

Coriolanus abbreviated

Act 2, Scene 1

Deference

Situation: As Coriolanus returns to Rome wounded “i’ th’ shoulder and i’ th’ left arm,” he is welcomed by his mother and his wife, and adored by much of the public. But as Coriolanus begins to leave for the Capitol to receive more honors, the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius express their skepticism over how this new honor for Martius will play out.

VOLUMNIA: I have lived to see inherited my very wishes and the building of my fancy. Only there’s one thing wanting, which I doubt not but our Rome will cast upon thee.

CORIOLANUS: Know, good mother, I had rather be their servant in my way, than sway with them in theirs.

COMINIUS: On, to the Capitol!

Brutus and Sicinius come forward. The others exit.

Brutus to Sicinius

All tongues speak of him and bleary eye sights
Are spectacl’d to see him. A nurse delights
In a rapture and lets her baby cry;
While gossiping about, the kitchen maid
Clamors o’er bulky roofs and walls to eye
Him, having about her grimy neck laid
Her best linen. Priests, mostly seen within
The church, do press among the throngs to win
A place in the crowd, as dames commit their
Nicely guarded red and white cheeks to the
Sun’s burning kisses. It’s as if that fair
Whatsoever god who leads him hath a
Way to creep into his human power
And provide him with his graceful posture.

SICINIUS: On the sudden, I warrant him consul. He cannot temp’rately carry his honor from where he should begin to where he should end, but will lose those he hath won.

BRUTUS: In that there’s comfort.

SICINIUS: The commoners upon their ancient malice will forget with the least cause his new honors.

BRUTUS: I heard him swear, were he to stand for consul, never would he appear i’ th’ marketplace nor on him put the threadbare vesture of humility.

SICINIUS: ‘Tis right.