

# Coriolanus

## 1.3

*Enter Volumnia and Virgilia, mother and wife to Martius. 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- 5 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 how honour would become such a person±±that it was no better 10 than, picture-like, to hang by th' 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 15 hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

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

**VOLUMNIA** Then his good report should have been my 20 son. I 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 Martius', I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action. 25

*Enter a Gentlewoman*

**GENTLEWOMAN** Madam, the Lady Valeria is come to visit you.

**VIRGILIA** (to Volumnia) Beseech you give me leave to retire myself.

**VOLUMNIA** Indeed you shall not. 30  
Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum,  
See him pluck Aufidius down by th' hair;

As children from a bear, the Volsces shunning him.  
Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:  
`Come on, you cowards, you were got in fear 35  
Though you were born in Rome!' His bloody brow  
With his mailed hand then wiping, forth he goes,  
Like to a harvest-man that's tasked to mow  
Or all or lose his hire.

**VIRGILIA**

His bloody brow? O Jupiter, no blood! 40

**VOLUMNIA**

Away, you fool! It more becomes a man  
Than gilt his trophy. The breasts of Hecuba  
When she did suckle Hector looked not lovelier  
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood  
At Grecian sword, contemning.  
(*To the Gentlewoman*) Tell Valeria 45  
We are fit to bid her welcome.  
*Exit Gentlewoman*

**VIRGILIA**

Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius!

**VOLUMNIA**

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

*Enter Valeria, with an usher and the Gentlewoman*

**VALERIA** My ladies both, good day to you. 50

**VOLUMNIA** Sweet madam.

**VIRGILIA** I am glad to see your ladyship.

**VALERIA** How do you both? You are manifest  
housekeepers. What are you sewing here? A fine spot,  
in good faith. How does your little son? 55

**VIRGILIA**

I thank your ladyship; well, good madam.

**VOLUMNIA** He had rather see the swords and hear a drum  
than look upon his schoolmaster.

**VALERIA** O' my word, the father's son! I'll swear 'tis a  
very pretty boy. O' my troth, I looked upon him o' 60  
Wednesday half an hour together. He's such a  
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

up again, caught it again. Or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it! 65  
O, I warrant, how he mammocked it!

**VOLUMNIA** One on's father's moods.

**VALERIA** Indeed, la, 'tis a noble child.

**VIRGILIA** A crack, madam. 70

**VALERIA** Come, lay aside your stitchery. I must have you play the idle housewife with me this afternoon.

**VIRGILIA** No, good madam, I will not out of doors.

**VALERIA** Not out of doors?

**VOLUMNIA** She shall, she shall. 75

**VIRGILIA** 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 80 with my prayers, but I cannot go thither.

**VOLUMNIA** Why, I pray you?

**VIRGILIA** '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 85 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. 90

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

**VIRGILIA** O, good madam, there can be none yet.

**VALERIA** Verily, I do not jest with you: there came news from him last night. 95

**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 Corioles. 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 everything hereafter.

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**VOLUMNIA** *(to Valeria)* Let her alone, lady. As she is now  
she will but disease our better mirth.

**VALERIA** In truth, 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. 110

**VIRGILIA** No, at a word, madam. Indeed, I must not. I  
wish you much mirth.

**VALERIA** Well then, farewell.

*Exeunt [Valeria, Volumnia, and usher at one  
door, Virgilia and Gentlewoman at another door]*