

Coriolanus

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

© *Copyright 2011 by Paul W. Collins*

Coriolanus

By William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, audio or video recording, or other, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Contact: paul@wsrightnow.com

Note: Spoken lines from Shakespeare's drama are in the public domain, as is the Globe edition (1864) of his plays, which provided the basic text of the speeches in this new version of *Coriolanus*. But *Coriolanus, by William Shakespeare: Presented by Paul W. Collins*, is a copyrighted work, and is made available *for your personal use only*, in reading and study.

Student, beware: This is a *presentation*, not a scholarly work, so you should be sure your teacher, instructor or professor considers it acceptable as a reference before quoting characters' comments or thoughts from it in your report or term paper.

Chapter One Up in Arms

Angry farmers, tradesmen and ordinary workers gather on the street in noisy protest—and armed with clubs and staves. Fifteen years ago the king was driven from his throne, but in this young Roman Republic of two and a half millennia past, successive poor harvests and the resulting shortages of food have left commoners feeling powerless and abused—and hungry.

“Before we proceed any further, *hear me speak!*” calls the baker who has been leading the plebeians.

Voices ring out: “Speak, *speak!*”

“You are all resolved rather to *die* than to *famish*?”

“Resolved!” is the reply. “*Resolved!*”

“*First*—you know *Caius Martius* is *chief enemy* of the *people!*” Martius, an army commander now detested among the populace, fought heroically in his youth to oust the Tarquin king, and since has battled to maintain Rome’s interests in Latium, south of the Tiber River.

Fists are shaken, weapons brandished. “*We know’t! We know’t!*”

“*Let us kill him!*—then we’ll *have wheat*, at our *own price!*” During this time of near-famine, wealthy patricians have secured most of the grain supply, then priced it high. “Is’t a *verdict*?”

An angry man calls back, “No more *talking* on’t—let it be *done!*” Others loudly agree: “*Away, away!*”

But a tall merchant appeals: “One *word*, good citizens!—”

“*We* are accounted *poor* citizens,” counters their leader, “the *patricians* *good* ones!”

“That which authority *surfeits on* would *relieve* us!” he cries. “If they would yield us but the *superfluity* while it were *wholesome*,”—the excess before it spoils, “we might guess they relieved us *humanely!* But *they* think we are too *dear!*”—costly. “The *leanness* that afflicts *us*—the basis of our misery!—is as an inventory to particularise *their abundance!* Our *suffering* is a *gain* to them!”

“Let us avenge this with our *pikes*, ere we become *rakes!*—for, the gods know, I speak this in *hunger for bread*, not in thirst for revenge!”

“Would you proceed especially against *Caius Martius*?” demands the merchant; the soldier does not deal in grain.

“*Against him first!*” shouts a citizen.

“He’s a very *dog* to the *commonalty!*” cries another.

“Consider you what *services* he has done for his country?” asks the tall man.

“*Very well,*” insists the ringleader, “and we could be content to give him good *report* for ’t, but that he *pays himself* with *being proud!*”

“Aye,” says the merchant, “but speak not *maliciously!*”

The leader is adamant. “I say unto you, what he hath done *famously*, he did it *to that end!* Though *soft-consciencèd* men can be content to say it was for his *country*, he did it to *please his mother*, and to be heartily *proud*—which he *is*, even to the altitude of his virtue!”

The merchant objects: “What he cannot help in his *nature*, you account a *vice* in him! You must in no way say he is *covetous!*”

Retorts the leader angrily, “If I must not, I need not be barren of *accusations!*—he hath *faults*, with *surplus* to tire in recitation!” The men hear a clamor from down the street. “What shouts are these? The other side o’ the city is *risen!* Why stay we prating *here?* *To the Capitol!*”

His followers encourage the others around them: “Come, *come!*”

But again the merchant urges restraint. “Soft!—who comes *here...?*” Approaching is an elderly nobleman. “Worthy *Menenius Agrippa*—one who hath always *loved* the people!”

Even the baker concurs. “He’s *one* honest enough. Would all the *rest* were so!”

“What work, my countrymen, is in hand?” asks frail Menenius, troubled to find such a disturbance of the public peace. “Where go you with *sticks and clubs*? The *matter*? *Speak*, I pray you!”

“*Our* business is not unknown to the *Senate*,” says the leader. “They have had inkling *this fortnight* what we intend to do!—which now we’ll show ’em in *deeds*! They say ‘*Poor* petitioners have *strong breaths*.’ They shall know we have strong *arms*, too!”

Menenius is alarmed. “Why, masters—my good *friends*, mine honest *neighbours*—will you *undo* yourselves?”

The leader laughs harshly. “We *cannot*, sir!—we are undone *already*!”

Menenius addresses the throng. “I tell you, friends, most charitable *care* have the patricians for you!

“As for your wants, your suffering during this *dearth*, you may as well strike at the *heavens* with your staves as lift them against the Roman *state*, whose course will go on the way it takes, cracking asunder *ten thousand* curbings of more strong link than can ever appear in *your* impediment!” he warns. “As for the dearth: 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* awaits you!—and you *slander* the helms o’ the state who care for you like *fathers* when you curse them as enemies!”

“*Care* for us!” cries the leader. “True, *indeed*!”—the nobles’ *care* is concern about public rage. He scoffs: “They ne’er cared *for us yet*!—they suffer us to *famish*!—and their store-houses are *crammed with grain*! They make edicts on usury—to *support usurers*!—repeal *daily* any *wholesome* act established against the *rich*, and provide *more piercing* statutes daily to chain up and restrain the *poor*!”

“If the *wars* do not eat us up, *they* will!—and *there’s* all the love they bear *us*!” Commoners can be conscripted, forced into military service; for many from the farms, that has meant loss of both land and livelihood.

Menenius dismisses the protest. “Either you must confess yourselves wondrous *malicious*, or be accused of *folly*!”

“I shall tell you a pretty tale,” says the old man. “It may be you have heard it; but, since it serves my purpose, I will venture to stale it a little more.”

Says the leader gruffly, “Well, I’ll hear it; sir, but you must not think to fob off our disgust with a *tale*! But, if ’t pleases you, deliver.”

The silver-haired man begins his parable. “There was a time when all of the body’s members rebelled against the *belly*, and thus accused it: that it did remain i’ the midst o’ the body like only a *gulf*, idle and unactive, ever cupboarding the viands, never bearing like *labour* with the rest—other instruments, which did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel, and mutually participate—did minister unto the appetite and affection common to the whole body.”

He gives the men a warm, benign smile. “The belly *answerèd*!”

The leader demands, impatiently, “Well, sir, what answer *made* the belly?”

“Sir, I shall *tell* you—with a kind of laugh which ne’er came from the *lungs*, but even thus”—he tips back his head and belches. “For, look you, as well as *smile* I may make the belly *speak*,” says the amiable storyteller, drawing a few chuckles. Menenius raises an eyebrow. “It *tauntingly* replied to the discontented members, the mutinous parts that envied its receipt—even as it would most *fitly* to *you* who malign our senators for that they are not *such as you*!”

The baker is annoyed. “That’s *your* belly’s answer!” he cries. To counter it, he addresses the crowd: “With other muniments and petty helps, *this* is *our* body: the kingly-crownèd *head*, the vigilant *eye*, the counsellor *heart*—the *arm*, our *soldier*!—our steed the *leg*!—the *tongue* our trumpeter! If *they*—”

Menenius is muttering, irritated: “*What, then?* Before *me* this *fellow* speaks? *What, then?* What *then*!”

“—should be restrainèd by the *belly*, which is the *sink* o’ the body—”

“Well, *what then?*” demands the old man.

The baker glares—and challenges: “Those former agents,”—the people’s, “if *they* did complain, what could the cormorant”—rapacious—“belly *answer?*”

Menenius seems peeved. “I will *tell* you! If you’ll bestow *small* of what you have *little—patience!*—awhile, you’ll *hear* the belly’s answer!”

“Ye’re long *about* it!”

“Note me this, good friends: your most-grave belly was *deliberate*, not *rash* like his accusers! And thus answered: ‘True is it, my embodied friends,’ quoth he, ‘that I receive at first the general food which you do live upon; and *fit it is*, because I am the *store-house* and the *shop* for the whole body. And, if you do remember, *I send it* through the rivers of your blood—even to the *court*, the *heart*—and to the *seat*, i’ the *brain!*’

“‘And through the cracks and orifices of man, the strongest sinew and small, inferior veins from *me* receive that natural competency whereby they *live!*’” He watches the crowd, pleased to see its vigor dissipating as he talks. “‘And although *all at once*, you, my good friends,’—this says the *belly*, mark ye—” He pauses, glancing at the baker.

“*Aye*, sir.... Well? ...*Well?*” says the leader; but many at the edges of the crowd can only see him nodding, and hear only *Well*.

“‘—though *all at once* you cannot *see* what I do deliver out to each, yet I can verify my audit: that all from me do back receive the *flour* for all, and leave *me* but the *bran!*’

“What say you to’t?” asks Menenius, looking around at the listeners.

The leader is unimpressed. “It was an answer,” he says dryly. “How *apply* you this?”

Menenius is happy to hold the men here, and to calm them further. “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’ the commons, and you shall find no public benefit which you receive but that it proceeds or comes from *them* to you!—and no way from *yourselves.*”

He regards the leader. “What do *you* think?—you, the great toe of this assembly!”

“I, the great *toe!*—why the great *toe?*”

“Because, being one of the *lowest, basest, poorest*, of this most *wise* rebellion,” says Menenius angrily, “thou go’st *foremost!*”

“Thou go’st foremost, *thou rascal* that art first to *run in blood!*—ledest *worst*, to win some *vantage!*”

He regards the men. “But *make you ready* your stiff bats and clubs,” he tells them contemptuously. “*Rome* and *her rats* are at the point of *battle*; only *one* side will need bail!”

Menenius turns as an army commander, a powerfully built patrician of thirty-two, approaches. “*Hail*, noble Martius!” he says, bowing.

The general only nods. “Thanks.” He confronts the many men boldly. “What’s the *matter*, you *dissentious rogues?*—who by rubbing the poor itch of your opinion make yourselves *scabs!*”

The leader replies scornfully: “We have ever *your* good word!”

“He that could give good words to *thee* will flatter that *beneath abhorring,*” growls Martius. He peers around. “What would you *have*, you *curs* who like *neither* peace nor war?—the one *affrights* you, the other makes you *prideful!*”

He turns his back on the baker and walks among the other men, glowering. “He that trusts to you when he should find you *lions* finds you *hares!*—where *foxes, geese!* You are no surer”—more reliable—“than is the *coal* afire upon the *ice*, nor *hailstone* in the *sun!*”

“Your ‘virtue’ is to make him *worthy* whose offence subdues him,”—praise the punished criminal, “and *curse* that Justice did it! Who deserves *greatness* deserves *your hate!*—and *your* affections are for a *sick* man’s appetite—one who most desires that which would increase his *evil!*”

“He that depends upon *your* favours swims with *fins of lead*, and would hew down *oaks* with *rushes!* *Hang ye!*” he shouts. “*Trust* ye? With every *minute* you do *change in mind*, and call him *noble* that was just now your *hate*, him *vile* that was your *garland!*”

“What’s the issue, that in these several places of the city you cry against the noble Senate?—who under the *gods* keep you in awe, that else would *feed on one another!*”

“What’s their seeking?” he asks Menenius.

“For *grain*—whereof, they say, the city is well storèd—at their *own* rates.”

“*Hang ’em!* ‘*They say!*’—*they’ll* sit by the fire, and presume to know what’s done i’ the *Capitol*—who’s likely to rise, who thrives and who declines—side with factions, and give out conjectural marriages—making parties strong, and *enfeebling* any such as stand not in their liking to *below their cobbled shoes!*”

“*They say* there’s grain enough!” he fulminates. “Would the nobility lay aside their *ruth*, and let me use my *sword*, I’d make a quarry,”—a pile of dead game, “with *thousands* of these slaves, *quartered*, as high as I could loft my lance!”

Noting the crowd’s demeanor, grown sullen, now, in the warrior’s commanding presence, Menenius tells him, “Nay, these are almost thoroughly persuaded; for though abundantly they lack *discretion*, yet are they surpassingly *cowardly!*”

“But, I beseech you, what says the other troop?”—those protesting at the Capitol.

“They are *dissolvèd*, hang ’em! They said they were *a-hungry*,” says Martius mockingly, “sighed forth proverbs: that *hunger* broke *stone walls*; that *dogs* must *eat*; that *meat* was made for *mouths*; that the gods sent wheat not for *rich* men only!

“With those *shreds* they vented their complainings!—which being *answerèd*, and a *petition* granted them—an *untoward* one, to break the heart of generosity, and make bold *power* look *pale!*—they threw their caps as if they would hang them on the horns o’ the *moon*, shouting their exultation!”

“What is granted them?” asks Menenius.

Martius almost spits out the bitter news: “Five ‘*tribunes*’ to *defend* their vulgar wisdoms—of their own choice; one’s Junius Brutus... Sicinius Velutus, and... I know not!” He shakes his head angrily. “‘*Sdeath!* The *rabble* should have *unroofed the city* first, ere so prevailed with *me!* It will in time *win into power*,” he prophesies, “and throw forth *greater* themes for Insurrection’s arguing!”

Menenius, too, is taken aback by the Senate’s concession. “This *is* strange.”

Martius shouts to the crowd. “*Go!*—get you *home*, you *fragments!*”

As the commoners begin to straggle away, a messenger approaches in great haste. “Where’s Caius Martius?”

“Here. What’s the matter?”

“The *news* is, sir!—the *Volsces* are *in arms!*”

The Volsci, Latium’s southerners, have begun to challenge Romans for control of the territory, which ranges east from the seacoast fully fifty miles.

“I am *glad* of ’t!” says Martius. “Then we shall ha’ means to *vent* our musty *superfluity!*” he calls out, with angry sarcasm; the army will make use of storehoused food.

Martius notes the arrival of other noblemen, hurrying down the street. “See—our *best elders!*” he says sourly; several senators lead the way, with two of the new tribunes. Following them are two general officers: Cominius, fifty; and Titus Lartius, forty-one, who walks with a limp.

A worried senator, puffing for breath, begins: “Martius, ’tis *true*, that which you have lately told us!—the *Volsces* are in arms!”

Martius nods grimly. “They have a leader, Tullus Aufidius, who will put you to ’t! I sin in envying his nobility, and were I anything but what I am, I would wish me only he!”

“You have fought each other?” asks Cominius.

“Were the *world* by the ears, *half to half*,”—split by conflict, “and he in *my* party, I’d *revolt*, only to make my wars against *him!* He is a lion that I am proud to hunt!”

“Then, worthy Martius, attend upon Cominius to these wars!” urges an elder senator.

Cominius, general consul of Rome, its highest-ranking official, also wants his help. “It is your former promise....”

“Sir, it is; and I am constant.” Martius smiles at the third commander: “Titus Lartius, thou shalt see me *once more* strike at Tullus’ face! What, art thou stiff? Stand’st out?” He wonders if the officer’s injury will hold him back.

“No, Caius Martius!—I’d lean upon *one* crutch and *fight* with *t’other* ere stay behind in *this* business!”

“Oh, *true bred!*” says Menenius.

The old senator motions courteously for Martius to go with them. “Your company to the Capitol, where, I know, our greatest friends attend us.” He starts away.

Titus nods to Cominius. “Lead you on,” he says, “right worthy of your priority.”

“Noble Martius!” says Cominius, pleased, as they start to go.

To the citizens, the senator shouts, angrily, “*Hence* to your homes!—*be gone!*”

The crowd breaks up; but not all of the morose men drift away. Some still talk—and watch.

Martius looks back at them in disgust. “Nay, let them *follow* us! The *Volsces* have much grain; take these rats thither to gnaw *their* garner!”

“Worshipful *mutiners*,” he calls back, “*your* valour put forth *well!*—pray *follow!*” He strides away, preceding the other officers.

Remaining here are two new tribunes, both in their fifties.

“Was ever man so *proud* as is this Martius?” asks Sicinius.

The younger man shakes his head. “He has no equal!”

Sicinius is chafed. “When we were chosen tribunes for the people—”

“Marked you his *lip* and *eyes*?” Brutus was struck by the warrior’s severe resolve.

“Aye—and his taunts.”

“Being angered, *he* will not spare to jeer the *gods!*”

“And *bemock* the modest *man*,” grumbles Sicinius.

Both intend to make use of the commander’s ability, when it will help Rome, but they despise his arrogance. “May the present wars *devour* him!” says Brutus. “He is grown too *proud* of being so *valiant*.”

“Such a nature, tricked out in good *success*, disdains the shadow which he treads on at *noon*,”—craves a longer one, says Sicinius. He watches the lords making their way up to the Capitol. “But I do wonder that His Insolence can brook to be commanded under Cominius.”

Brutus thinks he knows why. “*Fame*—at which he aims, in which already he’s well gracèd—can not be more attained nor better *held* than by a place *below* the first. For what *miscarries* shall be the *general’s* fault, though he perform to the utmost of a man; and giddy censure will then cry out, of Martius, ‘Oh, if only *he* had borne the business!’”

Sicinius concurs. “Besides, if things go *well*, opinion that so sticks on Martius shall rob merits from Cominius.”

“Some *half* of all Cominius’ honours *are* indeed gone to Martius, though Martius *earned* them not,” says Brutus. “And all of his *faults* shall be *honours* to Martius, though in aught he *merit* not!”

Sicinius starts away. “Let’s hence, and hear how the dispatch is made, and in what fashion he goes upon this present action despite his *singularity*”—fierce independence. “Let’s along.” They head up the hill toward the Capitol.

Chapter Two Those That Wait

At Corioli, the Volsces’ capital, twenty-five miles south of the Tiber, chief legislators confer in their Senate-house with their wily general.

“So, your opinion, Aufidius, is that they of Rome are entered in our counsels,”—have spies, “and know how we proceed?”

“Is it not *yours*?” asks the warrior impatiently. “What has ever been *thought* on in *this* state that could be brought to bodily *act* ere Rome had *circumvention*?”

“’Tis not four days gone since I heard thence; these are the words. . . . I think I have the letter here—yes, here it is.” He opens an agent’s report and reads: ““They have pressed a power,”—conscripted citizens into a military force, ““but it is not known whether for east or west.

““The *dearth* is great, the people *mutinous*!

““And it is rumoured that *Cominius*, your old enemy *Martius*—who is in Rome worse hated than *you*—and Titus *Lartius*, a most valiant Roman—these three lead on this preparation, whither ’tis aimed.’

“Most likely ’tis aimed at *you*,” he tells the Senate dryly. “Consider of it!”

The old politician is hardly surprised. “Our army’s *in the field*; we never yet doubted that Rome was ready to *answer* us.”

Says Aufidius hotly, “Nor did you think to keep your great intentions *veiled* till when they *must* show themselves! Which *in the hatching*, it seems, appeared to *Rome*!

“By the discovery we shall be shortened in our aim, which was to *take in many towns* almost ere Rome should know we were afoot!”

“Noble Aufidius, take your commission,” says a younger senator soothingly. “Hie you to your bands. Let us alone guard Corioli; if they set down before us, for their remove bring your army. But I think you’ll find they’ve not prepared for *us*.”

Aufidius scoffs: “Oh, doubt not *that*! I speak from *certainties*!—nay, *more*: some parcels of their power are *forth already*!—and *on the way hitherward*!

“I leave *Your Honours*,” he says, accepting the assignment with undisguised contempt. Yet he obviously relishes the coming fight. “If we and Caius Martius chance to meet, ’tis sworn between us we shall ever strike till one can do no more!”

The old senator offers encouragement: “May the gods assist you!”

“And keep *Your Honours safe*,” mutters Aufidius; they have carelessly made it much more difficult for *him* to do so.

Glumly, the graybeard watches him go. “Farewell.”

The younger nods. “Farewell.”

As their commander leaves the chamber, two of the other lawmakers mutter, “Fare *well*. . . .”

In a small room near the front of Martius’s large house in Rome, his mother, Volumnia, and his wife, Virgilia, are seated on wooden stools, sewing.

“I pray you, daughter-in-law, *sing*—or express yourself in a more *comfortable* sort!” the older woman urges. “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 most show love.

“When he, yet the only son of my womb, was but tender-bodied, and when youth with *comeliness* plucked all gaze his way—when for a *day* of the *king’s* 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 than hanging picture-like by the wall, if *renown* not made it *stir*!—was pleased to let him *seek* danger where he was likely to find *fame*!

“To a cruel war I sent him—from whence he returned, his brows bound with *oak*!”—sporting the crown of leaves awarded for valor in battle. “I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than *now*, in first seeing he had proved himself a *man*!”

“But had he *died* in the business, madam—how *then*?”

“Then his good *report* should have been my 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* surfeit voluptuously *out of action*!”

A woman attending on the elder lady comes into the parlor. “Madam, Lady Valeria is come to visit you.”

Virgilia rises, hoping to avoid Volumnia’s equally martial friend. “Beseech you, give me leave to retire myself. . . .”

“Indeed, you shall *not!*” Volumnia stands—and closes her eyes, happily imagining: “Methinks I hear hither your husband’s *drum*—see him *pluck Aufidius down!*—by the *hair*, as children do a bear from a bed!

“The Volsces shunning him,”—fleeing, “methinks I see him *stamp* thus!”—she plants a foot firmly on the woolen rug—“and *call* thus to his men: ‘*Come on, you cowards!* You were begot in *fear*, though you were born in *Rome!*’” Her notion of a rallying cry expresses the deep contempt for commoners inherited by her son. “His bloody brow with his mailed hand then wiping, *forth* he goes, like a harvest-man that’s tasked to *mow o’er all* or lose his hire!”

“His *bloody brow!*” cries Virgilia. “O, *Jupiter*, no *blood!*” He is the supreme god.

Volumnia scoffs: “Away, you fool! It more *becomes* a man than *gilt!*—his *trophy!* The breasts of Hecuba when she did suckle *Hector*”—a valiant Trojan prince—“looked not lovelier than Hector’s *forehead* when it spit forth blood to commend a Grecian sword!

“Tell Valeria we are fit to bid her welcome.” The waiting-woman curtsseys and goes.

Virgilia frets. “Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius!”

“He’ll beat Aufidius’ *head* below his *knee!*—then tread upon his *neck!*”

Lady Valeria comes to them, followed by an attendant. “My ladies both, good day to you!”

“Sweet madam!” says Volumnia.

“I am glad to see Your Ladyship,” says the young wife.

“How do you both?” asks Lady Valeria cheerfully. “You are manifest *house-keepers!* What are you sewing here?” She glances at Virgilia’s needlework. “A fine spot, in good faith. How does your little son?”

“I thank Your Ladyship; *well*, good madam.”

The grandmother brags: “He had rather see the *swords* and hear a *drum* than look upon his school-master!”

“O’ my word, the *father’s* son!” says Lady Valeria. “I’ll swear, ’tis a very pretty boy! O’ my troth, I looked upon him o’ Wednesday *half an hour* altogether!

“He has such a *determined* countenance! I saw him run after a gilded butterfly, and when he caught it, he let it go again—then *after* it again; and over and *over* he comes, and *again!*—*caught* it again!

“And, whether his *fall* enraged him so, or howe’er ’twas, he did set his teeth together and *tear* it!” She laughs delightedly: “Oh, I warrant how he *ripped it apart!*”

Volumnia smiles, nodding: “One of ’s *father’s* moods.”

“Indeed, *la*, ’tis a *noble* child!”

The lad’s mother smiles. “A *cracker*, madam!”

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

“No, good madam,” says the young wife politely, “I will not out of doors.”

“Not out of doors!”

“She shall, she *shall!*” insists Volumnia.

Virgilia demurs. “Indeed, no, by your patience; I’ll not over the threshold till my lord return from the wars.”

“*Fie!* You confine yourself most *unreasonably!*” says Valeria. “Come, you must go visit a good lady who lies in”—is pregnant.

“I will wish her speedy strength, and visit her with my prayers; but I cannot go thither.”

“*Why*, I pray you?” demands Volumnia irritably.

“’Tis not to save *labour*,” the wife assures her dryly, “nor that I lack *love*. . . .”

“You would be another *Penelope*,” scolds Lady Valeria. “They say that all the yarn she spun in Ulysses’ absence did but *fill Ithaca full of moths!*”

“Come! I would that your *cambric* were as sensitive as your finger, so you might *leave off pricking it out of pity!* Come, you shall go with us!”

“No, good madam, pardon me; indeed I will not forth.”

“Go *with me*, and in truth, *la*, I’ll tell you excellent *news* of your husband!”

“Oh, good madam, there can be none yet.”

“Verily, I do not *jest* with you,” says Valeria. “There came news from him last night!”

“Indeed, madam?”

“In earnest, it’s *true!* I heard a *senator* speak it. Thus it is: the Volscies 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 Corioli! They nothing doubt prevailing, and making it brief war.

“This is true, on mine honour! And so, I pray, *go with us!*”

But Virgilia retains her resolve, and her concerns. “Give me excuse, good madam; I will obey you in everything hereafter.”

“Let her alone, lady,” says Volumnia. “As she is now, she will but disease *our* better mirth.”

“In troth, I think she would! Fare you well, then,” Valeria tells her friend’s daughter-in-law.

“Come, good, sweet lady.” But at the door she looks back. “Prithee, Virgilia, turn thy solemnness out o’ door, and go along with us!”

“No; in a word, madam, indeed, I *must* not! I wish you much mirth!” Virgilia sits, and resumes sewing.

Valeria frowns, annoyed. “Well, then farewell!” she says, leaving, her gallant spirit oblivious to her son’s second child.

Chapter Three Armies Meet

The Romans’ army—assembled largely by compulsion; many of the republic’s aggrieved farmers and town workers now swell its ranks—has marched south with drums pounding and colors flying to take up two positions near Corioli.

With the smaller force, Titus Lartius and Caius Martius command battalions which, for the most part, comprise the newest, least-seasoned soldiers. The officers stand, now, at the center of hastily dug trenches just outside the wide main gate of the capital’s shielding walls.

General Cominius is farther to the east, where his troops now confront Aufidius’s forces.

“Yonder comes news,” says Martius, impatient, as Cominius’s messenger rides toward them. “A *wager*: they have *met!*”—began to fight.

Lartius doubts that the general has even held parley with the Volscians. “My horse to yours, no.”

“‘Tis done!”

“Agreed.”

Martius hails the rider. “Say: has our general met the enemy?”

“They lie in view; but have not spoke as yet.”

Lartius laughs. “So, the good horse is mine!”

“I’ll buy him from you!”

“No, I’ll not sell nor give him! *Lend* you him I will—for half a hundred years!” But his face turns grave as he tells a herald, “Summon the town.”

Martius asks the rider, “How far off lie these armies?”

“Within this mile and half.”

“Then we shall hear their *alarum*—and they *ours!*” says Martius, eager for combat. “Now, Mars, I prithee, make us *quick in work*, that we *with steaming swords* may march from hence to help our fielded friends!

“Come, blow thy blast!” he orders the trumpeter, ready to take and secure the city.

The horn sounds a parley. Soon the commanders see, atop the walls before them, two Volscian senators, with other lords. “*Tullus Aufidius!*” calls Martius. “Is *he* within your walls?”

“*No!*—nor any man that fears you *less* than he!” shouts a defiant senator from the parapet. “That’s *lesser* than a *little!*”

From within the city, a deep and steady cadence can be heard, and the senator smirks. “Hark! Our drums are bringing forth our youth! We’ll *break* our walls, rather than they shall impound us up! Our gates, which yet *seem* shut, we have but pinned with *rushes*—they’ll open by themselves!”

Off to the east, drums and trumpets can be heard, signaling battle. “*Hark* you!” calls the senator, “*There is Aufidius!* Listen to what *work* he makes amongst your *cloven army!*”

“*Oh*, they are *at it!*” cries Martius, fully aroused.

“Their noise be our instruction! *Ladders, ho!*” shouts Lartius.

But even as his men scramble to launch an assault against the walls, the heavy wooden doors swing open and a horde of Volscian troops swarms out.

“They fear us not, but issue forth their city!” says Martius, surprised. He calls to the Roman soldiers: “Now put your shields before your hearts and *fight!*—with *hearts* more proof than *shields!*”

“*Advance*, brave Titus!

“They do disdain us much beyond *our* thoughts—which makes me sweat with *wrath!*” he growls. He rushes to meet the enemy surge. “*Come on*, my fellows! He that *retires*, I’ll take him for a *Volscie*,” he warns, sword thrust forward, “and he shall feel mine edge!”

The fighting is close and furious, and sharp steel soon rends men’s limbs, necks and guts, ending the lives of many.

Another *alarum* sounds, and the Romans pull back from the enemy; some among the survivors are wounded and bleeding, despite their new shields of leather-bound wood. Martius’s threat notwithstanding, they are driven back to their trenches.

Livid with anger, Martius stalks after the shaken and retreating men. “*All the contagion* of the *south* light on you, you *shames of Rome!*—you *herd of—*”

He turns to confront another quavering group. “*May boils* and *plagues* so plaster you o’er that you be *abhorred* further than *seen*, and *one* infect *another* a mile against the *wind!* You souls of *geese* that bear the *shapes* of men!—how can you have run from slaves that *apes* would *beat?*”

“*Pluto in Hell!*” he bellows, staring scornfully, “all hurt *behind!*—*backs* red, but *faces* pale with fright, and *agued* in fear!

“*Mend*, and *charge home!*” he demands, “or by the fires of heaven I’ll leave the *foe* and make my wars on *you!* *Look to ’t!* *Come on!* If you’ll *stand fast*, we’ll beat them to their *wives* as they us to our *trenches* followed!”

From the Volscians’ side a trumpet sounds; they back away, and soon leave the field, moving toward their city’s entrance—with Martius in pursuit. “*Now the gates are open!*” he cries. “’Tis for the *followers* that Fortune widens them, not for the fliers!

“Now prove good seconders! *Mark me!*” he calls back to the weary, routed Romans, “and do the *like!*” Swinging his sword in a circle above his head, the champion charges after the last of the enemy troops, chasing them past the gate into town.

Wide-eyed, a veteran corporal backs away, staring. “*Foolhardiness!* Not *I!*”

The injured man beside him—a week ago a farmer—is no more eager. “Nor *I!*”

No one follows Martius—and the massive doors are pulled together, enclosing the bold commander in the enemy stronghold.

“See!—they have shut him in!” gasps the corporal, glad for his own respite.

“Into the *pot*, I warrant him!” mutters the young plowman, who left two boyhood friends dying on the field during the Volsces’ surprise attack; the dead will not miss Martius, nor will he.

Away to the east, both sides’ horns are sounding retreat; but here, Titus Lartius now hurries toward the troops who are still trying to recover. “What is become of Martius?”

“*Slain*, sir, doubtless,” says the old corporal, kneeling to wipe blood off his knife onto the much-scuffed turf.

“Following the fliers at the very heels, *he entered with them*,” the erstwhile farmer tells Lartius, “who, upon a sudden, *clapped to their gates!* He is himself *alone* to answer all the city.”

Lartius is stunned. “Oh, *noble* fellow!—who, though feeling, *outdares* his unsensing *sword!*—and even when *it bows, stands up!*”

“Thou art lost, Martius. A carbuncle”—gemstone—“entirely as big as *thou* art were not so rich a *jewel!*”

He peers, over the field strewn with dead and dying men, toward the dark gates. “Thou wast a *soldier* never ceasing: not only in *strokes* fierce and terrible, but, with thy grim *looks* and the thunder-like percussion of thy *sounds*, thou madst thine enemies *shake* as if the *world* were feverous and did tremble!”

And then the huge right-hand gate moves. “*Look*, sir!” cries the corporal, as they gape. Martius, bloodied, backs through the narrow opening, immediately pursued by two Volscian soldiers, both battering at his sword and shield with their flashing blades.

“*Oh!*—’tis *Martius!*” Lartius hobbles forward, urging the nearby troops, “*Let’s fetch him off*, or make to remain *alike!*”—perish with him.

The men are willing to follow Lartius. Running, they drive away Martius’s attackers—and find that they have led the way for the revived Romans, who now charge forward, pouring boldly into the startled city.

From a distance, trumpets can be heard calling men to renew their efforts, and drums are urging them on. As the two armies’ fighting grinds on outside the city walls, within Corioli several Roman warriors emerge from a house just sacked. Their hands, slick with blood, clutch booty.

“This will I carry to Rome!” cries the first, raising a goblet.

“And I *this!*” He has a necklace, pulled from a dead mother’s neck.

The third soldier is angry: “A murrain on’t!—I took this for *silver!*” He tosses away a pewter heirloom and goes back inside.

As the others wait for him to return with a worthy prize, Titus Lartius and Caius Martius come around a street corner, followed by a column of troops, who are peering back and forth warily, swords held at the ready.

Martius points to the petty pillagers with contempt. “See here, these *movers*, that do prize their hours at a cracked drachma!” he tells Lartius. “Cushions, leaden spoons, irons worth a doit, doublets that *hangmen* would bury with those that wore them, *these* base slaves, ere yet the fight be done, pack up!”

“Down with them!” he shouts, sending men after the three, who drop their only gains from warfare and run. They and the others soldiers will still take much—out of the sight of wealthy Caius Martius.

“But *hark!*” says Martius, as a call is sounded by a distant Roman trumpeter. “What *noise* the general makes! *To him!* *There* is the man of my *soul’s hate*—*Aufidius!*—piercing our *Romans!*”

“Then, valiant Titus, take enough numbers to make good the city, whilst I, with those that have the *spirit*, will hasten to help Cominius!”

Lartius, ready to lead that venture himself, is surprised. “Worthy sir, thou *bleed’st!*—thine exercise hath been too violent for a *second* course of fight!”

“Sir, praise me not; my work hath yet not *warmed* me! Fare you well! The blood I drop is more a relief than a danger to me! To *Aufidius thus* I will appear—and *fight!*”

Cries Lartius, "Now may the fair goddess Fortune fall *deeply in love* with thee!—thou, a friend no less than those she placeth *highest!* And may her great *charms* misguide thy opposers' swords!"

Martius replies magnanimously: "Bold gentleman, *Prosperity* be thy *page!*"—personal servant. "So, *farewell!*" Motioning for two captains to follow, he dashes away to rally his company.

"Thou worthiest *Martius!*" says Lartius, left to supervise the men who will secure and hold Corioli, in support of the foray of troops led by Fortune's favorite.

"Go, sound thy trumpet in the market-place," he tells a soldier. "Call thither all the officers o' the town, where they shall know our mind." He starts toward the square. "Away."

Breathe you, my friends!" Near his own encampment outside Corioli, Cominius has pulled his exhausted troops back for respite, and he now confers with their officers. "Well *fought!* We are come away like *Romans*, neither foolish in our stands, nor cowardly in retire!

"Believe me, sirs, we shall *charge again!* Whiles we have struck, by interims and conveying gusts we have heard the charges of *our friends!* Ye Roman gods, lead *their* successes as we wish our own, so that *both* our powers, with smiling fronts encountering, may give you thankful sacrifice!"

A runner comes to Cominius. "Thy news?" he demands, as the man bows.

"The citizens of Corioli have *issued* and given to Lartius and to Martius *battle!* I saw our party to their *trenches* driven!" the scout tells him. "And then I came away!"

"Though thou speak'st truth, methinks thou speak'st not *well!* How long is't since?"

"Above an hour, my lord."

"Briefly we heard their drums." Cominius frowns. "'Tis not a *mile!*—how couldst thou in a mile confound an *hour*, and bring thy news *so late!*"

"Spies of the Volsces held me in *chase!*—thus was I forcèd to wheel three or four miles about, else had I, sir, half an hour since brought my report."

Cominius sees the approach of other Roman forces, led by a bloody warrior. "Who's yonder, that does appear as if he were *flayed?* Oh, *gods!*—he has the *stamp* of *Martius!*; I have before-time seen him thus!"

Even from a distance, the loud voice sounds urgent: "*Come I too late?*"

Cominius smiles. "The shepherd knows not *thunder* from a *tabour* better than I know the sound of *Martius'* tongue from every less-*noble* man!"

Martius rushes forward. "Come I *too late?*" he demands, as the troops he brings from the city-gate follow, their captains joining the others.

"*Aye,*" says Cominius, staring at the crimson-soaked commander, "if you come not in the blood of *others*, but mantled in your *own!*"

Martius embraces him. "Oh, let me clip ye in arms as sound as when I *wooed!*—in heart as merry as when our nuptial day was done, and tapers burned to *bedward!*"

The general, grinning, asks, "Flower of warriors, how is it with Titus Lartius?"

Martius disdains aftermath: "As with a man busied about decrees: condemning some to death, and some to exile; ransoming him, or pitying; threatening the other—holding *Corioli* like a fawning *greyhound*—in the *leash*, to let it slip at will, in the name of *Rome.*"

Cominius is relieved. He looks around. "Where is that slave who told me they had beat you to your trenches?—where is he? Call him hither!" he tells an attendant.

"Let him alone," says Martius. "He did inform of the truth, but for our *gentlemen!* The *common* file—the *plague!*—*tribunes* for *them!*—a *mouse* ne'er shunned the *cat* as they did run from rascals *worse than they!*"

"But how *prevailèd* you?"

Martius frowns, still wanting to fight. “Will the time serve *telling*? I do not think so. Where is the *enemy*? Are you lords o’ the field?—if not, why cease you till you *are*?”

“Martius, we have at *disadvantage* fought, and did retire to *win our purpose*”—regain order.

“How lies their battle?”—their array. “Know you on which side they have placed their men of trust?”

“As I guess, Martius, the bands of their best trust, i’ the vaward, are the *Antiates*”—men from the city of Antium. “Over them: *Aufidius*—their very heart of *hope*!”

Martius is inflamed by the mention of his rival for renown. “I do *beseech* you!—by all the battles wherein we have fought, by the blood we have shed together, by the vows we have made to endure as friends!—that you set me directly against *Aufidius* and his *Antiates*!—and that you not *delay* the boon! Filling the air with darts,”—flights of arrows, “our swords advanced, we’ll *prove*—this very *hour*!”—win immediately.

Cominius smiles. “Though I could wish you were conducted to a gentle *bath*, and *balms* applied to you, yet dare I never deny *your* asking! Take your choice of those that best can aid your action!”

“Those are they that most are *willing*,” says Martius. He faces the troops, lifting his sword high. “If any such be here—as it were sin to *doubt*—who *love* this painting wherein you see *me* smeared; if any fear less for his *person* than an *ill report*; if any think *brave death* outweighs *bad life*, and that his *country’s* dearer than himself—let him alone, or as many as are so-minded, wave thus!”—he swirls his blade in the air—“to *express* his disposition—*and follow Martius*!”

The men nearest him, all experienced soldiers, cheer. Shouting, they swing their swords aloft, once again eager for combat.

Cries Martius, in jest as others press forward, “*Oh?—me alone? Make you a sword of me?*”

“If these shows be not *outward*, which of you is *but four* Volsces?” The warriors laugh heartily. Martius assures them, “*None* of you but is able to bear against the great Aufidius a *shield as hard as his*!”

“A certain *number*—though thanks to all!—must I select from all; the rest shall bear the business in some other fight, as *cause*”—the overall mission—“will be obeyed!”

“I shall quickly draw out, for my command, which men are best inclined, and please you to *march*!”

“*March on*, my fellows!” cries Cominius, as his best soldiers are pulled from the ranks to follow Martius. “Make good this ostentation, and you shall divide in all with *us*!”—receive a share of his own glory—and spoils.

In Corioli, Titus Lartius has positioned troops to control the city, and now he emerges from the main gate leading fewer than half of the soldiers who were left with him.

“So let the ports be guarded,” he finishes telling the new captain of the occupation. “Keep your duties as I have set them down. If I do send, dispatch those centuries”—companies of one hundred men each—“to our aid; the rest will serve for a short holding. If we lose the *field*, we cannot keep the *town*!”

“Fear not our care, sir,” the officer tells him.

Lartius nods. “Hence—and shut your gates upon ’s.” He wants no reversal by Coriolan troops.

“Our guider, come, to the Roman camp conduct us.” He and his available fighters follow the scout to join Cominius and Martius.

Amid the clamor of violence surrounding him on the field of battle, Martius encounters Aufidius. Each, sword in hand, recognizes the other as his chief competitor.

“I’ll fight with none but *thee*!” cries Martius, “for I do hate thee worse than a *promise-breaker*!” Their encounter is overdue.

Aufidius comes toward him, drawing a knife with his left hand. “We hate *alike!* Not *Afric* owns a *serpent* I abhor and envy more than thy fame! Affix thy foot!”

“Let the first to budge *die!*—and *after*, the gods doom him *the other’s slave!*” says the Roman, as they square off.

“If I fly, Martius, follow me like a *hare!*”

“Within these *three hours*, Tullus, *alone* I fought within your Corioli wall!” boasts Martius, drawing his own knife, “and made what work I *pleased!*—’tis not *my* blood wherein thou seest me maskèd! For thy revenge, wrench up thy power to the highest!”

Aufidius is scornful: “Wert thou the *Hector* that was braggèd the whip of *your* progeny,”—the Trojans, “thou shouldst not *’scape me here!*”

They fight vigorously, their swords clanging, knives darting forth, both men striking and fending. But soon, two more Volsces come to Aufidius’s aid.

To their dismay, Martius, inflamed, stabs one in the leg and slashes the other’s arm.

“*Oh, vicious—and not valiant!*” he shouts indignantly, as Tullus Aufidius flees with the injured others. “In using condemnèd *seconds*, you have *shamèd* me!”

The Romans’ victorious dual army, now led by Cominius and Martius, unites at the camp near the city gates, and trumpets blare out a flourish of triumph. The tired forces have driven away the vanquished troops; the Volsci have scattered south in disarray.

“If I should tell thee o’er this thy day’s work, *thou’ldst* not believe thy deeds!” cries Cominius, joyfully embracing Martius. “But I’ll report it where *senators* shall mingle tears with *smiles*—where great *patricians* shall attend, shrug—and i’ the end, *admire!*”

“Where ladies shall be *frighted*—and, *gladly* quakèd, hear *more!*”

“Where the dull *tribunes*, that with the fusty plebeians hate *thine* honours, shall say, against their hearts, ‘We thank the *gods* our Rome hath such a *soldier!*’

“Yet camest thou to the morsels of *this* feast having *fully dined before!*”

Titus Lartius, exhilarated, pulls off his hat and bows to Martius. “Oh, general,” he tells Cominius, “here is the *steed!*—we the caparison!”—draped-on decoration. “Hadst thou *beheld!*—”

Martius interrupts: “Pray, now, no more.” He customarily declines commendations made in his presence. “My mother—who has a charter to extol her blood—when *she* does praise me it grieves me,” he claims. “I have done as *you* have done: that’s *what I can!*—induced as you have been: that’s *for my country*. He that has but effected his *good will* hath overta’en *mine* act.”

Cominius will not be dissuaded. “You shall not be the grave of your *deserving!* Rome must know the *value* of *her own!* ’Twere a concealment worse than a *theft!*—no less than a *traducement!*—to *hide* your doings, and to silence that which, vouchèd to the *spire and top* of praises, would seem but *modest!*”

“Therefore, I beseech you, in sign of what you *are*, not to reward what you have *done!*—before our army *hear me!*”

Martius’s demurrals is masterly: “I have some *wounds* upon me, and *they* smart to hear themselves remembered. . . .”

“Should they *not* be, well might they *fester!*—’gainst *ingratitude!*—and content themselves with death,” argues Cominius, guiding Martius to take a place before the assembled troops. “Of *all* the good horses whereof we have ta’en, and of *all treasure* achievèd in this field, and a good store in the city, we *render you a tenth!*—to be ta’en forth, before the common distribution, at your-only choice!”

The foot soldiers are unmoved. They know well enough how items of actual value are distributed: among the noblemen, officers, and gentlemen.

“I thank you, general,” says Martius, “but cannot make my heart consent to take a *bribe* to pay my sword! I do refuse it—and stand upon my common part with those that have *beheld* the doing.”

At the general's signal there is a long flourish of horns; and the captains—crying "*Martius! Martius!*"—raise their swords high, as Cominius and Lartius stand, hats off, before him.

"May these same instruments,"—men's voices, "which you profane, never sound *more*," protests Martius, with prideful humility. "When drums and trumpets shall i' the *field* prove *flatterers*, let courts and cities be made *all* of false-faced smoothing! When *steel* grows as *soft* as the parasite's silk, let it be made an orator for the *worst!*"

"No *more*, I say! For that I have not washed my *nose* that bled, or have foiled some debile *wretch*—which, without note, here's many else have done—you shout me forth in acclamations hyperbolic, as if I loved that my *little* should be dieted in *praises*, sauced with *lies!*"

Standing with their battle-shrunk ranks, veteran sergeants grit their teeth at the deprecating modesty and its vainglorious disparaging of the troops' accomplishment. Among those wounded in the struggle, more of their men will soon perish in agony, feverish with infection. Many others will not live to complete the return; some who do will be left crippled.

"*Too modest* are you," says Cominius, "more *cruel* to your good *report* than grateful to us that give you truly!" Clapping a hand on the commander's shoulder, he laughs. "By your patience, if 'gainst *yourself* you be incensèd, we'll put you, like one that means his proper harm, in *manacles*, then reason *safely* with you!"

Cominius turns to the assembled army. "Therefore, be it known, as to us to *all the world*, that Caius Martius wears *this war's garland!* In token of the which, my noble *steed*, known to the camp, I give him, with all its trim belonging!" The officers voice approval of the awards.

Cominius raises both hands. "And from this time, for what he did before Corioli, call him, with all the applause and clamour of this host: Martius, Caius, *Coriolanus!*"—conqueror of the Corioles. "Bear the addition nobly ever!" he tells Martius.

Over the rolling sound of drums, the trumpets provide another flourish, and the host of men replies: "*Martius Caius, Coriolanus!*"

The hero nods as they cheer. "I will go wash—and when my face is fair, you shall perceive whether I blush or no! Howbeit I *thank* you," he tells Cominius, "I mean to bestride *your steed!*—and at all times undertake, to the crest of *my* power, to bear your addition *fair!*"—to uphold respect accorded his new name.

Cominius motions to the captains, and the troops are soon marched away to their respective camp sites.

"So, to our tent," says the general, "where, ere we do repose us, we will write to Rome of our success.

"You, Titus Lartius, must to Corioli back. Send us their best, with whom we may articulate for their own good and ours"—Volscian lords, to negotiate the peace settlement.

"I shall, my lord."

"The gods begin to mock me," says Coriolanus. "I, that now refused most princely gifts, am bound to beg of my lord general...."

"*Take 't!*—'tis *yours!*" says Cominius. "What is 't?"

"I sometimes lay here in Corioli at a poor man's house; he used me kindly. I saw him a *prisoner*; he called out to me—but then *Aufidius* was with in my view, and wrath o'erwhelmed my pity! I request you to give my poor host freedom."

"Oh, *well* begged! Were he the butcher of my *son*, he should be free as is the wind! Deliver him, Titus."

Lartius asks, "Martius, his name?"

"*By Jupiter, forgot!*" cries *Coriolanus*, angered at hearing his former form of address. But he covers: "I am weary... yea, my *memory* is tired." He asks Cominius. "Have we no wine here?"

The general smiles. "Go we to our tent. The blood upon your visage dries; 'tis time it should be looked to. Come."

And so the kindly Coriolan is forgotten. One of many ill-fed prisoners compelled by the Roman troops to bury the dead, he will perish within a fortnight.

After sunset, a brief cornet flourish signals the return of Tullus Aufidius, exhausted, to the Volsces' hastily formed camp well south of Corioli. "The town is ta'en," he confirms to his waiting officers.

Says a battered captain, "'Twill be delivered back, on good condition"—when the victor's terms are met.

"*Condition!*" cries Aufidius. "I would I were a *Roman*—for I cannot, being a Volscie, be what *I am!*"—proud. "*Condition!* What *good* condition can a treaty find i' the part that is *at mercy?*"

He paces, staring at the ground. "*Five times*, Martius, I have fought with thee; so often hast thou beat me—and *wouldst* do so, I think, should we encounter as often as we *eat!*"

"By the elements, if e'er *again* I meet him beard to beard, he's mine or I am his! Mine emulation"—spirit of competition—"hath not that honour in't it *had!* For where I had thought to crush him in an equal, true force, *sword to sword*, I'll poke at him some other way—wrath by *craft* may get him!"

"He's the Devil!" mutters the captain.

"*Bolder*, though—not so subtle," growls Aufidius. "My valour, suffering stain *only by him*, is *poisoned!*—for him it shall *fly out of itself!*"

"Neither sleep nor sanctuary, being naked nor sick, not vain prayers of priests nor times of capital sacrifice—all embarments to *fury!*—shall lift up their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst *my hate for Martius!*" he vows. "Where I find him—were it *at home, under my brother's guard!*—even *there*, against the hospitable canon, will I wash my fierce hand in's *heart's blood!*"

He stops, and strokes his beard, thinking. "Go you to the city," he tells a lieutenant. "Learn how 'tis held, and who they are that must be hostages for Rome." He will want intelligence from them when they are released after the settlement.

"Will not *you* go?"

Aufidius shakes his head; he means to confer with allies, powerful friends in his home territory, down nearer the coast. "I am awaited at the cypress grove. 'Tis south of the city mills; I pray you, bring me word thither how the world goes, so that to the pace of it I may spur on my journey."

"I shall, sir."

As the lieutenant heads, warily, back toward Corioli, Aufidius rides south. The other men move closer to the fire, nursing their wounds—and angry frustration—as night sets in.

Chapter Four Welcome to Rome

Pigeons flutter up briefly from the stone pavement of a sunny square in Rome, agitated by the feet of a man rushing among them. As they settle again to continue searching for crumbs, the messenger delivers a reply to Lord Menenius.

The nobleman, in turn, approaches two representatives of the people, Sicinius and Brutus. "The augurer tells me we shall have *news* tonight."

"Good?" asks Brutus.

"Not according to the prayer of the *people*," says Menenius, "for they love not *Martius.*"

Sicinius shrugs. "Nature teaches even beasts to know their friends."

"Pray you, whom does the *wolf* love?"

"The lamb," says the tribune sourly.

"*Aye—to devour* him!—as the hungry plebeians would the noble *Martius!*" says Menenius.

"*He's* a lamb that indeed *baas* like a *bear!*" protests Brutus.

"He's a bear indeed, that *lives* like a lamb," counters Menenius, defending his noble friend. He regards the bald commoners. "You are old men; tell me one thing that I shall ask you."

“Well, sir?”

“In what is Martius *poor*—what deficiency that *you* two have not in *abundance*?”

Brutus despises the commander. “He’s poor in no *one* fault, but stored with *all*!”

“Especially in *pride*!” says Sicinius.

“And, topping all others, in *boasting*,” Brutus adds.

Menenius seems surprised. “That is strange, now—do you two know how *you* are censured here in the city?—I mean by us o’ the right-hand file”—the leaders. “*Do you?*”

The men are curious. “Why, how are *we* censured?” asks Sicinius.

Menenius affects caution: “Because you spoke of *pride* just now—will you not be *angry*?”

“We’ll be fine, sir,” Brutus assures him. “Well?”

“Why, ’tis no great matter—for occasionally a *very little thief* will rob you of a *great deal of patience*!” he chides. “Give your *dispositions* the reins, and *be angry*, at your pleasures!—at least, if you take it as a pleasure to you in being so.

“You blame Martius for being *proud*?”

“We do it not *alone*, sir,” notes Brutus.

“I know you can do *very little* alone,” says Menenius. “Your *helpers* are *many*, or else your actions would grow wondrous simple! *Your* abilities are too infant-like for doing much *alone*!

“You talk of *pride*! Oh, that you could turn your eyes toward the *napes* of your necks, and make but an *interior* survey of your good selves! Oh, that you *could*!”

“What then, sir?” demands Brutus.

“Why, then you should discover a pair of magistrates *unmeriting, proud, violent, testy*—aliased *fools* by many in Rome!”

Sicinius flushes with anger. “Menenius, *you* are known well enough *too*!”

Scoffing at the childish retort, the nobleman describes his own reputation among the aristocracy—who find his judgment to be overly liberal. “*I* am known to be a jovial patrician, and one who loves a cup of mullèd wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in’t!—said to be somewhat imperfect for favouring the *first* in complaint,”—listening to plebians’ woes, “hasty and *tinder-like* upon too-trivial motion”—prone to reject their arguments. He looks at tribunes pointedly. “One that converses more with the *buttock* of the *night* than with the *forehead* of the *morning*!

“What *I think*, *I utter*—and expend any malice in my breath.

“Meeting two such *wealmen* as *you* are, I cannot call you *Lycurguses*”—solons. “If the drink you give me touch my palate adversely, *I make a crooked face* at it! I can’t say Your Worships have delivered a matter *well* when I find ‘as if’ in compound with the major part of your syllables!”—indignant speeches bolstered by specious examples. “And though I must be content to *bear with* those that say you are *reverend, grave* men, yet they *lie deadly* who tell you you have *good faces*!

“If even *you* can see in *this*,”—he points to his own face, “the map of my microcosm,”—its reddened anger, “it follows that *I am* ‘known well enough too.’ What *balm* can your *bee-some conspicuities*”—drone-like dullnesses—“glean out of *this* character, if it be *known well enough too*?”

Brutus grumbles, “Come, sir, come, we know you well enough to—”

“You *know* neither *me, yourselves*, nor *anything*!” cries Menenius scornfully. “You are ambitious for *poor knaves’* caps and legs!”—strive for their approval. “You wear out a good, wholesome forenoon in hearing a cause”—court case—“between an *orange-wife* and a *faucet-seller*,”—drink vendor, “and then *adjourn* the controversy over *three-pence* 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*,”—bowel pang, “you make faces like *mummers*, send up a flag”—halt the proceedings—“against all *patience*, and, in roaring for a chamber-pot, *dismiss* the bloody controversy, entangled by *your* hearing, *bleeding all the more*! The peace *you* make in their cause is calling *both* of the parties knaves!

“You are a pair of *strange* ones!”

“Come, come,” says Brutus angrily, “*you* are well understood to be more perfected as a *giber for the table* than needed as a *bencher*”—adviser—“in the *Capitol!*” The nobleman is said to sup sumptuously, but offer more wry commentary than useful counsel.

Paunchy Menenius sneers. “Our very *priests* shall become mockers, if they must 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 entombèd in an *ass’s pack-saddle!*”—uses for trimmed-off whiskers. “Yet you must be saying *Martius* is proud—who, even in a *cheap* estimation, is worth all *your* predecessors since *Deucalion!*”—the Flood, “though peradventure some of the *best* of ’em were hereditary to *hangmen!*”

“God-den to *Your Worships!*” he says, with a mockingly deep bow. “More of *your* conversation would *infect my brain*, hearing the *herdsman* of the *beastly plebeians!* I will be so bold as to take my leave of you!” He stalks away, leaving the indignant tribunes to complain about him to each other.

As he crosses the square near the Capitol, Menenius encounters a gathering crowd, and he sees Lady Volumnia hurrying forward with Virgilia and Lady Valeria. He bows. “How now, my *as-fair-as-noble* ladies—and *Diana*, were she earthly, no *nobler!*—whither do you follow your eyes so fast?”

“Honourable Menenius, my boy *Martius* approaches!” cries Volumnia. She motions for him to accompany them. “For the love of *Juno,*”—Jupiter’s wife, “let’s *go!*”

Menenius follows, delighted. “*Ah!*—*Martius* coming *home!*”

“*Aye,* worthy Menenius!—and with most prosperous *approbation!*”

He pulls off his hat and tosses it in the air. “Take my cap, Jupiter, and I *thank* thee! *Hoo!* *Martius* coming *home!*”

“*Aye,* ’tis true!” confirms Virgilia.

“Look, here’s a *letter* from him!” says the warrior’s mother. “The state hath another, his wife another—and I think there’s one at home for *you!*”

“It will make my very *house* reel tonight!” says Menenius, already celebrating as he puts his hat back on. “A letter for *me?*”

“Yes, certainly there’s a letter for you!” says Virgilia. “I *saw’t!*”

“A letter for *me!* It gives me an estate of *seven years’ health,*” says the old man, “during which time I will *make a face* at the physician! The most sovereign prescription in *Galen* is but an empiric’s pharmaceuticals, and compared to this *preservative,* of no better report than a *horse-drench!*”

“Is he not *wounded?* He was wont to come home wounded. . . .” *Martius’s* silent modesty has always been complemented by white bandages’ bright exposition of his valor.

His wife hopes for no more such symbols. “Oh, *no, no, no!*” moans Virgilia.

Volumnia has no doubt: “Oh, he *is* wounded!—I thank the *gods* for’t!”

“So do I, too, if it be not too much,” says Menenius. “Brings he *victory* in his pocket, the wounds *become* him!”

Volumnia grasps the old nobleman’s sleeve; she has heard more. “Menenius, he comes the *third time* home with the *oaken garland* on’s brows!”

“Has he disciplined Aufidius soundly?”

Volumnia frowns, disappointed. “Titus Lartius writes that they *fought* together, but Aufidius got away.”

Menenius grumbles in frustration, “And ’twas *time* for him, too! I’ll warrant that if he had stayed near him, Coriolanus would not have been so *Aufidiussed*”—cheated—“for all the chests in *Corioli,* and all the gold that’s *in* them!”

“Is the Senate possessed of this?”

Volumnia again urges her companions forward. “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!*”

Lady Valeria nods. “In troth, there’s wondrous things spoken of him!”

“*Wondrous!*” says Menenius. “*Aye*, I warrant you—and not without his true purchasing!”

“May the gods grant them true,” murmurs Virgilia.

“*True!*” cries Volumnia, “without doubt!”

“True? I’ll be sworn they *are* true!” cries Menenius. “Where is he wounded?” But before the mother can answer, he shouts to the two tribunes across the square. “God *save* Your Good Worships!” he cries, “*Martius* is coming *home!*—and he has *more* cause to be *proud!*”

Menenius turns back to the women. “Where is he wounded?”

Volumnia cites the badges: “I’ the shoulder and i’ the left arm there will be large cicatrices”—scars—“to show the people, when he shall stand for his place!”—seek popular approval for appointment to higher office. “In the repulse of Tarquin,”—when the king was defeated, “he received *seven* hurts i’ the body!” she notes proudly.

So Menenius has seen. “One i’ the neck, and two i’ the thigh... there’s *nine* that *I* know of!”

“He had, before this last expedition, twenty-five wounds upon him,” Virgilia reports.

“Now it’s *twenty-seven!*” says Menenius happily. “Every gash was an *enemy’s grave!*” They hear shouts and a flourish of horns. “Hark!—the trumpets!”

“Those are the *ushers* of *Martius!*” says Volumnia proudly. “Before him he carries noise, and behind him he leaves *tears! Death*, that dark spirit, doth lie in *his mighty arm*—which being advanced, *comes down*—and then *men die!*”

A ceremonial sennet announces the warriors’ arrival: resplendent on their stallions are Cominius and Titus Lartius, and between them rides Coriolanus, crowned with a wreath of oak leaves. Following in a parade formation march their captains, with the foot-soldiers trudging behind.

As the commanders dismount and come forward to stand before the crowd, a herald steps to the front to proclaim: “Know, Rome, that *all alone*, *Martius* did fight *within Corioli gates!*—where he hath won, with fame, a *name* to Caius *Martius!*” His gesture sweeps toward the halted troops. “These, in honour, follow *Coriolanus!*”

“Welcome to *Rome*, renowned *Coriolanus!*”

Trumpets send a flourish for gallantry over the cries and cheers of the throng.

Then come shouts: “*Welcome to Rome*, renowned *Coriolanus!*”

The hero is apparently discomfited. “No more of this; it does offend my heart! Pray now, no more!”

Cominius points. “Look, sir, your mother!”

As the crowd parts for his passage, Coriolanus goes to Volumnia and kneels. “Oh, you have, I know, petitioned all the gods for my prosperity!”

“*Nay*, my good soldier, *up!*” she tells him. “My *gentle* Caius, *worthy* *Martius*—and by *deed*—achieving honour, newly named—what is it?—*Coriolanus* must I call thee?” He kisses her cheek. She looks around. “—But, oh, thy wife...”

Coriolanus takes the hand of tearful Virgilia. “My gracious Silence, *hail!*” He teases: “Wouldst thou have laughed had I come confined home, who *weep’st* to see me *triumph*? *Ah*, my dear, such eyes the *widows* in *Corioli* wear, and mothers that *lack* sons!”

As he kisses her, Menenius, standing near them, smiles. “*Now* the gods crown thee!”

Coriolanus is ebullient. “And live *you* yet?” he laughs, as the old nobleman beams. He turns again to his mother. “O my sweet lady, pardon.”

“I know not where to turn!” she cries, ecstatic. “Oh, welcome *home!* And welcome, general!” she tells Cominius. She calls, to the ranks, “And ye’re welcome *all!*”

“A *hundred thousand* welcomes!” gushes Menenius. “I could *weep*, and I could *laugh*—I am light and heavy! *Welcome!*” he says to Coriolanus. “A *curse* begin at the very *root* of his heart that is *not* glad to see thee!”

He tells the commanders, “You are three that Rome should *dote* on!—but, by the faith of men, we have *some* old crab-trees here at home that will not be grafted to your relish. Yet *welcome, warriors!* We call a nettle but a *nettle!*—and the faults of *fools* but *folly!*”

Cominius smiles. “Ever *right!*”

Coriolanus nods. “Menenius *ever, ever.*”

At Cominius’s wave, the herald signals for the procession to resume its march; the soldiers have been standing in the sun, weary after their journey, waiting to be released to return to their homes. “Give way there, and go on!”

Coriolanus turns to his mother and his wife: “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, a *change of honours*”—nomination for a new role as general consul, successor to Cominius as his term ends.

“I have lived to see *inherited* my very *wishes*, and the buildings of my fancy!” Volumnia tells him, as they walk. “There’s only one thing wanting, which I doubt not but that our Rome will cast upon thee!” She has great political ambition, for him.

“Know, good mother: I had rather be their *servant* in my *own* way than rule with them in theirs.”

The hint of a frown crosses her face; but she will deal with his concern later.

“On, to the Capitol!” Cominius tells Lartius.

The nobles head up the long hill.

—

Brutus and Sicinius remain in the square, watching as other citizens disperse to go about their business.

Brutus is disgusted with the reception accorded Coriolanus. “All tongues *speak* of him, and the bleared sights are *spectacled* to *see* him! Your prattling *nurse* lets her baby cry while she chats of *him* in a *rapture!* The *kitchen* creature pins her richest kerchief ’bout her reechy neck, clambering the garden wall to *eye* him!

“Stalls, bulks, windows are smothered up, leads filed,”—rooftops lined with spectators, “houses ridged with variable complexions”—different faces, “all *agreeing* in their earnestness to *see him!* Seld-shown *flamens*”—coddled, reclusive monks—“do press among the popular throngs, and *puff!*”—actually put forth effort—“to win a vulgar station!”—a place to stand in the crowd. “Our veiled *dames* commit a war of *white and damask*, offer their nicely-gaued cheeks to the wanton spoil of Phoebus’ burning kisses!”—expose carefully powdered paleness to sunlight. “Such a *pother!*—as if whatever *god* leads him were slyly crept into his *human* powers, and gave him *graceful* posture!”—the standing of a deity.

Sicinius is sure the Senate will want to reward Coriolanus with political power. “On the sudden, I warrant him *consul!*”

Brutus hopes not: “Then *our* office may, during his power, go *sleep!*”

Sicinius shakes his head; he is less worried about the fiery warrior. “He cannot *temperately* transport his honours from where he should *begin and end,*”—the field of battle, “and will *lose* those he hath won.”

“In that there’s comfort,” says Brutus.

“Doubt not the commoners, for whom we stand; they, with their ancient malice, will forget these his new honours upon the least cause—which *he will give them!*” prophesies Sicinius. “I make as *little question* as *he is proud* that he’ll do’t!”

Brutus nods. “I’ve heard him swear that, were he to stand for consul,”—seek election, “never would he appear i’ the *market-place*, nor on him put the napless vesture of *humility*, nor show, as the manner is, his wounds to the people—‘*beg* their *stinking* breaths!’”

Tradition requires the procedure; protests Sicinius, "'Tis right!"

"It was *his word!* Oh, he would *miss it,*"—forego the office, "rather than carry it but by the *suit of the gentry* to him, and the desire of the *nobles!*"

Says Sicinius, "I wish no better than to have him *hold to* that purpose, and put it into execution."

"'Tis most likely he will!"

"It shall be to him, then, as *our* will would hope: a *sure destruction.*"

"So it *must* fall out to him—or our *authority's* at an *end!*" warns Brutus. "We must imply to the people what *hatred* he hath ever held them in!—that to 's power he would have made them *mute*—silenced their pleaders, and dispropertied their *freedoms!*—holding them, in human action and capacity, to be of no more soul nor fitness for the world than *mules* in the *war*—who have *there* proven good only for *bearing burdens,* and, sinking *under* them, for *sore blows!*"

Sicinius agrees. "This that you say—put forward at some time when his *soaring insolence* shall touch the people—which time shall not be lacking if he be *put* upon't; and that's as easy as to set dogs on sheep!—will be as *fire,* kindling their *dry stubble!* And their blaze shall darken him forever!"

A messenger comes running to them. "What's the matter?" asks Brutus.

"You are *sent for* to the *Capitol!* 'Tis thought that Martius shall be *consul!*"

"I have seen the deaf men throng to *see* him, and the blind to *hear him speak!* Matrons flung gloves, ladies and maids their scarfs and handkerchers 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!"

"Let's to the Capitol," says Brutus grimly, "and carry with us ears and eyes for the time—but *hearts* for the *event!*"

Sicinius nods, starting that way. "Have with you."

Chapter Five Meeting the People

All has been quiet near the Forum early this cool, still morning atop Capitoline Hill, the highest of Rome's seven. Two city officers bring stacks of cushions to place on the senators' stone benches.

"Come, *come,* they are almost *here!*" says the captain of the guard. "How many stand for consulship?"

"Three, they say; but 'tis thought that, of everyone, *Coriolanus* will carry it."

"That's a brave fellow; but he's vengeance *proud,* and loves not the common people."

"Faith, there have been many great men that *flattered* the people, who ne'er *loved* them," says the lieutenant. "And there be many that *they* have loved, they know not *wherefore.* So if they love they know not why, they can *hate* upon no better a ground.

"Therefore, for Coriolanus neither to *care* whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has of their disposition! And out of his *noble* carelessness, he lets them plainly see't!"

Hurrying along the rows and setting down cushions, one by one from an armful, the captain disagrees. "If he did *not* care whether he had their love or no, he'd waver indifferently 'twixt doing them either good or harm; but he *seeks* their *hate!*—with greater devotion than they can *render* it him!—and leaves nothing undone that may fully reveal him their *opposite!*"

"Now, seeming to *invite* the malice and displeasure of the people is as bad as that which he dislikes: to flatter them for their love!"

“He hath deserved worthily of his country,” says the lieutenant, “and his ascent is not by such easy degrees as those who, having been supple and courteous to the people, benefitted without any *deed* further to heave them into their estimation and report.

“But he hath so *implanted* his honours in their eyes, and his actions in their hearts, that for their tongues to be silent and not *confess* as much were a kind of ingrateful *injury!*—to report otherwise were a *malice* that, giving *itself* the lie, would pluck reproof and rebuke from every ear that heard it!”

“No more of him,” murmurs the captain, glancing around to see if they’ve been overheard. “He is a worthy man!” he says aloud, just in case, and places the last cushion. “Make way, they are coming.”

A sennet is sounded by trumpeters outside the building, the new Temple of Jupiter, and Cominius, Rome’s general consul, enters the marble hall, followed by the senators. With the legislators are Menenius and Coriolanus. The Senate is soon seated, as are the tribunes.

Menenius, standing at the front near where Coriolanus waits, addresses the assembly. “Having settled terms with the Volsces, and sent back Titus Lartius, it remains, as the main point of this, our after-meeting, to gratify his noble service who hath thus *stood for his country!*

“Therefore, please you, most reverend and grave elders, to desire the present consul, and general in our latest, well-found successes”—he nods to Cominius—“to report a little of that worthy work performed by Caius Martius, *Coriolanus*, whom we meet here both to thank and to remember with honours like *himself!*”—great ones.

An enthusiastic senator rises. “*Speak*, good Cominius! Leave nothing out for *length*, and make us think our *state*’s defective in *requital*, rather than *we* for stretching it out!”

He turns to the new tribunes. “Masters o’ the *people*, we do request your kindest ears—and, after, your loving motion toward the common body to yield in what passes here.” The plebians have recently been given the power to overrule any Senate decision.

The two rise. Sicinius tells the Senate, carefully, “We are convenèd upon a pleasing *entreaty*, and have hearts inclinable to honouring and advancing the theme of our assembly.”

But Brutus adds, with a glance at Coriolanus, “Which we shall do, if he remember a rather *kinder* value of the people than he hath heretofore prized them at.”

Menenius protests: “That’s off, that’s *off!*—I would rather you had been *silent!* Please you to hear *Cominius* speak!”

“Most willingly,” says Brutus. “But yet my *cautioning* was more pertinent than the *rebuke* you give it.” He takes his seat.

Says Menenius, “He loves your people, but do not expect him to be their *bedfellow.*” He, turns to the consul. “Worthy Cominius, speak!

“Nay, keep your place,” he tells Coriolanus, who has risen to go outside and wait.

“Sit, Coriolanus!” urges a senator. “Never shame to *hear* what you have nobly *done!*”

“By Your Honor’s pardon, I had rather have my *wounds* to *feel* again than hear said how I got them!” says the soldier.

Brutus prods: “Sir, I hope *my* words disbenched you not.”

“*No*, sir! Oft when *blows* have made me *stay*, I’ve fled from words; but you *soothed* not, therefore *hurt* not! And as for your *people*,” he adds, staring straight at Brutus, “I love them as they weigh”—as they *deserve*, arguably; but his look says *as a commodity*.

Menenius would curb his younger friend’s scorn. “Pray now, sit down.”

But Coriolanus stalks away. “I had rather have scratched my head i’ the sun when the *alarum* were struck, than idly sit to hear my nothings monstered.” He leaves the room—lest his presence diminish the praise of those *nothings*.

“Masters of the people,” Menenius growls at the tribunes, “how can he *flatter* your multiplying *spawn*, that’s *a thousand* to one *good* one, when you see how he had rather venture *all his limbs* for honour than one of ’s ears to *hear* of it?”

“Proceed, Cominius!”

As Menenius seats himself, the general consul whose term is ending steps forward and faces the full Senate. “I shall lack voice; the deeds of *Coriolanus* should not be uttered *feebly!*”

“It is held that *valour* is the *chiefest* virtue, and most dignifies the haver. If it be, the man I speak of cannot in the *world* be singly counterpoised!

“At *sixteen years*, when Tarquin made a head for Rome,”—when the former king tried to return and overthrow the republic, “he fought beyond the mark of others!” He nods to a silver-haired predecessor. “Our then leader, whom with all praise I point at, saw him *fight*, when with his Amazonian chin,”—not yet whiskered, “he *drove* the bristled lids”—rebels’ tufted helmets—“*before him!*”

“He bestrid an o’er-pressèd Roman,”—stood protecting a fallen soldier, “and i’ the consul’s view *slew three opposers!*”

“Tarquin’s *self* he met!—and *struck him*, on his knee!

“In that day’s feats, when he might have acted the *woman* in the scene, he proved *best man i’ the field*, and for his meed was brow-bound with the *oak!*”

“The pupil-age man thus *entered*, he *waxèd like a sea*, and in the brunt of *seventeen* battles since, he lurched all swords of the garland!”—outdid all others.

“As for this last, before and in Corioli, let me say I cannot speak him home! He stopped the *fliers*,”—those retreating, “and by his rare *example*, made the coward turn terror into *spur!*”

“As reeds before a vessel under sail, so men *obeyed*, and fell below his *stern!*”

“His sword, *Death’s* stamp—where *it* did mark, *he took!*”

“From face to foot he was a thing of *blood*, whose every motion was timed with dying cries!

“*Alone* he entered the mortal gates of the city, which he departed with a shuntless *destiny!*—*aidless* came away!—and, with a sudden reinforcement, struck Corioli like a *planet!*—now *all’s his!*”

“When by and by the dint of war ’gan to pierce his ready senses, then straight his *doubled spirit* requickened what in flesh was fatigate, and *to the battle* he came!—where he did *run*, wreaking o’er the lives of men as if ’twere a *perpetual sport!*”

“And till we callèd both field *and* city ours, he never stood to ease his breast with panting!”

Menenius rises to his feet, crying, “*Worthy man!*”

The tall senator calls, to the others, “He cannot but with measure fit the honours which we devise for him!”

Cominius raises his voice to add: “Our *spoils* he *kicked* at, and looked upon things precious as if they were the common muck of the world! He *covets* less than *miser-ing* itself would *give!*—*rewards* his deeds with *doing* them, and is content to spend but the *time to end!*”

“He’s right *noble!*” declares Menenius. “Let him be called for!”

“Call Coriolanus!” the senator tells the guards.

“He doth appear,” says their captain—dryly; the warrior, who was listening, is already striding back into the hall.

“The Senate, Coriolanus, are well pleasèd to *make thee consul!*” Menenius tells him.

Coriolanus bows. “I do owe them ever my life and services.”

“It then remains but that you do speak to the people.”

Coriolanus regards the senators. “I do beseech you, let me o’erleap that custom, for I cannot put on the gown,”—the plain white toga of a civilian, “stand naked,”—without a warrior’s accoutrements, “and *entreat* them, for my *wounds’* sake, to give their suffrage! Please you that I may *pass* that doing.”

Sicinius rises. “Sir, the people *must* have their *voices*; neither will they abate *one jot* of *ceremony!*” he insists.

The senators, aware of continual threats from Etruscans in the north and Volscians to the south, dare not stir rebellion within Latium itself. As the hall buzzes with concern, Menenius goes to Coriolanus, and urges, quietly, “Put them not to’t! Pray you, go *fit you* to the *custom*, and take unto you, as your predecessors have, your *form* with your honour!”

Coriolanus protests, "It is a part that I should *blush* enacting—and might *well* be *taken* from the people!"

Brutus is on his feet, angry. "*Mark you that?*" he demands of the others.

Coriolanus glowers. "To brag unto *them*—'*Thus* I did, and *thus!*'—show them the unaching *scars*, which I should *hide!*—as if I had received them only for the *hire of their breath!*"

Menenius whispers, urgently, "*Do not stand upon't!*" He turns to face Sicinius and Brutus. "We recommend to you, tribunes of the *people*, our purpose to *them*."

"And to our noble *consul*," he says, to Coriolanus, "we wish all joy and honour!"

The senators echo the sentiment aloud: "To *Coriolanus* come all joy and *honour!*"

At a sign from Cominius, a flourish of cornets is sounded at the back, and the noblemen begin to leave the temple.

Brutus fumes. "You see how he intends to use the people!"

"May they *perceive* 's intent!" replies Sicinius, delighted by the brazen attempt to circumvent Roman law. "He *will* request of them!—even if he did contemn that what he desires should be in *them* to give!"

Brutus eagerly leads the way down to the city. "Come, we'll inform them of our proceedings here! On the marketplace, I know they do wait for us...."

Above the city's many dwellings, but nestled between the Capitoline and Palatine hills, lie the Forum and its busy marketplace, an exchange for commodities, livestock, household goods—and opinions. This morning, as always, citizens discuss the news; today's talk centers on a controversial warrior's bid for public approval to become general consul of Rome.

One older man sells poultry and fresh eggs to the stewards of wealthy families, and stale goods, when he has them, to the poor. He could accept the will of the Senate, if Coriolanus would simply ask for public approval. "If only he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him."

"We *may*, sir, if we choose," notes the Chandler. His various wares are used by all: soap and wax candles for nobles, and clear oil for their lamps; for the citizens, thin tallow tapers that burn with small, smoky flames. He remembers well the days of the harsh kings, and he relishes the people's ability to challenge the will of their republic's nobles.

"We have power in ourselves to do it—but it is a power that we have no power to *use!*" complains the mercer. "For if he 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 tells us his noble *deeds*, we must also tell him our noble *acceptance* of them!"

Resentment of the custom's compulsion has not dulled his ribald wit: "Ingratitude is monstrous; and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude—of the which we, being members, should bring ourselves to be *monstrous members!*"—big pricks.

The old man has smarted under Coriolanus's invective, but he grins. "And to make us no *better* thought of, only a little help will serve: for once we'd stood up about the wheat, he himself stuck not to call us 'the many-headed multitude!'" He laughs. "We have not been called so by many!"

The mercer's stall displays fabrics, coarse and fine, threads of linen and silk, for anyone who has money. "Note that our heads are some brown, some black, some auburn, some bald—and that our *wits* are so diversely coloured. And truly, I think, if all our wits were to *issue* their content, they would fly *east, west, north, south!*—not one direct way from one skull, but at once would be to *all the points o' the compass!*"

The Chandler is a quiet, careful young man. "Think you so? Which way do you judge *my* wit would fly?"

The cloth merchant chuckles. "Nay, *your* wit will not so soon go out as another man's will: 'tis strongly wedged up in a *block-head!* But if it were at liberty, 'twould, surely, go southward."

"Why that way?"

“To *lose* itself in a *fog!*—from where, three parts of it being melted away by rotten dews, the *fourth* would return—for conscience’ sake, to help thee to *get a wife!*”

Even the candle-maker laughs. “You are never without your tricks! *You may, you may!*”

“Are you all resolved to give him your voices?” asks the mercer. “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.”

As the others nod, he sees that, at the wide far doors, Coriolanus is entering the marketplace with Menenius. “Here he comes—and in the gown of humility.” The plain toga bears no sign of the officer’s rank; he wears no hat—nor oak wreath. “Mark his behavior.”

Influential men of the market have already been advised by their tribunes. “We are not to stay all together, but to come past him where he stands, by ones, by twos, and by threes.” The mercer’s smile is mischievous. “He’s to make his requests”—for approval as consul—“to *particulars*—wherein every one of us has a *single* honour, in giving him our own voices with our own tongues!” The irascible supplicant will have to solicit them individually.

“Therefore follow me, and I’ll direct you how you shall go by him.”

The others nod amused agreement. “Content, content!”

Menenius has been arguing to Coriolanus that he should simulate humility. “Oh, sir, you are not right!” He alone could speak so to the proud general—and even Menenius won’t say *You are wrong*. “Have you not known the *worthiest* men to have done’t?”

“What must I *say*? ‘I *pray, sir...*’ *Plague upon’t!* I cannot bring my tongue to such a pace! ‘Look, sir, at my wounds; I got them in my country’s service—when some certain of *your brethren* reared and *ran* from the *noise* of *our own drums!*’”

“*Oh, me, the gods!*—you must not speak of *that!* You must desire them to think upon *you!*”

“*Think* upon me! *Hang* ’em, I would they would *forget* me!—like the *virtues* which our divines waste on ’em!”—merits ascribed by priests to common men.

Menenius whispers a warning: “You’ll mar all!” Looking down the long rows of stalls, he is worried, but the pettifogging process must begin. “I’ll leave you. Pray you, speak to ’em—in *wholesome manner*, I pray you!”

Coriolanus is revolted by the market’s ambient aromas of commoners’ commerce for the larder. “Bid *them* wash their faces, and keep their teeth clean,” he mutters as Menenius moves away.

The general watches as the Chandler and poulterer stop nearby. *So, here comes a brace!* he thinks, of the apparently timid pair. “You know the cause, sir, of my standing here?” he demands, as the mercer approaches.

“We do, sir; tell us what hath brought you to’t.” The other man comes up behind him, followed by another.

“Mine own desert.”

“Your own desert....”

“Aye, but not mine own desire.”

“How?—not your own desire?” asks the mercer.

“No, sir: ’twas never my desire yet to trouble the *poor* with *begging*.” The churlish response hardly pleases these men—who are *not* poor.

The mercer counters, “You must understand that, if we *give* you anything, we hope to *gain* by you.” He is expects some such assurance.

“Well, then I pray: your *price* for the consulship?”

“The price is to ask for it kindly,” the old poulterer tells him.

Coriolanus looks at the Chandler. “*Kindly*, sir, I pray, let me ha’t. I have wounds to show you—which shall be yours *in private*.” He raises an eyebrow. “Your good *voice*, sir—what say you?”

The Chandler seems satisfied. “You shall ha’ it, worthy sir.”

“A *match*, sir!” says Coriolanus. “There’s in all *two* worthy voices begged. I have your *alms*,”—charity. “Adieu.” And thus he curtly dismisses all three.

As they walk away, the mercer looks at the others. “But this is somewhat odd. . . .”

The chandler, too, had hoped the candidate would better accommodate them. “If ’twere to *give* again. . . . But ’tis no matter.”

They return to their wares, and Coriolanus sees several others nearing him. “Pray you now, if it may stand within the tune of *your* voices that I may be consul, I have here the *customary gown*,” he says—with the tone of one being martyred.

A wiry cobbler eyes him. “You have deserved nobly of your country; and you have *not deserved* nobly.”

“Your enigma?”

“You have been a scourge to her enemies, but you have been a *rod* to her *friends*. You have *not*, indeed, loved the *common* people.”

“You should account me the more *virtuous*, that I have not been *common* in my love,” says Coriolanus. “I will, sir, *flatter* my sworn brothers, *the people*, to earn a dearer estimation of them; ’tis a condition *they* account *gentle*.”

His feeling of humiliation rises. “And since the *wisdom* of their choice is rather to have my *hat* than my heart, I will practise the insinuating *nod*—and *doff* to them most counterfeitly!” The cobbler frowns, puzzled. “That is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchments”—affect the charming manner—“of some *popular* man, and give it *bountifully* to the desirers!” Pretending to pull off a hat, he bows, much too deeply. “Therefore, *beseech* you I may be consul!”

A grocer, approaching, is pleased by the gesture: “We hope to find you our *friend*—and therefore give you our voices heartily!”

The cobbler nods. “You have received many wounds for your country,” he says, eager to see.

“I will not seal your knowledge with showing them,” says Coriolanus, although he has displayed scars often enough before patrician eyes. “I will make much of your voices,” he says, scarcely concealing his contempt and turning away, “and so trouble you no further.” He heads down the aisle between stalls.

Still, the grocer smiles as he goes. “The gods give you joy, sir, heartily!”

Coriolanus thinks, sourly, *Most sweet voices!*

Better it is to die!—better to starve!—than to crave the hire which we first do deserve!

Why in this woolish toge should I stand here, to beg from whatever Hob and Dick do appear their needless vouches? Custom calls me to ’t! What Custom wills?—if in all things should we do ’t, the dust on antique Time would lie unswept, and mountainous Error be too highly heapt for Truth to o’erpeer!

Rather than ’fool’ for it so, let the high office and the honour go to one that would do thus!

But he soldiers on. *I am half through; the one part suffered, the other will I do!*

Three prosperous men of middle age approach him as they pass through the market.

Here come more voices. “Your *voices!*” he cries. “For your *voices* I have fought; *watchèd* for your voices; for your voices bear *wounds!*—two *dozen* odd! Battles *thrice six* I have seen and heard, for your voices!—have done *many* things, some less, some more—*for your voices!*” He regards them dourly. “Indeed, I *would* be consul.”

The heaviest man nods to the other two, as more gather around them. “He *has* done nobly, and cannot go without any honest man’s voice.”

His friend concurs. “Therefore let him be consul! The gods give him joy, and make him good friend to the people!”

“Amen, *amen!*” cry others.

“God save thee, noble consul!” says a citizen, patting his arm.

“*Worthy* voices,” mutters Coriolanus, as they go.

He sees Menenius returning—with Sicinius and Brutus; they have been watching from a distance.

“You have stood your initiation,” Menenius tells him, “and the tribunes endue you with the people’s voice! It remains only that, in the official marks invested,”—with emblems of the new office, “you anon do meet the Senate!”

Coriolanus is surprised. “Is *this* done?”

Sicinius nods glumly. “The custom of *request* you have discharged; the people do admit you, and are summoned to meet anon, upon your approbation.”

“Where? At the Senate-house?”

Sicinius nods. “There, Coriolanus.”

“May I change these garments?” He wants his sword.

“You may, sir.”

“That I’ll straight do!—and, knowing *myself* again, repair to the Senate-house.”

Menenius nods. “I’ll keep you company. Will you go along?” he asks the others.

“We’ll wait here for the people,” says Brutus.

“Fare you well,” says Sicinius as the noblemen leave. But frustration shows as he turns to Brutus. “He *has* it now—and by his *looks*, methinks ’tis *warm* at ’s heart!”

“With a *proud heart* he wore his humble *clothes*,” Brutus admits, scowling. “Will you dismiss the people?”

The men who met Coriolanus—and who have since spoken among themselves—approach.

“How now, my masters,” says Sicinius. “Have you chosen this man?”

“He has our *voices*, sir,” says the graying poulterer.

Brutus says, stonily, “We pray the gods he may *deserve* your loves.”

“*Amen*, sir,” says the Chandler. He frowns and blinks. “But to *my* poor, unworthy notice, he *mocked* us when he begged our voices...”

The mercer concurs. “*Certainly*—he *flouted* us downright!”

“No,” insists the old man, “’tis his kind of *speech*. He did not mock us!”

The Chandler scoffs. “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!”

“Why, so he *did*, I am sure...” says Sicinius—too smoothly.

“*No, no!*” cry several citizens. “No man *saw* ’em!”

“He said he had wounds which he *could* show—in *private*,” notes the mercer. “And with his ‘hat’ thus waving in *scorn*, says he. ‘I would be consul. Agèd custom but by *your voices* will so permit me—your *voices* therefore!’

“When we *granted* that, here was, ‘I thank you for your *voices!*’” Making a face, he imitates spurious gratitude. “‘*Thank you! Your most sweet voices!*’” He turns his back abruptly. “‘Now you have *left* your voices, I’ll have no further with you.’” He asks the others: “Was not this *mockery*?”

Sicinius glares at the men, irked. “Why, were you either too ignorant to *see*’t, or, *seeing* it, of such *childish* friendliness as to *yield* your voices?”

Brutus berates them: “Could you not have told him *as you were lessoned!*—when he *had no power!*—was but a petty servant to the state!

“He was your *enemy!*—ever spake against your *liberties*, and the *charters* that you bear i’ the body of the weal! And *now*, arriving at a place of *potency* and *sway* o’er the state, if he should still malignantly remain fast *foe* to the *plebeii*, your voices might be *curses to yourselves!*”

“You *should* have said that, as his worthy *deeds* did proclaim what *he* stood for, so his *gracious nature* should think no less upon *you* for your *voices*—and have translated his malice towards you into love, standing as your *friendly* lord.”

“*Thus* to have said—as you were *fore-advised*,” Sicinius points out, “had touched his *spirit* and tried his *inclination*—from him would either have plucked his gracious *promise*, which you might, as cause had called you up, have *held* him to!—or else have galled his *surly* nature, which easily endures no article tying him to *ought!* Thus putting him into a *rage*, you could have ta’en the advantage of his choler, and passed him on *unelected!*”

Brutus is exasperated. “Did you not *perceive*? He did solicit you *in open contempt* 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 all your bodies no *heart* among you?—had you no *tongue* to cry against the wrackèd ship of *judgment*?”

“Have you not ere now *denied* the asker?—and *now*, of him that did *not* ask, but *mocked*, *bestow* you sued-for tongues?” demands Sicinius.

“He’s not *confirmed*,” says the mercer, flushing at the censure. “We may deny him yet!”

“And *will* deny him!” cries the Chandler. “I’ll have five hundred voices of that sound!”

Even the poulterer is convinced. “I *twice* five hundred—and *their* friends to piece ’em!”—add their support.

“Get you hence *instantly*!” demands Brutus. “And, you who have chosen a consul that will from them *take their liberties*—make them of no more voice than *dogs* that are as often *beaten* for barking as *kept* therefore—*tell those friends to do so!*”

Sicinius would soothe. “Let them assemble,” he says more calmly, “and, upon a safer judgment, all *revoke* your uninformed election.

“Stress his *pride* and his old *hate* unto you! Besides, forget not with what *contempt* he wore the humble toga—how in his request he *scorned* you!

“Only your *loves*, thinking upon his *services*, *took* from you the perception of his present bearing, which most *gibingly, ungravely*, he did fashion after the inveterate *hate* he bears you!”

Brutus adds a deception: “Lay the fault on *us*, your tribunes: say that, no *impediment* being seen, we belaboured that you *must* cast your election on him!”

Sicinius approves. “Say you chose him more after *our commandment* than as guided by your own true affections, and that your minds, pre-occupied with what you *must* do rather than what you *should*, *made* you, against the grain, to voice him consul. Lay the fault on us.”

Brutus is sure their phantom effort will please the senators, to the tribunes’ benefit. “Aye, spare us not! Say we read *lectures* to you: how *youngly* he began to serve his country, how long *continued*; and from what *stock* he springs—of the noble house o’ Marcian, from whence came that Ancus Martius, Numa’s daughter’s son, who, after great Hostilius, here was *king*. Of the same house were Publius and Quintus. That, and *Censorinus*—nobly named so, twice being chosen censor by the *people*—was his great ancestor.”

Sicinius completes the argument: “Our *best* water was brought by such conduits hither. One thus descended—who hath, beside, wrought well *in his person* to be set high in place—we did commend to your remembrances.

“But *you* have found, balancing his *present* bearing against his past, that he’s your *fixèd enemy*!—and *revoke* your sudden approbation.

“Say you ne’er had done’t—harp on that still—but by *our putting on!*” insists Brutus. “And as soon as you have drawn your number,”—gathered the plebians, “repair to the Capitol!”

The citizens are persuaded. “We will do so!” nods the grocer. “Almost all repent in their election.”

The men leave, hurrying away to secure agreement from among the populace at large.

Brutus knows that the stratagem is dangerous. “Let them go on; this mutiny were better *put in hazard* than to wait, past doubt, for a *greater!*”

“If, as his nature is, he fall into rage with their refusal, both observe and *answer* the vantage of his anger!” he advises.

Sicinius nods. “To the Capitol, come.

“We will be there before the stream o’ the people, and this which we have goaded onward shall seem—as partly *’tis*—their *own*.”

Chapter Six Candor—and Charges

The streets of Rome are busy, with citizens, gentry and nobles moving up toward the market. As Menenius and Coriolanus approach, they are met by Cominius and Titus Lartius—who provide news.

“Tullus Aufidius has made new head, then?” asks Coriolanus.

“He *has*, my lord,” says Lartius, “and that it was which caused *our* swifter composition.” The soldiers recently released have been called back—along with more from the town and farms, to replace those disabled or killed.

“So now the Volscies stand but *as at first!*—ready, when time shall prompt them, to make road upon us again!” says Coriolanus, vexed.

Cominius is not alarmed. “They are *worn*, lord consul,”—Coriolanus is pleased to be addressed by the title, “so well that we shall hardly *in our ages* see *their* banners wave again!” He doubts that the disheartened Volscian nobles being gathered by Aufidius after his latest defeat can marshal enough support to pose a serious threat.

“Saw you Aufidius?” asks Coriolanus.

Lartius nods. “On safe-guard he came to me—and did *curse* against the Volscies for having so vilely yielded the town! He is retired to Antium.” That large city, on the seacoast south of Corioli, is ten leagues from Rome.

“Spoke he of *me*?”

“He did, my lord.”

“How? What?”

“How he had often met you *sword-to-sword*,” says Lartius. “That of all things upon the *earth* he *most* hated *your person!*—that he would pawn his fortunes to *hopeless destitution*, so long as he might be called *your vanquisher!*”

“At Antium lives he?”

“At Antium.”

Coriolanus’s face shows the eagerness that his challenger arouses. “I wish I had a cause to *seek* him there, to oppose his hatred fully!”

He sees men coming down from the Capitol; the plebeians’ vote on a new consul will have been taken. “Welcome *home*,” he calls, dryly, to Sicinius and Brutus. “Behold,” he says to Cominius, “these are the tribunes of the *people*, the *tongues* o’ the common *mouth!* I despise them because they *prank* themselves in authority, against all *noble* sufferance!”

Sicinius holds up a hand, and the tribunes move to block Coriolanus’s way. “Pass no further.”

Coriolanus is surprised—and annoyed. “*What is that?*”

“It will be *dangerous* to go on,” says Brutus. “No further!”

“What makes this change?” demands Coriolanus.

“The *matter?*” demands Menenius.

Cominius frowns. “Hath he not *passed* the noble and the common?”—been confirmed as consul.

“Cominius, no.” says Brutus.

Coriolanus is infuriated by the reversal. “Have I had *children’s* voices?”

A tall, silver-haired senator is among those who have arrived behind Menenius. “Tribunes, *give way!*—he *shall* to the market-place!”

But Sicinius shakes his head, warning, “The people are incensed against him.”

Brutus tells them, “*Stop*, or all will fall into *broil!*”

Coriolanus glares at the tribunes, while angry, hostile citizens begin to gather behind the two. “Are these *your* herd? Must *these* have voices—that can *yield* them now, then straight *disclaim*

their tongues? What are *your* offices?—you being their *mouths*, why rule you not their *teeth*?” He steps closer. “Have you not *set them on*?”

Menenius grips his arm to hold him back. “Be calm, be *calm!*”

“It is a *purposed* thing, and grows by *plot* to curb the will of the *nobility!*” cries Coriolanus. “*Suffer* it, and live with such as *cannot* rule, nor ever will *be ruled!*”

“Call’t not a *plot*,” says Brutus defiantly. “The people cry you *mocked* them!—and of late, when grain was given them gratis, you *repined*—*scandaled* the suppliants for the people, called them *time-pleasers, flatterers—foes to nobleness!*”

“Well, this was known *before*,” says Coriolanus.

“Not to them *all*.”

“Have you informed them since?”

“What?—*I* inform them?”

“You are likely to do such business!”

“Not *un*-likely,” says Brutus calmly. *Any way to best yours!*

Coriolanus is rarely thwarted. “Then why *should* I be consul? By yond clouds, let me deserve *so ill* as you—and make me your fellow *tribune!*”

Sicinius is aware that many are now observing. “You show *too much* of that for which the people *stir!* If you will pass to where you are bound, you must inquire on your way—which you are *out of*—with a *gentler* spirit, or never be so noble as consul—nor yoke with him as a *tribune!*”

“Let’s be calm!” urges Menenius as Coriolanus’s face turns scarlet.

“The people are abused!—*set on!*” says Cominius. “This *paltering* becomes not *Rome*—nor has Coriolanus deserved this so-dishonoured hindrance, laid falsely i’ the plain way of his merit!”

“Tell me of *grain!*” mutters Coriolanus, growing angrier. “*This* was my speech, and I will speak’t *again!*—”

“Not *now*,” says Menenius, “*not now!*”

The tall senator, too, is concerned; a frowning, grumbling crowd is forming around them.

“Not in *this heat*, sir, not now.”

“*Now!*—as I *live*, I *will!*” cries Coriolanus. “Of my noble friends, I crave their pardons; as for the mutable, *rank-scented many*, let them *regard* me—and therein *behold themselves*, as *I do not flatter!*”

“I say *again*: in *soothing* them, we nourish, *against our Senate*, the cockleburs of *rebellion, insolence, sedition!*—which *we ourselves* have ploughed for, sown, and scattered, by *mingling* them with *us*, the *honoured* number who lack not *virtue!*—no, nor *power*, but that which we have *given to beggars!*”

Menenius tries to calm him. “Well, no more . . .”

“No more words, we beseech you!” pleads the senator.

“*What?*—no *more?*” cries Coriolanus. “As I have *shed my blood* for my country, not fearing outward *force*, so shall my lungs coin words *till their decay*, lest these *pustules* which we disdain should *tatter* us!—we who sought the very way to *save* them!”

“You speak of the people as if you were a *god*, to *punish*,” says Brutus, “not a *man*, of their infirmity!”

Sicinius nods. “’Twere *well* we let the people *know’t!*” he says—and growling agreement is heard from those around them.

“Know *what?*” demands Menenius. “*What?*—of his *choler?*”—momentary anger.

“*Choler!*” protests Coriolanus, pulling away from Menenius. “Were I as settled as a *midnight sleep*, by Jove ’twould be my mind!”

Sicinius turns to the senators angrily. “It is a mind—a *poison!*—that shall remain *where it is!*—not poison any *further!*” he pronounces.

“*Shall* remain!” shouts Coriolanus. “*Hear* you this *Triton* of the *minnows*? Mark you his absolute ‘shall’?”

“’Twas from the canon,” Cominius notes; the people may lawfully block his election.

“*Shall?*” Coriolanus addresses the legislators. “O good but most *unwise* patricians! *Why*, you grave but reckless senators, have you thus given *Hydra* here”—the populace—“the choosing of an officer who—being but the *horn* and *noise* o’ the monster, with his peremptory ‘*shall*’—lacks not spirit to say he’ll *turn your current into a ditch*, and make *your* channel *his*?”

“If ye *have* power, then *void* your ignorance!”—correct the mistake. “If *none*, awake from your dangerous *lenity*!”

“If you are *learnèd*, be not as common fools! If you are *foolish*, *let* them have cushions beside you!—you are *plebeians* if they be *senators*!—and they are *no less* when, both of your voices blended, the great’st taste must palate *theirs*!”

“They choose their *magistrates*—and *such* a one as he who puts his ‘*shall*,’ his popular ‘*shall*,’ against a graver bench than ever frowned in *Greece*!”

“*By Jove* himself,” cries Coriolanus, “it *makes the consul base*!”

“And my *soul aches*, knowing how soon, when *two* authorities are up, neither supreme, *disorder* may enter ’twixt the gap of both, and *take* the one by the other!”

Cominius—hardly pleased to be described as a *debased* consul—wants to end the diatribe against the Senate, and to prevent further suggestion of civil conflict. “Well, on to the market-place....”

But Coriolanus persists. “Whoever gave *counsel* to give forth grain o’ the storehouse *gratis*, as ’twas used sometime in *Greece*—”

“Well, well, no more of that,” says Menenius.

“—though there the *people* had *more* absolute powers—I say *they nourished disobedience*!—*fed the ruin of the state*!” insists Coriolanus, who disdains Greek democracy.

Brutus appeals indignantly to the listeners: “Why shall the people give their voice to *one that speaks thus*?”

“I’ll give my *reasons*!—more worthier than their *voices*,” growls the general. “They know the grain was not for *recompense* of those who, resting well assurèd, *ne’er did service* for it! Even being conscripted to the war *when the navel of the state* was touchèd,”—its very life threatened, “they would not thread the gates!”—avoided defending it. “*That kind of service* did not deserve *grain gratis*!”

“Then, being in the war, their *mutinies* and *revolts*—wherein they showed *most* valour—spoke not *for* them!”

“The accusation which they have often made against the Senate—a *cause unborn*!—could never be a motive for our so-frank *donation*!”—obvious *gift*. “Well, *what then*?—how would this bosom multiplièd *digest* the Senate’s courtesy?”—perceive the boon. “Let *these* express what’s likely to be *their* words: ‘We did *request* it; we are the greater *poll*, and they gave us our demands in true *fear*!’”

“Thus we *debase* the nature of our seats, and make the rabble call our *cares* ‘*fears*’—which will in time break ope the locks o’ the Senate, and bring in the *crows* to peck the *eagles*!”

The senators stare, stunned by the harsh, public affronts.

Menenius is dismayed—and apprehensive—as angry commoners move closer. “Come, enough!”

“*Enough*!—with *over-measure*!” huffs Brutus.

“No, take *more*!” cries Coriolanus, raging on. “May whatever can be *sworn by*, both divine and human, *seal* what I end withal:

“This *double working*—where one part does *disdain with cause*, the other *insult beyond all reason*—where *gentry, title, wisdom*, cannot conclude but by the yea-and-no of *general ignorance*!—must *omit real necessities*, and give way the while to *unstable slightness*!”

“*Purpose* so barred, it follows that *nothing* is done for a purpose!”

“Therefore, *beseech you*—you who would be less fearful than *durable*, who love the *fundamental* part of the state more than you fret about the change on’t, who prefer a *noble* life

before a *long*, and wish to bestir with a dangerous *medicine* a body that's sure of death without it!—at once *pluck out* the multitudinous tongue! Let them not lick the *sweet* which is their *poison*!

“Your dishonour *mangles true judgment*, and *bereaves* the state—not having the power to do the *good* it would, for the *ill* which doth *control*’t—of that *integrity* which should *become it*!”

“*He’s said enough!*” cries Brutus—to clamorous concurrence by irate citizens nearby.

“Spoken like a *traitor!*” calls Sicinius. “And he shall *answer* as traitors do!”

“*Thou wretch!*” shouts Coriolanus. “*Despite o’erwhelm thee!*” He challenges the patricians: “What *might the people do* with these bald tribunes?—on whom depending, their obedience to the *greater bench fails!*”

“*In a rebellion*—when not what’s meet but what ‘*must be*’ was law—*then* were they chosen! In a *better* hour, let what is *meet* be said *must be!*—and *throw their power i’ the dust!*”

Brutus is livid. “*Manifest treason!*”

Sicinius scowls at Coriolanus. “*This, a consul? No!*”

“The aediles, *ho!*” calls Brutus, summoning the tribunes’ deputies. He points to Coriolanus, as two men come forward. “Let him be apprehended!”

“Go, call up the *people!*” cries Sicinius. “In whose name myself *attach thee* as a *traitorous subverter!*” he says, grasping Coriolanus by the arm to arrest him, “a *foe to the public weal!* Obey, I charge thee, and follow to thine answer!”

Coriolanus laughs. “*Hence, old goat!*”

The eldest senator there hastens to offer bond for the commander: “We’ll surety him!”

Cominius scowls at the tribune. “*Agèd sir, hands off!*”

“*Hence, rotten thing,*” Coriolanus tells Sicinius, “or I shall shake thy *bones* out of thy *garments!*” Roughly, he jerks his arm away, staggering the old tribune.

“*Help, ye citizens!*” calls the graybeard—and onlookers, their fists balled, cluster around to defend him, as more deputies arrive.

Menenius raises a palm. “On both sides, more *respect!*”

“Here’s he that would *take from you* all your *power!*” cries Sicinius to the crowd.

Brutus orders, “*Seize him, aediles!*”

“*Down with him!*” call citizens nearby. “*Down with him!*”

From the ensuing commotion around Coriolanus come diverse cries: “*Weapons, weapons! Weapons!*”—“*Tribunes!*”

“*Patricians!*”—“*Citizens!*”—“*What, ho!*”—“*Sicinius!*”—“*Brutus!*”—“*Coriolanus!*”—“*Citizens!*”

“*Peace, peace, peace!*”—“*Stay, hold! Peace!*”

Menenius is pushed back from the fray. *What is about to be? I am out of breath!—disorder’s near!—I cannot speak.*

But he calls out: “You, *tribunes* to the people! *Coriolanus! Patience!*” The old lord appeals for help: “*Speak, good Sicinius!*”

The tribune raises his hands high. “*Hear me, people! Peace!*”

Some in the crowd would listen. “Let’s hear our *tribune!*” “*Peace!*” *Speak!*” “*Speak, speak!*”

“You are at the point of *losing your liberties!*” Sicinius warns them. “*Martius* would have *all* from you!

“*Martius,*” he shouts at the senators, “whom of late *you* had named for *consul!*”

“*Fie, fie, fie!*” cries Menenius. “This is the way to *kindle*, not to quench!”

“To *unbuild* the city, and to lay all flat!” adds a senator.

Sicinius is unmoved. “What is the city but the *people?*”

“*True!*” cries a citizen, “the *people are* the city!”

“By the consent of *all,*” says Brutus, “we were established as the people’s *magistrates.*”

“You so *remain!*” calls a voice in the crowd.

“And are likely so to *do!*” says Menenius, trying to conciliate.

Cries Cominius, furious with the tribunes, “This is the way to *lay the city flat!*—to bring the roof down to the *foundation*, and *bury* all which yet distinctly ranges in heaps and piles of *ruin!*”

But Sicinius exhorts the crowd: “This deserves *death!*”

Shouts Brutus, “Let us *stand* to our authority, or let us *lose* it! We do here pronounce, upon the part o’ the people, in whose power we were elected theirs, *Martius deserves immediate death!*”

“Therefore *lay hold of him!*” Sicinius tells the deputies. “Bear him to the rock Tarpeian, and from thence *cast him into destruction!*”

The nearby cliff, part of Capitoline Hill, is a vertical face of stone; criminals are executed by being thrown from its height.

Aediles, *seize him!*” demands Brutus.

Angry citizens, shaking raised fists, yell, “Yield, Martius, yield!” The deputies edge warily toward Coriolanus.

Menenius steps before the magistrates. “Hear me *one word!* Beseech you, tribunes, hear me but a *word!*”

The aediles’ chief motions for the crowd to listen. “*Peace, peace!*”

Menenius faces Brutus. “*Be* what you *seem!*—truly your country’s *friend*—and *temperately* proceed to what you would thus *violently* redress!”

Brutus retorts, “Sir, those cold ways that *seem* like prudent helps are *very poisonous*, when the *disease* is *virulent!*” He commands the deputies, “Lay *hands* upon him, and *bear him to the rock!*”

Coriolanus’s laugh is harsh; then his glare smolders. “No, I’ll die here.” He draws his sword. “There’s some among you have *beheld* me fighting,” he says, with a thin, menacing smile. “Come!—try upon *yourselves* what you have seen me do....”

“Down with that sword!” says Menenius. “Tribunes, *withdraw* awhile!”

“*Lay hands upon him!*” insists Brutus.

Cominius now draws his blade, and calls for support: “*Help Martius! Help*, you that be *noble! Help him, young and old!*” The legislators’ and commanders’ swords slide from their scabbards. The noblemen, backing closer to each other, soon form a ring with Coriolanus.

“*Down with him!*” demand several commoners, “*down with him!*” But, facing long, well wrought steel weapons in the hands of those who can use them skillfully, they must move back.

“*Go,*” Menenius calls to them, “get you to your houses! *Be gone, away!* All will be *nought*, else!” The patricians carefully advance outward, their gleaming sword-points moving forward.

The tribunes and their deputies lead the sullen citizens down the slope toward the market.

“Get you gone!” a fat senator calls to the stragglers.

Cominius tells the nobles, “Stand fast! We have as many *friends* as enemies!”

But white-haired Menenius is appalled by conflict within Rome. “Shall it be put to *that?*”

“The gods forbid!” says the tall senator. “I prithee, noble friend, home to thy house!” he urges Coriolanus—who, he believes, has done enough harm. “Leave *us* to cure this cause!”

Menenius concurs. “As ’tis a sore upon us you cannot heal *yourself*, be gone, I beseech you!”

Cominius, too, wants no further provocation. “Come, sir, along with us.”

Coriolanus angrily shoves his sword into its sheath. “I would they were *barbarians*—as they *are!*—though in Rome litterèd, not *Romans!* They are *not*, though calved i’ the porch o’ the Capitol!”

“*Begone,*” pleads Menenius. “Put not your worthy rage into your *tongue*, or one time will own *another!*”—bar recourse.

Coriolanus watches the departing plebeians. “On fair ground I could beat *forty* of them!”

“I could myself take on a pair o’ the best of them!” says Cominius. He laughs, “Yea—the two *tribunes!*”

“But now ’tis odds beyond *arithmetic*—and manhood is called *foolery* when it stands against a falling fabric!”—the flag of a lost cause. “Will you *hence*, before the rag-tag *return*?—whose rage doth run like interrupted waters, and o’erbear what they are used to bear!”—flood, if dammed.

“Pray you, begone,” says Menenius gently. “I’ll try whether my old wit be in request with those that have but *little*!” He is very worried. “This must be *patched*, with cloth of *any* colour!”

Cominius smiles, and claps a hand on Coriolanus’s shoulder. “Nay, come away.”

The officers start down the slanted street. Escorted by Cominius, they will reach their homes without further incident.

Near the Capitol at sunset, one owner of much land in the area, is dismayed. “This man has *marred his fortune*!”

Menenius, who has been talking with several other patricians, sighs. “His nature is too noble for the world. He would not flatter Neptune for his *trident*, nor Jove for’s power to *thunder*! His *heart*’s his *mouth*: what his breast forges, that his tongue must *vent*—and being *angry*, he does forget that he ever heard the *name* of Death.”

They hear, growing louder and closer, the angry grumbling of many voices, and some echoing shouts. Menenius sees the men advancing. “Here’s *goodly work*,” he says wearily.

“I would they were *a-bed*,” says another wealthy Roman.

“I would they were in the *Tiber*!” says Menenius. “What the vengeance!—could he not *speak ’em fair*?”

A crowd of wrathful rabble—well armed, now—approaches Menenius, led by the people’s tribunes.

“*Where is this viper*,” demands Sicinius loudly, “that would *depopulate* the city and be *every man himself*?”

“You worthy tribunes—”

“He shall be *thrown from the Tarpeian rock* by rigorous hands! He hath *resisted law*!—and therefore law shall scorn him any further trial than the severity of the *public* power which he *so sets at nought*!”

The poulterer brandishes an old pike. “He shall well know the noble tribunes are the people’s *mouths*—and *we* their *hands*!”

Citizens around him shout in agreement. “He *shall*!—*be sure* of’t!”

“Sir, sir!—”

Sicinius motions for the crowd to listen. “Peace!”

Menenius tells them, “Do not cry *Havoc* where you should but hunt with modest warrant!”

Sicinius frowns ominously. “Sir, how comes’t that *you* have help to *make his rescue*?”

Menenius raises his empty hands. “Hear me speak! As I do know the consul’s worthiness, so can I name his *faults*—”

“*Consul*!” cries Sicinius, “what *consul*?”

“The consul Coriolanus—”

“*He, consul*?” cries Brutus, scornfully, to the crowd.

“*No*!” shout the amassed citizens, “*no, no*!” “*No*!” “*No*!”

Menenius steps forward. “If, by the tribunes’ leave, and *yours*, good people, I may be *heard*, I would crave a word or two—the which shall turn you to no further harm than so much loss of time.”

“Speak *briefly* then,” demands Sicinius, “for we are peremptory to *dispatch* this *viperous traitor*!” He glances toward the lethal ledge. “To eject him hence were but *one danger*—to *keep* him here our *certain death*! Therefore it is decreed *he dies tonight*!”

Menenius addresses the crowd: “Now the good gods forbid that our renowned Rome, whose *gratitude* towards her deserving children is enrolled in Jove’s own book, should like an *unnatural dam* now *eat up her own*!”

“He’s a *disease* that must be *cut away!*” insists Sicinius.

Menenius speaks calmly. “Oh, he’s but a *limb* that *has* a disease—mortal to cut it off; to cure it, *easy!*”

“What has he done to Rome that’s worthy of *death?* Killing our *enemies?*”

“The *blood* he hath lost—which, I dare vouch, is more than that he *now hath*, by many an ounce!—he dropped it *for his country!* And to lose what is left *by* his country were, to us all that do’t and allow it, a *stigma* to the *end o’ the world!*”

Sicinius scoffs. “This is clean *cant!*”

“*Completely awry!*” argues Brutus. “When he *did* love his country, it *honoured* him!”

Adds Sicinius—mocking Menenius’s famous analogies—“The service of the *foot*, being once *gangrened*, is not then respected for what *before* it was!”

“We’ll hear no more,” rules Brutus. “*Pursue him to his house*, and pluck him *thence!*—lest his *infection*, being of catching nature, spread *further!*”

“One word *more,*” cries Menenius, “*one word!* This *tiger-footed* rage, when it shall *find* the harm in unscannèd swiftness, will *too late* tie leaden pounds to its heels! Because he is *belovèd*, proceed by *process*, lest *faction* break out, and *sack* great Rome with *Romans!*”

Sicinius starts to reply. “If it were so—”

Brutus overrides: “Why do we *talk?* Have we not had a taste of *his* obedience?—our aediles *smote!*—*ourselves resisted!* *Come!*”

“Consider *this!*” insists Menenius loudly. “He has been bred i’ the *wars* since he could draw a sword, and is ill-schooled in *bolted* language!”—secure, safe phrasing. “Meal and bran *together* he throws, without distinction!

“Give me leave!—I’ll go to him and undertake to *bring* him where he shall *answer!*—by a *lawful* form, in *peace*, to his utmost peril!”—even with his life at stake.

A senator supports the offer. “Noble tribunes, it is the *humane* way! The other course will prove too bloody, and the end of it unknown to the beginning!”

Sicinius considers: having Coriolanus brought before him—yielding to his judgment—seems preferable to rioting and a brutal siege. “Noble Menenius, be you then as the *people’s* officer! Masters, lay down your weapons.”

“Go not *home,*” Brutus cautions the citizens.

“Meet on the market-place,” Sicinius tells them. “We’ll attend you there.

“Where, if you bring not Martius,” he warns Menenius, “we’ll proceed in our *first* way!”

Menenius seems confident. “I’ll bring him to you.” He starts down toward the city’s homes. “Let me desire your company,” he tells one of the other patricians as he goes.

Away from the plebeians, he reveals his fear. “He *must come*, or *what is worst will follow!*”

The tall statesman concurs. “Pray you, let’s *to* him!”

Chapter Seven Facing Judgment

Coriolanus rages. “Let them *pull all down about mine ears!*—present me *death on the wheel*, or at *wild horses’* heels!—or *pile ten hills* on the Tarpeian rock, so the precipitous height might stretch *beyond the beam of sight!*—yet will I *still* be *thus* to them!”

“You do the nobler!” one of the lords visiting his home assures him.

Says the warrior, “I muse that my *mother* does not approve me further—she who was wont to call them *woollen vassals*, *things* created to buy and sell with *goats*—to show *bare heads* in congregations, to *gape* and be still in *wonder* when one of *my* ordinance stood up to speak of peace or war!

“I talk of *you,*” he tells Volumnia, as she enters the room. “Why did you wish me *milder?* Would you have me be *false to my nature?* Say, rather, I should play the man *I am!*”

“Oh, sir, sir, sir, I would have had you *put your power well on* before you had *worn it out!*” she retorts.

Coriolanus waves away the office of general consul. “Let it go.”

Volumnia persists: “You might have been *enough* of the man you are by *striving* less to be so! Lesser had been the *thwarting* of your dispositions if you had not shown them how ye were disposed *till they lacked power to cross you!*”

“Let them hang!”

“Aye, and *burn* too!” says the portly patrician, as Menenius and a senator are ushered in by a servant.

Menenius speaks immediately and urgently: “Come, come, you have been too rough, somewhat *too rough!* You must return and *mend* it!”

The senator concurs. “There’s no remedy; otherwise, our good city may cleave in the midst, and perish!”

Volumnia faces her son. “Pray, *be counselled!* I have a heart as little apt as *yours*, but yet a brain that leads my *use* of anger to better *advantage!*”

Menenius nods. “*Well said*, noble woman! But that the violent fit o’ the *time* craves it as *physic for the whole state*, before he should thus stoop to the herd *I* would put on mine armour, which I can scarcely *bear!*”

Coriolanus regards them gloomily. “What must I do?”

“Return to the tribunes,” says Menenius.

“Well, what then? What *then?*”

“Repent what you have spoken.”

“Before *them?*” cries Coriolanus. “I cannot do it to *the gods!*—must I then do’t to *them?*”

“Though you can never be too *noble*, speaking extremities you are too *absolute* therein!” his mother tells him. “I have heard you say that in *war*, honour and policy do grow *together*, like severed friends! Granting that, tell me what in *peace* each of them loses by the other, such that they combine not *then?*”

Annoyed, Coriolanus turns away.

But Menenius seconds her challenge. “A good demand!”

Volumnia presses: “If it be honourable in your *wars* to *seem* the same as you are *not*,”—to employ a ruse, “when for your best ends you *adapt* your policy, how is it less or worse to hold counterfeiting to be as honourable in *peace* as in war, since it stands in like request to both?”

Coriolanus frowns. “Why *force* you this?”

“Because now it lies upon you to speak to the people not by your *own* instruction, nor by the matter which your *heart* prompts you, but with such words as are rooted in but your *tongue!*—though bastards, and syllables of no allegiance to your *bosom’s truth!*”

“Now, this no more dishonours you at all than through gentle words to *take in a town*, which else would put you to your fortune and the *hazard of much blood!*”

“*I*, with *my* nature, would dissemble when—with my fortunes and my *friends’* at stake—honour *required* I should do so! *I* am in this!—your *wife*, your *son*, these *senators*, the *nobles!*”

“Would you rather show our general louts *how you can frown* than spend a *fawn* upon ’em for the inheritance of their love, and the safeguard of what its lack might *ruin?*”

Menenius bows to her. “Noble lady!” He turns to Coriolanus. “Come—go with us! Speak *fair*, not so you may *salve* what is dangerous, but to *thwart the loss* in what has passed!”

Volumnia hands Coriolanus his hat. “I prithee now, my son, go to them, with this bonnet in thy *hand*”—a sign of humility. “And *thus* far having stretched it, be *here* with them,”—she kneels, “thy knee bussing the stones; for in such business, *action* is eloquence, and the *eyes* of the ignorant are more learned than their ears.

“Nod thy head often,” she urges, “thus commending thy stout heart, *shown* as but *humble*—the ripest mulberry that will not hold the handling!”

She thinks for a moment. "Say to them thou art *their soldier*—and, being bred in *broils*, hast not the *soft* way—which now thou dost confess were as *fit* for thee to use in asking their good loves as for *they* to *claim*—and that thou wilt frame thyself, forsooth, *hereafter theirs*, so far as thou hast power and person!"

Menenius is pleased. "This done just as she speaks, why, their hearts were *yours!* For, being but *asked*, to little purpose they give *pardon* as freely as *words!*"

"Prithee now, go and be ruled," says Volumnia, "although I know thou hadst rather follow thine enemy into a *fiery gulf* than *flatter* him in a bower."

She sees that the general consul now joins them. "Here is Cominius."

"I have been in the market-place," he tells Coriolanus, "and, sir, 'tis fit you make *strong parley!* Defend yourself in *calmness*—or by *absence!* All's in *danger!*"

"Only *fair speech!*" insists Menenius.

"I think 'twill *serve,*" says Cominius, "if he can thereto frame his spirit...."

"He *must* and *will!*" says Volumnia, touching her son's arm. "Prithee now, say you will, and go about it!"

The warrior protests: "Must I go show them my *barbered sconce?*"—head shorn like Samson's. "Must I with base tongue give my noble heart a *lie* that it must bear?"

"Well, I will do't. Yet, were there but this *single* plot to lose,"—were only he affected, "this mould of Martius"—his corporeal being—"they to *dust* should grind, and throw't against the *wind!*"

"To the market-place." Gritting his teeth, he shakes his head. "You have put me now to such a part as I shall *never* discharge to the life!"—play convincingly.

"Come, come" says Cominius, "we'll prompt you!"

Volumnia smiles. "I prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said *my praises* first made thee a *soldier*, so you have my praise for *this!* Perform a part thou hast not done before!"—play a politician.

"Well, I must do't. Away, *my* disposition, and *possess* me, some *harlot's* spirit!" he growls. "My throat of *war*, which had choired with my *drum*, be turned into a pipe small as a *eunuch's*, or the virgin voice that lulls *babies* to sleep! The *smiles of knaves* attend in my cheeks, and *schoolboys'* tears fill up the glasses of my sight! A *beggar's* tongue make motion through my lips, and my armored knee, which bent but for my *stirrup*, bow like his that hath received *alms!*"

He blurts out, "*I will not do't!*—lest I cease to honour *mine own truth*, and by my body's action teach my *mind* a most abhorrent *baseness!*"

"At thy choice, then!" says Volumnia angrily. "*To beg of thee* is more to *my* dishonour than thou begging of *them!*" She turns away. "Come all to ruin, let thy *mother* feel thy *pride*, rather than *fear* thy dangerous determination—for *I* mock at Death with *as big a heart as thou!*"

"Do as thou list, thy *valiantness* was *mine!*—thou suckèd'st it from *me!*"

"But own thy *pride* thyself!"

Coriolanus reddens, chastised. "Pray, be content, Mother. I am going to the market-place; chide me no more. I'll *mountebank* their loves, *cog* their hearts from them, and come home *belovèd by all the trades in Rome!*"

"Look, I am *going*. Commend me to my wife. I'll return as *consul*, or never trust further to what my tongue can do i' the way of *flattery!*"

Says Volumnia coldly, "Do your will."

"Away!" says Cominius, "the tribunes do attend you! *Arm* yourself to answer mildly," he warns, "for they are preparèd, as I hear, with accusations more strong than are yet upon you!"

"The word is '*mildly,*'" the soldier mumbles. "Pray you, let us go. Let them accuse me by *invention*, I will answer in mine *honour.*"

"Aye," says Menenius, "but *mildly.*"

Coriolanus's face is grim. "Well, mildly be it then.

"*Mildly,*" he mutters as he leaves.

In the Forum, the tribunes are plotting their attack. “On this point, *charge him home*: that he craves *tyrannical* power!” says Brutus. “If he evade us there, enforce him with his *enmity* to the *people*—and that the *spoil* got from the Antiates *was ne’er distributed!*” The southern city of Antium—Aufidius’s home town—was among those paying tribute in defeat after challenging Rome.

An aedile approaches them. “What?—will he *come?*” asks Brutus.

“He’s coming.”

“How accompanied?”

“With old Menenius, and those senators that always favoured him.”

Sicinius asks the man, “Have you a catalogue of all the voices set down in the poll that we have *procured?*”

“I have; ’tis ready.”

“Have you *collected* them, by district?”—brought supporters to strengthen the vote.

“I have.”

“Assemble the people hither immediately,” Sicinius tells him. “And when they hear me say, *‘It shall be so, i’ the right and strength o’ the commons!’*—whether it be for death, fine, or banishment—then let them, if I say fine, cry *‘Fine!’*—if death, cry *‘Death!’*—insisting on the old prerogative and power, i’ the truth o’ the cause.”

“I shall inform them.” The aedile starts away.

Brutus grabs his arm. “And then, at such time as they have begun to cry out, *let them not cease*, but with a *din confusèd* enforce the immediate *execution* of what we chance to sentence!”

“Very well,” says the deputy.

“Make them be *strong and ready* for this hint,” says Sicinius, “when we shall hap to give ’t them.”

“Go about it,” says Brutus, and the man leaves. Brutus urges Sicinius, “Put him into *choler straight!* He hath been used ever to conquer, and to have his words free of contradiction; being once *chafèd*, he cannot be reined again to temperance! Then he speaks what’s in his heart—and *there* is that which works with us *to break his neck!*”

Sicinius turns toward the front entrance. “Well, here he comes.”

Coriolanus walks between Cominius and Menenius; following are illustrious legislators and patricians who have joined them along the way.

As they enter the long building, Menenius touches his friend’s arm. “*Calmly*, I do beseech you,” he says softly.

Coriolanus replies, his voice hushed. “Aye—as an *hostler*, that for the poorest price will bear the knave *by the volume!*”—like an inn’s stable man, who must take however much abuse a guest dishes out.

But as they walk, he speaks aloud—and piously: “May the honoured *gods* keep Rome in *safety*, and the chairs of justice supplièd with *worthy* men!—plant *love* among ’s—throng our large temples with the shows of *peace*, and not our streets with war.”

“Amen, *amen!*” says a senator—oblivious to the soldier’s taut sarcasm.

Menenius smiles hopefully. “A *noble* wish!”

An aedile leads a group of noisy citizens into the hall, and Sicinius waves them forward.

“Draw near, ye *people!*”

“List to your tribunes,” a deputy tells the restless men. “*Audience!*”—listen. “*Peace*, I say!”

Coriolanus stands before them. “First, hear me speak!”

“Well, *say,*” Sicinius tells him.

“*Peace, ho!*” calls Brutus, to quiet the swarming crowd.

“Shall I be chargèd no further than this at present?” asks Coriolanus; he wants the hearing to be definitive. He looks at the many restive plebeians “Must *all* here determine?”

Sicinius does not answer. "I do demand to know if you *submit you* to the *people's* voices, allow their *officers*, and are content to suffer *lawful censure* for such faults as shall be proven upon you."

It is barely audible: "I am content."

"Lo, citizens," says Menenius, stepping forward, "he says he is *content!*"

"The warlike *service* he has done, *consider!*—think upon the *wounds* his body bears, which show like graves i' the holy churchyard!"

"Scratches with briers," says Coriolanus, "scars to move laughter only."

Menenius proceeds. "Consider further, that when he speaks not like a citizen, you find him like a *soldier!* Do not take his rougher accents for *malicious* sounds, but, as I say, such as *become a soldier*, rather than abuse you."

Cominius, a soldier, too, sees his friend's frown appearing again. "Well, *well*; no more."

Coriolanus challenges the tribunes: "What is the matter that, being *passed* for consul *with full voice*, I am so dishonoured that *that very hour* you *take it off* again?"

But Sicinius will not yield control. "*Answer to us*," he says sternly.

"Say, then," demands Coriolanus; but he adds, more quietly, "'Tis true I ought so."

Sicinius pronounces, "We charge you that you have contrived to take from Rome *all seasoned office*, and to wind yourself up into a *power tyrannical*—for which you are a *traitor to the people!*"

Instantly the patriot is furious. "*What? Traitor!*"

Menenius tries to restrain him. "Nay, temperately! Your *promise*—"

"The *fires i' the lowest hell* fold-in *the people!*" cries Coriolanus. "Call *me* they *traitor?*" He glares at Sicinius. "*Thou injurious tribune!* If within thine *eyes* sat *twenty thousand deaths*, if thy *hand* clutched as many *millions!*—in thy *lying tongue* both numbers—I would say unto thee '*Thou liest!*' with a voice as free as I pray to the gods!"

Sicinius looks around at the crowd. "Mark you this, people?"

"To the rock!" cries a commoner angrily.

"To the rock with him!" shouts another.

"Peace," says Sicinius calmly. "We need not put *new* matter to his charge!—what you have seen him *do*, and heard him *speak*—beating your *officers*, cursing *yourselves*, opposing laws with *strokes*, and here *defying* those whose great power must try him—even *this*, so criminal and in such *capital* kind, deserves the extremest death."

Brutus begins, "But, since he hath served well for Rome—"

Coriolanus interrupts: "*What?*—do you prate of *service?*"

"I talk of that, who know it."

"*You?*" In the general's view, the only worthy service is warfare.

Quietly, Menenius chides him: "Is *this* the promise that you made your *mother?*"

And Cominius, realizing that the tribunes might call for something less than death, wants to hear what they propose. "Know, I pray you—"

"*I'll know no further!*" cries Coriolanus. "*Let* them pronounce the steep *Tarpeian death!*—vagabond *exile*, *flaying*, held *lingering* with but *a grain a day!* I would not buy their mercy at the price of *one fair word!*—nor check my umbrage for what *they* can give, even to have't by saying '*Good morrow.*'"

Sicinius shakes his head gravely. And now his voice is strong with authority: "For that he has, as much as in him lies, from time to time *inveighed against the people*, seeking means to *pluck away their power*—has now at last given hostile *strokes!*—and that, not only in the *presence* of dreaded *justice*, but *upon the ministers* that do distribute it—

"In the *name o' the people*, and in the power of us, their *tribunes*, we even this instant *banish him from our city!*—on peril of precipitation from off the rock *Tarpeian* never more to enter our Rome gates!

"In the people's name, I say *it shall be so!*"

“It shall be so,” cry citizens on cue, “it shall be so!” “Let him away!” “He’s banished—and it shall be so!”

Cominius moves forward. “Hear me, my masters, and my common friends—”

Sicinius cuts him off. “He’s sentenced; no more hearing.”

“Let me speak!” demands Cominius. “I have been *consul*, and can show ’fore Rome her enemies’ marks upon me! I do love my country’s good with a respect more tender, more holy and profound, than *mine own life!*—than my dear *wife’s* full estimate!—her womb’s increase and *treasure of my loins!* Then if I would speak that—”

“We know your drift!” says Sicinius. “Speak what?”

“There’s no more to be said but ‘*He is banished!*’” cries Brutus, “as enemy to the people and his *country!* *It shall be so!*”

The citizens loudly agree. “It shall be so, it shall be so!”

“Your common cry of *curs!*” growls Coriolanus, “whose *breath* I hate as the reek o’ the rotten *fens!*—whose *loves* I prize as I do the dead *carcasses* of *unburied* men that *corrupt my air!*”

“I banish you!—here to *remain* with your *uncertainty!* Let every feeble rumour *shake your hearts!*—your enemies, with a *nodding of their plumes,* fan you into *despair!*”

“May you have *always* the power to banish your *defenders!*—till at length your *ignorance!*—which *finds* not till it *feels,* making but to *preserve* yourselves as *ever your own foes!*—deliver you as *most abased captives* to some nation that *won you without blows!*”

“Despising—because of *you!*—this city, thus I turn my back!” He stalks away in a fury. “There is a *world* elsewhere!”

Rome’s nobles, perturbed by the outcome of their concessions, follow him from the Forum.

The chief aedile calls out: “The people’s enemy is *gone!*—*is gone!*”

The citizens shout and cheer. “Our enemy is *banished!* He is *gone!*” They wave their caps joyously in the air.

“Go, see him out at the gates,” Sicinius commands, “and follow him, as he hath followed you, with *all despite!*—give him deserved *vexation!* Let a guard attend us through the city!”

“Come, *come!* let’s see him out at gates!” is the cry as the people stream away. “*Come!*”

“The gods preserve our noble *tribunes!* *Come!*”

Just inside one of the capital city’s gated entrances, Coriolanus turns to face those he must leave behind: his mother, his wife, Cominius, Menenius and other Roman nobles. “Come, leave off your tears!” he tells them. “A brief farewell! The *beast with many heads* butts me away!

“Nay, Mother, where is your ancient courage? You were used to say extremity was the *trier of spirit!*—that *common* chances *common men* should bear—that when the sea was *calm,* all boats alike showed mastership in *floating.*”

He is already plotting. “Fortune’s blows most strike home when a *noble,* being wounded, *carves* with a gentle *cunning!*”

“You were used to load me with precepts that would make *invincible* the heart that learned them,” he tells Volumnia, smiling.

“O heavens!” moans his distraught wife clinging to him. “O *heavens!*”

Coriolanus embraces her. “Nay! prithee, woman—”

“Now the *red pestilence* strike *all trades in Rome,* and may *all occupations perish!*” cries his mother, furious—and disgusted with the commoners who have followed them, jeering all the way.

Coriolanus objects—wryly. “What, what, *what?*—I shall be *loved,* when I am *lacked!*”

“Nay, Mother, resume that spirit when you were wont to say that if *you* had been the wife of Hercules, *six* of his twelve labours *you’d* have done, and saved your husband so much *sweat!*”

“Cominius, droop not! *Adieu!*”

“Farewell, my wife, my mother! I’ll do well yet!

“Thou, old and true Menenius, thy tears are *saltier* than a younger man’s, and venomous to thine eyes.

“My sometime general,” he tells Cominius, “I have seen thee stern, and thou hast oft beheld heart-hardening spectacles; tell these sad women ’tis as foolish to *bewail* inevitable strokes as ’tis to *laugh* at ’em.

“My mother, you well know that my *hazards* ever have been your *solace*! And believe’t not unlikely: though I go alone, like a lonely *dragon* that his fen makes *fearèd* and *talked of* more than *seen*, your son will neither accede to the *common*, nor be caught with cautelous baits and *practises!*”—crafty lures and schemes.

“First, my son, whither wilt thou *go?*” asks Volumnia fretfully. “Take good Cominius with thee a while! Determine on some *course* more than a wild exposure to each chance that starts i’ the way before thee!”

Coriolanus laughs, “Oh, the gods!”—for such is precisely a soldier’s fortune.

“I’ll follow thee a month,” Cominius offers, “devise with thee where thou shalt rest, so that thou mayst hear from us—and *we* from *thee!*—so that if the time thrust forth a cause for thy *repeal*, we shall not send o’er the vast *world* to seek a single man, and lose advantage, which doth ever cool i’ the absence of the *needed!*”

But Coriolanus only smiles. “Fare ye well! Thou hast years upon thee, and thou art too full of the wars’ surfeits to go roving with one that’s *yet unbruised!*”

“Bring me but out of the gate,” he tells them. “Come, my sweet wife,” he says, and kisses her, “my dearest mother, and my friends of noble touch! When I am *forth*, bid me *farewell*—and *smile!* I pray you, come.”

He walks away, passing beyond the wall. “While I remain above the ground, you shall hear from me still—and never of me aught but what is like me formerly!”

“That’s *worthily as any ear can hear!*” cries Menenius, beside him. “Come, let’s not weep. If I could shake off but *one in seven* years from these old arms and legs, by the good gods, I’d go *with* thee every foot!”

“Give me thy hand! Come!” Coriolanus shakes his hand and embraces him.

And then he strides off, unyielding as ever, down the road.

—

Not far away, Sicinius and Brutus have been watching. Beside them, aediles struggle to keep together the throng of common citizens who have closely followed the patricians, all the while hooting in derision.

“Bid them all home,” Sicinius tells Brutus. “He’s gone, and we’ll go no further.” But he looks thoughtfully at Coriolanus’s admirers. “The nobility, who we see have sided in his behalf, are vexed.”

The other tribune nods. “Now that we have shown our power, let us seem humbler after it is *done* than when it was a-doing.”

“Bid them home,” Sicinius tells him. “Say their great enemy is gone, and they stand in their strength of old.”

“Dismiss them home,” Brutus tells an aedile, who moves among the crowd. Soon the commoners have dispersed.

“Here comes his mother,” warns Brutus. Volumnia and her party are approaching.

Sicinius starts away. “Let’s not meet her.”

“Why?”

“They say she’s raving.”

“They have ta’en note of us,” Brutus cautions, looking down. “Keep on your way....”

Volumnia, walking with Virgilia and Menenius, shouts at the tribunes: “Oh, *ye’re* well met! The *hoarded plague o’ the gods* requite *your* love!”

“Peace, *peace,*” says Menenius, “be not so *loud.*”

Volumnia wails: “If I *could* be loud but for *weeping!* You should *hear!*— Nay, and you *shall* hear some!” She challenges Brutus as he tries to slink away, “Would you be *gone?*”

“You shall stay too!” cries Virgilia to Sicinius. “I would I had the power to say so to my *husband!*”

Sicinius stares, astonished at the noblewomen’s boldness. “Are you of *mankind?*”

Volumnia’s laugh is bitter. “*Aye, fool!*—is that a *shame?*” She tells Menenius, “Note but this fool!” She asks the tribune, “Was *thy father* not a *man?*—hadst thou the *foxship?*—animal cunning—“to *banish* him that *struck more blows* for Rome than *thou* hast spoken *words?*”

After the outburst, unseemly from a female, Sicinius gapes. “O blessed heavens!”

“More *noble* blows than ever thou *wise* words!—and *for Rome’s good!*” she shrieks, livid. “I’ll tell thee *what!*—” Her voice falters. “Yet *go to!*”

But Volumnia recovers quickly. “*Nay*, but *thou* shalt wait *too!*” she cries, again furious. “I would my son were in *Arabia*, and *thy tribe* before him—his good *sword* in his hand!”

“What, then?”

“What *then?*” cries Virgilia. She sneers “He’d make an end of *thy posterity!*”—castrate him.

“Bastards and all!” adds Volumnia. She looks back, toward the gate. “*A good man!*—the *wounds* that he does bear for Rome!”

Menenius gently urges the ladies to go home: “Come, come; peace.”

“I would he had continued for his country as he *began,*” says Sicinius, sanctimoniously, “and not unknit, *himself,* the noble knot he made.”

Brutus nods. “I would he *had.*”

Volumnia flares: “*I would he had!*” ’Twas *you!*—*whores* who incensed a *rabble* that can as fitly judge of *his* worth as *I* can of those mysteries which *Heaven* will not have *Earth* to know!”

“Pray, let’s go,” says Brutus to Sicinius.

Volumnia waves them away. “Now, pray, *sirs,* get you *gone!* You have done a *brave* deed!

“Ere you go, hear this! As far as doth the *Capitol* exceed the meanest house in Rome, so does *my son!*—this lady’s *husband,* this lady you do see here!—whom you have *banished,* exceed you *all!*”

“Well, well, we’ll leave you,” says Brutus.

“Why stay we to be baited by one that lacks her *wits?*” mutters Sicinius, as they go.

Volumnia calls after them, “Take my *prayers* with you!—I would the *gods* had nothing else to do but to *confirm my curses!*”

Turning again to Menenius, she groans. “Could I meet ’em but *once a day,* it would unclog my heart of what lies heavy to’t!”

“You have *told them home,*” Menenius assures her, “and, by my troth, you have cause!” He offers, soothingly, “You’ll sup with me?”

Volumnia shakes her head. “*Anger’s* my meat! I sup upon *myself,* and so shall starve with *feeding!*”

“Come, let’s go,” she tells Virgilia. “Leave that faint *puling,* and lament as *I* do—in *anger,* *Juno-like!*”

“Come, come, come....” The women walk toward the banished warrior’s house.

The old man, shoulders slumping, trudges wearily home.

He has witnessed enough futile fury today. *Fie, fie, fie!*

Chapter Eight In the South

Hurrying southward this morning along the wide road from Rome, and just now approaching Antium, a cloaked traveler encounters a northbound Volsc. The stranger hails the local: “I know you well, sir, and you know me; your name, I think, is Adrian.”

“It is so, sir,” says the gentleman. He proceeds cautiously: “Truly, I have forgot you....”

“I am a Roman, but my services are as *yours* are—*against* ’em. Know you me yet?”

“Nicanor? No....”

“The same, sir!”

“You had more beard when I last saw you; but your favour is well approved by your tongue,”—his speech confirms the face. “What’s the news in Rome? I have a note from the Volscian state, and was to seek you out there; you have well saved me a day’s journey.”

“There hath been in Rome strange insurrections: *the people* against the senators, patricians, and nobles!”

“*Hath* been,” says the Volsce, frowning. “Is it *ended*, then? Our state thinks not so—they are in a most warlike preparation, and hope to come upon them in the heat of their *division!*”

“The main blaze of it is past,” the spy tells him, “but a small thing would make it *flame* again—for the nobles so *receive to heart* the banishment of that worthy Coriolanus that they are in a ripe aptness to *take all power from the people*, and to pluck their *tribunes* from them forever!”

“This lies *aglowing*, I can tell you, and is almost mature for a violent breaking out!”

The news has astonished the Volscian. “*Coriolanus* banished!”

“*Banished*, sir.”

“You will be *welcome* with *this* intelligence, Nicanor!”

“The day serves well for thee!” The Roman considers the Volsces’ intention. “Now, I have heard it said that the fittest time to corrupt a man’s wife is when she’s fallen out with her husband. Your noble Tullus *Aufidius* will appear *well* in these wars, his great opposer, Coriolanus, being now of no request in his country.”

The Volscian concurs: “He cannot choose but do so! I am most fortunate thus accidentally to encounter you! You have ended my business, and I will merrily accompany you home!”

“I shall, between this and supper, tell you most strange things from Rome—all tending to the good of their *adversaries*. Have you an army ready, say you?”

“A most *royal* one!—the centurions in their charges distinctly billeted,”—organized by martial skills with pike, halberd, bow, “all ready to be on foot in the enterprise at an hour’s warning!”

“I am joyful to hear of their readiness—and am the man, I think, that shall *set them in present action!* So, sir—*heartily well met!* I’m most glad of your company!”

“You take my part *from* me, sir!—I have the most cause to be glad of *yours!*”

“Well, let us go together,” says the spy, as they stride briskly into the city.

Aufidius will soon learn of his rival’s humiliation, and of Rome’s distress.

Disguised—to the benefit of a penurious gentleman—Coriolanus, too, has made his way south. This evening he surveys the view before him, thinking, *A goodly city is this Antium!*

O city, ’tis I who made thy widows! Many an heir of these fair edifices ’fore my wars have I heard groan and drop! He pulls his cloak closer. *Then know me not, lest that thy wives with spits, and boys with stones, in puny battle slay me!*

He passes a Volscian on the road at the edge of town. “Save you, sir.”

The old gentleman smiles. “And you.”

“Direct me, if it be your will, to where great Aufidius lies. Is he in Antium?”

“He is, and feasts the nobles of the state at his house this night.”

“Which is his house, beseech you?”

The graybeard points across the way to an old manse set back from the road. “This, here before you.”

“Thank you, sir! Farewell.” The gentleman nods and goes on his way.

As the sun is setting, Coriolanus glances back in the direction of Rome. *O world, thy slippery turns! Now friends fast sworn—whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart, whose house,*

whose bed, whose meals and exercise, are ever together, who twin, as 'twere, in love unseparable—shall, within an hour, on a dissension over a coin, break out to bitterest enmity!

He looks at the looming home of his rival in arms. *And fellest foes, whose passions and whose plots have broken their sleep, the one to take the other, by some chance, some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends, and interjoin their issues!*

So with me: my birth-place hate I, and my love's upon this enemy town.

He starts through the dusk toward the house.

I'll enter. If he slay me, he does fair justice; if he give me way, I'll do his country service!

Despite the soothing music drifting in from the dining hall of Aufidius's mansion, the large kitchen, its tables still laden with loaves of still-warm bread and platters of steaming beef, is far from quiet.

"Wine, wine, *wine!*" calls the chubby steward to his busy staff. "What *service* is here?—I think our fellows are *asleep!*" He ducks into the pantry.

An aging cook dashes in from the larder. "Where's Cotus? My master calls for him! *Cotus!*" He hurries down stone stairs to look in the wine cellar.

From the back, a black-clad traveler silently enters the kitchen unnoticed; he comes to stand near the fire. *A goodly house!* thinks Coriolanus. *The feast smells fine—but I appear not like a guest....*

The steward returns to find the threadbare stranger—a beggar, most likely—his face partly concealed by a scarf. "What would you have, friend? Whence are you?" He scowls, hastening away, "*Here's no place for you! Pray, go to the door!*"

The visitor accepts the rude reception silently. *I have deserved no better entertainment by being Coriolanus!*

The cook hurries back up the stairs—without young Cotus, but with two dusty bottles. "Whence are *you*, sir? Has the porter no eyes in his head, that he gives entrance to such companions? Pray, get you out!"

Coriolanus dismisses him: "Away."

"Away!—get *you* away!"

Coriolanus frowns. "Now thou'rt troublesome...."

"Are you so brave? I'll have you *talked* with *anon!*" He heads into the dining room.

A burly serving-man asks the steward, as they cross paths, darting through the kitchen, "What fellow's this?"

The steward regards Coriolanus. "As strange a one as ever *I* looked on! I cannot get him out of the house! Prithee, call my master to him!" He proceeds to the cellar.

The man comes to Coriolanus. "What have *you* to do here, fellow?" he demands. "Pray you, void the house!"

"Let me but stand; I will not hurt your hearth."

"What are you?"

"A gentleman."

The servant looks him up and down. "A marvellous *poor* one!"

The patrician exile concurs wryly: "True, so I am."

"Pray you, poor *gentleman*, take up some other station; *here's no place for you!* Pray you, *avoid! Come!*" He starts to grab the other's sleeve.

With one hand, Coriolanus shoves the man brusquely, turning him away. "Follow your *function!*—go and batten on cold bits!"—remove diners' garbage.

The servant turns back, indignant, fists at his sides; but the stranger, however poor, wears a sword, and certainly has a knife. "*What?*—you *will not?*" He tells the cook, who has come back for bread, "Prithee, tell my master what a *strange guest* he has here!"

The slender man frowns at Coriolanus and nods vigorously, wispy white hairs floating. "That *I shall!*" He goes.

“Where *dwellest* thou?”

“Under the canopy.”

“Under the *canopy!*”

“Aye.”

“Where’s that?”

“I’ the city of kites and crows”—that of carrion birds; the sky.

The man mocks: “I’ the city of kites and crows!”—what an *ass* he is! Then thou dwellest with *’daws*, too!”—jackdaws, foolish fowl.

“No, I serve not thy master.”

“*What, sir?* Do you meddle with my *master?*”

“*Aye—*’tis an honest service than to meddle with *thy mistress!*” gibes the uninvited guest. “Thou *pratest* and *pratest!* *Serve* with thy trenchers,”—wooden plates, “*hence!*” He shoves the servant again. Battering the man with his hat, Coriolanus drives him into the dining hall.

After a moment, the master of the house comes into the kitchen with his steward. As they pass the rows of pots and pans hung from ceiling beams, Aufidius asks, “Where is this fellow?”

“*Here, sir,*” says the steward, pointing. “I’d have *beaten him like a dog*, but for disturbing the lords within!” Seeing the stranger’s fierce glare, he quickly returns to serving the many guests.

Aufidius regards the intruder. “Whence comest thou? What wouldst thou? Thy name?”

“Why speak’st not? *Speak, man!* What’s thy name?”

“If, Tullus, thou knowest me not *yet*—or seeing me, dost not think me the man I *am*, necessity commands me name myself.”

“What is thy name?”

“A name unmusical to the Volscians’ ears—and *harsh* in sound to thine!” Coriolanus lowers the scarf.

“*Say—*what’s thy name? Thou hast a grim appearance, and thy face bears a command in’t! Though thy *tackle’s* torn,”—ship’s rigging is flawed, “thou show’st as a noble *vessel*. What’s thy name?”

“Prepare thy brow to *frown*. Know’st thou me yet?”

“I know thee not. *Thy name?*”

“My name is *Caius Martius*, who hath done to thee, particularly, and to *all* the Volscies, *great hurt and mischief!*—*witness* thereto may be my surname: *Coriolanus!*”

Aufidius listens, gravely silent, as his foe continues: “The painful *service*, the extreme *dangers*, and the *drops of blood* shed for my thankless country are requited with *but that surname*—a good memorial for the malice and displeasure which *thou* shouldst bear me!

“Only that name remains; the cruelty and envy of *the people—permitted* by our dastard nobles, who have all forsook me—hath devoured the rest, and suffered *me* by the voice of *slaves* to be *whooped out of Rome!*”

“Now this extremity hath brought me to thy hearth. Not out of hope—mistake me not—to save my *life*; for if I had feared *death*, of all the men i’ the world I would have avoided *thee*—but in mere *spite!*—to be fully acquitted of those my *banishers!*—stand I before thee here.

“Then, if thou hast in thee a heart to *wreak!*—one that wilt *revenge* thine *own* particular wrongs, and stop those maims of *shame* seen throughout thy country!—speed thee straight and make my misery *serve thy turn!* So use it that my revengeful services may prove as benefits to thee, for I will fight against my cankered country *with the spleen of all the under-fiends!*”

“But if it so be that thou not *darest* this, and that to prove more fortunes thou’rt *too tired*, then, in a word, I, also, aim no longer to live most *weary*—and present to thee and to thine ancient malice *my throat!*—which not to cut would show thee but a *fool*, since I have ever followed thee with *hate*, drawn *barrels* of blood out of thy country’s breast, and cannot *live* but to *thy shame*—unless it be to *do thee service.*”

Aufidius regards him with wonder. “O *Martius, Martius!* Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart a root of ancient malice!

“If *Jupiter* should from his cloud speak divine things, and say ‘*Tis true,*’ I’d not believe *him* more than *thee*, all-noble *Martius*!

“Let me twine mine arms about that body,” he cries, embracing him, “against which my grained ash”—spear-shaft—“an hundred times hath broken, and scarred *the moon* with *splinters*!

“Here I clasp the *anvil of my sword*, and do comport as hotly and as nobly with thy *love* as ever in ambitious strength I did contend against thy *valour*!”

Aufidius steps back, beaming. “Know thou: *first* I love the maid I married—never man sighed truer breath! But now that I see *thee* here, thou noble thing, my rapt heart more dances than when I first my wedded mistress saw *bestride my threshold*!

“Well, *thou Mars*, I’ll tell thee *we have a power on foot*!—and I had purposed, once more, to hew thy shield from thy brawn, or *lose mine arm* for’t! Thou hast beat me out several *dozen* times, and I have since *dreamt nightly* of encounters ’twixt thyself and me! We have been *down* together in my sleep, *unbuckling helms*, grasping each other’s *throats*!—but I waked, half dead, with *nothing*!

“Worthy *Martius*, had we *no quarrel else* with Rome but that *thou* art thence *banished*, we would muster all from twelve to seventy, and, *pouring war* into the bowels of ungrateful Rome, like a bold flood *o’erbear*!”

Coriolanus, in his pride—and now need—does not question that.

Aufidius turns toward the dining hall. “Oh, come!—go in and take our friendly senators by the hands, who now are here taking their leaves of *me*, who am *prepared against your territories*, though not for Rome itself.”

Coriolanus looks upward. “You *bless* me, gods!”

Aufidius, still amazed, readily concurs. “Therefore, most absolute sir, if thou wilt have the leading of thine own *revenges*, take thou *one-half of my commission*, and set about *thine own ways*, as thou art best experienced, since thou know’st thy country’s strength and weakness, whether to *knock against the gates* of Rome, or rudely visit them in parts remote, to *fright* them ere *destroy*!

“But *come in*! Let me commend thee first to those that shall say yea to thy desires! *A thousand welcomes*! And *more a friend* than e’er yet an *enemy* is *Martius*—who was *much*! Your *hand*! Most *welcome*!”

Together, they go to surprise the Volscian lords with their army’s new joint commander.

The two serving-men confer again in the kitchen after supper is done. “Here’s a strange alteration!” says the heavy one.

“By my hand, I had thought to have stricken him with a *cudgel*,” says the frail elder, “and yet my mind gave me that his clothes made a false report of him.”

“What an *arm* he has!—he turned me about with his finger and his thumb, as one would set up a top!”

“Nay, I knew by his *face* that there was something in him! He had, sir, the kind of face, methought—” He struggles, briefly. “I cannot tell how to term it.”

The bigger man nods. “He *had* so; looking, as it were.... Would I were hanged but I thought there was more in him than I could *think*.”

The cook seconds: “So did *I*, I’ll be sworn!” he cries. “He is simply the rarest man i’ the world!”

“I think he is but a greater *soldier* than he you *know*,” says the younger man.

“Who—my *master*?”

“Nay, it’s no matter for that,” says the man guardedly.

The old cook nods: “Worth *six* of him!”

“Nay, not so neither. But I do take him to be the *greater soldier*.”

“Faith, look you, one cannot say how to tally that,” argues the cook. “For the *defence* of a town, our general is excellent,” the sage pronounces, if a bit sourly.

“Aye, and for an assault, too!” insists the other military expert.
The steward now bumbles into the kitchen, quite stirred up. “Oh, slaves, I can tell you news—*news*, you rascals!”

“What, what, *what?*” asks the younger.

“Let *us* partake!” says the older.

“I would not be a *Roman*, of *all* nations!—I had as lief be a *condemned* man!” laughs the steward.

“Wherefore? *Wherefore?*”

“Why, here’s he that was wont to *thwack our general!*—*Caius Martius!*” the steward informs them.

The cook frowns. “Why do you say ‘thwack our general?’”

The steward retreats at bit: “I do not say *thwack* our general—but he was always *good enough for him!*”

“Come, we are fellows and friends,” says the younger servant. “He was *ever too hard* for him!—I have heard him say so himself.”

“He *was* too hard for him *directly*, to say the troth on’t,” the old man admits. “At *Corioli* he scotched him, and notched him like a carbonado!”—a piece of meat scored for grilling.

The burly one laughs. “If he had been *cannibally* given, he might have *broiled* and *eaten* him too!”

“But, *more* of thy *news!*” demands the wiry cook of the steward.

“Why, he is so *made on*, here within!—as if he were son and heir to *Mars!*—set at upper end o’ the table!—no *question* asked him by any of the senators, but they stand *bald!*—hats off—“before him! Our general makes himself a *mistress* of him: sanctifies himself with ’s hand, and turns up the white o’ the eye to his discourse!”—listens, looking up in awe.

“But the bottom of the news is that *our* general is *cut i’ the middle*, and but *one-half* of what he was yesterday!

“For the *other* has half!—at the entreaty and grant of the whole table! *He’ll* go, he says, and *grab the porter of Rome gates by the ears!* He will *mow all down before him*, and leave his passage *polled!*”—his way cut clear.

“And he’s as likely to *do’t* as any man I can *imagine!*” the husky young servant assures them.

“*Do’t?* He *will* do’t!” cries the steward happily. “For, look you, sir, he has as many *friends* as enemies—which Roman friends, look you, sir, sir, durst not *show themselves*, as it were, to be his friends whilst he’s in *derectitude*, as we term it,—”

“*Derectitude?* What’s that?” asks the cook.

“—but when they shall see, sir, his crest *up again*, and the man *in blood,*”—erect, “they will out of their burrows like *rabbits after rain*, and all rebel *with* him!” The invasion is expected to rouse an insurrection among Rome’s nobles.

“But when goes this forward?”

“*Tomorrow!*” He realizes it is now past midnight. “*Today!*—*presently!* You shall hear the drum struck up this afternoon! ’Tis as if it were a parcel of their *feast*, and to be executed ere they wipe their lips!”

“Why, then we shall have a *stirring* world again!” says the burly man happily “This *peace* is nothing but to rust iron, increase tailors, and breed ballad-makers!”

“Let me have *war*, say I!” cries the bellicose cook. “It exceeds peace as far as day does night!—it’s *spritely*, *waking*, *audible*, and full of *vent!* Peace is the very apex of *lethargy*, mullèd, deaf, sleepy, insensible—a getter more of bastard *children* than *war*’s a destroyer of men!”

“’Tis so!” says his cohort. “And though war may in some sort be said to be a *ravisher*, so it cannot be denied that *peace* is a great maker of *cuckolds!*”

The steward nods knowingly: “Aye, and it makes men hate one another!”

The old man can explain it. “The reason: because they then *need* one another less. *War*’s for my money! I hope to sell *Romans* as cheap as *Volscians!*”

The steward hears the noise of chairs shifting in the dining hall. “They are rising, they are rising!”

“In!—*in, in, in!*” he commands.

Chapter Nine Disturbing News

Strolling with Brutus along a sunset-tinged street in Rome near the Forum, Sicinius is comfortable and satisfied. “We hear not *of* him; neither need we *fear* him. His enmity’s unnamed i’ the present peace and quietness of the people, who before were in wild fury.

“Here do we make his friends *blush* that the world goes *well!*—they who had rather, though they themselves did suffer by’t, behold our dissentious numbers fester in streets than see tradesmen within their *shops*, and going about their functions *friendly.*”

“We stood to’t in good time,” says Brutus. He spots a patrician lord coming their way. “Is this Menenius?”

“’Tis he, ’tis *he!* Oh, he is grown most *kind* of late!” The tribunes nod. “Hail, sir!”

The nobleman joins them. “Hail to you both.”

“Your Coriolanus is not much missed but among his friends,” Sicinius notes. “The commonwealth doth stand—and so would do were he *more* angry at it.”

“All’s well,” Menenius admits. “And might have been much *better*, if he could have temporized.”

“Where is he, hear you?” asks Sicinius.

Menenius shrugs. “Nay, I hear nothing. His mother and his wife hear nothing from him.”

They pass several citizens in work clothes heading into the market.

“The gods preserve you both!” says a cobbler.

Sicinius nods. “God-den, our neighbours.”

“God-den to you all, god-den to you all!” says Brutus warmly.

The poulterer beams at the tribunes. “Ourselves, our wives, and children, on our *knees* are bound to pray for you both!”

Sicinius is gracious: “Live, and thrive.”

“Farewell, kind neighbours!” says Brutus. “We wished *Coriolanus* had loved you as *we* did!”

“Now the gods keep you!” cries the mercer.

Brutus is gratified. “Farewell, farewell!” The three resume their walk.

“This is a happier and more comely time than when these fellows ran about the streets, crying for destruction,” says Sicinius. “Caius Martius was a worthy officer i’ the *war*, but insolent, o’ercome with pride, ambitious past all thinking, self-loving—”

“And affecting one sole *throne*, without assistance!” adds Brutus.

Walking carefully on the uneven pavement, Menenius murmurs, “I think not so.”

“Had he gone forth *consul*, we should *all* by now have found it so!—to our *lamentation!*” insists Brutus.

“The gods have well prevented it,” says Sicinius, “and Rome sits safe and still without him.”

As they enter the market, an aedile finds them; he is troubled. “Worthy tribunes, there is a slave, whom we have put in prison, who reports that the *Volsces* with two several powers are entered into the Roman territories—and with the deepest malice of *war*, *destroy* what lies before ’em!”

Menenius blanches. “’Tis *Aufidius!*—who, hearing of the banishment, again thrusts forth into the world his *horns*—which were inhibited when our Martius stood for Rome, and durst not once peep out!”

Sicinius scoffs: “Come, why talk you of *Martius?*”

“Go, see this rumourer *whipped*,” Brutus tells the deputy. “It cannot be that the Volsces dare break with us.”

“Cannot *be*?” cries Menenius. “We have *record* that very well it *can!*—and *three* examples of the like have there been within *my* age!

“But *reason* with the fellow, before you punish him, to learn where he heard this, lest you shall chance to whip your *information*, and beat the messenger who bids beware of what is to be *dreaded!*”

“Tell not me,” says Sicinius, waving the aedile away. “I know this cannot be.”

Brutus concurs. “Not possible.”

Now another officer comes, running. “The *nobles* in great *earnestness* are all going to the Senate-house!” he gasps. “Some *news* is come that turns their countenances!”

Sicinius is annoyed. “’Tis this *slave!* Go whip him *’fore the people’s eyes!* He’s raising nothing but *his report!*”

“Yet, worthy sir,” says the deputy, “the slave’s report is *seconded!*—and *more, more fearful,* is deliverèd!”

“What?—*more* fearful?”

“It is spoken freely out of many mouths—how probable I do not know—that *Martius, joinèd with Aufidius,* leads a power *’gainst Rome!*—and *vows revenge* as spacious as between the young’st and oldest beings!”

Sicinius laughs. “*This* is most *likely!*”

“Raised only so that the *weaker* sort may wish ‘good Martius’ home again!” says Brutus.

Sicinius nods. “The very trick of’t.”

Menenius is puzzled by the report. “*This is* unlikely; he and *Aufidius* can no more atone than violentest *contrariety.*”

A senator’s page now dashes up to the tribunes. “You are sent for to the Senate!” the boy tells them. “A fearful *army* led by *Caius Martius,* associated with *Aufidius’s,* rages upon our *territories!*—and they have already o’erborne their way!—*took* what lay before them, then *consumed with fire!*”

As the three ponder the latest word, the consul approaches on his way to the Senate. “Oh, you have made *good* work!” growls Cominius at Sicinius.

“What news?” asks Menenius. “What *news?*”

“You have help to *ravish your own daughters,*” Cominius tells the tribunes angrily, “and to *melt the city leads!*”—roofing sheets—“upon your *pates!*—to see your *wives* dishonoured *before your noses!*—”

“What’s the news?” demands Menenius, “what’s the *news?*”

“—your *temples* burnèd to their cement, and your *franchises* whereon you stood”—roles as judges and tribunes—“confined into an *auger’s bore!*”

“Pray now, your *news!*” cries Menenius. He frowns at the stunned tribunes. “You *have* made fair work, I fear me!” He faces the consul. “Pray, your *news?* If Martius should be joined with Volscians!—”

“*If?*—he is their *god!*” Cominius is very perturbed. “He leads them like a thing made by some deity other than *Nature*—one that shapes men *better!*—and they *follow* him *against us!*—brutes with no less confidence than boys pursuing summer *butterflies,* or *butchers* killing flies!”

Menenius glares at the tribunes: “You have made *good* work, you and your *apron-men*—you that stood so much upon the voice of *occupations* and the breath of *garlic-eaters!*”—tradesmen and the poor.

“He will shake *your Rome about your ears!*” cries Cominius.

“As Hercules did shake down mellow fruit!” Menenius wags his head. “You have made fair work!”

Brutus is aghast. “But is this *true, sir?*”

“*Aye!*” says Cominius, “and you’ll look *pale*”—be dead—“before you find it otherwise! All the regions”—the farming areas south of Rome—“do *smilingly revolt!*—any who resist are mocked for valiant *ignorance*—and perish as loyal *fools!*”

“Who is’t can blame them? *Your enemies and his find something in him!*”

Menenius is staggered. “We are all *undone*, unless the noble man have *mercy!*”

Cominius snorts. “Who shall *ask* it? The tribunes cannot do’t, for *shame*; the *people* deserve such pity of him as the *wolf* does of the *shepherds!*”

“As for his best *friends*—should *they* say, ‘Be good to Rome’?—they who *discharged* him even as did those that had deserved his hate, and therein showed like *enemies!*”

“’Tis true!” confesses Menenius. “If he were putting to *my* house the brand that should consume it, I have not the face to say ‘*Beseech* you, cease!’”

He rages at the tribunes: “*You* have been fair ‘hands,’ you and your *crafts!*—you have crafted *fair!*”

Says Cominius, “You have brought such a *trembling* upon Rome that it was never before so *incapable of help!*”

Sicinius protests: “Say not *we* brought it!”

Menenius’s temper flares. “*What?*—was it *we?*” he demands. “We loved him, but like *beasts*, and *cowardly*, the nobles gave way unto your clatterers—who did *hoot him out o’ the city!*”

Says Cominius bitterly. “But I fear they’ll *howl* him *in* again! Tullus Aufidius, the *second namèd among men*, obeys his points as if he were his *officer!*”

“*Desperation* is all the policy, strength, and defence that Rome can make against *them!*”

The old lord, contemplating the menace, murmurs to himself, “And is Aufidius *with* him?” He looks up as portly merchants and tradesmen emerge from the market and approach. “Here come the *clusters,*” he notes contemptuously.

Menenius regards the commoners dourly. “*You* are they that made the *air* unwholesome, when you cast your *stinking, greasy caps* in hooting at Coriolanus’ exile! Now he’s *coming!*—and not a hair upon the soldier’s head which will not prove a *whip!* As many *coxcombs*”—worn by fools—“as you threw caps up will he *tumble down*, and *repay* you for your *voices!*”

“’Tis no matter,” he adds sorrowfully. “If he could *burn us all into one coal*, we have deserved it!”

The merchants push past the tribunes. “Faith, we hear *fearful news!*” the mercer tells Cominius.

“As for mine own part, when I said banish him, I said ‘*twas a pity!*” claims the poulterer.

“And so did I!” the Chandler insists.

The mercer nods. “And so did *I*—and, to say the truth, so did very *many* of us! What we did, we did for the best; and though we willingly *consented* to his banishment, yet it was *against our will!*”

Cominius laughs—harshly—at the equivocation. “Ye’re *goodly* things, you *voices!*”

Menenius berates the citizens: “You have made good *work*, you and your cry!” He turns to the consul. “Shall we to the Capitol?”

“Oh, aye,” groans Cominius, “what else?” They leave the market together, pondering in silence.

Sicinius would reassure the market men. “Go, masters, get you home; be not dismayed.” He motions toward the departing lords. “Those are a side that would be glad to have this be *true* which they so seem to fear!

“Go home, and show *no sign of fear!*” he urges.

“May the gods be good to us!” cries the poulterer. “Come, masters, let’s home! I ever said we were i’ the wrong when we banished him!”

The grocer concurs. “So did we all! But, come, let’s home!”

The citizens head down toward their houses in the suburbs to await nightfall—and what it may bring.

"I do not like this news," Brutus tells Sicinius.

"Nor I."

"Let's to the Capitol. Would half my wealth would buy this for a lie!"

"Pray, let us go!"

Encamped with his troops just south of Rome's outskirts, Aufidius is increasingly concerned about the Volscian troops and volunteers his new partner has attracted—too many, too eager. "Do they still fly to the Roman?" he asks his favored captain.

"I do not know what witchcraft's in him, but your soldiers use him as the *grace* 'fore meat, their *talk* at table, and their *thanks* at the end!" the officer tells him. "And you are *dimmed* in this action, sir, even by your *own*"—the act of subordinating himself to Coriolanus.

Aufidius paces in his tent, perturbed. "I cannot help it *now*, unless by using means that lame the foot of our *design*!"

"He bears himself more *proudly*, even to *my* person, than I thought he would when first I did embrace him. Yet his nature in *that* is no changeling," he admits, "and I must excuse what cannot be amended."

The captain—now but the second to the *second* in command—complains cautiously. "Yet I wish, sir—I mean for *your* particular—you had not *joined* in commission with him, but either had borne the action by yourself, or else had left it to him solely." While they must still endure considerable danger, now they'll have to relinquish many rewards—although Rome itself would be a rich prize indeed.

"I understand thee *well*," Aufidius assures him angrily, "and be thou sure, when he shall come to his *account*, he knows not what I can *urge against him*!"

"Although it seems—so *he* thinks, and it is no less apparent to the vulgar eye—that he bears all things fairly, and shows good husbandry for the Volscian state—fights *dragon*-like, and does *achieve* as soon as draw his sword!—yet he hath left *undone* that which shall break his neck ere I hazard *mine*, whene'er we come to our accounting!"

The officer, thinking of the vast potential spoils, does not ask what Coriolanus should be doing. "Sir, I beseech you: think you he'll carry Rome?"

Aufidius is certain that Coriolanus can defeat the republic's pampered aristocracy: "All places yield to him *ere he sits down*, and the *nobility* of Rome are *his*!"

"The senators and patricians love him, too," he says wryly. "The tribunes are no *soldiers*, and their people will be as rash in the *repeal* as hasty to expel him thence. I think he'll be to Rome as is the *osprey* to the *fish*—*take it* by the sovereignty of *Nature*."

"At first he was a noble servant to them; but he could not carry his honours *evenly*! Whether 'twas *pride*, which ever taints a fortunate man out of *daily* fortune; whether defect of *judgment*, to fail in the disposing of those chances which he was lord of; or whether his *nature*, not to be other than *one thing*, to move from the helmet to the *hat*, to command *peace* with the same austerity and garb as he controllèd war—

"Any *one* of those—and he hath *a spice* of them all, if not all, for I'd dare so far free him—made him *feared*; and so *hated*—and so *banished*!"

"But he has enough *merit* to choke that in the utterance, so *our* virtues lie in the interpretation of the *time*." Aufidius will have to wait for retribution until Coriolanus has served his purpose: taking and sacking Rome.

He muses grimly. "But *power*—unto *itself* most commendable—hath not a tongue to *extol* what it hath done so evidently as a *choir*."

Aufidius has considered it well: Coriolanus, already despised by his hard-driven troops, will arrogantly chafe the Volscies' lords as well.

"One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail; rights by rights falter, strengths by strengths do *fail*."

"Come, let's away."

Thinks Aufidius, as they go to meet with his other captains: *When Rome is thine, Caius, thou art poor'st of all: then shortly art thou mine!*

In Rome, at the southern gates, Cominius has reported to the republic's leaders on his failed attempt this morning to dissuade the wrathful Coriolanus—whose still-growing army now threatens the city.

"No, *I'll* not go!" insists Menenius. "You heard what he hath said to his sometime *general!*—who in particular loved him most dear!" He shakes his head sadly. "He once called me *Father*. But what o' that?" he adds, wistfully.

Menenius tells the tribunes, "*Go you that banished him!*—a mile before his tent *fall down*, and *kneel* your way into his mercy!" The old lord is wholly disheartened. "Nay, if he's coy to hear *Cominius* speak, I'll keep at home."

"He would not deem to *know* me!" says the general consul, still amazed.

"Do you hear?" says Menenius to the other noblemen.

"Yet one time he *did* call me by my name," says Cominius. "I urged our old acquaintance, and the drops that we have bled together. But '*Coriolanus*' he would not *answer* to—*forbade all* names!—he was a kind of *nothing*—*titleless*, till he has forged himself a name *in the fire of burning Rome!*"

"Why, *so!*" Menenius stares at Brutus and Sicinius. "*You* have made good work!—a pair of tribunes that have *rackèd Rome* for to make *cheap bread!*—a *noble* memorial!"

Cominius is frustrated. "I reminded him how *royal* 'twas to *pardon* when it was least expected; that, he replied, was a *barren* petition, from a state to one *whom they had already punished!*"

Menenius spreads his hands in sorrowful acceptance. "Could he very well say less?"

"I attempted to awaken his regard for 's *private friends*," says Cominius. "His answer to me was, he could not take the time to pick them from a *pile of noisome, musty chaff!* He said 'twas folly to leave it *unburnt*, and keep nosing the offence"—smelling it—"for *one poor grain or two!*"

"For one poor grain or two," moans Menenius. "*I* am one of those!—his mother, wife, his child, and this brave fellow, too," he says, beside Cominius, "*we* are the grains!"

"*You*," he snarls at the tribunes, "are the *musty chaff*—and you are smelt *above the moon!* We must be burnt for *you!*"

"Nay, pray be *patient!*" pleads Sicinius. "If you *refuse your aid* in this never-so-needed help, do not yet upbraid us with our distress!"

"But surely if you *would* be your country's pleader, your good tongue, more than the immediate army we can make, might stop our countryman!"

Menenius shakes his head. "No, I'll not meddle."

"Pray you, *go* to him!"

"What could I *do?*"

Brutus urges, "Only make *trial* with Martius of what your love can do, *for Rome!*"

"Well, and say that Martius return *me* as Cominius is returned—*unheard?*—as but a discontented friend, *grief*-shot with 's unkindness—say *that* be so? What *then?*"

Sicinius replies: "Then your good will must have *thanks from Rome*, and in the measure as you *intended* well!"

Menenius is swayed; he does want to save the republic. "I'll undertake't. I think he'll *hear* me. But his biting his lip and *hmm!*-ing at good Cominius much unhearts me!"

The nobleman stares down, thinking. "He was not undertaken *well*: he had not *dined*. The veins unfillèd, our blood is cold, and then we pout—upon the morning are unapt to give or to *forgive*." He strokes his gray beard. "But when we have stuffèd this,"—he touches his stomach, "and the conveyances of our blood opened with wine and feeding, we have *suppler* souls than in our priest-like fasts.

“Therefore I’ll watch him till he be *dieted* for my request,”—wait until he is sated and receptive, “and then I’ll set upon him.”

Brutus is hopeful: “You know the very road into his *kindness*, and cannot lose your way!”

“Good faith, I’ll approach him, speed how it will,” says Menenius. “I shall ere long have knowledge of my success.” He walks resolutely through the gates, headed toward the burgeoning camp of Volscians.

Cominius watches glumly. “He’ll never hear him.”

Sicinius frowns. “Not?”

Cominius has seen Coriolanus, now in command of troops who already carry considerable plunder and are eager for more. “I tell you, he does sit in *gold!*—his eye red as if *it* would burn Rome!—and his *injury* jailer to his *pity!*

“I *kneeled* before him! If he said, ‘Rise,’ ’twas very faintly—dismissed me *thus*”—he motions carelessly—“with his speechless *hand!*

“What he *would* do he had sent after me, set down in writing; as for what he would *not*, he bound *yielding to his conditions* with an *oath!*”—swore a vow of victory.

“So all hope is vain—unless his noble *mother* and his wife—who, as I hear, *mean* to—do solicit him for mercy to his country.

“Therefore, let’s hence, and with our fair entreaties hasten *them* on!”

Chapter Ten Pleas for Peace

Menenius has been stopped on the path to the Volscian camp that faces toward Rome. Two sentries are on watch here. “*Stay!* Whence are you?” demands the young corporal—sternly, if pointlessly.

“Stand, and go back,” says the sergeant.

“You guard like *men*; ’tis well!” says Menenius, smiling. “But, by your leave, I am an *officer of state*, and come to speak with *Coriolanus!*”

“From *whence?*” insists the corporal.

“From Rome.”

“You may not pass; you must return. Our general will hear no more from thence.” The youth grins wickedly. “You’ll see your Rome *embraced with fire* before you’ll speak with Coriolanus!”

Again Menenius smiles. “Good my friends, if you have heard your general talk of Rome, and of his *friends* there, I like to think *my* name hath touched your ears—it is *Menenius!*”

The sergeant shrugs. “Be it so, go back. The virtue of your name is not here passable.”

Menenius presses. “I tell thee, fellow, the general is *my friend!* I have been the *book* of his good acts, whence men have read his name *unparalleled*—haply *amplified*: for I have ever extolled my friends, of whom he’s chief, with all the size that *verity* would suffer without lapsing!” He chuckles. “Nay, sometimes, like to a bowler, upon a subtle ground I have tumbled past the throw, and in his praise have almost trumped the releasing!”—gone too far. “Therefore, fellow, I must have leave to pass.”

The sergeant only laughs. “Faith, sir, even if you had told as many *lies* in *his* behalf as you have uttered words in your *own*, you should not pass here—not though it were as virtuous to lie as to live chastely! Therefore, go back.”

“Prithee, fellow, remember: my name is *Menenius!*—always factionary on the part of your general!”

The young sentinel is peeved. “Howsoever you have been his *liar*, as you say you have, I am one that, telling *true* under him, must say *you cannot pass!* Therefore go back!”

Menenius persists; it is past time for the noon meal. “Has he dined, canst thou tell? For I would not speak with him till after dinner....”

The sergeant regards him sourly. "You are a *Roman*, are you?"

"I am—as thy *general* is!"

"Then you should *hate* Rome, as he does! Can you—when you have *pushed out of your gates* the very *defender* of them, and in violent popular ignorance *given your enemy* your *shield!*—think to confront his *revenges* with the easy groans of old women, the virginal palms of your daughters, or with the palsied intercession of such a *decayed dotant* as *you* seem to be?"

"Can you think to blow out the *intended fire* your city is ready to flame in with such weak breath as *this*?"

"*No!*—you are *deceived!* Therefore, back to Rome, and prepare for your *execution!*"

"You are *condemnèd*; our general has sworn you beyond reprieve and pardon!"

"*Sirrah,*" says Menenius angrily, "if thy captain knew *I* were here, he would use me with estimation!"

The simple sentinel laughs. "Come, my captain knows you not!"

Menenius scowls. "I mean, thy *general!*"

But the sergeant has lost patience. "My general cares not for *you!* *Back,* I say! *Go,* lest I let forth your half-pint of blood! *Back!*—*that's* the utmost of your having! *Back!*"

"Nay, but, fellow, *fellow!*"

As it happens, the Volscians' joint commanders are passing nearby, on their way to review foot soldiers newly arrived from Antium. "What's the matter?" demands Coriolanus.

The old man, foolishly, first addresses the lowly sentinel. "Now, you *companion,* I'll say an *errand* for you:

"You shall *know* now that I am in estimation; you shall perceive that a *Jack-guardant* cannot office me from my *son Coriolanus!* *Guess,* but by my conversation with him, if thou standest not i' the state of *hanging!*—or of some death more *long* in spectatorship, and *crueller* in suffering! *Behold* now instantly—and *swoon* for what's to come upon thee!"

Menenius turns to Coriolanus. "The glorious gods sit in hourly synod about thy particular prosperity, and love thee no worse than thine old father *Menenius* does!"

"O my son, my *son!*" he groans, his voice cracking with emotion, "thou art preparing fire for us; look thee, here's water to quench it!" he says, touching the tears. "I was but with difficulty movèd to come to thee; but, being assured that none but myself could move thee, I have been *blown* out of yon gates with *moans!*—and conjure thee to *pardon* Rome, and thy petitionary *countrymen!*"

"May the good gods *assuage* thy wrath—and turn the *dregs* of it upon *this varlet here!*—*this,* who, like a *block,* hath denied my access to thee!"

The exile—who has been living in cold fury—seethes at the pompous nobleman's presumption. "Away!"

Menenius is stunned. "What? *Away!*"

"*Wife, mother, child* I know not," Coriolanus tells him. "My affairs are servanted to *others!*—though I properly own my *revenge,* my *remission* lies in Volscian breasts."

He glares at the other Roman. "That *we* have been familiar, the ingrate Forgetfulness shall *poison,* rather than let *Pity* note how much! Therefore, be gone! Mine ears against your suits are stronger than your *gates* against my *force!*"

"Yet, for that I lovèd thee, take this along." He hands Menenius a document—one listing very harsh terms for Rome's complete surrender. "I writ it for *thy* sake—and would have sent it." He raises a hand: "'Another word,' Menenius, I will *not* hear thee speak!"

Coriolanus—mindful of how carefully the Volscies monitor his attitude toward Rome—turns his back on Menenius. "This man, Aufidius, *was* by me belovèd in Rome; yet, thou behold'st..."

Aufidius nods. "You keep a constant temper," he says as they stride away.

The sergeant laughs at the emissary. "Now, sir, is your name *Menenius?*"

"'Tis a *spell,* you can see, of *much power!*" gibes the corporal. He tips his halberd toward the city. "You know the way home again."

The sergeant chuckles. “Do you hear *how we are shent* for keeping Your Greatness back?”

The young sentinel taunts: “What cause do you think I have to *swoon*?”

Menenius is defeated but defiant: “I neither care for your general nor the *world*. As for such things as *you*, I can scarce think there’s *any*, ye’re so *slight*.”

“He that hath a will to die himself fears it not from another; let your general do his worst. As for you: be what you *are*—for a *long time*, and may your *misery* increase with your *age*!”

“I say to you, as I was said to: *Away*.” With that, he trudges, sorrowfully, back toward the gate into Rome.

Watching the humiliated old man, even the hardened sergeant is touched. “A noble fellow, I warrant him.”

“The *worthy* fellow is our *general*!” says the beardless sentinel, eager for his first battle—first pillage. “He’s a *rock*—an oak not to be *wind*-shaken!”

Coriolanus and Aufidius stand in the fading sunlight, looking out over long rows of soldiers’ tents; more men are still arriving from the south, and fires have been lighted for cooking the troops’ spare suppers.

“We will before the walls of Rome tomorrow *set down our host*!” says Coriolanus. “My partner in this action, you must report to the Volscian lords how plainly I have borne this business.”

“Only *their* ends you have respected,” Aufidius confirms, “stopped your ears against the general suit of Rome, never admitted a private *whisper*—no, not with such friends as thought them sure of you.”

“This last old man,” says Coriolanus, “whom I have sent to Rome with a cracked heart, loved me above the measure of a *father*—nay, *goddèd* me. Indeed, their *last refuge* was to send him for whose old love, though I showed sourly to him, I have once more offered the *first* conditions—which they did refuse, and cannot now accept. Only to grace *him*, who thought he could do more, a very little I have yielded to.

“No fresh embassies and suits, neither from the state nor private friends, hereafter will I lend ear to.

“What shout is this?” He turns, as they hear loud voices—then women’s—behind them.

Coriolanus sees the sentinels stopping three Roman noblewomen dressed in clothes of mourning—with his son. *Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow in the same time ’tis made? I will not!*

“My wife comes foremost,” he tells Aufidius, “then the honoured mould wherein this trunk was framed,”—his mother, “and in her hand the grandchild to her blood.

“But, *out*, affection! All bond and privilege of nature, break! Let it be virtuous to be obstinate!”

His mother, barred from coming forward, her eyes fixed on her son, slowly curtsies to him. *What is that curt’sy worth? Or those doves’ eyes, which can make gods forsworn?*

Here in the field, the general is taken by surprise. *I melt, and am not of stronger earth than others!*

My mother bows—as if Olympus to a molehill should in supplication nod!

And my young boy hath an aspect of intercession which great Nature cries ‘Deny not!’

He is torn at heart, but steels himself to pursue revenge. *Let the Volscies plough Rome and harrow Italy! I’ll never be such a gosling as to obey instinct, but will stand as if a man were author of himself, and knew no other kin!*

As he approaches her—closely followed by Aufidius—Virgilia speaks. “My lord and husband!”

Coriolanus’s face is hard. “These eyes are not the same I wore in Rome.”

She replies tearfully, “The *sorrow* that delivers us thus *changèd* makes you think so!” The four do look different—wan and gaunt.

Like a dull actor now, I have forgot my part, and I am put out, even to a full disgrace! he admits to himself, watching her. Still, he tells his wife, “Best of my flesh, forgive my tyranny—but do not say, for that, ‘Forgive our Romans.’”

He remembers their parting. “Oh, a *kiss* long as my *exile!*—*sweet* as my *revenge!* Now, by the jealous queen of heaven,”—Juno, “that kiss I carried from *thee*, dear; and my true lip hath virgined it e’er since!” he tells Virgilia truthfully.

You gods, I prate—and leave the most noble mother of the world unsaluted! Sink, my knee, i’ the earth! Of thy deep duty more impression show than that of common sons! He kneels before Volumnia.

“Oh, stand up, *blest,*” she tells him sourly, “whilst with no softer cushion than *flint gravel* I kneel before thee—and *properly* show duty, so *mistaken* all this while between the child and parent.”

He rises, scorched by her irony, and flushes when, with grave dignity, his mother actually does kneel before him.

“What is this?” asks Coriolanus. “Your knees to *me?*—to your *corrected son?*” He tries to make light of the gesture. “Then let *pebbles* on a hungry beach *eclipse the stars!* Then let a mutinous wind *shrink the cedars*, proud in the fiery sun—murdering *impossibility!*—making slight work of what *cannot be done!*”

But Volumnia looks up at him, solemnly and sternly. “Thou art *my warrior*; I help to frame thee.” She looks toward her friend, also in black. “Do you know this lady?”

Coriolanus nods. “The noble sister of Publicola—the *moon* of Rome—chaste as the icicle that’s condensed by the frost from purest snow, and hangs on Diana’s temple. Dear Valeria,” he says; but her gaze, too, is cold.

Volumnia points to her grandson. “This is the poor epitome of yours, which, by the interpretation of full time, may show all like yourself.”

Looking at the pale, fearful child, Coriolanus wavers. He invokes Mars: *Thou, god of soldiers, with the consent of supreme Jove, inform thy thoughts with nobleness, that thou mayst prove invulnerable to shame, and stand i’ the wars like a great sea-mark, enduring every flow, and saving those that eye thee!*

But his stony front, he realizes, is eroding.

Volumnia tells the boy, “*Your knee, sirrah.*” Coriolanus’s son kneels before him.

The warrior smiles, unable to conceal his pride. “That’s my brave boy!”

Volumnia’s unflinching stare is disturbing. “Even he, your wife, this lady, and myself are petitioners to you.”

“I beseech you, *peace,*” says Coriolanus. “Or, if you’d *ask*, remember this before: the things I have *forsworn to grant* must never be taken by you as *denials.*”

“Do not bid me dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate *again* to Rome’s *mechanics!* Tell me not wherein I seem *unnatural*; desire not to allay my rage and revenge with your colder *reasons!*”

“Oh, no more, *no more!*” replies Volumnia irritably. “You have *said* you will not grant us *anything*; we have nothing else to ask but that which you deny already.

“Yet we *will* ask!—so that, if you fail in our request, the *blame* may hang upon *your hardness!* Therefore *hear us!*”

Coriolanus turns to his companion and their attendants. “Aufidius, and you Volsces, mark!—for we’ll hear nought from Rome in private.”

He faces Volumnia, who is still kneeling. “Your request?”

She motions toward the others. “If we should be silent and nothing speak, our raiment and state of bodies would bewray what life we have led since thine exile.

“Think, with myself, how more *unfortunate* than all *living* women are *we* who come hither, since sight of thee—which *should* make our eyes flow with *joy*, hearts dance with *comforts*—constrains them to *weep*, and makes thy mother, wife and child to shake with *fear and sorrow*—at seeing the son, the husband and the father *tearing his country’s bowels out!*”

“And to poor *we*, thine enmity is *most* capital: thou barr’st us from *prayers* to the *gods*, which is a comfort that *all but we* enjoy! For how can we—*alas*, how can *we*—pray for our *country*, whereto we are bound, and for *thy victory*—whereto we are *together* bound?”

“Alack, either we must lose the *country*, our dear nurse, or else *thy person*, our comfort in the country! Though we had our wish which side should win, *we must find an evident calamity!* For either thou must, as a foreign recreant, *be led with manacles* thorough our streets, or else *triumphantly tread on thy country’s ruin*, and bear the palm”—victor’s honors—“for having bravely *shed thy wife and child’s blood!*”

“As for myself, Son, I purpose not to wait on Fortune till these *wars* determine,” she warns dourly. “If I cannot rather persuade thee to show a noble grace to *both parts*”—Romans and Volsces—“than to seek the *end* of *one*, thou shalt no sooner march to assault thy country than to tread—trust to’t, thou *shalt!*—on the *tomb of thy mother*—who brought thee to this world!”

“Aye,” says Virgilia, “and *mine*, who brought you forth this boy, to keep your name living into time!”

“He shall not tread on *me!*” young Martius tells his mother. “I’ll run away till I am bigger, and then I’ll *fight!*”

Coriolanus closes his eyes. *Not of a woman’s tenderness to be requires nor child nor woman’s face to see!*

He turns away, trying to steady himself. “I have sat too long.”

Volumnia rises. “Nay, go not from us thus!”

“If it were so that our request did tend to *save the Romans* and thereby to *destroy the Volsces* whom you serve, you might condemn us as poisonous of your *honour*. *No!*—our suit is that you *reconcile* them!—so that 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* for making up this *peace!*’

“Thou know’st, great son, the end of war is uncertain. But this is *certain*: that if thou conquer Rome, the benefit which thou shalt thereby reap is a name whose repetition will be *doggèd with curses!* A chronicle thus writ: ‘The man *was noble*—but with his last attempt, he *wiped it out—destroyed his country!*—and his name remains to the ensuing ages *abhorred!*’

“Speak to me, Son! Thou hast affected the fine strains of *honour*, emulated the *graces* of the *gods*—yet in *changing* thou’*d* deploy a *bolt* that would *rive an oak!*—tear with *thunder* the wide cheeks o’ the *air!*”

“Why dost not *speak*? Think’st thou it *honourable* for a noble man *ever to remember wrongs?*”

She appeals, in frustration, to the others. “Daughter, *speak* you—he cares not for your *weeping!*”

“Speak *thou*, boy!—perhaps thy *childishness* will move him more than can our *reasoning.*”

Volumnia regards Coriolanus with disgust. “There’s no man in the world more *bound* to ’s mother,”—who owes his mother more, “yet here he lets me prate like one *i’ the stocks!*”

“Thou hast *never* in thy *life* showed thy dear mother any courtesy,” moans Volumnia, “when she, poor hen, fond of no *second* brood, has cluckèd thee to the wars and safely home, loaden with *honour!*”

“Say my request’s *unjust*,” she challenges, “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!”

Again, he turns away.

“*Down*, ladies,” cries Volumnia, “let us *shame* him with our *knees!* To his surname Coriolanus belongs more *pride* than pity for our prayers!”

“*Down!*—and an *end*; this is the last.”

Apparently implacable, he regards them all as they kneel before him.

His mother groans, rising. “So, we will home to Rome, and die among our neighbours.” But she puts a hand on young Martius’s thin shoulder. “Nay, behold us! This boy, who cannot *tell* you what he would have—only kneels and holds out hands for fellowship—does argue our petition with more strength than thou hast to *deny* it!”

But she believes he is unmoved. “Come, let us go.” She glares at Coriolanus. “This *fellow* had a *Volscian* as his mother; his wife is in *Corioli*—and this child is like him by *chance*!”

“Yet give us our *dispatch*,” she tells her son, bitterly, as the others slowly rise. “I am *hushèd* until our city be *a-fire*,” she says, sadly, “and then I’ll speak a little.”

He stares for a moment; against his will, tears form in his eyes.

He takes her by the hand.

“Oh, Mother, *Mother!* What have you *done*? Behold, *the heavens do ope!*—the *gods* look down, and this *unnatural* scene they *laugh* at!”

“O my mother! *Oh, Mother,* you have won a happy victory for *Rome!* But as for your son—believe it—oh, *believe* it!—most *dangerously* you have with him prevailed—if not most *mortally* to him!”

“But, let it come.” Coriolanus faces the Volscies. “Aufidius, though I cannot make true war, I’ll frame a commensurable *peace!* Now, good Aufidius, were *you* in my stead, would you have heard a mother less?” he demands. “Or *granted* less, Aufidius?”

The Volscian knows that, without Coriolanus, he cannot take Rome. “I was moved withal.”

“I dare be sworn you *were!* And, sir, it is no little thing to make *mine* eyes to sweat compassion!” he says, wiping away tears. “But, good sir, what peace *you’ll* make, advise me! As for my part, I’ll not to Rome—I’ll back with *you*—and pray you *stand with me* in this cause!”

He turns to his family. “Oh, Mother! Wife!”

And thus Aufidius sees his rival’s first surrender. *I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thine honour against each other within thee! Out of that I’ll work myself a finer fortune!*

The ladies, weeping with happiness, want further conversation with Coriolanus. “Aye, by and by!” he tells them.

“But *we* will drink together!” he assures Aufidius, “and you shall bear a better witness back”—to the Volscies’ lords and Senate—“than words which we, to like conditions, will have counter-sealèd”—sent in writing to confirm the peace settlement.

He invites the visitors into the camp. “Come, enter with us!”

“Ladies, you deserve to have a *temple* built you! All the swords in *Italy* and her *confederated armies* could not have made *this* peace!”

Aufidius and the other Volscians watch, in silence, as the Romans talk.

Chapter Eleven The Capitals Celebrate

Within Rome, Menenius approaches a man who is pacing fretfully on hilltop pavement. “See you yond coign o’ the Capitol—yond corner-stone?” he asks.

Sicinius glances at the massive block of marble. “Why, what of that?”

“If it be possible,” says the graying nobleman, carefully, “for you to *displace* it with *your little finger*, there is *some* hope that the ladies of Rome, especially his mother, may prevail with him.

“But *I* say there is *no* hope in’t!—our throats are *sentenced*, and *await execution!*”

Sicinius has been increasingly alarmed. “Is’t *possible* that so short a time can alter the condition of a man?”

“There *is* difference between a grub and a butterfly; yet your butterfly was a *grub*; thus Martius is grown, from man to *dragon!*—he has *wings!*” Menenius sneers at the tribune. “*He’s* more than a *creeping* thing!”

Looking out over Rome, and down toward the Volscian camp, visible even from here, Sicinius notes hopefully, "He loved his mother *dearly*."

"So did he *me!* But he no more remembers his mother *now* than his *eight-year-ago horse!* The tartness of *his face sours ripe grapes!*"

Menenius has learned from Roman spies how the Volscies have rallied to their new champion. "When he walks, he moves like an *engine*, and the *ground* shrinks before his treading! He is able to *pierce* a corslet with his *eye!*—talks like a *knell!*—and his '*hmh!*' is a *battery!*"—a flight of arrows. "He sits, and his state"—seat—"is a thing made for *Alexander!* What he bids be done is *finished* with his *bidding!*"—as soon as he orders it. "He lacks nothing of a *god* but eternity and a *heaven* to throne in!"

"Yes—and *mercy*, if you report him truly," moans Sicinius.

"I paint him but in his character! Mark what mercy his *mother* shall bring from him," says Menenius angrily. "There is no more mercy in *him* than there is *milk* in a male *tiger!*—*that* shall our poor *city* find!—and all this is because of *you!*"

Sicinius pleads, to the sky, "May the gods be *good* unto us!"

"*No!*—in such a case the gods will *not* be good unto us! When we banished *him*, we *respected* not *them*; and, he returning to *break our necks*, they'll not respect *us!*"

A young messenger from Cominius, who has stationed himself with the troops down at the main gates, runs toward the Capitol. He calls to Sicinius, "Sir, if you'd *save your life*, fly to *your house!*—the plebeians have got your fellow-tribune and *haul him up and down!*—all swearing if the Roman ladies bring not *comfort* home, they'll give him *death by inches!*"

Sicinius, his face ashen, asks a second man, running just behind. "What's the news?"

"*Good news, good news!*—the ladies have *prevailed!* The Volscians are dislodged, and Martius *gone!* *A merrier day did never yet greet Rome!*—no, not the expulsion of the *Tarquins!*"

Demands Sicinius, grasping the messenger's arm, "Friend, art thou certain this is true? Is it most *certain?*"

"As certain as I know the *sun* is *fire!* Where have *you* lurked, that you make doubt of it?"

"Ne'er through a bay so hurried a *blown tide* as the *recomforted* through the *gates!* Why, *hark you!*—the trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes, tabours and cymbals!" They can hear a rising clamor of jubilation. "And the shouting *Romans* make the *sounds of dance!* *Hark* you!"

Menenius beams. "This *is* good news! I will go meet the ladies! This *Volumnia* has the worth of consuls, senators, patricians—a *city* full! Of *tribunes* such as *you,*" he tells Sicinius, "a *sea and land full!*"

"You have prayed *well* today! This morning for *ten thousand* of *your* throats I'd not have given a *doit!*" He listens to the rising sound of celebration from the streets. "Hark, how they joy!"

Sicinius releases the general consul's runner. "First, the gods *bless* you for your tidings; next, accept *my* thankfulness!"

The messenger laughs happily: "Sir, we have *all* great cause to give great thanks!"

"They are near the city?" asks Sicinius, regarding the returning noblewomen.

"Almost at point to enter!"

Sicinius, his face drawn, stares south. "We will meet them, and help them joy...."

On a street near the gate, two senators stand before the celebrating citizens, gathered to welcome the ladies. Under a flourish of trumpets and drums, Volumnia and Valeria, followed by Virgilia and her son, pass by them into town—victorious, and accompanied now by nobles, patricians and lawmakers.

"Behold our *patroness!*—*the life of Rome!*" cries a senator to the populace. "Call all your tribes together, *praise* the *gods*, and make *triumphant* fires—*strew flowers* before them!"

"*Unshout* the noise that banished Martius!—*repeal* him with the welcome of his *mother!* Cry '*Welcome, ladies, welcome!*'"

The crowd responds: "*Welcome!*" "*Welcome, ladies!*"

In Antium near the market, citizens are gathering in a festive mood this afternoon to welcome home their army, following its success against Rome. Terms of the peace have been received, approved, and affirmed by the Volscian Senate.

Tullus Aufidius has returned just ahead of Coriolanus and his troops; he stands with one of his two own captains next to the public square. “Go tell the lords o’ the city I am here. Deliver them this paper; bid them, having read it, repair to the market place—where I, even in theirs and in the commons’ ears, will avouch the *truth* of it!

“Him I accuse, the city ports by now hath entered,” he says, glancing northward along the street, “and intends to appear before the people, hoping to purge himself with *words*!

“Dispatch!” The officer bows and goes, smiling in anticipation.

Three gentlemen, somewhat unkempt and wearing, now, dark, civilian clothes, emerge from an alley, looking around cautiously. They join Aufidius, who is waiting in the shade of an empty stall, well away from the market entrance. “Most welcome,” he tells them quietly.

“How is it with our general?” asks a heavy southerner.

Aufidius’s voice is hushed—but angry. “Even so as with a man *empoisoned* by his own *alms*, and with his charity *slain*!”

“Most noble sir,” says a tall man of military bearing, “if you do hold the same intent wherein you wished us parties, we’ll deliver you from your great danger.”

“Sir, I cannot tell. We must proceed as we do find the *people*,” Aufidius cautions.

“The people’s will remains uncertain whilst ’twixt you there’s no dispute,” says a gentleman sometimes known as Nicanor, “but the fall of either makes the *survivor* heir of *all*.”

“I know it,” says Aufidius, watching the long street for signs of the other army’s arrival. “And my pretext to strike at him admits a good construction: I elevated him, and I pledged *mine* honour to back his truth who, being so heightened, watered his new plants with dews of *flattery*, so *seducing my friends*—and to that end, he *bowed his nature*!—never known *before* but to be rough, free, and unswayable.”

Nicanor nods. “Sir, his stoutness when he did stand for consul, which he lost by lack of stooping—”

“That *I* would have spoken of,” says Aufidius, irritated. “Being *banished* for’t, he came unto my hearth!—presented to my knife his *throat*!

“I *took him in*, made him *joint* servant with me, *gave him way* in all his own desires—aye, let him, his projects to accomplish, choose out of my ranks my *best and freshest men*!—*served* his designments in *mine own person*!—help to reap the fame which he did *send* as *all his*!—and took some *pride* in *doing myself this wrong*!

“Till, at the last, I seemed his *follower*, not partner!—and he *wagèd* me, with his *countenance*, as if I had been a *mercenary*!”

“So he did, my lord!” the big man confirms. “The army marvelled at it! And, in the last, when he had carried Rome, and we looked for no less *spoil* than *glory*—”

“*There* was that for which my sinews shall be stretched against him!” says Aufidius. “For a few drops of women’s *rheum*,”—tears, “which are as cheap as *lies*, he *sold the blood and labour* of our great action!

“Therefore shall he *die*—and I’ll *renew me* in his fall!

“But, *hark*....” They can hear, from far up the road, the insistent pounding of drums and bright call of trumpets, and the muffled cheers and shouts of people gathered along the way.

“Your native town *you* entered like a *post*,”—a *messenger*, the big man complains, “and had no welcomes home! But *he* returns splitting the air with noise!”

“And patient *fools*—*whose children he hath slain*!—their base throats tear with giving him glory!” says the tall one.

Nicanor advises, “Therefore, at your vantage—ere he express himself, or move the people with what he would say—let him *feel your sword*!—which we will *second*!”

“After he lies alone, his tale *your* way pronouncèd shall bury his reasons with his body.”

Aufidius holds up a hand. “Say no more; here come the lords.” The other three remain in the shadows as he strides out to meet the officials.

“You are most welcome home,” says a portly nobleman, bowing with curt politeness, as Aufidius joins the patricians on the sunny square.

“I have not deserved it,” says Aufidius humbly. “But, worthy lords, have you with heed perused what I have written to you?”

The lords nod gravely. “We have.”

“And grieve to hear ’t,” says the senior nobleman, angrily. “What faults he made before the *last* I think might have found easy *finés*. But there to *end* where he was to *begin!*—and *give away* the benefit of our levies, answering us with *our own charge!*”—bringing back no more than what had been provided him.

The fat burgher is disgusted. “*Making a treaty* where there was a *yielding!*—this admits no excuse!”

Aufidius nods toward the Roman general, now riding into the square. “He approaches; you shall hear him.”

Coriolanus arrives grandly on a black stallion, leading columns of troops who march under the Volscian colors to the heavy pounding of martial drums, and waving to the cheering commoners. Near the market entrance he dismounts, and a corporal leads his horse away.

“Hail, lords!” cries the commander. “I am returnèd *your soldier*, no more infected with my country’s love than when I *parted* hence, but ever subsisting under *your* great command.

“You are to know that *prosperously* I have attempted—and with bloody passage, led your wars *even to the gates of Rome!*”

“Our *spoils* we have brought home do more than counterpoise by a *full third part* the charges of the action!

“We have made *peace*—with no less *honour* to the *Antiates* than *shame* to the *Romans!*”

“And we here deliver, subscribèd by the consul and patricians, together with the seal o’ the Senate, what we have compounded on.” He proffers a scroll listing the wealth which Romans have yielded in their capitulation.

Aufidius steps forward. “Read it not, noble lords,” he cries, “but *tell the traitor*: in the *high ’st degree* he hath *abusèd your powers!*”

Coriolanus stares, aghast. “*Traitor! How now?*”

“Aye, *traitor*, Martius!”

“*Martius!*” The general is stunned.

“Aye, Martius—*Caius Martius!*” shouts Aufidius. “Dost thou think I’d grace thee with that *robbery*, thy *stolen* name ‘Coriolanus!’—in *Antium?*”

He addresses the Volscian patricians. “You lords and heads o’ the state, *perfidiously* he has *betrayed* your business, and given up, for certain drops of *salt*, your city, *Rome!*—I say *your city!*—to his wife and *mother*—breaking his oath and resolution like a twist of rotten silk!

“Never admitting counsel in the *war*, at his *nurse’s tears* he whined and *wept away your victory!*—such that *pages* blushed at him, and *men of heart* looked at each other, *wondering!*”

Coriolanus, incensed, cries skyward: “*Hear ’st thou, Mars?*”

Aufidius scoffs. “Name not the god, thou *boy of tears!* *No more!*”

Coriolanus is livid. “*Measureless liar!*—thou hast made my heart too great for what contains it! ‘*Boy?*’ Oh, *slave!*” He faces the politicians. “*Pardon* me, lords!—’tis the first time that ever I was *forcèd to scold!*”

“*Your judgments*, my grave lords, *must give this cur the lie!*”—denounce his falsehood. “And he who wears *my stripes* impressed upon him—who must bear *my beatings* to his *grave!*—his *own nation* shall join me in thrusting the lie unto him!”

“Peace, *both!*” demands the old nobleman, “and hear *me* speak!”

But Coriolanus rages on: “Cut me to *pieces*, Volsces!—men and lads, stain *all* your edges on me!

“Boy? False *hound!*—if you have writ your annals *true*, ’tis that like an *eagle* in a *dove-cote* I *fluttered* your Volsicians there in Corioli!

“*Alone I did it*,” he declares proudly, hurling “*boy!*” at his accuser.

Aufidius seems indignant. “Why, noble lords, will you be put in mind of his *blind fortune*—which was *your shame!*—by this *unholy braggart* ’fore your own eyes and ears?”

From within the crowd, a harsh voice calls out, “Let him *die* for’t!”

Angry shouts now rise from two others: “*Tear him to pieces!*” and “Do it *instantly!*”—then from angry citizens: “He *killed my son!*” “*My daughter!*” “He killed my cousin Marcus!” “He killed my *father!*”

“*Peace, ho!*” demands one of the lords, raising both hands. “No *outrage! Peace!* The man is *noble*—and his *fame* folds-in this orb o’ the *earth!*”

“His last offences to us shall have judicious *hearing!*”

“*Stand*, Aufidius, and trouble not the peace!”

Coriolanus, grasping the hilt at his side, growls, “Oh, that I had *him*, with *six* Aufidiuses—*or more!*—his *tribe!*—for the lawful use of my *sword!*”

“*Insolent villain!*” cries Aufidius, drawing his blade.

“Kill, kill, *kill!*” shout three men, rushing forward, their swords raised. “*Kill!—kill him!*”

“Hold, *hold,*” cry the Volscian lords, “*hold, hold!*”

But from behind Coriolanus, two conspirators slash viciously at his left leg and right shoulder. He falls back, bleeding heavily, and the third man plunges a sword through his heart.

The crowd backs away, gaping, aghast, at the bloody figure.

Aufidius steps forward and puts his right foot on the body, as the killers back away and move through the yielding crowd. He raises his clean sword. “My noble *masters*, hear me *speak!*”

“*Oh, Tullus!*—” gasps a lord, wide-eyed at the sudden violence.

“Thou hast done a deed whereat *Valour* will *weep!*” cries another.

“*Tread not upon* him!” demands a nobleman, appalled. “Masters all, be quiet; put up your swords!” he calls to the crowd.

Aufidius moves forward, leaving bloody footprints on the stone. “My lords, when you shall *know*—though in this rage, provoked by him, you cannot—the *great danger* which this man’s life did show you, you’ll *rejoice* that he is thus cut off!

“Please it Your Honours to call me to your Senate, I’ll deliver myself *your loyal servant*, or endure your heaviest censure!”

The nobles can see the still-angry faces of the townsmen, and they want to leave the open square.

“Bear from hence his body,” the eldest lord tells the people sadly, “and *mourn* you for him! Let him be regarded as the most noble corpse that ever herald did follow to his urn!”

Says one patrician quietly to others, “His *own* impatience takes from Aufidius a great part of blame. Let’s make the best of it.”

Aufidius looks down at the fallen man, sheathing his sword. “My rage is gone; and I am struck with sorrow.

“Take him up. Help—three o’ the chiefest *soldiers!* I’ll be one!

“Beat thou the drum so that it speak mournfully,” he tells an officer of the guard.

“Trail your steel pikes,” he orders the troops. “Though in this city he hath widowed and unchilded many a one, who to this hour bewail the injury, yet he shall have a noble *memory.*”

As two foot-soldiers lift the body, the crowd begins to disperse; none will follow Coriolanus.

“Assist,” Aufidius tells a captain, who signals to his men.

The Volscian army’s sole commander goes to address the Senate.

A march for the dead is sounded.