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978-1-108-00576-0 - The Tragedy of Coriolanus, Volume 4

William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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THE TRAGEDY OF
CORIOLANUS

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The scene: Rome and the neighbourhood; Corioli
and the neighbourhood; Antium

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY.

CAIUS MARCIUS, *afterwards* CAIUS MARCIUS CORIOLANUS

TITUS LARTIUS, }
COMINIUS, } *generals against the Volscians*

MENENIUS AGRIPPA, *friend to Coriolanus*

SICINIUS VELUTUS, }
JUNIUS BRUTUS, } *Tribunes of the people*

YOUNG MARCIUS, *son to Coriolanus*

A Roman Herald

NICANOR, *a Roman*

TULLUS AUFIDIUS, *general of the Volscians*

Lieutenant to Aufidius

Conspirators with Aufidius

ADRIAN, *a Volscian*

A Citizen of Antium

Two Volscian Guards

VOLUMNIA, *mother to Coriolanus*

VIRGILIA, *wife to Coriolanus*

VALERIA, *friend to Virgilia*

Gentlewoman attending on Virgilia

Usher attending on Valeria

*Roman and Volscian Senators, Patricians, Ædiles,
Lictors, Soldiers, Citizens, Messengers, Servants to
Aufidius, and other Attendants.*

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THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS

[1. 1.] *Rome. A street*

*'Enter a company of mutinous Citizens, with staves,
 clubs, and other weapons'*

1 *Citizen*. Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.

All. Speak, speak.

1 *Citizen*. You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?

All. Resolved, resolved.

1 *Citizen*. First, you know Caius Marcius is chief enemy to the people.

All. We know't, we know't.

1 *Citizen*. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict? 10

All. No more talking on't; let it be done. Away, away!

2 *Citizen*. One word, good citizens.

1 *Citizen*. We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely; but they think we are too dear: the lean-ness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularize their abundance; our sufferance is a gain to them. Let us revenge this with our pikes ere we become rakes; for the gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge. 20

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CORIOLANUS

I. I. 25

2 *Citizen*. Would you proceed especially against Caius Marcius?

1 *Citizen*. Against him first: he's a very dog to the commonalty.

2 *Citizen*. Consider you what services he has done
 30 for his country?

1 *Citizen*. Very well, and could be content to give him good report for't, but that he pays himself with being proud.

2 *Citizen*. Nay, but speak not maliciously.

1 *Citizen*. I say unto you, what he hath done famously he did it to that end; though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it partly to please his mother and to be proud, which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue.

40 2 *Citizen*. What he cannot help in his nature you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous.

1 *Citizen*. If I must not, I need not be barren of accusations; he hath faults (with surplus) to tire in repetition. [*'shouts'*]. What shouts are these? The other side o' the city is risen: why stay we prating here? To th' Capitol!

All. Come, come.

1 *Citizen*. Soft! who comes here?

'Enter MENENIUS AGRIPPA'

50 2 *Citizen*. Worthy Menenius Agrippa, one that hath always loved the people.

1 *Citizen*. He's one honest enough; would all the rest were so!

Menenius. What work's, my countrymen, in hand?

Where go you

With bats and clubs? The matter? Speak, I pray you.

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CORIOLANUS

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I *Citizen*. Our business is not unknown to th' Senate; they have had inkling this fortnight what we intend to do, which now we'll show 'em in deeds. They say poor suitors have strong breaths: they shall know we have strong arms too. 60

Menenius. Why, masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbours,

Will you undo yourselves?

I *Citizen*. We cannot, sir; we are undone already.

Menenius. I tell you, friends, most charitable care Have the patricians of you. For your wants, Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them Against the Roman state, whose course will on The way it takes; cracking ten thousand curbs Of more strong link asunder than can ever 70 Appear in your impediment. 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 attends you; and you slander The helms o' th' state, who care for you like fathers, When you curse them as enemies.

I *Citizen*. Care for us! True, indeed! They ne'er cared for us yet. Suffer us to famish, and their store-houses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury, to 80 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 eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

Menenius. Either you must Confess yourselves wondrous malicious, Or be accused of folly. I shall tell you

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CORIOLANUS

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A pretty tale: it may be you have heard it;
 90 But, since it serves my purpose, I will venture
 To stale't a little more.

I *Citizen*. Well, I'll hear it, sir: yet you must not
 think to fob off our disgrace with a tale: but, an't please
 you, deliver.

Menenius. There was a time when all the
 body's members
 Rebelled against the Belly; thus accused it:
 That only like a gulf it did remain
 I' th' midst o' th' body, idle and unactive,
 Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
 100 Like labour with the rest; where th' other instruments
 Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
 And, mutually participate, did minister
 Unto the appetite and affection common
 Of the whole body. The Belly answered—

I *Citizen*. Well, sir, what answer made the Belly?

Menenius. Sir, I shall tell you. With a kind of smile,
 Which ne'er came from the lungs, but even thus—
 For, look you, I may make the Belly smile
 As well as speak—it tauntingly replied
 110 To th' discontented members, the mutinous parts
 That envied his receipt; even so most fitly
 As you malign our senators for that
 They are not such as you.

I *Citizen*. Your Belly's answer—What?
 The kingly crownéd head, the vigilant eye,
 The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier,
 Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter,
 With other muniments and petty helps
 In this our fabric, if that they—

Menenius. What then?
 'Fore me, this fellow speaks! what then? what then?

I. I. 120

CORIOLANUS

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I *Citizen*. Should by the cormorant Belly
 be restrained, 120

Who is the sink o' th' body,—

Menenius. Well, what then?

I *Citizen*. The former agents, if they did complain,
 What could the Belly answer?

Menenius. I will tell you;

If you'll bestow a small (of what you have little)
 Patience awhile, you'st hear the belly's answer.

I *Citizen*. You're long about it.

Menenius. Note me this, good friend;

Your most grave Belly was deliberate,

Not rash like his accusers, and thus answered:

'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,

'That I receive the general food at first, 130

Which you do live upon; and fit it is,

Because I am the storehouse and the shop

Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,

I send it through the rivers of your blood,

Even to the court, the heart, to th'seat o' th' brain;

And, through the cranks and offices of man,

The strongest nerves and small inferior veins

From me receive that natural competency

Whereby they live: and though that all at once,

You, my good friends'—this says the Belly, mark me— 140

I *Citizen*. Ay, sir; well, well.

Menenius. 'Though all at once cannot

See what I do deliver out to each,

Yet I can make my audit up, that all

From me do back receive the flour of all,

And leave me but the bran.' What say you to't?

I *Citizen*. It was an answer. How apply you this?

Menenius. The senators of Rome are this good Belly,
 And you the mutinous members: for examine

- Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
 150 Touching the weal o'th' common, you shall find
 No public benefit which you receive
 But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
 And no way from yourselves. What do you think,
 You, the great toe of this assembly?
 I *Citizen*. I the great toe! why the great toe?
Menenius. For that, being one o'th' lowest,
 basest, poorest,
 Of this most wise rebellion, thou goest foremost.
 Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,
 Lead'st first to win some vantage.
 160 But make you ready your stiff bats and clubs:
 Rome and her rats are at the point of battle;
 The one side must have bale.

'Enter CAIUS MARCIUS'

- Hail, noble Marcius!
Marcius. Thanks. What's the matter, you
 dissentious rogues
 That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
 Make yourselves scabs?
 I *Citizen*. We have ever your good word.
Marcius. He that will give good words to thee
 will flatter
 Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs,
 That like nor peace nor war? the one affrights you,
 The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,
 170 Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;
 Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,
 Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
 Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue is
 To make him worthy whose offence subdues him
 And curse that justice did it. Who deserves greatness

I. I. 176

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Deserves your hate. And your affections are
 A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
 Which would increase his evil. He that depends
 Upon your favours swims with fins of lead
 And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye? 180
 With every minute you do change a mind,
 And call him noble that was now your hate,
 Him vile that was your garland. What's the matter
 That in these several places of the city
 You cry against the noble Senate, who
 (Under the gods) keep you in awe, which else
 Would feed on one another? What's their seeking?

Menenius. For corn at their own rates, whereof
 they say

The city is well stored.

Marcus. Hang 'em! They say!
 They'll sit by th'fire, and presume to know 190
 What's done i'th' Capitol: who's like to rise,
 Who thrives and who declines; side factions and
 give out

Conjectural marriages, making parties strong,
 And feebling such as stand not in their liking
 Below their cobbled shoes. They say there's
 grain enough!

Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
 And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
 With thousands of these quartered slaves, as high
 As I could pick my lance.

Menenius. Nay, these are all most
 thoroughly persuaded; 200

For though abundantly they lack discretion,
 Yet are they passing cowardly. But, I beseech you,
 What says the other troop?

Marcus. They are dissolved: hang 'em!

They said they were an-hungry; sighed forth proverbs—
 That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,
 That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent not
 Corn for the rich men only: with these shreds
 They vented their complainings; which being answered,
 And a petition granted them—a strange one,
 210 To break the heart of generosity
 And make bold power look pale—they threw their caps
 As they would hang them on the horns o'th' moon,
 Shouting their emulation.

Menenius. What is granted them?

Marcus. Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,
 Of their own choice. One's Junius Brutus, one
 Sicinius Velutus, and—I know not. 'Sdeath!
 The rabble should have first unroofed the city,
 Ere so prevailed with me: it will in time
 Win upon power and throw forth greater themes
 220 For insurrection's arguing.

Menenius. This is strange.

Marcus. Go, get you home, you fragments!

'Enter a Messenger, hastily'

Messenger. Where's Caius Marcus?

Marcus. Here: what's the matter?

Messenger. The news is, sir, the Volsces are in arms.

Marcus. I am glad on 't: then we shall ha' means
 to vent

Our musty superfluity. See, our best elders.

*Enter COMINIUS, TITUS LARTIUS, and other Senators;
 JUNIUS BRUTUS and SICINIUS VELUTUS*

1 *Senator.* Marcus, 'tis true that you have lately
 told us;
 The Volsces are in arms.