

Coriolanus – Act 1, Scene 1 (excerpt)

The citizens are threatening a food riot and some claim the patricians' greed is the cause of the plebians' starvation. Caius Martius, later named Coriolanus, shows his contempt for the citizens. He accuses them of being cowardly, unpredictable and are stupid.

Martius

He that will give good words to thee will flatter
Beneath abhorring¹. What would you have, you curs²,
That like nor³ peace nor war? The one⁴ affrights you,
The other makes you proud⁵. He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares⁶;
Where foxes⁷, geese⁸: you are no surer⁹, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue¹⁰ is
To make him worthy whose offence subdues him
And curse that justice did it¹¹.
Who¹² deserves¹³ greatness
Deserves your hate; and your affections¹⁴ are
A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
Which would increase his evil¹⁵. He that depends
Upon your favours swims with fins of lead
And hews¹⁶ down oaks with rushes¹⁷. Hang ye! Trust Ye?
With every minute you do change a mind,
And call him noble that was now¹⁸ your hate,
Him vile that was your garland¹⁹. What's the matter,
That in these several²⁰ places of the city
You cry against the noble senate, who,
Under the gods, keep you in awe, which else²¹
Would feed on one another? What's their seeking²²?

Glossary:

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| 1. Contempt | 10. Particular ability | 16. Cuts |
| 2. Worthless dogs | 11. Honour a man whose wrongdoing is punished and then curse the justice that did so. | 17. Grass-like plants |
| 3. Neither | 12. Whoever | 18. Recently |
| 4. War | 13. Earns | 19. Hero (who wears a victory wreath) |
| 5. Arrogant | 14. Desires | 20. Various |
| 6. Timid | 15. Sickness | 21. Who otherwise |
| 7. Clever, cunning | | 22. Request |
| 8. Foolish | | |
| 9. More reliable | | |

