

Coriolanus – Act 5, Scene 3 (excerpt)

Joining forces with his former enemy, the Volsces, and hardening his heart against the entreaties even of his staunchest friends and supporters in Rome, Coriolanus prepares to attack his former homeland, much to the alarm of its people. At last, his mother, Volumnia, accompanied by his wife, Virgilia, her friend Valeria, and his son, young Martius, go to the Volscian camp to plead for a peace treaty.

➡ Look at how Volumnia uses a variety of persuasive arguments to make Coriolanus change his mind about attacking Rome. Divide into 5 groups. How would you stage your section?

VOLUMNIA [*Coriolanus rises and turns to leave*]

1

Nay, go not from us thus.

If it were so that our request did tend

aim

To save the Romans, thereby to destroy

The Volsces whom you serve, you might condemn us

As poisonous of your honour. No, our suit

Is that you reconcile them: while the Volsces

so that while

May say 'This mercy we have showed;' the Romans,

'This we received;' and each in either side

Give the all-hail to thee and cry 'Be blest

welcome/praise

For making up this peace!'

2

Thou know'st, great son,

The end of war's uncertain: but this certain,

only this is

That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit

Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name

Whose repetition will be dogged with curses:

followed

Whose chronicle thus writ: 'The man was noble,

history

But with his last attempt he wiped it out,

his nobility

Destroyed his country, and his name remains

To th' ensuing age abhorred.'

3

Speak to me, son:

loathed and detested

Thou hast affected the fine strains of honour,

acquired the most noble honour

To imitate the graces of the gods,

Jupiter/Jove whose weapon was a thunderbolt

To tear with thunder the wide cheeks o' th' air,

sky

And yet to charge thy sulphur with a bolt

load / lightning

That should but rive an oak. Why dost not speak?
Think'st thou it honourable for a noble man
Still to remember wrongs? Daughter, speak you:
He cares not for your weeping. Speak thou, boy:
Perhaps thy childishness will move him more
Than can our reasons.

do no harm to mankind (rive = split)

constantly

#4

There's no man in the world
More bound to 's mother, yet here he lets me prate
Like one i' th' stocks. Thou hast never in thy life
Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
Has clucked thee to the wars and safely home,
Loaden with honour. Say my request's unjust,
And spurn me back: but if it be not so,
Thou art not honest, and the gods will plague thee
That thou restrain'st from me the duty which
To a mother's part belongs.

public form of punishment – to put to shame

with no desire for more children

honourable

withhold, deny

#5

He turns away:
Down, ladies: let us shame him with our knees.
To his surname 'Coriolanus' 'longs more pride
Than pity to our prayers. Down: an end; *[they kneel]*
This is the last. So we will home to Rome,
And die among our neighbours. Nay, behold 's:
This boy, that cannot tell what he would have
But kneels and holds up bands for fellowship,
Does reason our petition with more strength
Than thou hast to deny 't. Come, let us go: *[they rise]*
This fellow had a Volscian to his mother:
His wife is in Corioles and his child
Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch:
I am hushed until our city be afire,
And then I'll speak a little. *[Coriolanus holds her by the hand, silent]*

belongs

does not know what he asks

argue for

for

dismissal