

Coriolanus

5.3

Enter Coriolanus and Aufidius, with Volscian soldiers. [Coriolanus and Aufidius sit]

CORIOLANUS

We will before the walls of Rome tomorrow
Set down our host. My partner in this action,
You must report to th' Volscian lords how plainly
I have borne this business.

AUFIDIUS

Only their ends

You have respected, stopped your ears against 5
The general suit of Rome, never admitted
A private whisper, no, not with such friends
That thought them sure of you.

CORIOLANUS

This last old man,

Whom with a cracked heart I have sent to Rome,
Loved me above the measure of a father, 10
Nay, godded me indeed. Their latest refuge
Was to send him, for whose old love I have±±
Though I showed sourly to him±±once more offered
The first conditions, which they did refuse
And cannot now accept, to grace him only 15
That thought he could do more. A very little
I have yielded to. Fresh embassies and suits,
Nor from the state nor private friends, hereafter
Will I lend ear to.

Shout within

Ha, what shout is this?

Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow 20
In the same time 'tis made? I will not.

*Enter Virgilia, Volumnia, Valeria, Young Martius,
with attendants*

My wife comes foremost, then the honoured mould
Wherein this trunk was framed, and in her hand
The grandchild to her blood. But out, affection!
All bond and privilege of nature break; 25
Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.

[Virgilia] curtsies

What is that curtsy worth? Or those dove's eyes
Which can make gods forsworn? I melt, and am not
Of stronger earth than others.

Volumnia bows

My

mother bows,

As if Olympus to a molehill should 30
In supplication nod; and my young boy
Hath an aspect of intercession which
Great nature cries `Deny not'.±±Let the Volsces
Plough Rome and harrow Italy! I'll never
Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand 35
As if a man were author of himself
And knew no other kin.

VIRGILIA My lord and husband.

CORIOLANUS

These eyes are not the same I wore in Rome.

VIRGILIA

The sorrow that delivers us thus changed
Makes you think so.

CORIOLANUS Like a dull actor now 40

I have forgot my part, and I am out
Even to a full disgrace. *[Rising]* Best of my flesh,
Forgive my tyranny, but do not say
For that `Forgive our Romans'.

[Virgilia kisses him]

O, a kiss

Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge! 45
Now, by the jealous queen of heaven, that kiss
I carried from thee, dear, and my true lip
Hath virgined it e'er since. You gods, I prate,
And the most noble mother of the world
Leave unsaluted! Sink, my knee, i'th' earth. 50

He kneels

Of thy deep duty more impression show
Than that of common sons.

VOLUMNIA O, stand up blest,

[Coriolanus rises]

Whilst with no softer cushion than the flint
I kneel before thee, and improperly

Show duty as mistaken all this while
Between the child and parent. 55

She kneels

CORIO LANUS What's this?
Your knees to me? To your corrected son?

[He raises her]

Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
Fillip the stars; then let the mutinous winds
Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun, 60
Murd'ring impossibility to make
What cannot be slight work.

VOLUMNIA Thou art my warrior.
I help to frame thee. Do you know this lady?

CORIO LANUS
The noble sister of Publicola,
The moon of Rome, chaste as the icicle 65
That's candied by the frost from purest snow
And hangs on Dian's temple±±dear Valeria!

VOLUMNIA (*showing Coriolanus his son*)
This is a poor epitome of yours,
Which by th' interpretation of full time
May show like all yourself.

CORIO LANUS (*to Young Martius*) The god of soldiers, 70
With the consent of supreme Jove, inform
Thy thoughts with nobleness, that thou mayst prove
To shame invulnerable, and stick i'th' wars
Like a great sea-mark standing every flaw
And saving those that eye thee! 75

VOLUMNIA (*to Young Martius*) Your knee, sirrah.
[Young Martius kneels]

CORIO LANUS That's my brave boy.

VOLUMNIA
Even he, your wife, this lady, and myself
Are suitors to you.

CORIO LANUS I beseech you, peace.
Or if you'd ask, remember this before: 80
The things I have forsworn to grant may never
Be held by you denials. Do not bid me
Dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate
Again with Rome's mechanics. Tell me not

Wherein I seem unnatural. Desire not t'allay 85
My rages and revenges with your colder reasons.

VOLUMNIA O, no more, no more!

You have said you will not grant us anything±±
For we have nothing else to ask but that
Which you deny already. Yet we will ask, 90
That, if you fail in our request, the blame
May hang upon your hardness. Therefore hear us.

CORIOLANUS

Aufidius and you Volscies, mark, for we'll
Hear naught from Rome in private.
[He sits]

Your request?

VOLUMNIA

Should we be silent and not speak, our raiment
And state of bodies would bewray what life
We have led since thy exile. Think with thyself
How more unfortunate than all living women
Are we come hither, since that thy sight, which should
Make our eyes flow with joy, hearts dance with
 comforts, 100
Constrains them weep and shake with fear and
 sorrow,

Making the mother, wife, and child to see
The son, the husband, and the father tearing
His country's bowels out; and to poor we
Thine enmity's most capital. Thou barr'st us
Our prayers to the gods, which is a comfort
That all but we enjoy. For how can we,

Alas, how can we for our country pray,
 Whereto we are bound, together with thy victory,
 Whereto we are bound? Alack, or we must lose
 The country, our dear nurse, or else thy person,
 Our comfort in the country. We must find
 An evident calamity, though we had
 Our wish which side should win. For either thou
 Must as a foreign recreant be led
 With manacles thorough our streets, or else
 Triumphantly tread on thy country's ruin,

Must as a foreign recreant be led 115
With manacles thorough our streets, or else
Triumphantly tread on thy country's ruin,

And bear the palm for having bravely shed
Thy wife and children's blood. For myself, son,
I purpose not to wait on fortune till 120
These wars determine. If I cannot persuade thee
Rather to show a noble grace to both parts
Than seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner
March to assault thy country than to tread±±
Trust to't, thou shalt not±±on thy mother's womb 125
That brought thee to this world.

VIRGILIA Ay, and mine,
That brought you forth this boy to keep your name
Living to time.

YOUNG MARTIUS A shall not tread on me.
I'll run away till I am bigger, but then I'll fight.

CORIOLANUS
Not of a woman's tenderness to be 130
Requires nor child nor woman's face to see.
I have sat too long.

[He rises and turns away]

VOLUMNIA Nay, go not from us thus.
If it were so that our request did tend
To save the Romans, thereby to destroy
The Volsces whom you serve, you might condemn us 135
As poisonous of your honour. No, our suit
Is that you reconcile them: while the Volsces
May say 'This mercy we have showed', the Romans
'This we received', and each in either side
Give the all-hail to thee and cry 'Be blest 140
For making up this peace!' Thou know'st, great son,
The end of war's uncertain; but this certain,
That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name
Whose repetition will be dogged with curses, 145
Whose chronicle thus writ: 'The man was noble,
But with his last attempt he wiped it out,
Destroyed his country, and his name remains
To th' ensuing age abhorred.' Speak to me, son.
Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour, 150
To imitate the graces of the gods,
To tear with thunder the wide cheeks o'th' air,

And yet to charge thy sulphur with a bolt
 That should but rive an oak. Why dost not speak?
 Think'st thou it honourable for a noble man 155
 Still to remember wrongs? Daughter, speak you,
 He cares not for your weeping. Speak thou, boy.
 Perhaps thy childishness will move him more
 Than can our reasons. There's no man in the world
 More bound to's mother, yet here he lets me prate 160
 Like one i'th' stocks. Thou hast never in thy life
 Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
 When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
 Has clucked thee to the wars and safely home,
 Loaden with honour. Say my request's unjust, 165
 And spurn me back. But if it be not so,
 Thou art not honest, and the gods will plague thee
 That thou restrain'st from me the duty which
 To a mother's part belongs.±±He turns away.
 Down, ladies. Let us shame him with our knees. 170
 To his surname `Coriolanus' 'longs more pride
 Than pity to our prayers. Down! An end.
 This is the last.

The ladies and Young Martius kneel

So we will home to Rome,
 And die among our neighbours.±±Nay, behold's.
 This boy, that cannot tell what he would have, 175
 But kneels and holds up hands for fellowship,
 Does reason our petition with more strength
 Than thou hast to deny't.±±Come, let us go.
 This fellow had a Volscian to his mother.
 His wife is in Corioles, and this child 180
 Like him by chance.±±Yet give us our dispatch.
 I am hushed until our city be afire,
 And then I'll speak a little.

He holds her by the hand, silent

CORIOLANUS O mother, mother!
 What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
 The gods look down, and this unnatural scene 185
 They laugh at. O my mother, mother, O!
 You have won a happy victory to Rome;
 But for your son, believe it, O believe it,

Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come. 190

[The ladies and Young Martius rise]

Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars,
I'll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius,
Were you in my stead would you have heard
A mother less, or granted less, Aufidius?

AUFIDIUS

I was moved withal.

CORIOLANUS I dare be sworn you were. 195

And, sir, it is no little thing to make
Mine eyes to sweat compassion. But, good sir,
What peace you'll make, advise me. For my part,
I'll not to Rome; I'll back with you, and pray you
Stand to me in this cause. ±±O mother! Wife! 200

AUFIDIUS *(aside)*

I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour
At difference in thee. Out of that I'll work
Myself a former fortune.

CORIOLANUS *(to Volumnia and Virgilia)* Ay, by and by.

But we will drink together, and you shall bear
A better witness back than words, which we 205
On like conditions will have counter-sealed.
Come, enter with us. Ladies, you deserve
To have a temple built you. All the swords
In Italy, and her confederate arms,
Could not have made this peace. 210

Exeunt