

# Coriolanus

## 1.1

*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? 5

**ALL** Resolved, resolved.

**FIRST CITIZEN** First, you know Caius Martius 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? 10

**ALL** 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 particularize 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. 15 20

**SECOND CITIZEN** Would you proceed especially against Caius Martius? 25

**[THIRD CITIZEN]** Against him first.

**[FOURTH CITIZEN]** He's a very dog to the commonalty.

**SECOND CITIZEN** Consider you what services he has done for his country?

**FIRST CITIZEN** Very well, and could be content to give him good report for't, but that he pays himself with being proud. 30

**[FIFTH 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 35  
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 to the altitude of his virtue.

**SECOND CITIZEN** What he cannot help in his nature you  
account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is 40  
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*

What shouts are these? The other side o'th' city is 45  
risen. Why stay we prating here? To th' Capitol!

**ALL** Come, come.

*Enter Menenius*

**FIRST CITIZEN** Soft, who comes here?

**SECOND CITIZEN** Worthy Menenius Agrippa, one that hath  
always loved the people. 50

**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** Our business is not unknown to th' senate. 55  
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**

Why, masters, my good friends, mine honest  
neighbours, 60  
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,  
Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well 65  
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  
Appear in your impediment. For the dearth, 70  
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  
The helms o'th' state, who care for you like fathers, 75  
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 80  
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** Either you must 85  
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  
To stale't a little more. 90

**[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,  
Rebelled against the belly, thus accused it: 95  
That only like a gulf it did remain  
I'th' midst o'th' body, idle and unactive,  
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing  
Like labour with the rest; where th'other instruments  
Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel, 100  
And, mutually participate, did minister  
Unto the appetite and affection common  
Of the whole body. The belly answered±±

**[FIRST] CITIZEN**  
Well, sir, what answer made the belly?

**MENENIUS**

Sir, I shall tell you. With a kind of smile, 105  
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 th' discontented members, the mutinous parts  
That envied his receipt; even so most fitly 110  
As you malign our senators for that  
They are not such as you.

[FIRST] CITIZEN Your belly's answer±±what?  
The kingly crowneÁd head, the vigilant eye,  
The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,  
Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter, 115  
With other muniments and petty helps  
In this our fabric, if that they±±

MENENIUS What then?  
Fore me, this fellow speaks! What then? What then?

[FIRST] CITIZEN  
Should by the cormorant belly be restrained,  
Who is the sink o'th' body±±

MENENIUS Well, what then? 120

[FIRST] CITIZEN  
The former agents, if they did complain,  
What could the belly answer?

MENENIUS I will tell you,  
If you'll bestow a small of what you have little±±  
Patience±±a while, you'st hear the belly's answer.

[FIRST] CITIZEN  
You're long about it.

MENENIUS Note me this, good friend: 125  
Your most grave belly was deliberate,  
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answered:  
`True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,  
`That I receive the general food at first  
Which you do live upon, and fit it is, 130  
Because I am the storehouse 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 th' seat o'th' brain;  
And through the cranks and offices of man 135  
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±±

**[FIRST] CITIZEN**

Ay, sir, well, well.

**MENENIUS**                   `Though all at once cannot                   140  
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  
And leave me but the bran.' What say you to't?

**[FIRST] CITIZEN**

It was an answer. How apply you this?                   145

**MENENIUS**

The senators of Rome are this good belly,  
And you the mutinous members. For examine  
Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly  
Touching the weal o'th' common, you shall find  
No public benefit which you receive                   150  
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?

**[FIRST] CITIZEN**

I the great toe? Why the great toe?

**MENENIUS**

For that, being one o'th' lowest, basest, poorest                   155  
Of this most wise rebellion, thou goest foremost.  
Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,  
Lead'st first to win some vantage.  
But make you ready your stiff bats and clubs.  
Rome and her rats are at the point of battle.                   160  
The one side must have bale.

*Enter Martius*

Hail, noble

Martius!

**MARTIUS**

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.

**MARTIUS**

He that will give good words to thee will flatter 165

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, 170  
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  
Deserves your hate, and your affections are 175  
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?

With every minute you do change a mind, 180  
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,  
Under the gods, keep you in awe, which else 185  
Would feed on one another?

(*To Menenius*) What's their seeking?

**MENENIUS**

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

**MARTIUS** Hang 'em! They say?

They'll sit by th' fire and presume to know  
What's done i'th' Capitol, who's like to rise, 190  
Who thrives and who declines; side factions and give  
out

Conjectural marriages, making parties strong  
And feebling such as stand not in their liking  
Below their cobbled shoes. They say there's grain  
enough!

Would the nobility lay aside their ruth 195  
And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry  
With thousands of these quartered slaves as high  
As I could pitch my lance.

**MENENIUS**

Nay, these are all most thoroughly persuaded,  
For though abundantly they lack discretion, 200  
Yet are they passing cowardly. But I beseech you,  
What says the other troop?

**MARTIUS** They are dissolved. Hang 'em.  
They said they were an-hungry, sighed forth  
    proverbs±±  
That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,  
That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent  
    not 205  
Corn for the rich men only. With these shreds  
They vented their complainings, which being  
    answered,  
And a petition granted them±±a strange one,  
To break the heart of generosity  
And make bold power look pale±±they threw their caps 210  
As they would hang them on the horns o'th' moon,  
Shouting their emulation.

**MENENIUS** What is granted them?

**MARTIUS**  
Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,  
Of their own choice. One's Junius Brutus,  
Sicinius Velutus, and I know not. 'Sdeath, 215  
The rabble should have first unroofed the city  
Ere so prevailed with me! It will in time  
Win upon power and throw forth greater themes  
For insurrection's arguing.

**MENENIUS** This is strange. 220

**MARTIUS** *(to the Citizens)* Go get you home, you fragments.  
    *Enter a Messenger hastily*

**MESSENGER** Where's Caius Martius?

**MARTIUS** Here. What's the matter?

**MESSENGER**

The news is, sir, the Volscies are in arms.

**MARTIUS**

I am glad on't. Then we shall ha' means to vent 225  
Our musty superfluity.

*Enter Sicinius, Brutus, Cominius, Lartius, with  
    other Senators*

See, our best elders.

**FIRST SENATOR**

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

**MARTIUS** They have a leader,  
Tullus Aufidius, that will put you to't.  
I sin in envying his nobility, 230  
And were I anything but what I am,  
I would wish me only he.

**COMINIUS** You have fought together!

**MARTIUS**

Were half to half the world by th' ears and he  
Upon my party, I'd revolt to make  
Only my wars with him. He is a lion 235  
That I am proud to hunt.

**FIRST SENATOR** Then, worthy Martius,  
Attend upon Cominius to these wars.

**COMINIUS** (*to Martius*)  
It is your former promise.

**MARTIUS** Sir, it is,  
And I am constant. Titus Lartius, thou  
Shalt see me once more strike at Tullus' face. 240  
What, art thou stiff? Stand'st out?

**LARTIUS** No, Caius Martius.  
I'll lean upon one crutch and fight with th'other  
Ere stay behind this business.

**MENENIUS** O true bred!

**[FIRST] SENATOR**

Your company to th' Capitol, where I know  
Our greatest friends attend us.

**LARTIUS** (*to Cominius*) Lead you on. 245  
(*To Martius*) Follow Cominius. We must follow you,  
Right worthy your priority.

**COMINIUS** Noble Martius.

**[FIRST] SENATOR** (*to the Citizens*)  
Hence to your homes, be gone.

**MARTIUS** Nay, let them follow.  
The Volsces have much corn. Take these rats thither  
To gnaw their garners.

*Citizens steal away*

Worshipful mutineers,



250

Your valour puts well forth. (*To the Senators*) Pray  
follow.

*Exeunt all but Sicinius and Brutus*

**SICINIUS**

Was ever man so proud as is this Martius?

**BRUTUS** He has no equal.

**SICINIUS**

When we were chosen tribunes for the people±±

**BRUTUS**

Marked you his lip and eyes?

**SICINIUS** Nay, but his taunts. 255

**BRUTUS**

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

**SICINIUS** Bemock the modest moon.

**BRUTUS**

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

**SICINIUS**

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

260

**BRUTUS** Fame, at the which he aims±±  
In whom already he's well graced±±cannot  
Better be held nor more attained than by 265  
A place below the first; for what miscarries  
Shall be the general's fault, though he perform  
To th' utmost of a man, and giddy censure  
Will then cry out of Martius `O, if he  
Had born the business!'

**SICINIUS** Besides, if things go well, 270  
Opinion, that so sticks on Martius, shall  
Of his demerits rob Cominius.

**BRUTUS**

Come,  
Half all Cominius' honours are to Martius,  
Though Martius earned them not; and all his faults  
To Martius shall be honours, though indeed 275  
In aught he merit not.

**SICINIUS** 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**

Let's along.

*Exeunt*