

Coriolanus

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*Enter Menenius with the two tribunes of the people,
Sicinius and Brutus*

MENENIUS The augurer tells me we shall have news
tonight.

BRUTUS Good or bad?

MENENIUS Not according to the prayer of the people, for
they love not Martius. 5

SICINIUS 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 Martius. 10

BRUTUS He's a lamb indeed that baas 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.

SICINIUS AND BRUTUS Well, sir? 15

MENENIUS In what enormity is Martius 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. 20

MENENIUS This is strange now. Do you two know how
you are censured here in the city±±I mean of us o'th'
right-hand file. Do you?

SICINIUS AND BRUTUS Why, how are we censured?

MENENIUS Because±±you talk of pride now±±will you not 25
be angry?

SICINIUS AND BRUTUS 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 30
you in being so. You blame Martius for being proud?

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!

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SICINIUS AND BRUTUS What then, sir?

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

SICINIUS Menenius, you are known well enough too. 45

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 Lyncurguses±±if the drink you give me
touch my palate adversely, I make a crooked face at 55
it. I cannot 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 have good faces.
If you see this in the map of my microcosm, follows it
that I am known well enough too? What harm can
your bisson conspectuities glean out of this character,
if I be known well enough too?

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BRUTUS Come, sir, come, we know you well enough. 65

MENENIUS You know neither me, yourselves, nor anything.
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 faucet-seller, and
then rejourn the controversy of threepence to a 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

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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 benchman 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 'Martius is proud', who, in a cheap estimation, is worth all your predecessors since Deucalion, though peradventure some of the best of 'em were hereditary hangmen. Good e'en 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

He leaves Brutus and Sicinius, who stand aside.
Enter in haste Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria

How now, my as fair as noble ladies—and the moon, were she earthly, no nobler—whither do you follow your eyes so fast? 95

VOLUMNIA Honourable Menenius, my boy Martius approaches. For the love of Juno, let's go.

MENENIUS Ha, Martius coming home? 100

VOLUMNIA Ay, worthy Menenius, and with most prosperous approbation.

MENENIUS *[throwing up his cap]* Take my cap, Jupiter, and I thank thee! Hoo, Martius coming home?

VIRGILIA AND VALERIA Nay, 'tis true. 105

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? 110

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

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 empiric and, to this preservative, of no better 115 report than a horse-drench. Is he not wounded? He was wont to come home wounded.

VIRILIA 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 120 victory in his pocket, the wounds become him.

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 125 Aufidius got off.

MENENIUS And 'twas time for him too, I'll warrant him that. An he had stayed by him, I would not have been so fidiussed for all the chests in Corioles 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 In truth, there's wondrous things spoke of him. 135

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

VIRILIA The gods grant them true.

VOLUMNIA True? Pooh-who!

MENENIUS True? I'll be sworn they are true. Where is he 140 wounded? *(To the tribunes)* God save your good worships. Martius is coming home. He has more cause to be proud. *(To Volumnia)* Where is he wounded?

VOLUMNIA I'th' shoulder and i'th' left arm. There will be large cicatrices to show the people when he shall stand 145 for his place. He received in the repulse of Tarquin seven hurts i'th' body.

MENENIUS One i'th' neck and two i'th' thigh±±there's nine that I know.

VOLUMNIA He had before this last expedition twenty-five 150 wounds upon him.

MENENIUS Now it's twenty-seven. Every gash was an

enemy's grave.

A shout and flourish

Hark, the trumpets.

VOLUMNIA These are the ushers of Martius. Before him 155
he carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.
Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie,
Which being advanced, declines; and then men die.

*Trumpets sound a sennet. Enter [in state] Cominius
the general and Lartius, between them Coriolanus,
crowned with an oaken garland, with captains and
soldiers and a Herald*

HERALD

Know, Rome, that all alone Martius did fight
Within Corioles' gates, where he hath won 160
With fame a name to `Martius Caius'; these
In honour follows `Coriolanus'.
Welcome to Rome, renowneÁd Coriolanus!
A flourish sounds

ALL

Welcome to Rome, renowneÁd Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS

No more of this, it does offend my heart. 165
Pray now, no more.

COMINIUS Look, sir, your mother.

CORIOLANUS (to Volumnia) O,
You have, I know, petitioned all the gods
For my prosperity!
He kneels

VOLUMNIA Nay, my good soldier, up,
My gentle Martius, worthy Caius,
[He rises]

And, by deed-achieving honour newly named±± 170
What is it?±±`Coriolanus' must I call thee?
But O, thy wife!

CORIOLANUS (to Virgilia) My gracious silence, hail.
Wouldst thou have laughed had I come confined
home,
That weep'st to see me triumph? Ah, my dear,
Such eyes the widows in Corioles wear, 175
And mothers that lack sons.

MENENIUS Now the gods crown thee!

[CORIOLANUS] *(to Valeria)*

And live you yet? O my sweet lady, pardon.

VOLUMNIA

I know not where to turn. O, welcome home!

And welcome, general, and you're welcome all!

MENENIUS

A hundred thousand welcomes! I could weep 180

And I could laugh, I am light and heavy. Welcome!

A curse begnaw at very root on's heart

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 185

Be grafted to your relish. Yet welcome, warriors!

We call a nettle but a nettle, and

The faults of fools but folly.

COMINIUS Ever right.

CORIOLANUS Menenius, ever, ever. 190

HERALD

Give way there, and go on.

CORIOLANUS *[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 I have lived 195

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 Know, good mother,

I had rather be their servant in my way 200

Than sway with them in theirs.

COMINIUS On, to the Capitol.

*A flourish of cornetts. Exeunt in state, as before, all
but Brutus and Sicinius, who come forward*

BRUTUS

All tongues speak of him, and the bleareÁd sights

Are spectacled to see him. Your prattling nurse

Into a rapture lets her baby cry

While she chats him; the kitchen malkin pins 205
 Her richest lockram 'bout her reechy neck,
 Clamb'ring the walls to eye him. Stalls, bulks, windows
 Are smothered up, leads filled and ridges horsed
 With variable complexions, all agreeing
 In earnestness to see him. Seld-shown flamens 210
 Do press among the popular throngs, and puff
 To win a vulgar station. Our veiled dames
 Commit the war of white and damask in
 Their nicely guarded cheeks to th' wanton spoil
 Of Phoebus' burning kisses. Such a pother 215
 As if that whatsoever god who leads him
 Were slily crept into his human powers
 And gave him graceful posture.

SICINIUS On the sudden
 I warrant him consul.

BRUTUS Then our office may
 During his power go sleep. 220

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

BRUTUS In that there's comfort.

SICINIUS
 Doubt not
 The commoners, for whom we stand, but they
 Upon their ancient malice will forget 225
 With the least cause these his new honours, which
 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'th' market-place nor on him put 230
 The napless vesture of humility,
 Nor, showing, as the manner is, his wounds
 To th' people, beg their stinking breaths.

SICINIUS 'Tis right.

BRUTUS
 It was his word. O, he would miss it rather
 Than carry it, but by the suit of the gentry to him, 235

And the desire of the nobles.

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

BRUTUS '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 240
To him, or our authority's for an end.
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 245
In human action and capacity
Of no more soul nor fitness for the world
Than camels in their war, who have their provand
Only for bearing burdens, and sore blows
For sinking under them.

SICINIUS This, as you say, suggested 250
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 255
Shall darken him for ever.

Enter a Messenger

BRUTUS What's the matter?

MESSENGER
You are sent for to the Capitol. 'Tis thought
That Martius shall be consul. I have seen
The dumb men throng to see him, and the blind
To hear him speak. Matrons flung gloves, 260
Ladies and maids their scarves and handkerchiefs,
Upon him as he passed. The nobles bended
As to Jove's statue, and the commons made
A shower and thunder with their caps and shouts.
I never saw the like.

BRUTUS Let's to the Capitol, 265
And carry with us ears and eyes for th' time,

But hearts for the event.

SICINIUS

Have with you.

Exeunt