

Coriolanus

5.2

Enter Menenius to the Watch or guard

FIRST WATCHMAN Stay. Whence are you?

SECOND WATCHMAN Stand, and go back.

MENENIUS You guard like men; 'tis well.

But, by your leave, I am an officer

Of state, and come to speak with Coriolanus.

5

FIRST WATCHMAN From whence?

MENENIUS

From Rome.

FIRST WATCHMAN You may not pass, you must return.

Our general will no more hear from thence.

SECOND WATCHMAN

You'll see your Rome embraced with fire before

You'll speak with Coriolanus.

MENENIUS

Good my friends,

10

If you have heard your general talk of Rome

And of his friends there, it is lots to blanks

My name hath touched your ears. It is Menenius.

FIRST WATCHMAN

Be it so; go back. The virtue of your name

Is not here passable.

MENENIUS

I tell thee, fellow,

15

Thy general is my lover. I have been

The book of his good acts, whence men have read

His fame unparalleled happily amplified;

For I have ever verified my friends,

Of whom he's chief, with all the size that verity

20

Would without lapsing suffer. Nay, sometimes,

Like to a bowl upon a subtle ground,

I have tumbled past the throw, and in his praise

Have almost stamped the leasing. Therefore, fellow,

I must have leave to pass.

25

FIRST WATCHMAN Faith, sir, if you had told as many lies

in his 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 30
Menenius, always factionary on the party of your
general.

SECOND WATCHMAN 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. 35

MENENIUS Has he dined, canst thou tell? For I would not
speak with him till after dinner.

FIRST WATCHMAN You are a Roman, are you?

MENENIUS I am as thy general is.

FIRST WATCHMAN Then you should hate Rome as he does. 40
Can you, when you have pushed out your gates the
very defender of them, and in a violent popular
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 45
intercession of such a decayed dotant as you seem to
be? Can you think to blow out the 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 50
general has sworn you out of reprieve and pardon.

MENENIUS Sirrah, if thy captain knew I were here, he
would use me with estimation.

FIRST WATCHMAN Come, my captain knows you not.

MENENIUS I mean thy general. 55

FIRST WATCHMAN My general cares not for you. Back, I
say, go, lest I let forth your half pint of blood. Back.
That's the utmost of your having. Back.

MENENIUS Nay, but fellow, fellow±±

Enter Coriolanus with Aufidius

CORIOLANUS What's the matter? 60

MENENIUS (to First Watchman) Now, you companion, I'll
say an errand for you. You shall know now that I am
in estimation. You shall perceive that a jack guardant
cannot office me from my son Coriolanus. Guess but
by my entertainment with him if thou stand'st not i'th' 65
state of hanging, or of some death more long in
spectatorship and crueller in suffering. Behold now
presently, and swoon for what's to come upon thee.

(*To Coriolanus*) The glorious gods sit in hourly synod
about thy particular prosperity, and love thee no worse 70
than thy old father Menenius does! (*Weeping*) 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 being assured none but myself could move
thee, I have been blown out of our gates with sighs, 75
and conjure thee to pardon Rome and thy petitionary
countrymen. The good gods assuage thy wrath and
turn the dregs of it upon this varlet here, this, who
like a block hath denied my access to thee!

CORIOLANUS Away! 80

MENENIUS How? Away?

CORIOLANUS

Wife, mother, child, I know not. My affairs
Are servanted to others. Though I owe
My revenge properly, my remission lies
In Volscian breasts. That we have been familiar, 85
Ingrate forgetfulness shall poison rather
Than pity note how much. Therefore be gone.
Mine ears against your suits are stronger than
Your gates against my force. Yet, for I loved thee,
He gives him a letter

Take this along. I writ it for thy sake, 90
And would have sent it. Another word, Menenius,
I will not hear thee speak. ±± This man, Aufidius,
Was my beloved in Rome; yet thou behold'st.

AUFIDIUS You keep a constant temper.

Exeunt Coriolanus and Aufidius

FIRST WATCHMAN Now, sir, is your name Menenius? 95

SECOND WATCHMAN 'Tis a spell, you see, of much power.
You know the way home again.

FIRST WATCHMAN Do you hear how we are shent for
keeping your greatness back?

SECOND WATCHMAN What cause do you think I have to 100
swoon?

MENENIUS I neither care for th' world nor your general.
For such things as you, I can scarce think there's any,
you're so slight. He that hath a will to die by himself
fears it not from another. Let your general do his worst. 105

For you, be that you are long, and your misery increase
with your age. I say to you as I was said to, `Away!'

Exit

FIRST WATCHMAN A noble fellow, I warrant him.

SECOND WATCHMAN The worthy fellow is our general. He's
the rock, the oak, not to be wind-shaken.

110

Exeunt