

# Coriolanus

## 2.3

*Enter seven or eight Citizens*

**FIRST CITIZEN** Once, if he do require our voices we ought not to deny him.

**SECOND CITIZEN** We may, sir, if we will.

**THIRD CITIZEN** We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do. For if he 5 show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them; so if he tell us his noble deeds we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a 10 monster of the multitude, of the which we, being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members.

**FIRST CITIZEN** And to make us no better thought of, a little help will serve; for once we stood up about the 15 corn, he himself stuck not to call us the many-headed multitude.

**THIRD CITIZEN** We have been called so of many, not that our heads are some brown, some black, some abram, some bald, but that our wits are so diversely coloured; 20 and truly I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, north, south, and their consent of one direct way should be at once to all the points o'th' compass.

**SECOND CITIZEN** Think you so? Which way do you judge 25 my wit would fly?

**THIRD CITIZEN** Nay, your wit will not so soon out as another man's will, 'tis strongly wedged up in a blockhead. But if it were at liberty, 'twould sure southward. 30

**SECOND CITIZEN** Why that way?

**THIRD CITIZEN** To lose itself in a fog where, being three parts melted away with rotten dews, the fourth would return for conscience' sake, to help to get thee a wife.

**SECOND CITIZEN** You are never without your tricks. You 35

may, you may.

**THIRD CITIZEN** Are you all resolved to give your voices?  
But that's no matter, the greater part carries it. I say,  
if he would incline to the people there was never a  
worthier man. 40

*Enter Coriolanus in a gown of humility, with  
Menenius*

Here he comes, and in the gown of humility. Mark his  
behaviour. We are not to stay all together, but to come  
by him where he stands by ones, by twos, and by  
threes. He's to make his requests by particulars, wherein  
every one of us has a single honour in giving him our 45  
own voices with our own tongues. Therefore follow  
me, and I'll direct you how you shall go by him.

**ALL THE CITIZENS** Content, content.  
*Exeunt Citizens*

**MENENIUS**

O sir, you are not right. Have you not known  
The worthiest men have done't?

**CORIOLANUS** What must I say? 50  
`I pray, sir'? Plague upon't, I cannot bring  
My tongue to such a pace. `Look, sir, my wounds.  
I got them in my country's service, when  
Some certain of your brethren roared and ran  
From th' noise of our own drums'?

**MENENIUS** O me, the gods! 55  
You must not speak of that, you must desire them  
To think upon you.

**CORIOLANUS** Think upon me? Hang 'em.  
I would they would forget me like the virtues  
Which our divines lose by 'em.

**MENENIUS** You'll mar all.  
I'll leave you. Pray you, speak to 'em, I pray you, 60  
In wholesome manner.

**CORIOLANUS** Bid them wash their faces  
And keep their teeth clean.

*Exit Menenius*

*Enter three of the Citizens*

So, here  
comes a brace.

You know the cause, sir, of my standing here.

**THIRD CITIZEN**

We do, sir. Tell us what hath brought you to't.

**CORIOLANUS** Mine own desert. 65

**SECOND CITIZEN** Your own desert?

**CORIOLANUS** Ay, but not mine own desire.

**THIRD CITIZEN** How not your own desire?

**CORIOLANUS** No, sir, 'twas never my desire yet to trouble  
the poor with begging. 70

**THIRD CITIZEN** You must think if we give you anything  
we hope to gain by you.

**CORIOLANUS** Well then, I pray, your price o'th' consulship?

**FIRST CITIZEN** The price is to ask it kindly.

**CORIOLANUS** Kindly, sir, I pray let me ha't. I have wounds 75  
to show you which shall be yours in private. (*To Second  
Citizen*) Your good voice, sir. What say you?

**SECOND CITIZEN** You shall ha't, worthy sir.

**CORIOLANUS** A match, sir. There's in all two worthy voices  
begged. I have your alms. Adieu. 80

**THIRD CITIZEN** (*to the other Citizens*) But this is something  
odd.

**SECOND CITIZEN** An 'twere to give again±±but 'tis no  
matter.

*Exeunt Citizens*

*Enter two other Citizens*

**CORIOLANUS** Pray you now, if it may stand with the tune 85  
of your voices that I may be consul, I have here the  
customary gown.

**[FOURTH] CITIZEN** You have deserved nobly of your  
country, and you have not deserved nobly.

**CORIOLANUS** Your enigma? 90

**[FOURTH] CITIZEN** You have been a scourge to her enemies,  
you have been a rod to her friends. You have not,  
indeed, loved the common people.

**CORIOLANUS** You should account me the more virtuous  
that I have not been common in my love. I will, sir, 95  
flatter my sworn brother the people to earn a dearer  
estimation of them. 'Tis a condition they account gentle.  
And since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have  
my hat than my heart, I will practise the insinuating

nod and be off to them most counterfeitly; that is, sir, 100  
I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular  
man, and give it bountiful to the desirers. Therefore,  
beseech you I may be consul.

**[FIFTH] CITIZEN** We hope to find you our friend, and  
therefore give you our voices heartily. 105

**[FOURTH] CITIZEN** You have received many wounds for  
your country.

**CORIOLANUS** I will not seal your knowledge with showing  
them. I will make much of your voices, and so trouble  
you no farther. 110

**BOTH CITIZENS** The gods give you joy, sir, heartily.

**CORIOLANUS** Most sweet voices.

*Exeunt Citizens*

Better it is to die, better to starve,  
Than crave the hire which first we do deserve.  
Why in this womanish toge should I stand here 115  
To beg of Hob and Dick that does appear  
Their needless vouches? Custom calls me to't.  
What custom wills, in all things should we do't,  
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,  
And mountainous error be too highly heaped 120  
For truth to o'erpeer. Rather than fool it so,  
Let the high office and the honour go  
To one that would do thus. I am half through.  
The one part suffered, the other will I do.

*Enter three Citizens more*

Here come more voices. 125  
Your voices! For your voices I have fought,  
Watched for your voices, for your voices bear  
Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six  
I have seen and heard of for your voices, have  
Done many things, some less, some more. Your  
voices! 130

Indeed I would be consul.

**[SIXTH] CITIZEN** He has done nobly, and cannot go without  
any honest man's voice.

**[SEVENTH] CITIZEN** Therefore let him be consul. The gods  
give him joy and make him good friend to the people! 135

**ALL THE CITIZENS** Amen, Amen. God save thee, noble

consul!  
**CORIO LANUS**      Worthy voices.  
                          *Exeunt Citizens*  
                          *Enter Menenius with Brutus and Sicinius*  
**MENENIUS**  
     You have stood your limitation, and the tribunes  
     Endue you with the people's voice. Remains      140  
     That in th' official marks invested, you  
     Anon do meet the senate.  
**CORIO LANUS**      Is this done?  
**SICINIUS**  
     The custom of request you have discharged.  
     The people do admit you, and are summoned  
     To meet anon upon your approbation.      145  
**CORIO LANUS**  
     Where, at the senate-house?  
**SICINIUS**      There, Coriolanus.  
**CORIO LANUS**  
     May I change these garments?  
**SICINIUS**      You may, sir.  
**CORIO LANUS**  
     That I'll straight do, and, knowing myself again,  
     Repair to th' senate-house.  
**MENENIUS**  
     I'll keep you company. (*To the tribunes*)      Will you  
                          along?      150  
**BRUTUS**  
     We stay here for the people.  
**SICINIUS**      Fare you well.  
                          *Exeunt Coriolanus and Menenius*  
     He has it now, and by his looks methinks  
     'Tis warm at's heart.  
**BRUTUS**      With a proud heart he wore  
     His humble weeds. Will you dismiss the people?  
                          *Enter the Plebeians*  
**SICINIUS**  
     How now, my masters, have you chose this man?      155  
**FIRST CITIZEN**      He has our voices, sir.  
**BRUTUS**  
     We pray the gods he may deserve your loves.  
**SECOND CITIZEN**

Amen, sir. To my poor unworthy notice  
He mocked us when he begged our voices.

**THIRD CITIZEN**

Certainly. He flouted us downright. 160

**FIRST CITIZEN**

No, 'tis his kind of speech. He did not mock us.

**SECOND CITIZEN**

Not one amongst us save yourself but says  
He used us scornfully. He should have showed us  
His marks of merit, wounds received for's country.

**SICINIUS**

Why, so he did, I am sure.

**ALL THE CITIZENS** No, no; no man saw 'em. 165

**THIRD CITIZEN**

He said he had wounds which he could show in  
private,  
And with his hat, thus waving it in scorn,  
'I would be consul,' says he. 'Age's custom  
But by your voices will not so permit me.  
Your voices therefore.' When we granted that, 170  
Here was 'I thank you for your voices, thank you.  
Your most sweet voices. Now you have left your voices  
I have no further with you. Was not this mockery?

**SICINIUS**

Why either were you ignorant to see't,  
Or, seeing it, of such childish friendliness 175  
To yield your voices?

**BRUTUS** *(to the Citizens)* Could you not have told him

As you were lessoned: when he had no power  
But was a petty servant to the state,  
He was your enemy, ever spake against  
Your liberties and the charters that you bear 180  
I'th' body of the weal; and now arriving  
A place of potency and sway o'th' state,  
If he should still malignantly remain  
Fast foe to th' plebeii, your voices might  
Be curses to yourselves. You should have said 185  
That as his worthy deeds did claim no less  
Than what he stood for, so his gracious nature  
Would think upon you for your voices and  
Translate his malice towards you into love,

Standing your friendly lord.

**SICINIUS** *(to the Citizens)* Thus to have said 190  
As you were fore-advised had touched his spirit  
And tried his inclination, from him plucked  
Either his gracious promise which you might,  
As cause had called you up, have held him to,  
Or else it would have galled his surly nature, 195  
Which easily endures not article  
Tying him to aught. So putting him to rage,  
You should have ta'en th'advantage of his choler  
And passed him unelected.

**BRUTUS** *(to the Citizens)* Did you perceive  
He did solicit you in free contempt 200  
When he did need your loves, and do you think  
That his contempt shall not be bruising to you  
When he hath power to crush? Why, had your bodies  
No heart among you? Or had you tongues to cry  
Against the rectorship of judgement?

**SICINIUS** *(to the Citizens)* Have you 205  
Ere now denied the asker, and now again,  
Of him that did not ask but mock, bestow  
Your sued-for tongues?

**THIRD CITIZEN**

He's not confirmed, we may deny him yet.

**SECOND CITIZEN** And will deny him. 210  
I'll have five hundred voices of that sound.

**FIRST CITIZEN**

I twice five hundred, and their friends to piece 'em.

**BRUTUS**

Get you hence instantly, and tell those friends  
They have chose a consul that will from them take  
Their liberties, make them of no more voice 215  
Than dogs that are as often beat for barking,  
As therefor kept to do so.

**SICINIUS** *(to the Citizens)* Let them assemble,  
And on a safer judgement all revoke  
Your ignorant election. Enforce his pride  
And his old hate unto you. Besides, forget not 220  
With what contempt he wore the humble weed,  
How in his suit he scorned you; but your loves,

Thinking upon his services, took from you  
Th'apprehension of his present portance,  
Which most gibingly, ungravely he did fashion 225  
After the inveterate hate he bears you.

**BRUTUS** (*to the Citizens*) Lay  
A fault on us your tribunes, that we laboured  
No impediment between, but that you must  
Cast your election on him.

**SICINIUS** (*to the Citizens*) Say you chose him  
More after our commandment than as guided 230  
By your own true affections, and that your minds,  
Preoccupied with what you rather must do  
Than what you should, made you against the grain  
To voice him consul. Lay the fault on us.

**BRUTUS** (*to the Citizens*)  
Ay, spare us not. Say we read lectures to you, 235  
How youngly he began to serve his country,  
How long continued, and what stock he springs of,  
The noble house o'th' Martians, from whence came  
That Ancus Martius, Numa's daughter's son,  
Who after great Hostilius here was king; 240  
Of the same house Publius and Quintus were,  
That our best water brought by conduits hither;  
And Censorinus that was so surnamed,  
And nobly named so, twice being censor,  
Was his great ancestor.

**SICINIUS** (*to the Citizens*) One thus descended, 245  
That hath beside well in his person wrought  
To be set high in place, we did commend  
To your remembrances, but you have found,  
Scaling his present bearing with his past,  
That he's your fixeÁd enemy, and revoke 250  
Your sudden approbation.

**BRUTUS** (*to the Citizens*) Say you ne'er had done't±±  
Harp on that still±±but by our putting on;  
And presently when you have drawn your number,  
Repair to th' Capitol.

[A CITIZEN] We will so.

[ANOTHER CITIZEN] Almost all  
Repent in their election.



*Exeunt Citizens*

**BRUTUS** Let them go on. 255

This mutiny were better put in hazard  
Than stay, past doubt, for greater.  
If, as his nature is, he fall in rage  
With their refusal, both observe and answer  
The vantage of his anger.

**SICINIUS** To th' Capitol, come. 260

We will be there before the stream o'th' people,  
And this shall seem, as partly 'tis, their own,  
Which we have goaded onward.

*Exeunt*