WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616), PLAYWRIGHT AND POET. For a brief biography and selections from some of Shakespeare’s other works, see the print anthology, pp. 319-27 and pp. 437-39.

From CORIOLANUS (c. 1607-09)

[The Roman warrior Coriolanus (Caius Marcius) has defeated the Volscians, led by Marcus Aufidius, and returned to his people in triumph. Unable to transform himself from a proud and uncompromising fighter into a politician, he does not win the consulship he desires, is rejected by the Roman populace, and finally turns on his people, joining Aufidius in his attempt to conquer Rome.]

ACT 4, SCENE 5

[…]


CORIOLANUS. [Unmuffling.] If, Tullus, Not yet thou know’st me, and seeing me dost not Think me for the man I am, necessity Commands me name myself.

AUFIDIUS. What is thy name? CORIOLANUS. A name unmusical to the Volscians’ ears And harsh in sound to thine.

AUFIDIUS. Say, what’s thy name? Thou hast a grim appearance, and thy face Bears a command in’t; though thy tackle’s torn,¹ Thou show’st a noble vessel: what’s thy name?

CORIOLANUS. Prepare thy brow to frown. Know’st thou me yet?

AUFIDIUS.

¹ bears a command i.e., has the appearance of authority. tackle battle dress and implements of war (sword, etc.).
I know thee not. Thy name!

CORIOLANUS.

My name is Caius Marcius, who hath done
To thee particularly, and to all the Volscjes,
Great hurt and mischief; thereto witness may\textsuperscript{2}
My surname, Coriolanus. The painful service,\textsuperscript{3}
The extreme dangers and the drops of blood
Shed for my thankless country are requited
But with that surname—a good memory
And witness of the malice and displeasure
Which thou should’st bear me. Only that name remains;
The cruelty and the envy of the people,
Permitted by our dastard nobles, who\textsuperscript{4}
Have all forsook me, hath devoured the rest,
And suffered me by th’ voice of slaves to be
Whooped out of Rome. Now this extremity\textsuperscript{5}
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’ th’ world
I would have ’voided thee, but in mere spite,
To be full quit of those my banishers,\textsuperscript{6}
Stand I before thee here. Then if thou hast
A heart of wreak in thee, that wilt revenge\textsuperscript{7}
Thine own particular wrongs and stop those maims
Of shame seen through 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\textsuperscript{8}
Of all the under fiends. But if so be\textsuperscript{9}
Thou dar’st not this and that to prove more fortunes\textsuperscript{10}
Thou’rt tired, then, in a word, I also am
Longer to live most weary, and present
My throat to thee and to thy ancient malice;

\textsuperscript{2} mischief serious injury or harm.
\textsuperscript{3} My surname Coriolanus Marcus was given this surname to commemorate and honour his sacking of one of the cities of Aufidius’ people, the Volscians: Corioles.
\textsuperscript{4} dastard cowardly, hypocritical.
\textsuperscript{5} Whooped Hooted (shouted at and insulted).
\textsuperscript{6} full quit of completely revenged upon.
\textsuperscript{7} wreak vengeance.
\textsuperscript{8} cankered diseased, corrupted. spleen wrath.
\textsuperscript{9} under fiends devils in hell.
\textsuperscript{10} prove more fortunes try or test whether fortune will be favourable [to you] or not.
Which not to cut would show thee but a fool,
Since I have ever followed thee with hate,
Drawn tuns of blood out of thy country’s breast,\(^\text{11}\)
And cannot live but to thy shame, unless
It be to do thee service.

**AUFIDIUS.**

O Marcius, Marcius!
Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart
A root of ancient envy! If Jupiter
Should from yond cloud speak divine things,
And say, “‘Tis true,” I’d not believe them more
Than thee, all noble Marcius. Let me twine
Mine arms about that body, where against
My grainèd ash a hundred times hath broke,\(^\text{12}\)
And scarred the moon with splinters. Here I clip
The anvil of my sword, and do contest\(^\text{13}\)
As hotly and as nobly with thy love
As ever in ambitious strength I did
Contend against thy valour. Know thou first,
I loved the maid I married; never man
Sighed truer breath. But that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart\(^\text{14}\)
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold. Why, thou Mars, I tell thee,\(^\text{15}\)
We have a power on foot; and I had purpose\(^\text{16}\)
Once more to hew thy target from thy brawn,\(^\text{17}\)
Or lose mine arm for’t. Thou hast beat me out\(^\text{18}\)
Twelve several times, and I have nightly since\(^\text{19}\)
Dreamt of encounters ’twixt thyself and me.
We have been down together in my sleep,
Unbuckling helms, fistling each other’s throat,
And waked half dead with nothing. Worthy Marcius,\(^\text{20}\)
Had we no other quarrel else to Rome but that
Thou art thence banished, we would muster all

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\(^{11}\) **tuns** casks (in which wine or ale was generally stored and shipped); a **tun** measured approximately 252 gallons.

\(^{12}\) **grainèd ash** a spear made of ash, showing the grain of the wood.

\(^{13}\) Aufidius here embraces (*clip[s]*) Coriolanus, who is the **anvil** to Aufidius’ **sword**.

\(^{14}\) **rapt** enraputured.

\(^{15}\) *when my wedded mistress … Bestride my threshold* A Roman bride crossed (or was carried across) the threshold of her new husband’s house as part of the marriage ceremony. **Mars** god of war (Marcius is a form of this name).

\(^{16}\) **power on foot** an army standing by, prepared to fight.

\(^{17}\) **target** shield. **brawn** strong (brawny) arm.

\(^{18}\) **out** utterly, completely.

\(^{19}\) **several** separate.

\(^{20}\) **waked** i.e., I have waked.
From twelve to seventy, and pouring war
Into the bowels of ungrateful Rome,
Like a bold flood o’erbeat. Oh, come, go in,\(^{21}\)
And take our friendly senators by th’ hands;
Who now are here, taking their leaves of me
Who am prepared against your territories,
Though not for Rome itself.

CORIOLANUS. You bless me, gods!

AUFIDIUS.
Therefore, most absolute sir, if thou wilt have\(^ {22}\)
The leading of thine own revenges, take
Th’ one half of my commission, and set down—\(^ {23}\)
As best thou art experienced, since thou know’st
Thy country’s strength and weakness—thine own ways,
Whether to knock against the gates of Rome,
Or rudely visit them in parts remote
To fright them ere destroy. But come in.\(^ {24}\)
Let me commend thee first to those that shall
Say yea to thy desires. A thousand welcomes!
And more a friend than e’er an enemy.
Yet, Marcius, that was much. Your hand: most welcome!

[Exeunt CORIOLANUS and AUFIDIUS.]

[…]

3 SERVINGMAN.
O slaves, I can tell you news—news you rascals!

BOTH [1 AND 2 SERVINGMAN].

3 SERVINGMAN.
I would not be a Roman, of all nations. I had as lief\(^ {25}\) be a condemned man.

BOTH.
Wherefore? wherefore?

3 SERVINGMAN.
Why, he’s he that was wont to thwack our general: Caius Marcius!

1 SERVINGMAN.

\(^{21}\) *o’erbeat* surge over.
\(^{22}\) *absolute* excellent, perfect.
\(^{23}\) *commission* martial responsibility for and command of [half the army presently under Aufidius’ sole command].
\(^{24}\) *ere* before.
\(^{25}\) *lief* willingly.
Why do you say ‘thwack our general’?

3 SERVINGMAN.
I do not say ‘thwack our general,’ but he was always good enough for him.

2 SERVINGMAN.
Come, we are fellows and friends. He was ever too hard for him; I have heard him say so himself.

1 SERVINGMAN.
He was too hard for him directly, to say the truth on’t. Before Corioles, he scotched him and notched him like a carbonado.

2 SERVINGMAN.
And he had been cannibally given, he might have boiled and eaten him too.

1 SERVINGMAN.
But more of thy news?

3 SERVINGMAN.
Why, he is so made on here within as if he were son and heir to Mars, set at upper end o’ th’ table; no question asked him by any of the senators but they stand bald before him. Our general himself makes a mistress of him, sanctifies himself with’s hand and turns up the white o’ th’ eye to his discourse. But the bottom of the news is that our general is cut i’ th’ middle and but one half of what he was yesterday; for the other has half, by the entreaty and grant of the whole table. He’ll go, he says, and sowl the porter of Rome gates by th’ ears. He will mow all down before him, and leave his passage polled.

[…]

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26 fellows compatriots, comrades.
27 directly plainly.
28 scotched and notched him like a carbonado A ‘carbonado’ was a piece of meat or fish that would be scored across with a knife before grilling.
29 so made on i.e., made so much of.
30 bald with their hats off, a gesture of respect and subordination.
31 sanctifies himself with’s hand i.e., in touching Marcius’ hand Aufidius treats it reverently, like a holy object.
32 turns up the white o’ th’ eye a gesture understood to convey some emotional state, often devotion or pretended devotion.
33 sowl drag.
34 polled cleared, bare.