

Coriolanus abbreviated

Act 4, Scene 7

Insight

Situation: Roman citizens have learned that Caius Martius Coriolanus has “joined with Aufidius, and leads a power ‘gainst Rome with a fearful army that rages upon our territories” and that the “Volscians follow him with no less confidence than boys pursuing summer butterflies.” A Volscian lieutenant has said to Aufidius “You are eclipsed in this action.”

AUFIDIUS: I understand thee well; and be thou sure, when he shall come to his account, he knows not what I can urge against him. Although it seems that he bears all things fairly, and shows good husbandry for the Volscian state, yet he hath left undone that which shall break his neck or hazard mine, whene’er we come to our account.

LIEUTENANT: Sir, I beseech you, think you he’ll carry Rome?

AUFIDIUS: All places yield to him ere he sits down, and the nobility of Rome are his; the senators and patricians love him too. The tribunes are no soldiers, and their people will be as rash in the repeal as hasty to expel him thence.

Aufidius to Lieutenant

He was Rome’s most noble servant, but he
Could not carry his honors evenly.
Whether ‘twas one of pride, where persistent
Success often corrupts the fortunate
Man; whether ‘twas a defect in judgment
In failing to settle the chances that
He was lord of; or whether nature, not
Letting one be of more than one kind, caught
Him moving from helmet to cushion, where
He commanded peace with austerity
As he controlled war; but ‘twas one I dare
Than banished him. Our virtues lie in th’
Moment of time. When, Caius, Rome is thine,
Thou art poor’st of all; then thou art mine.