



Coriolanus

The setting is ancient Italy in the years before the rise of the Roman Empire. The citizens of Rome are disgruntled and mistrustful of the patrician Senate. Marcius holds the rabble in contempt, for the most part, and draws the ire of the plebes by calling them cowards. However, Marcius is Rome's best general, and when the neighboring Volscians wage war upon Rome, Marcius takes their capital, Corioli, single-handedly. In honor of his accomplishment he is given the new name of Coriolanus; Tullus Aufidius, the Volscian general, vows to avenge the defeat.

Coriolanus is given a great welcome back in Rome for his victory, and the Senate wishes to make him a consul. However, he must have popular support to be elected to this position, and two tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, conspire to reverse the plebes' opinion on him. In turn, Coriolanus denounces the tribunes, even saying that the office itself should be abolished. Volumnia, his mother, attempts to soothe him, but when confronted with the tribunes in front of the people, their insults and accusations are too much for the proud warrior. His temper earns him banishment. Coriolanus angrily travels to Antium.

There Coriolanus meets with Aufidius. He offers himself as a war leader, for Aufidius either to accept or to slay. Aufidius grants him the leadership of half the Volscian army. Though Aufidius chafes under Coriolanus's arrogance, the two generals invade Roman territory, advancing to the very gates of Rome itself. All of Coriolanus's previous friends and allies try to reason with him; however, it takes Volumnia to convince him to negotiate for peace. When Coriolanus returns to the Volscians, he explains that Rome will not be conquered—only to be dragged before the Volscian senators, accused of treason by Aufidius, and unceremoniously stabbed to death.

Dramatis Personae

Caius Marcius, afterward Caius Marcius Coriolanus

Titus Lartius

Cominius

Menenius Agrippa

Sicinius Velutus

Junius Brutus

Young Marcius

A Roman Herald

Tullius Aufidius

Lieutenant to Aufidius

Conspirators

A Citizen of Antium

Two Volscian Guards

Volumnia, mother of Coriolanus

Virgilia, wife of Coriolanus

Valeria, friend to Virgilia

Gentlewoman attendant to Virgilia

Senators, Patricians, Aediles, Lictors, Citizens

Soldiers, Messengers

Servants to Aufidius and other Attendants