls of Rome tomorrow Set down our host. My partner in this action, You must report to the Volscian lords, how plainly I have borne this business.

AUFIDIUS

5 Only their ends You have respected; stopp'd your ears against The general suit of Rome; never admitted A private whisper, no, not with such friends That thought them sure of you.

CORIOLANUS

10 This last old man, Whom with a crack'd heart I have sent to Rome, Loved me above the measure of a father; Nay, godded me, indeed. Their latest refuge Was to send him; for whose old love I have, 15 Though I show'd sourly to him, once more offer'd The first conditions, which they did refuse And cannot now accept; to grace him only That thought he could do more, a very little I have yielded to: fresh embassies and suits, 20 Nor from the state nor private friends, hereafter Will I lend ear to. Ha! what shout is this? Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow In the same time 'tis made? I will not.

Enter in mourning habits, VIRGILIA, VOLUMNIA, leading young MARCIUS, VALERIA, and Attendants

CORIOLANUS

My wife comes foremost; then the honour'd mould Wherein this trunk was framed, and in her hand The grandchild to her blood. But, out, affection!

Shakescleare Translation

CORIOLANUS, AUFIDIUS, and others enter.

CORIOLANUS

Tomorrow, we'll camp our army in front of the walls of Rome. Aufidius, my partner in this war, you must report to the Volscian lords how straightforwardly I've acted.

AUFIDIUS

You've respected only the goals of the Volscians. You plugged your ears against the general pleas of Rome, listened not even to a whisper, no, not even with friends who were certain that you would.

CORIOLANUS

This last old man, whom with a broken heart I have sent back to Rome, loved me more than a father; no, he loved me as a god, even. It was Rome's last hope to send him, and because I have such deep love for him—even though I conveyed that poorly to him—I've again offered the original conditions of surrender, which they had refused before and can't accept now. Out of respect for Menenius, who thought he could do more, I have yielded very little. No new negotiators or beggars, neither from the state nor private friends, will I listen to from now on. Huh? What are these shouts about? [Shouting from offstage] Will I be tempted to take back my vow the moment it's made? I will not.

VIRGILIA and VOLUMNIA enter, leading young MARCIUS, VALERIA, and attendants. All wear mourning clothes.

CORIOLANUS

My wife comes at the head of the group, and after her the honored mold in which my body was created ¹, and holding her hand, her grandchild. But I will not feel

¹ This "honour'd mould" refers to Coriolanus's mother.

All bond and privilege of nature, break!
Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.
What is that curt'sy worth? or those doves' eyes,
30 Which can make gods forsworn? I melt, and am not
Of stronger earth than others. My mother bows;
As if Olympus to a molehill should
In supplication nod: and my young boy
Hath an aspect of intercession, which
35 Great nature cries 'Deny not.' let the Volces
Plough Rome and harrow Italy: I'll never
Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand,
As if a man were author of himself
And knew no other kin.

VIRGILIA

40 My lord and husband!

CORIOLANUS

These eyes are not the same I wore in Rome.

VIRGILIA

The sorrow that delivers us thus changed
Makes you think so.

CORIOLANUS

Like a dull actor now,
45 I have forgot my part, and I am out,
Even to a full disgrace. Best of my flesh,
Forgive my tyranny; but do not say
For that 'Forgive our Romans.' O, a kiss
Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!
50 Now, by the jealous queen of heaven, that kiss
I carried from thee, dear; and my true lip
Hath virgin'd it e'er since. You gods! I prate,
And the most noble mother of the world
Leave unsaluted: sink, my knee, i' the earth;

VOLUMNIA

55 O, stand up blest!
Whilst, with no softer cushion than the flint,
I kneel before thee; and unproperly
Show duty, as mistaken all this while
Between the child and parent.

Kneels

CORIOLANUS

60 What is this?
Your knees to me? to your corrected son?
Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
Fillip the stars; then let the mutinous winds
Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun;
65 Murdering impossibility, to make
What cannot be, slight work.

VOLUMNIA

Thou art my warrior;
I holp to frame thee. Do you know this lady?

CORIOLANUS

The noble sister of Publicola,
70 The moon of Rome, chaste as the icicle
That's curdied by the frost from purest snow
And hangs on Dian's temple: dear Valeria!

VOLUMNIA

This is a poor epitome of yours,
Which by the interpretation of full time
75 May show like all yourself.

affection! I must break every familial bond and instinct! Let it be virtuous to be coldhearted. What is that curtsey worth, or those dove's eyes, which would make a god break his promise? I melt, and am not made of stronger earth than other men. My mother bows. As if Mount Olympus ² should bow to a molehill! My young boy has a face which seems to cry out "Don't send us away." And yet let the Volces plow Rome to the ground and destroy all of Italy. I will not be such a child to bend to instinct, but will stand strong, as if a man created himself wholly and had no family.

² Olympus was often imagined, in Greek and Roman mythology, to be the tallest mountain in the world, and the home of the gods. It is, at least, the tallest mountain in Greece, at around 10,000 ft.

VIRGILIA

My lord and husband!

CORIOLANUS

These eyes are not the same I had when I was in Rome.

VIRGILIA

It is the tragedy that brings us here which makes you think so.

CORIOLANUS

[Breaking down] Like a bad actor, I have forgotten my part, and I am out of character, to my complete disgrace. Beloved, please forgive my tyranny, but do not ask me to "Forgive our Romans." You kissed me as I was exiled, and by the jealous queen of heaven, I have carried it with me ever since and touched my lips to no one else. You gods! I'm rambling, and leave the most noble mother of the world ungrated. My knees sink into the earth. *[He kneels]*

VOLUMNIA

Oh, stand up you foolish man, while I, with no cushion but the stony ground, kneel before you, and improperly show deference, as though you were the parent and I the child.

Volumnia kneels.

CORIOLANUS

What is this? You would kneel to me, to your son? Then let the world reverse itself—let pebbles on the beach fill up the stars, and let the mutinous winds blow trees into the the fiery sun, doing the impossible and making what cannot be suddenly easy.

VOLUMNIA

You are my warrior. I helped to create you. *[Referring to Valeria]* Do you know this lady?

CORIOLANUS

The noble sister of Publicola, the pride of Roma, chaste as the icicle that's formed by frost from purest snow and hangs on the temple of Diana ³: dear Valeria!

³ Diana is the Roman goddess of the hunt, associated with nature and chastity.

VOLUMNIA

[Pointing to young Marcius, Coriolanus's son] This is a weaker version of you, which, in time, may come to be much like you.

CORIOLANUS

The god of soldiers,
With the consent of supreme Jove, inform
Thy thoughts with nobleness; that thou mayst prove
To shame unvulnerable, and stick i' the wars
Like a great sea-mark, standing every flaw,
And saving those that eye thee!

VOLUMNIA

Your knee, sirrah.

CORIOLANUS

That's my brave boy!

VOLUMNIA

Even he, your wife, this lady, and myself,
Are suitors to you.

CORIOLANUS

I beseech you, peace:
Or, if you'd ask, remember this before:
The thing I have forsworn to grant may never
Be held by you denials. Do not bid me
Dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate
Again with Rome's mechanics: tell me not
Wherein I seem unnatural: desire not
To ally my rages and revenges with
Your colder reasons.

VOLUMNIA

O, no more, no more!
You have said you will not grant us any thing;
For we have nothing else to ask, but that
Which you deny already: yet we will ask;
That, if you fail in our request, the blame
May hang upon your hardness: therefore hear us.

CORIOLANUS

Aufidius, and you Volsces, mark; for we'll
Hear nought from Rome in private. Your request?

VOLUMNIA

Should we be silent and not speak, our raiment
And state of bodies would bewray what life
We have led since thy exile. Think with thyself
How more unfortunate than all living women
Are we come hither: since that thy sight,
which should
Make our eyes flow with joy, hearts dance
with comforts,
Constrains them weep and shake with fear and sorrow;
Making the mother, wife and child to see
The son, the husband and the father tearing
His country's bowels out. And to poor we
Thine enmity's most capital: thou barr'st us
Our prayers to the gods, which is a comfort
That all but we enjoy; for how can we,
Alas, how can we for our country pray.
Whereto we are bound, together with thy victory,
Whereto we are bound? alack, or we must lose
The country, our dear nurse, or else thy person,
Our comfort in the country. We must find
An evident calamity, though we had
Our wish, which side should win: for either thou
Must, as a foreign recreant, be led
With manacles thorough our streets, or else
triumphantly tread on thy country's ruin,
And bear the palm for having bravely shed
Thy wife and children's blood. For myself, son,
I purpose not to wait on fortune till
These wars determine: if I cannot persuade thee
Rather to show a noble grace to both parts

CORIOLANUS

The god of soldiers, with the consent of the supreme God,
keep my thoughts noble, so that I may be invulnerable to
shame. Gods, keep my resolve in this war like a great sea-
^{mark,}⁴ standing strong against every flaw and saving
those who can see you!

⁴ Like a landmark, a "sea-mark" is that which is visible from far away, in this case at sea. Sea-marks helped sailors on storm-tossed seas find their way.

VOLUMNIA

[To young *Marcius*] Kneel, boy.

CORIOLANUS

That's my brave boy!

VOLUMNIA

Even he, your wife, this lady, and myself, have come to beg
your mercy.

CORIOLANUS

Please, no more; don't ask. Or, if you ask, remember this: I
have sworn not to do anything but deny you. Do not ask me
to dismiss my soldiers, or to submit again to Rome's laws.
Do not tell me that I have gone mad; do not ask me to
exchange my rage and revenge with your cold reason.

VOLUMNIA

Oh, no more, no more! You have said you will not grant us
anything, for we have nothing else to ask other than what
you have already denied. Yet we will ask anyway, so that if
you do not say yes, the blame may be solely on you.
Therefore, hear us.

CORIOLANUS

Aufidius, and you Volsces, listen, because I don't want to be
accused of hearing anything from Rome in private.

[To *VOLUMNIA*] Your request?

VOLUMNIA

If we stayed silent and did not speak, our clothes and
bodies alone should tell you how we've lived since your
exile. Just consider: we are the most miserable women
alive, since now that we have finally seen you again, that
sight—which should make our eyes flow with joy and our
hearts dance—instead makes us weep and shake with fear
and sorrow. We, the mother, wife, and child are forced to
see the son, husband, and the father tearing the guts out of
his country. And to us, your hatred is even worse. You
prevent us even from praying to the gods, something which
even the most wretched can do—for how could we pray for
our country, if it is to pray against you, or for you, if against
our country? We see a disaster in either case: either you
must, as a foreign monster, be led in chains through our
streets, or else you will triumphantly walk through the ruins
of Rome, and wear garlands for having bravely killed your
wife and child. As for me, son, I cannot wait to see what
happens. If I cannot persuade you to be merciful to both
yourself and Rome rather than seek to destroy one, you will
no sooner march to attack your country than you will walk
over my dead body, the very womb that brought you into
this world.

Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner
March to assault thy country than to tread—
135 Trust to't, thou shalt not—on thy mother's womb,
That brought thee to this world.

VIRGILIA

Ay, and mine,
That brought you forth this boy, to keep your name
Living to time.

YOUNG MARCIUS

140 A' shall not tread on me;
I'll run away till I am bigger, but then I'll fight.

CORIOLANUS

Not of a woman's tenderness to be,
Requires nor child nor woman's face to see.
I have sat too long.

145

*Rising***VOLUMNIA**

Nay, go not from us thus.
If it were so that our request did tend
To save the Romans, thereby to destroy
The Volsces whom you serve, you might condemn us,
150 As poisonous of your honour: no; our suit
Is that you reconcile them: while the Volsces
May say 'This mercy we have show'd,' the Romans,
'This we received;' and each in either side
Give the all-hail to thee and cry 'Be blest
155 For making up this peace!' Thou know'st, great son,
The end of war's uncertain, but this certain,
That, if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name,
Whose repetition will be dogg'd with curses;
160 Whose chronicle thus writ: 'The man was noble,
But with his last attempt he wiped it out;
Destroy'd his country, and his name remains
To the ensuing age abhor'r'd! Speak to me, son:
Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour,
165 To imitate the graces of the gods;
To tear with thunder the wide cheeks o' the air,
And yet to charge thy sulphur with a bolt
That should but rive an oak. Why dost not speak?
Think'st thou it honourable for a noble man
170 Still to remember wrongs? Daughter, speak you:
He cares not for your weeping. Speak thou, boy:
Perhaps thy childishness will move him more
Than can our reasons. There's no man in the world
More bound to 's mother; yet here he lets me prate
175 Like one i' the stocks. Thou hast never in thy life
Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy,
When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
Has cluck'd thee to the wars and safely home,
Loaden with honour. Say my request's unjust,
180 And spurn me back: but if it be not so,
Thou art not honest; and the gods will plague thee,
That thou restrain'st from me the duty which
To a mother's part belongs. He turns away:
Down, ladies; let us shame him with our knees.
185 To his surname Coriolanus 'longs more pride
Than pity to our prayers. Down: an end;
This is the last: so we will home to Rome,
And die among our neighbours. Nay, behold 's:
This boy, that cannot tell what he would have
190 But kneels and holds up bands for fellowship,
Does reason our petition with more strength
Than thou hast to deny 't. Come, let us go:
This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
His wife is in Coriooli and his child
195 Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch:
I am hush'd until our city be a-fire,
And then I'll speak a little.

VIRGILIA

Indeed, and mine too, the body that brought you this boy,
your son, who bears your name.

YOUNG MARCIUS

You will not tread on me. I'll run away till I am bigger, but
then I'll fight you.

CORIOLANUS

If I want to avoid being tender, I cannot see the face of a
child or a woman. I have sat and listened too long.

*CORIOLANUS rises from his chair.***VOLUMNIA**

No, don't go leave us like that. Were it true that we were
asking you to save the Romans by destroying the Volsces,
then you might rightly condemn us for poisoning your
honor, but that's not what we're asking. No, we're asking
that you make a peace between them. Then, the Volsces
may say "we've shown this mercy," and the Romans may
say "this mercy we have received," and both sides will cry
out praise to you and say: "Bless you for bringing us peace!"
You know, great son, that war's outcome is uncertain, but
we know this much—if you conquer Rome, all you'll get out
of it will be a name so cursed that in the history books [5]
they'll write: "The man was noble, but with his last acts
undid all his nobility; he destroyed his own country, and his
name will be hated forever." Speak to me, son. You have
been at other times so honorable you seemed to imitate the
gods, to tear open the air with thunder, and to work
yourself up like lightning that would split an oak tree. Why
won't you speak? Do you think it's honorable for a noble
man to hold grudges?

5 Chronicles are the models for our textbooks of history, and they were very important sources for Shakespeare in this and other plays. In this moment, Shakespeare is recognizing how historical record has informed his play (which follows closely the accounts from historians like Livy and Plutarch).

[To VIRGILIA] Daughter, you speak—he doesn't care about
your weeping.

[To young MARCIUS] You speak, boy. Perhaps your youthful
voice will move him more than our reasoning. There's no
man in the world more bound to his mother, but here he
lets me ramble on like a man in the stocks [6]. You have
never in your life shown your dear mother any courtesy,
when she, poor hen, fond of no second brood [7], has
clucked you to the wars and safely home, covered in
medals. Say that what I'm asking is unjust, and throw me
out. But if it is not unjust, than you're not being fair, and the
gods will plague you for preventing me from doing the duty
which a mother should. He turns away. Down, ladies, let us
shame him on our knees. He has more pride in that name,
Coriolanus, than he has pity for our prayers. Down, and
that's it. [All kneel] This is all we can do. Lets go home to
Rome and die among our neighbors. No, look at this: this
boy who barely knows what we are doing, kneeling and
holds up his hands for friendship, makes our case with
more strength than you can have to deny it. Come, let us
go. This fellow had a Volscian as his mother, his wife is in
Coriooli and this child just looks like him by chance. We'll go
like this—I will not speak until our city is burning, and then
I'll speak a little.

6 To be put in the "stocks" was a common punishment in 1608. A man's head and arms were locked outstretched by a wooden device, and he was made to stand in a public place to be heckled and often abused by passers-by.

7 Hens usually have multiple sets of eggs in their lifetime, known as broods. Volumnia, saying she has "no second brood" is thus expressing her unwavering loyalty to Coriolanus alone.

*He holds her by the hand, silent***CORIOLANUS**

O mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But, for your son,— believe it, O, believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
If not most mortal to him. But, let it come.
Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars,
I'll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius,
Were you in my stead, would you have heard
A mother less? or granted less, Aufidius?

AUFIDIUS

I was moved withal.

CORIOLANUS

I dare be sworn you were:
And, sir, it is no little thing to make
Mine eyes to sweat compassion. But, good sir,
What peace you'll make, advise me: for my part,
I'll not to Rome, I'll back with you; and pray you,
Stand to me in this cause. O mother! wife!

AUFIDIUS

[Aside] I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and
thy honour
At difference in thee: out of that I'll work
Myself a former fortune.

*The Ladies make signs to CORIOLANUS***CORIOLANUS**

Ay, by and by;
But we will drink together; and you shall bear
A better witness back than words, which we,
On like conditions, will have counter-seal'd.
Come, enter with us. Ladies, you deserve
To have a temple built you: all the swords
In Italy, and her confederate arms,
Could not have made this peace.

*Exeunt**CORIOLANUS takes her by the hand silently.***CORIOLANUS**

Oh, mother, mother! What have you done? Behold, the
heavens open up, the gods look down and laugh at this
mad scene. Oh my mother, mother! Oh! You have won a
fortunate victory for Rome, but for your son—believe me,
Oh, believe me—you have very dangerously convinced him,
if not sentenced him to death. But, let death come. Aufidius,
though I cannot make an all out war, I'll bring us a
convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius, if you were in my
place, would you have listened to your mother less? Or
given less, Aufidius?

AUFIDIUS

I was also moved by it.

CORIOLANUS

I'd risk swearing that you were. And sir, it is no little thing to
make my eyes sweat with compassion. 8 But, good sir, tell
me what peace terms you'll agree to. As for me, I'll not
return to Rome, but will go back with you, so please,
support me in making peace. Oh, mother! Wife!

8 To make "eyes to sweat
compassion" is to cry.

AUFIDIUS

[To himself] I am glad your mercy and honor are working
against each other; I'll make a fortune out of this situation.

*The ladies weep and reach out toward CORIOLANUS.***CORIOLANUS**

Yes, this is what must be. But we'll drink together first, and
you'll take back a treaty to Rome, which we will agree to.
Come along with us. Ladies, you deserve to have a temple
built to you. 9 All the swords in Italy, and all the other
weapons too, could not have brought this peace.

9 According to the Roman historian
Livy, this is exactly what happens.
Rome builds a temple to Fortuna, a
goddess of mercy and luck, around
488 BC.

All exit.

Act 5, Scene 4

Shakespeare*Enter MENENIUS and SICINIUS***MENENIUS**

See you yond coign o' the Capitol, yond
corner-stone?

SICINIUS

Why, what of that?

MENENIUS

If it be possible for you to displace it with your
little finger, there is some hope the ladies of
Rome, especially his mother, may prevail with him.
But I say there is no hope in't: our throats are
sentenced and stay upon execution.

Shakescleare Translation*MENENIUS and SICINIUS enter.***MENENIUS**

Do you see that corner of the Capitol, that cornerstone?

SICINIUS

Why, what about it?

MENENIUS

If you can move that with your little finger, there is some
hope the ladies of Rome, especially his mother, will
convince Coriolanus not to attack. But I say there's really no
hope; we have been sentenced to death and are just
waiting for the execution.

SICINIUS

Is't possible that so short a time can alter the
condition of a man!

10

MENENIUS

There is difference between a grub and a butterfly;
yet your butterfly was a grub. This Marcius is grown
from man to dragon: he has wings; he's more than a
creeping thing.

SICINIUS

He loved his mother dearly.

15

MENENIUS

So did he me: and he no more remembers his mother
now than an eight-year-old horse. The tartness
of his face sours ripe grapes: when he walks, he
moves like an engine, and the ground shrinks before
his treading: he is able to pierce a corset with
his eye; talks like a knell, and his hum is a
battery. He sits in his state, as a thing made for
Alexander. What he bids be done is finished with
his bidding. He wants nothing of a god but eternity
and a heaven to throne in.

25

SICINIUS

Yes, mercy, if you report him truly.

MENENIUS

I paint him in the character. Mark what mercy his
mother shall bring from him: there is no more mercy
in him than there is milk in a male tiger; that
shall our poor city find: and all this is long of
you.

30

SICINIUS

The gods be good unto us!

MENENIUS

No, in such a case the gods will not be good unto
us. When we banished him, we respected not them;
and, he returning to break our necks, they respect not
us.

35

Enter a Messenger

MESSENGER

Sir, if you'd save your life, fly to your house:
The plebeians have got your fellow-tribune
And hale him up and down, all swearing, if
The Roman ladies bring not comfort home,
They'll give him death by inches.

40

Enter a second Messenger

SICINIUS

What's the news?

SECOND MESSENGER

Good news, good news; the ladies have prevail'd,
The Volscians are dislodged, and Marcius gone:
A merrier day did never yet greet Rome,
No, not the expulsion of the Tarquins.

45

SICINIUS

Friend,
Art thou certain this is true? is it most certain?

SICINIUS

Is it possible that a man can change so much in so little
time?

MENENIUS

There is a difference between a caterpillar and a butterfly,
but butterflies do start out as caterpillars. Marcius has
grown from man to dragon: he has wings, he is more than a
creeping thing.¹

¹ If Marcius is "more than a
creeping thing," he is more than
something which creeps and crawls
along the ground.

SICINIUS

He loved his mother dearly.

MENENIUS

He loved me dearly, too. He no more remembers his mother
now than an old horse does. The fury of his face turns
grapes sour. When he walks, he moves like a great machine,
and the ground cowers before him. He is able to pierce
armor with his eyes; his voice is like a funeral bell and his
very hum is an assault. He sits on his throne like a statue of
Alexander.² What he orders to be done is done by very
order itself. He is a god, except that he lacks eternity and a
heaven in which to rule.

² Alexander the Great was a king of
Macedonia who conquered much of
Asia and north Africa around 330 BC.

SICINIUS

Yes, god have mercy if you are describing him truthfully.

MENENIUS

I paint him just as he is. Watch what mercy his mother will
bring from him. There is no more mercy in him than there is
milk in a male tiger. That's what our poor city will learn. And
all of this is your fault.

SICINIUS

The gods be good to us!

MENENIUS

No, in this case the gods will not be good to us. When we
banished him, we did not respect the gods, and when he
returns to break our necks, the gods will not respect us.

A MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

[To SICINIUS] Sir, if you value your life, flee to your house.
The commoners have got the other tribune and are running
him through the streets, all swearing that if the Roman
ladies do not bring good news back, they will torture him to
death.

SECOND MESSENGER enters.

SICINIUS

What's the news?

SECOND MESSENGER

Good news, good news! The ladies have succeeded! The
Volscians are packing up their camp, and Marcius has gone.
No happier day has ever dawned on Rome, no, not even the
retreat of the Tarquins.³

³ Tarquin was the previous king of
Rome, a tyrant who Coriolanus helped
defeat, ushering in the the
establishment of the Roman Republic.

SICINIUS

Friend, are you certain this is true? Are you
absolutely certain?

SECOND MESSENGER

As certain as I know the sun is fire:
Where have you lurk'd, that you make doubt of it?
Ne'er through an arch so hurried the blown tide,
As the recomforted through the gates. Why, hark you!

Trumpets; hautboys; drums beat; all together

SECOND MESSENGER

The trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes,
Tabours and cymbals and the shouting Romans,
Make the sun dance. Hark you!

A shout within

MENENIUS

This is good news:
I will go meet the ladies. This Volumnia
Is worth a city full of consuls, senators, patricians,
A city full; of tribunes, such as you,
A sea and land full. You have pray'd well to-day:
This morning for ten thousand of your throats
I'd not have given a doit. Hark, how they joy!

Music still, with shouts

SICINIUS

First, the gods bless you for your tidings; next,
Accept my thankfulness.

SECOND MESSENGER

Sir, we have all
Great cause to give great thanks.

SICINIUS

They are near the city?

SECOND MESSENGER

Almost at point to enter.

SICINIUS

We will meet them,
And help the joy.

Exeunt

All exit.

SECOND MESSENGER

As certain as I know the sun is fire. Where have you been,
that you doubt it? News has never flown so quickly through
the city as this, straight through the front gates. Why, listen!

*From offstage, trumpets are heard, and drums beat, rising
to a celebratory pitch.*

SECOND MESSENGER

The trumpets and bugles, organs and flutes, tambourines
and cymbals and the shouting Romans make the very sun
dance. Listen!

Celebratory shouting is heard from offstage.

MENENIUS

This is good news indeed. I'll go meet the ladies. Volumnia
is worth a city full of consuls, senators, and nobles. She's
worth an ocean and a continent of tribunes such as you.
You have prayed well today. This morning I would not have
given a cent to save ten thousand of your throats. Listen to
how joyful they are!

Trumpets and music continues, with shouting.

SICINIUS

First, may the gods bless you for this news. Next, allow me
to thank you.

SECOND MESSENGER

Sir, we all have great reason to give great thanks.

SICINIUS

The women are near the city?

SECOND MESSENGER

They are about to enter it.

SICINIUS

We will meet them, and contribute to this joy.

Act 5, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Enter two Senators with VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, VALERIA, &c. passing
over the stage, followed by Patricians and others

FIRST SENATOR

Behold our patroness, the life of Rome!
Call all your tribes together, praise the gods,
And make triumphant fires; strew flowers before them:
Unshout the noise that banish'd Marcius,
Repeal him with the welcome of his mother;
Cry 'Welcome, ladies, welcome!'

ALL

Welcome, ladies, Welcome!

A flourish with drums and trumpets. Exeunt

Shakescleare Translation

Two SENATORS enter with VOLUMNIA, VIRGILIA, VALERIA
and young MARCIUS, all in a procession followed by nobles
and, even further behind, some commoners crying out their
gratitude and celebrating.

FIRST SENATOR

Behold our savior, the lifeblood of Rome! Call all the people
together, praise the gods, and light all the city's ceremonial
flames. Throw flowers in the streets, choke down the words
that banished Marcius and replace them with the welcome
of his mother. Cry, "Welcome, ladies, welcome!"

ALL

Welcome, ladies, welcome!

A huge burst of drums and trumpets is heard. All exit.

Act 5, Scene 6

Shakespeare

Enter TULLUS AUFIDIUS, with Attendants

AUFIDIUS

Go tell the lords o' the city I am here:
 Deliver them this paper: having read it,
 Bid them repair to the market place; where I,
 Even in theirs and in the commons' ears,
 Will vouch the truth of it. Him I accuse
 The city ports by this hath enter'd and
 Intends to appear before the people, hoping
 To purge himself with words: dispatch.

Exeunt Attendants

Enter three or four Conspirators of AUFIDIUS' faction

AUFIDIUS

Most welcome!

10

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

How is it with our general?

AUFIDIUS

Even so
 As with a man by his own alms empoison'd,
 And with his charity slain.

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

15 Most noble sir,
 If you do hold the same intent wherein
 You wish'd us parties, we'll deliver you
 Of your great danger.

AUFIDIUS

Sir, I cannot tell:
 20 We must proceed as we do find the people.

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The people will remain uncertain whilst
 'Twixt you there's difference; but the fall of either
 Makes the survivor heir of all.

AUFIDIUS

I know it;
 25 And my pretext to strike at him admits
 A good construction. I raised him, and I pawn'd
 Mine honour for his truth: who being so heighten'd,
 He water'd his new plants with dews of flattery,
 Seducing so my friends; and, to this end,
 30 He bow'd his nature, never known before
 But to be rough, unswayable and free.

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

Sir, his stoutness
 When he did stand for consul, which he lost
 By lack of stooping,—

AUFIDIUS

35 That I would have spoke of:
 Being banish'd for't, he came unto my hearth;
 Presented to my knife his throat: I took him;
 Made him joint-servant with me; gave him way
 In all his own desires; nay, let him choose
 40 Out of my files, his projects to accomplish,
 My best and freshest men; served his designments

Shakescleare Translation

TULLUS AUFIDIUS enters with servants.

AUFIDIUS

Go tell the lords of the city that I am here. Deliver them this letter. Once they have read it, tell them to come to the market, where I will declare the truth of what it says to the ears of the public. Coriolanus, who I accuse in the letter, has entered the city and intends to appear before the people to pardon himself with words.

All servants exit.

Enter three or four CONSPIRATORS  of AUFIDIUS.

 A conspirator is a person who plots or joins in a secret mission.

AUFIDIUS

You're very welcome here!

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

How's it going with our general?

AUFIDIUS

He has poisoned himself with his own forgiveness, killed himself with his own charity.

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

Most noble sir, if you still want us to be your allies, we'll help save you from great danger.

AUFIDIUS

Sir, I don't know whether there will be danger. We will have to take things as they come and see how the people feel.

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

The people will be uncertain how to feel while you and Coriolanus are opposed. But if either one of you falls, the survivor will win everything.

AUFIDIUS

I know, and I have a good reason to strike at him. I raised him up among the Volscians, and gave up my honor for his sake. Once he had power, he used flattery to win all my former friends to his side, and in this way, he made himself—always known to be rough—even more stubbornly powerful.

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

Sir, his stubbornness was what cost him the Roman consulship, which he lost because he could not bow—

AUFIDIUS

I would bring that up. He was banished for stubbornness, came to my home, and put my knife at his throat. I took him in, made him equal to me, let him do whatever he desired—nay, let him choose from my own plans which projects to work on with my best and freshest men. I worked for him myself, and helped him to earn the fame which in the end all came to him, and even was proud of

In mine own person; holp to reap the fame
Which he did end all his; and took some pride
To do myself this wrong: till, at the last,
I seem'd his follower, not partner, and
45 He waged me with his countenance, as if
I had been mercenary.

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

So he did, my lord:
The army marvell'd at it, and, in the last,
50 When he had carried Rome and that we look'd
For no less spoil than glory,—

AUFIDIUS

There was it:
For which my sinews shall be stretch'd upon him.
At a few drops of women's rheum, which are
55 As cheap as lies, he sold the blood and labour
Of our great action: therefore shall he die,
And I'll renew me in his fall. But, hark!

Drums and trumpets sound, with great shouts of the People

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

Your native town you enter'd like a post,
And had no welcomes home: but he returns,
60 Splitting the air with noise.

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

And patient fools,
Whose children he hath slain, their base throats tear
With giving him glory.

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

Therefore, at your vantage,
65 Ere he express himself, or move the people
With what he would say, let him feel your sword,
Which we will second. When he lies along,
After your way his tale pronounced shall bury
His reasons with his body.

AUFIDIUS

70 Say no more:
Here come the lords.

Enter the Lords of the city

ALL THE LORDS

You are most welcome home.

AUFIDIUS

I have not deserved it.
75 But, worthy lords, have you with heed perused
What I have written to you?

LORDS

We have.

FIRST LORD

And grieve to hear't.
What faults he made before the last, I think
80 Might have found easy fines: but there to end
Where he was to begin and give away
The benefit of our levies, answering us
With our own charge, making a treaty where
There was a yielding,— this admits no excuse.

AUFIDIUS

85 He approaches: you shall hear him.

Enter CORIOLANUS, marching with drum and colours; commoners being with him

that, until, in the end, I was his follower and not his partner.
He looked at me and treated me like I was just a soldier for hire.

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

Indeed, my lord. The army could barely believe it, and in
the end, when he had conquered everything but Rome, and
we were looking forward to treasures and glory—

AUFIDIUS

That was it! For giving it up, all my muscles will strain upon
him. For the price of a few women's tears, which are as
cheap as lies, he sold the blood and labor of our great war.
Therefore, he shall die, and I'll rise as he falls. But listen!

Drums and trumpets sound, with great shouts from the people.

FIRST CONSPIRATOR

You came back to your hometown like a lowly messenger,
and had no welcomes home. But he returns, and the air
splits with noise.

SECOND CONSPIRATOR

And these fools, whose children he has killed, will tear their
throats apart cheering at his glory.

THIRD CONSPIRATOR

Therefore, when you are ready, before he has a chance to
speak or bring the people to his side, let him feel your
sword, and we will help. When he lies dead, you can tell the
story and his reasons will be buried with his body.

AUFIDIUS

Say no more: here come the lords.

The LORDS of the city enter.

ALL THE LORDS

Welcome home!

AUFIDIUS

I have not deserved it. But, worthy lords, have you looked
at what I have written to you?

LORDS

We have.

FIRST LORD

And we grieve to hear it. Were it not for his final mistake, I
think his other errors would have been forgivable. But to
end where he began, and to turn our terms of peace around
and force us into our own treaty, where it is as though he
surrendered—there can be no excuse for this.

AUFIDIUS

He's coming. You'll hear what he has to say.

*Enter CORIOLANUS, marching with drum and colours;
commoners following him.*

CORIOLANUS

Hail, lords! I am return'd your soldier,
No more infected with my country's love
Than when I parted hence, but still subsisting
Under your great command. You are to know
That prosperously I have attempted and
With bloody passage led your wars even to
The gates of Rome. Our spoils we have brought home
Do more than counterpoise a full third part
The charges of the action. We have made peace
With no less honour to the Antiates
Than shame to the Romans: and we here deliver,
Subscribed by the consuls and patricians,
Together with the seal o' the senate, what
100 We have compounded on.

AUFIDIUS

Read it not, noble lords;
But tell the traitor, in the high'st degree
He hath abused your powers.

CORIOLANUS

Traitor! how now!

AUFIDIUS

105 Ay, traitor, Marcius!

CORIOLANUS

Marcius!

AUFIDIUS

Ay, Marcius, Caius Marcius: dost thou think
I'll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol'n name
Coriolanus in Corioli?
110 You lords and heads o' the state, perfidiously
He has betray'd your business, and given up,
For certain drops of salt, your city Rome,
I say 'your city,' to his wife and mother;
Breaking his oath and resolution like
115 A twist of rotten silk, never admitting
Counsel o' the war, but at his nurse's tears
He whined and roar'd away your victory,
That pages blush'd at him and men of heart
Look'd wondering each at other.

CORIOLANUS

120 Hear'st thou, Mars?

AUFIDIUS

Name not the god, thou boy of tears!

CORIOLANUS

Ha!

AUFIDIUS

No more.

CORIOLANUS

Measureless liar, thou hast made my heart
125 Too great for what contains it. Boy! O slave!
Pardon me, lords, 'tis the first time that ever
I was forced to scold. Your judgments, my grave lords,
Must give this cur the lie: and his own notion—
Who wears my stripes impress'd upon him; that
130 Must bear my beating to his grave— shall join
To thrust the lie unto him.

FIRST LORD

Peace, both, and hear me speak.

CORIOLANUS

Cut me to pieces, Volces; men and lads,
Stain all your edges on me. Boy! false hound!

CORIOLANUS

Honorable lords! I have returned again as your soldier, no
more infected with my country's love than when I left, but
still under your great command. You must know that I
successfully led the army in your wars to the very gates of
Rome. The spoils we brought home will pay for more than a
third of the entire war. We have made peace with great
honor to this city and great shame for the Romans. [Holding
a paper] Here I deliver the treaty, agreed to by the consuls
and the nobles and signed by the senate.

AUFIDIUS

Do not read it, noble lords, but tell the traitor how he has
committed high treason and abused your powers.

CORIOLANUS

Traitor? What's going on?

AUFIDIUS

Yes, traitor, Marcius!

CORIOLANUS

Marcius?

AUFIDIUS

Yes, Marcius! Caius Marcius. Do you think I'll honor you with
that robbery, that name you stole from Corioli—Coriolanus?
You lords and heads of state, how disloyally he has betrayed
us all, and given up your city Rome—I say "your city"—for a
few drops of salt  from wife and mother. He has broken
his oath like he would tear a piece of rotten silk; at his
nurse's tears he, like a complaining child, begged and
sobbed away your victory. Servants blushed to see it, and
brave men looked at each other in shock.

 These "drops of salt" are tears.

CORIOLANUS

[As though to the gods] Do you hear this, Mars?

AUFIDIUS

Don't name the god of war, you tearful boy!

CORIOLANUS

Ha!

AUFIDIUS

That's enough.

CORIOLANUS

You impossible liar, you have made my heart break even as
it swells in fury. Boy! Oh, you slave. Pardon me, lords, this is
the first time I was ever forced to scold a man. Grave lords,
you must use your judgements and see that this dog is
lying. He wears honors that I have earned for him, and must
remember to his grave all the times I beat him; these show
he is lying.

FIRST LORD

Peace, both of you, and listen to me.

CORIOLANUS

Cut me to pieces Volces, men and lads, stain all your edges
on me  Boy! You false hound! If you have written your

 A thick metaphor. Literally, "stain all your edges on me" means "wet the

If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli:
Alone I did it. Boy!

histories truthfully, you'll find there, that like an eagle in a dove's nest, I fluttered ⁴ your Volscians in Corioli. Alone! I did it! Boy!

edges of your swords with my blood, which will stain them," but Coriolanus also speaks here of his influence over the Volsces. Over the course of the play, Coriolanus has driven the entire Volscian nation to either hate him or love him, and in "staining" their "edges," on him, they will absorb a part of him, like a tough stain on metal, which will never come off.

⁴ "Flutter'd" here means "killed all of"; a very strange metaphor in that it is both unmistakable and almost impossible to explain.

AUFIDIUS

Why, noble lords,
140 Will you be put in mind of his blind fortune,
Which was your shame, by this unholy braggart,
'Fore your own eyes and ears?

ALL CONSPIRATORS

Let him die for't.

ALL THE PEOPLE

'Tear him to pieces!' 'Do it presently!' 'He kill'd
145 my son!' 'My daughter!' 'He killed my cousin
Marcus!' 'He killed my father!'

SECOND LORD

Peace, ho! no outrage: peace!
The man is noble and his fame folds-in
This orb o' the earth. His last offences to us
150 Shall have judicious hearing. Stand, Aufidius,
And trouble not the peace.

CORIOLANUS

O that I had him,
With six Aufidiuses, or more, his tribe,
To use my lawful sword!

AUFIDIUS

155 Insolent villain!

ALL CONSPIRATORS

Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!

The Conspirators draw, and kill CORIOLANUS: AUFIDIUS stands on his body

LORDS

Hold, hold, hold, hold!

AUFIDIUS

My noble masters, hear me speak.

FIRST LORD

160 O Tullus,—

SECOND LORD

Thou hast done a deed whereat valour will weep.

THIRD LORD

Tread not upon him. Masters all, be quiet;
Put up your swords.

AUFIDIUS

My lords, when you shall know— as in this rage,
165 Provoked by him, you cannot— the great danger
Which this man's life did owe you, you'll rejoice
That he is thus cut off. Please it your honours
To call me to your senate, I'll deliver
Myself your loyal servant, or endure

AUFIDIUS

Why, noble lords, will you be brought to shame by this damned bragger who has won fortune by killing our people?

ALL CONSPIRATORS

Let him die for it.

ALL THE PEOPLE

[Shouting individually, all at once] Tear him to pieces! Do it now! He killed my son! He killed my daughter! He killed my cousin Marcus! He killed my father!

SECOND LORD

Peace, everyone! No outrage, peace! This man is noble and he is famous around the world. His crimes against us will be heard in a military trial. Stand aside, Aufidius, and don't trouble the peace.

CORIOLANUS

Oh that I had him, and six Aufidiuses more, on which to use my sword!

AUFIDIUS

You disrespectful villain!

ALL CONSPIRATORS

Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!

The CONSPIRATORS draw their weapons, and kill CORIOLANUS. AUFIDIUS stands over his dying body.

LORDS

Stop, stop, stop, stop!

AUFIDIUS

My noble masters, hear me speak.

FIRST LORD

Oh, Tullus—

SECOND LORD

You have done a deed at which all bravery weeps.

THIRD LORD

Do not stand over him. Sirs, be quiet. Sheath your swords.

AUFIDIUS

My lords, when you are more aware of the great danger this man's life posed to you, you'll be glad he's dead. If you want to call me to the senate, I'll go as your loyal servant, and there take your most serious condemnations.

Your heaviest censure.

FIRST LORD

Bear from hence his body;
And mourn you for him: let him be regarded
As the most noble corse that ever herald
Did follow to his urn.

SECOND LORD

175 His own impatience
Takes from Aufidius a great part of blame.
Let's make the best of it.

AUFIDIUS

My rage is gone;
And I am struck with sorrow. Take him up.
180 Help, three o' the chieftest soldiers; I'll be one.
Beat thou the drum, that it speak mournfully:
Trail your steel pikes. Though in this city he
Hath widow'd and unchilded many a one,
Which to this hour bewail the injury,
185 Yet he shall have a noble memory. Assist.

Exeunt, bearing the body of CORIOLANUS. A dead march sounded

FIRST LORD

Carry his body out of here, and mourn for him. Let him be
regarded as the most noble corse that bards will ever sing
about.

SECOND LORD

Coriolanus did provoke Aufidius, and so takes a great part
of the blame. Let's make the best of it.

AUFIDIUS

[Suddenly shocked by what he has done, and crying] My
rage is gone, and I am struck with sorrow. Pick him up.
Help, three of the strongest soldiers; I'll be one of the men
who carries him. Beat the drum in a mournful way. Drag
your pikes in the ground. Though he has made many
widows in this city, and though many mothers still wail at
their children which he killed, he will be noble in our
memories. Assist me.

*All exit, bearing the body of CORIOLANUS. A funeral march
is sounded.*

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