



Virgilia

CORIOLANUS. ACT 2. SC. 1.

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The first of the two scenes of the drama is a picture of domestic life in the home of the Coriolanus. The first scene is a picture of domestic life in the home of the Coriolanus. The first scene is a picture of domestic life in the home of the Coriolanus.

The second scene of the drama is a picture of domestic life in the home of the Coriolanus. The second scene is a picture of domestic life in the home of the Coriolanus. The second scene is a picture of domestic life in the home of the Coriolanus.

After the departure of Marcus, the scene is left to the women, who are shown in a state of distress. The women are shown in a state of distress. The women are shown in a state of distress.



VIRGILIA.

THE Virgilia of *Coriolanus*, wife of the Roman hero, is a pleasing outline study of the patrician lady of that classic period. In her conjugal devotion, her "gracious silence," and her shrinking modesty—befitting a virgin, rather than the wife of the renowned Marcius, and the mother of his boy—she is strongly contrasted with her mother-in-law, Volumnia, whose grand patriotism, stately pride of intellect and blood, and lofty spirit, constitute her a representative matron of old Rome.

In the dramatic action, as well as in her domestic relations, Virgilia is entirely subordinate to Volumnia; Marcius is a tender husband, but his mother is the inspiration of his most famous achievements, and hers the only influence he acknowledges—Virgilia has neither the intellect, nor the desire, to control his haughty spirit.

After the departure of Marcius for the wars against the Volcians, whence he returns distinguished with the name of Coriolanus, these two ladies are discovered in a home scene, full of the charm of privacy and feminine ways, sitting on "low stools" at their "stitchery;" they are interrupted in their conversation by

a call from the Lady Valeria, "the noble sister of Publicola, the moon of Rome."

The talk between the mother and her son's wife concerning their mutual idol, Marcius—the heroic love of glory in the one, opposed to the timid tenderness of the other—discriminates with much nicety their widely contrasted characters:

Vol. I pray you, daughter, sing; or express yourself in a more comfortable sort. If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honor.

* * * * * When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb; when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way; when, for a day of king's entreaties, a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding—I, considering how honor would become such a person—that it was no better than picture-like, to hang by the wall, if renown made it not stir—was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child, than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

Vir. But had he died in the business, madam? how then?

Vol. Then his good report should have been my son; I therein would have found issue;

* * * * * Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum—
See him pluck Aufidius down by the hair—
As children from a bear, the Volces shunning him;
Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus,—
Come on, you cowards! you were got in fear,
Though you were born in Rome. His bloody brow
With his mail'd hand then wiping, forth he goes—
Like to a harvest-man, that's task'd to mow
Or all, or lose his hire.

Vir. His bloody brow! O, Jupiter, no blood!

Vol. Away, you fool! it more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy: The breasts of Hecuba,
When she did suckle Hector, look'd not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
At Grecian swords' contending.—Tell Valeria
We are fit to bid her welcome.

Vir. Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius.

Vol. He'll beat Aufidius' head below his knee,
And tread upon his neck.

And yet, to a woman, who alone can appreciate the temptation, Virgilia's persistent resistance of her friend's and her mother's entreaties to "go forth with them," bespeaks a quiet firmness of purpose, for which, with her usual soft yielding, one would scarce give her credit:

Val. How do you both? you are manifest house-keepers. What! are you sewing here? A fine spot in good faith.

* * * * *

Come lay aside your stitchery; I must have you play the idle huswife with me this afternoon.

Vir. No, good madam; I will not out of doors.

Val. Not out of doors!

Vol. She shall, she shall.

Vir. Indeed, no, by your patience: I will not over the threshold, till my lord returns from the wars.

Val. Fye! you confine yourself most unreasonably.

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Vol. Why, I pray you?

Vir. 'Tis not to save labor, nor that I want love.

Val. You would be another Penelope; yet, they say, all the yarn she spun, in Ulysses' absence, did but fill Ithaca full of moths. Come; I would your cambric were as sensible as your finger, that you might leave pricking it for pity. Come, you shall go with us.

Vir. No, good madam—pardon me; indeed, I will not forth.

Vol. Let her alone, lady; as she is now, she will but disease our better mirth.

Val. In troth, I think she would:—Fare you well then.—Come, good sweet lady.—Pry'thee, Virgilia; turn thy solemnness out o'door, and go along with us.

Vir. No—at a word, madam; indeed, I must not. I wish you much mirth.

Val. Well then, farewell.

The separate individualities of the two ladies are also clearly shown in their manner of receiving the tidings of their absent warrior; Volumnia proudly rejoices in that which fills the gentle soul of Virgilia with unqualified horror:

Vol. Honorable Menenius, my boy Marcius approaches; for the love of Juno, let's go.

Men. * * * * *
* * * * * Is he not wounded? he was wont to come home wounded.

Vir. O, no, no, no!

Vol. O, he is wounded—I thank the gods for't!
* * * * *

Lo, on's brows, Menenius! he comes the third time home with the oaken garland.

So, too, their several receptions of him on his return from victory:

Cor. O!
You have, I know, petition'd all the gods
For my prosperity.

[*Kneels.*

Vol. Nay, my good soldier, up!
My gentle Marcius, worthy Caius, and
By deed-achieving honor newly nam'd—
What is it? Coriolanus, must I call thee?
But O, thy wife—

Cor. My gracious silence, hail!
Would'st thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd home,
That weep'st to see me triumph? Ah, my dear,
Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear,
And mothers that lack sons.

When Coriolanus is banished, Virgilia is overwhelmed with grief; it leaves her no words—only pitiful ejaculations; but Volumnia stuns the ears of her ungrateful countrymen with her curses, her accusations, her withering sarcasm.

And again, on the occasion of Volumnia's grand triumph over her son's headlong determination of revenge, this "most noble mother in the world" appeals to him in a torrent of immortal eloquence; Virgilia, with no other arguments than the tears in "those doves' eyes, which can make gods forsworn"—her hands raised to heaven, she kneeling, with her boy, in the dust.