

Coriolanus

3.1

Cornetts. Enter Coriolanus, Menenius, all the gentry; Cominius, 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 raid
Upon's again.

5

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

CORIOLANUS *(to Lartius)* Saw you Aufidius?

LARTIUS

On safeguard he came to me, and did curse
Against the Volsces for they had so vilely
Yielded the town. He is retired to Antium.

10

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 called your vanquisher.

15

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.

20

Enter Sicinius and Brutus

Behold, these are the tribunes of the people,
The tongues o'th' common mouth. I do despise them,

For they do prank them in authority
Against all noble sufferance. 25

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 The matter? 30

COMINIUS
Hath he not passed the noble and the common?

BRUTUS
Cominius, no.

CORIOLANUS Have I had children's voices?

[FIRST] SENATOR
Tribunes, give way. He shall to th' market-place.

BRUTUS
The people are incensed against him.

SICINIUS Stop,
Or all will fall in broil.

CORIOLANUS Are these your herd? 35
Must these have voices, that can yield them now
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
It is a purposed thing, and grows by plot 40
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.
The people cry you mocked them, and of late
When corn was given them gratis, you repined, 45
Scandalled the suppliants for the people, called them
Time-pleasers, flatterers, foes to nobleness.

CORIOLANUS
Why, this was known before.

BRUTUS Not to them all.

CORIOLANUS

Have you informed them sithence?

BRUTUS How, I inform them?

[CORIOLANUS]

You are like to do such business. 50

BRUTUS Not unlike

Each way to better yours.

CORIOLANUS

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

SICINIUS You show too much of that 55

For which the people stir. If you will pass
To where you are bound, you must enquire 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 Let's be calm. 60

COMINIUS

The people are abused, set on. This palt'ring
Becomes not Rome, nor has Coriolanus
Deserved this so dishonoured rub, laid falsely
I'th' plain way of his merit.

CORIOLANUS Tell me of corn?

This was my speech, and I will speak't again. 65

MENENIUS Not now, not now.

[FIRST] SENATOR Not in this heat, sir, now.

CORIOLANUS Now as I live,

I will. My nobler friends, I crave their pardons.
For the mutable rank-scented meinie, 70
Let them regard me, as I do not flatter,
And therein behold themselves. I say again,
In soothing them we nourish 'gainst our Senate
The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
Which we ourselves have ploughed for, sowed, and
scattered 75
By mingling them with us, the honoured number
Who lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that
Which they have given to beggars.

MENENIUS Well, no more.

[FIRST] SENATOR

No more words, we beseech you.

CORIO LANUS How, no more?
As for my country I have shed my blood, 80
Not fearing outward force, so shall my lungs
Coin words till their decay against those measles
Which we disdain should tetter us, yet sought
The very way to catch them.

BRUTUS
You speak o'th' people as if you were a god 85
To punish, not a man of their infirmity.

SICINIUS
'Twere well we let the people know't.

MENENIUS What, what, his
choler?

CORIO LANUS
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, 90
Not poison any further.

CORIO LANUS `Shall remain'?
Hear you this Triton of the minnows? Mark you
His absolute `shall'?

COMINIUS 'Twas from the canon.

CORIO LANUS `Shall'?
O good but most unwise patricians, why,
You grave but reckless senators, have you thus 95
Given Hydra here to choose an officer
That, with his peremptory `shall', being but
The horn and noise o'th' monster's, wants not spirit
To say he'll turn your current in a ditch
And make your channel his? If he have power, 100
Then vail your impotence; if none, awake
Your dangerous lenity. If you are learned,
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 105
When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste
Most palates theirs. They choose their magistrate,
And such a one as he, who puts his `shall',

His popular `shall', against a graver bench
Than ever frowned in Greece. By Jove himself, 110
It makes the consuls base, and my soul aches
To know, when two authorities are up,
Neither supreme, how soon confusion
May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take
The one by th' other.

COMINIUS Well, on to th' market-place. 115

CORIOLANUS

Whoever gave that counsel to give forth
The corn o'th' 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 nourished disobedience, fed 120
The ruin of the state.

BRUTUS Why shall the people give
One that speaks thus their voice?

CORIOLANUS I'll give my reasons,

More worthier than their voices. They know the corn
Was not our recompense, resting well assured
They ne'er did service for't. Being pressed to th' war, 125
Even when the navel of the state was touched,
They would not thread the gates. This kind of service
Did not deserve corn gratis. Being i'th' war,
Their mutinies and revolts, wherein they showed
Most valour, spoke not for them. Th'accusation 130
Which they have often made against the senate,
All cause unborn, could never be the native
Of our so frank donation. Well, what then?
How shall this bosom multiplied digest
The senate's courtesy? Let deeds express 135
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
The nature of our seats, and make the rabble
Call our cares fears, which will in time 140
Break ope the locks o'th' senate and bring in
The crows to peck the eagles.

MENENIUS

Come, enough.

BRUTUS

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, 145
Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
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 150
To unstable slightness. Purpose so barred, 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 155
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 160
Mangles true judgement, and bereaves the state
Of that integrity which should become't,
Not having the power to do the good it would
For th'ill which doth control't.

BRUTUS

He's said enough.

SICINIUS

He's spoken like a traitor, and shall answer 165
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
To th' greater bench? In a rebellion,
When what's not meet but what must be was law, 170
Then were they chosen. In a better hour
Let what is meet be said it must be meet,
And throw their power i'th' dust.

BRUTUS

Manifest treason.

SICINIUS

This a consul? No.

BRUTUS

The aediles, ho!
Enter an Aedile

Let him be apprehended.

175

SICINIUS

Go call the people,
[Exit Aedile]
(To Coriolanus) in whose name myself
Attach thee as a traitorous innovator,
A foe to th' public weal. Obey, I charge thee,
And follow to thine answer.

CORIOLANUS

Hence, old goat!

ALL [THE PATRICIANS]

We'll surety him.

COMINIUS *(to Sicinius)* Aged sir, hands off. 180

CORIOLANUS *(to Sicinius)*

Hence, rotten thing, or I shall shake thy bones
Out of thy garments.

SICINIUS

Help, ye citizens!

Enter a rabble of 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.

ALL [THE CITIZENS]

Down with him, down with him!

SECOND SENATOR

Weapons, weapons, weapons! 185

They all bustle about Coriolanus

[CITIZENS AND PATRICIANS] *[in dispersed cries]*

Tribunes! Patricians! Citizens! What ho!

Sicinius! Brutus! Coriolanus! Citizens!

[SOME CITIZENS AND PATRICIANS]

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

190

To th' people, Coriolanus, patience!

Speak, good Sicinius.

SICINIUS Hear me, people, peace.

ALL [THE CITIZENS] Let's hear our tribune! Peace! Speak, speak, speak!

SICINIUS
 You are at point to lose your liberties.
 Martius would have all from you±±Martius 195
 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
 What is the city but the people?

ALL [THE CITIZENS] True,
 The people are the city.

BRUTUS By the consent of all 200
 We were established the people's magistrates.

ALL [THE CITIZENS]
 You so remain.

MENENIUS And so are like to do.

[CORIOLANUS]
 That is the way to lay the city flat,
 To bring the roof to the foundation,
 And bury all which yet distinctly ranges 205
 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'th' people in whose power
 We were elected theirs, Martius is worthy 210
 Of present death.

SICINIUS Therefore lay hold of him,
 Bear him to th' rock Tarpeian; and from thence
 Into destruction cast him.

BRUTUS Aediles, seize him.

ALL THE CITIZENS
 Yield, Martius, yield.

MENENIUS Hear me one word.
 Beseech you, tribunes, hear me but a word. 215

AEDILES Peace, peace!

MENENIUS *(to the tribunes)*

Be that you seem, truly your country's friend,
And temp'rately proceed to what you would
Thus violently redress.

BRUTUS

Sir, those cold ways
That seem like prudent helps are very poisons 220
Where the disease is violent. Lay hands upon him,
And bear him to the rock.

Coriolanus draws his sword

CORIOLANUS

No, I'll die here.
There's some among you have beheld me fighting.
Come, try upon yourselves what you have seen me.

MENENIUS

Down with that sword. Tribunes, withdraw a while. 225

BRUTUS

Lay hands upon him.

MENENIUS

Help Martius, help!
You that be noble, help him, young and old.

ALL [THE CITIZENS]

Down with him, down with him!
*In this mutiny the tribunes, the Aediles, and the
people are beat in*

MENENIUS *(to Coriolanus)*

Go get you to your house. Be gone, away!
All will be naught else.

SECOND SENATOR *(to Coriolanus)* Get you gone. 230

[CORIOLANUS]

Stand fast; we have as many friends as enemies.

MENENIUS

Shall it be put to that?

[FIRST] SENATOR

The gods forbid!
(To Coriolanus) I prithee, noble friend, home to thy
house.

Leave us to cure this cause.

MENENIUS

For 'tis a sore upon us
You cannot tent yourself. Be gone, beseech you. 235

[COMINIUS]

Come, sir, along with us.

[CORIOLANUS]

I would they were barbarians, as they are,
Though in Rome littered; not Romans, as they are
not,

Though calved i'th' porch o'th' Capitol.

[MENENIUS] Be gone. 240

Put not your worthy rage into your tongue.
One time will owe another.

CORIOLANUS On fair ground
I could beat forty of them.

MENENIUS I could myself
Take up a brace o'th' best of them, yea, the two
tribunes.

COMINIUS
But now 'tis odds beyond arithmetic,
And manhood is called foolery when it stands 245
Against a falling fabric.
(*To Coriolanus*) Will you hence
Before the tag return, whose rage doth rend
Like interrupted waters, and o'erbear
What they are used to bear?

MENENIUS (*to Coriolanus*) Pray you be gone.
I'll try whether my old wit be in request 250
With those that have but little. This must be patched
With cloth of any colour.

COMINIUS Nay, come away.
Exeunt Coriolanus and Cominius

A PATRICIAN This man has marred his fortune.

MENENIUS
His nature is too noble for the world. 255
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident
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

work. 260

A PATRICIAN
I would they were abed.

MENENIUS I would they were in Tiber.
What the vengeance, could he not speak 'em fair?
Enter Brutus and Sicinius, with the rabble again

SICINIUS Where is this viper

Here's goodly

That would depopulate the city and
 Be every man himself?

MENENIUS You worthy tribunes±± 265

SICINIUS
 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 naught.

FIRST CITIZEN He shall well know 270
 The noble tribunes are the people's mouths,
 And we their hands.

ALL [THE CITIZENS] He shall, sure on't.

MENENIUS
 Sir, sir.

SICINIUS Peace!

MENENIUS
 Do not cry havoc where you should but hunt
 With modest warrant.

SICINIUS Sir, how comes't that you 275
 Have help to make this rescue?

MENENIUS Hear me speak.
 As I do know the consul's worthiness,
 So can I name his faults.

SICINIUS Consul? What consul?

MENENIUS The consul Coriolanus. 280

BRUTUS He consul?

ALL [THE CITIZENS] 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 285
 Than so much loss of time.

SICINIUS Speak briefly, then,
 For we are peremptory to dispatch
 This viperous traitor. To eject him hence
 Were but our danger, and to keep him here
 Our certain death. Therefore it is decreed 290
 He dies tonight.

MENENIUS Now the good gods forbid

That our renowneÁd Rome, whose gratitude
Towards her deserveÁd children is enrolled
In Jove's own book, like an unnatural dam
Should now eat up her own!

295

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?
Killing our enemies, the blood he hath lost±± 300
Which I dare vouch is more than that he hath
By many an ounce±±he dropped it for his country;
And what is left, to lose it by his country
Were to us all that do't and suffer it
A brand to th' end o'th' world.

SICINIUS

This is clean cam. 305

BRUTUS

Merely awry. When he did love his country
It honoured him.

[**SICINIUS**] The service of the foot,
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, 310
Lest his infection, being of catching nature,
Spread further.

MENENIUS One word more, one word!

This tiger-footed rage, when it shall find
The harm of unscanned swiftness, will too late
Tie leaden pounds to's heels. Proceed by process, 315
Lest parties±±as he is beloved±±break out
And sack great Rome with Romans.

BRUTUS If it were so?

SICINIUS (to Menenius) What do ye talk?

Have we not had a taste of his obedience: 320
Our aediles smote, ourselves resisted? Come.

MENENIUS

Consider this: he has been bred i'th' wars
Since a could draw a sword, and is ill-schooled

In bolted language. Meal and bran together
He throws without distinction. Give me leave, 325
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
Will prove too bloody, and the end of it 330
Unknown to the beginning.

SICINIUS Noble Menenius,
Be you then as the people's officer.
(*To the Citizens*) Masters, lay down your weapons.

BRUTUS
Go not home.

SICINIUS
Meet on the market-place. (*To Menenius*) We'll attend
you there,
Where if you bring not Martius, we'll proceed 335
In our first way.

MENENIUS I'll bring him to you.
(*To the Senators*) Let me desire your company. He must
come,
Or what is worst will follow.

[FIRST] SENATOR Pray you, let's to him.
Exeunt [tribunes and Citizens at one door,
Patricians at another door]