“Julius Caesar”

From *Shakespeare Stories II*, by Leon Garfield

Based on the play *Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare

**Act I, Scene 1**

All Rome was wild with joy! The bright morning streamed with flying caps and pennants, and the very stones danced to the applause of ten thousand feet! Julius Caesar had won a glorious victory over the traitor Pompey, and all the carpenters, cobblers, tradesmen and their wives shut up shop, put on their best attire, and rushed out of doors to welcome him and crown his statues with garlands, as if he was a king!

“Hence! Home, you idle creatures—”

Two officers of state, high up on the steps of a monument, were shouting furiously to make themselves heard as the noisy crowd came flooding into the marketplace, like a filthy, stinking tide, wanting only to lap and lick the feet of Caesar.

“Get you home!”

They drew their swords. The crowd faltered—

“You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!”

Filled with anger and contempt for the common people who, not so long before, had welcomed Pompey even as they now welcomed Caesar, they rushed down and drove them from the marketplace, like a frightened flock of sheep. Then, hearing a distant shot of trumpets, they hastened away to clear the streets and uncrown all the stone Caesars they could find.

They were men of the republic. Like the stern marble Romans on their lofty pedestals, who stood on every corner and in every public place, clutching their scrolls of hard-won liberty, they wanted no more crowning and no more kings.

But their task was hopeless. No sooner had they gone, than through a hundred different channels and alleys, the crowd came streaming back, as if the world had tilted Caesar’s way. They flowed up steps, they climbed on columns, they clung from windows, as the long brazen trumpets approached, flashing like shooting stars and blasting the air with majesty!

**Act I, Scene 2**

Then came Caesar himself, and suddenly all of Rome was one huge adoring eye! Robed in gold and purple, and wearing the laurel wreath of victory, he walked slowly, inclining his head from side to side as he acknowledged the cheering of the people; and the marble Romans on their pedestals seemed to clutch their scrolls more tightly, as if they feared they’d be snatched away.

Following after, like faithful dogs, walked all the great ones of Rome: eager Casca, the noble Brutus with slight Cassius by his side; dry, learned old Cicero, hobbling as if his new sandals pinched, and Mark Antony, stripped and ready to run the course – for it was the Feast of Lupercal when it was the custom for young noblemen to run naked through the streets, striking childless women with leather thongs, to cure them of barrenness.

“Calpurnia!”

The procession halted. The trumpets were stilled. Caesar had spoken. He had summoned his wife. At once she left her place and, almost stumbling over her heavy purple gown in her haste, she came to her husband’s side. He bade her stand in Antony’s path when he ran the magic course. She was childless and Caesar had need of a son. Humbly, she bowed her head and, accompanied by knowing smiles that made her blush with shame, she returned to her place.

“Set on,” commanded Caesar. He raised his hand –

“Caesar!”

He paused, and the trumpets, half-way to lips, stayed motionless. Who had called his name? A silence fell on the marketplace. Then there was a stirring among the crowd. An old man shuffled forward, a gaunt old man with wild white hair. He was a soothsayer who, it was said, looked into tomorrow as clearly as if it was yesterday. He spoke again.

“Beware the Ides of March.”

“Set him before me,” ordered Caesar, but the old man needed no assistance. Leaning heavily on his staff, he approached and stood before Caesar, his ragged black gown flapping in the gusty air.
“What sayest thou to me now? Speak once again.”

“Beware the Ides of March,” said the soothsayer, and his words struck a chill into every heart. The Ides of March were close at hand. But Caesar was unmoved. He stared hard into the man’s pale blue eyes that blazed either with madness or the harmless folly of age. He smiled.

“He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass.” And, with a shrug of his shoulders, as if the warning had been of no more consequence than a pebble cast against the sun, he set on.

Two remained behind: Brutus and Cassius. Weary of walking in Caesar’s shadow, they had no wish to watch him presiding over the Festival games. They leaned against a wall and stared after the swirling clouds of dust that had been raised by the multitude that had streamed after Caesar. Although they were friends they were, at that moment, separate islands of thought. Then Cassius, the quicker and more passionate of the two, broke the silence. Shrewdly observing the direction of Brutus’s gaze, he wondered if his friend was troubled with the same thought that was troubling himself and certain other gentlemen of Rome? Was it possible, he went on, choosing his words with care, that the noble Brutus, whose great ancestor had driven out the last of Rome’s bad kings, was growing uneasy over Caesar’s ever-increasing power?

Before Brutus could answer, there came a roar from the distant multitude. “What means this shouting?” he muttered. “I do fear the people choose Caesar for their king!”

“Ay, do you fear it?” asked Cassius quickly. “Then must I think you would not have it so!”

Brutus hesitated; then slowly answered, “I would not . . .” and Cassius’s heart beat rapidly. Thus far Brutus was with him!

A cloud passed across the sun. Shadows invaded the market-place. The pale Romans on their pedestals seemed to tremble and sway, as if their ghostly world had begun to shake. They glared down in stony dismay on the two men who murmured together: the one tall and upright, the other, slighter and fiercely restless, like a darting flame striving to set a mighty tree ablaze.

Cassius hated Caesar. He hated him for the huge and arrogant thing he had become.

“Why, man,” cried Cassius, seizing his friend by the arm, “he doth bestride the narrow world like a Colossus, and we petty men walk under his huge legs and peep about to find ourselves dishonorable graves!”

At the word “dishonorable” Brutus flushed angrily. Honor was dearer to him than life itself, and Cassius knew it. Indeed, he loved and admired his friend for it, but such was his hatred for Caesar that he did not scruple to play upon Brutus’s honor as if it was an instrument, as he led him further and further along the dangerous path that he himself was treading. And Brutus, to the noble tune of honor, followed the skillful piper willingly.

Caesar was returning. Guiltily, the friends drew apart as the procession entered the marketplace. They watched curiously. Plainly, something was amiss. The trumpets hung down like broken daffodils and the crowd had drained away to a ragged trickle. Caesar himself looked angry, and those near him were shaken and pale. They halted. Caesar looked about him, as if for someone on whom he might vent his spleen. His eye fell upon Cassius. He beckoned Mark Antony to his side.

“Let me have men about me that are fat,” he said loudly, “sleek-headed men and such as sleep a-nights. Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look. Such men are dangerous.”

“Fear him not, Caesar; he’s not dangerous,” said Antony with a smile; but Caesar, never taking his eyes from the suddenly white-faced Cassius, slowly shook his head.

“Such men as he be never at heart’s ease whiles they behold a greater than themselves,” he said thoughtfully, “and therefore are they very dangerous.” Then, as if remembering who he was, his hand went to his laurel wreath, which he wore as much to hide his thinning hair as to mark his victory, and settled it more firmly on his head. Others might fear, but never Caesar. “Come to my right hand,” he said to Antony, “for this ear is deaf, and tell me truly what thou thinkest of him,” and, with a last long look at Cassius, he led the way from the market-place.

As the procession passed, Brutus plucked Casca by the sleeve. Casca, careful not to be observed, lingered behind. Brutus asked him what had happened. Casca looked about him, and, seeing there was none else by, smiled broadly and related what had taken place.

He was full of lively mockery, sparing neither Caesar, nor his friends, nor the people from the sharpness of his tongue; for Casca, though he bowed low before Caesar, was never afraid to speak his mind – behind Caesar’s back.

The scene had been so comical and ridiculous that it had been as much as he could do to stop himself laughing aloud. Antony had offered Caesar a crown. Caesar had refused it and the rabble had hooted and shouted for joy. Antony offered it a second
time. Again Caesar refused, and again the people cheered him for it. But when it was offered for a third time, and for a third time Caesar pushed it aside, the sweaty crowd yelled and shouted so much that Caesar fell down in a fit and foamed at the mouth – as much from the people’s bad breath as from his bitter disappointment that they did not want him to be a king.

“What, did Caesar swoon?” asked Cassius softly.

“‘Tis very like,” said Brutus; “he hath the falling sickness.”

Cassius shook his head. “No, Caesar hath it not; but you, and I, and honest Casca, we have the falling sickness.”

Casca looked at him sharply. “I know not what you mean by that,” he said; but Cassius had seen in his eyes the very image of his own dark thoughts.

“Will you sup with me tonight, Casca?”

“No, I am promised forth.”

“Will you dine with me tomorrow?”

“Ay, if I be alive, and your mind hold, and your dinner worth the eating.”

With that, they parted, all three agreeing to meet – tomorrow.

Act I, Scene 3

A heap of rags stirred in a dusty corner of the marketplace, and, with little groanings and cracklings of the joints, raised itself up to the height of a man. It was the soothsayer. He stared after the three who had just gone; and his pale blue eyes, that looked into tomorrow as clearly as if it was yesterday, widened with dread. Tomorrow was the Ides of March. The sky darkened and a wind sprang up. Frightened rubbish flew across the market-place, and the old man, his gown stretched out like a black flag, stumbled away.

Then the storm broke, and all Rome shook. It was a strange storm, of sudden enormous glares and enormous blacknesses, and unnatural roarings as if huge lions were rending the sky. Some said blood drizzled on the Capitol, others saw men, all in flames, walking the streets, and dead men shrieking down alleys with their stained winding-sheets streaming out in the dark wind.

“Who’s there?”

“A Roman.”

Two muffled figures, meeting in a narrow way, drew close together. One was Casca, white with fear at the supernatural violence of the night; the other was Cassius, exulting in it, for he had a storm within as wild as the one above. Fearfully, Casca spoke of monsters in the sky; fiercely Cassius spoke of a monster in Rome –

“‘Tis Caesar that you mean, is it not, Cassius?”

“Let it be who it is,” muttered Cassius; and, while the earth shook and glaring terrors piled up in the sky, he led the trembling Casca into the darker terror of his own design: the murder of Caesar!

He was not alone, he promised Casca. Even now there were others who had no love for Caesar, waiting in the night. But first they must win Brutus to the cause. The plot had need of him. His noble name would make the deed seem just and honorable in all men’s eyes.

“Three parts of him is ours already,” whispered Cassius, “and the man entire upon the next encounter . . .” He drew a scroll of paper from his sleeve. It was to be thrown in at Brutus’s window. In fiery words it urged him, in the name of the people, to rise up like his great ancestor and rid Rome of the tyrant! Cassius had written it himself. Once more he was playing upon his friend’s honor; and this time the tune would lead Brutus to take the final step.

Lightning flashed. The muffled figures shrank back, and their monstrous double shadow was flung across the street like a pall. Then blackness engulfed them . . .

Act II, Scene 1

Brutus walked alone in his orchard. The worst of the storm’s violence was over, but not its weirdness. Mad shooting stars whizzed across the black sky, breaking up the darkness into a patchwork of flickering sights. At one moment all was hidden and secret; at the next, the clustering trees threw up their thin arms in despair.
“It must be by his death,” he whispered as, with an anguished heart, he contemplated the terrible deed that Cassius had put into his thoughts: the killing of a friend, for Caesar was his friend. But Caesar’s spirit, that huge, ambitious thing that stretched its arm across the world, was the enemy of all free men. “It must be by his death . . .” not because of what he was, but because of what he might become . . .

Someone was coming. It was Lucius, his servant. The boy was puzzled. He’d found a scroll of paper inside the window of his master’s room. It had not been there before. Brutus took it, and, when the boy had gone, broke the seal and read:

“Brutus, thou sleep’st. Awake and see thyself! Speak, strike, redress!”

He breathed deeply. It was not the first such letter to reach him. There had been others that had been put in his way. It seemed that all Rome was begging him to act. He clenched up the paper in his fist. Rome should not beg in vain! “It must be by his death!”

There was a knocking at the gate. Lucius came to tell him that Cassius was waiting.

“Is he alone?”

“No, sir, there are more with him.”

“Do you know them?”

Lucius shook his head. They had all been hidden in their cloaks.

“Let ‘em enter,” said Brutus, and frowned. Unlike Cassius, he was not a man of plots and conspiracy. He despised concealment and felt ashamed to be a part of it.

Presently, quietly, faceless figures approached from among the trees. One by one, they made themselves known: Casca, Decius, Cinna, Metellus Cimber, Trebonius . . . By the light of day, they were men of substance, worthy Romans; but by night, they were something different . . . Softly, they talked together while Cassius and Brutus whispered apart. Then Cassius smiled and nodded, and they knew that Brutus was theirs!

He stepped forward and shook each man firmly by the hand, and the bond was sealed. At once, all constraint vanished and they began talking eagerly of what must be done. Brutus was ever in the forefront; his doubts resolved, he embraced the cause with all his heart, and took it upon himself to lead. Should Cicero be approached? His age and dignity would gain all men’s respect. But Brutus was against it, and Brutus had his way. Should no one else but Caesar be killed?

“Let Antony and Caesar fall together,” said Cassius; but Brutus was against it, and Brutus had his way.

The death of Caesar was to be the sacrifice of a single man for the good of all. “And for Mark Antony,” he said, “think not of him, for he can do no more than Caesar’s arm when Caesar’s head is off.”

“Yet I fear him,” muttered Cassius; but he was overruled.

The hour was late. It was three o’clock in the morning, and the heavy blackness was already wearing thin.

“Good gentleman,” urged Brutus, as his companions, with pale and desperate looks, took their leave, “look fresh and merrily . . .” but when they had gone, the show of ease he had put on, left him, and once more he was the lonely brooding figure among the trees. “It must be by his death . . .” They were to meet at Caesar’s house at eight o’clock to bring him to the Capitol, and there to kill him –

“Brutus, my lord.”

He started. Portia, his wife, stood beside him, like a good spirit in the ugly dark. She was troubled. She had seen the secret men in the orchard, and she knew her husband was distressed. Gently, she begged him to tell her the cause.

He turned away. He dared not tell her. He feared her honesty too much.

“I am not well in health,” he said, “and that is all.”

Angered at being put off with thin excuses, as if she had no more understanding than a child, she reproached him for his lack of trust. Were he and she not one? Why, then, should she not share in his griefs as well as in his joys?

“Am I your self,” she demanded, confronting him wherever he turned, “in sort or limitation, to keep with you at meals, comfort your bed, and talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs of your good pleasures? If it were no more, then Portia is Brutus’s harlot, not his wife!” In despair, she knelt. “Tell me your counsels,” she pleaded, “I will not disclose ‘em!”
Eagerly, she dragged up her gown and displayed a deep and bloody wound in her white thigh. She herself had done it and endured the pain in silence as a proof of her fortitude.

“Can I bear that with patience, and not my husband’s secrets?”

“O ye gods,” wept Brutus, shamed by Portia’s courage, “render me worthy of this noble wife!” and, with a warm embrace, promised that she should share in the terrible secret he carried in his heart.

Act II, Scene 2

“Help, ho, they murder Caesar!”

But it was only in the dreams of Caesar’s wife. She awoke with a cry. She left her bed and rushed in search of her husband. She found him already preparing himself to go to the Capitol. Urgently, she begged him to stay at home that day. Not only had her dreams been full of blood, but all night the sky had roared and glared with fiery doom. But Caesar only smiled and shook his head.

“These predictions are to the world in general as to Caesar.”

“When beggars die there are no comets seen,” cried Calpurnia, “the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes!”

Caesar was unmoved. Neither the savage sights in the streets nor the dreadful portents in the sky could shake him. He was always Caesar.

“Alas, my lord,” pleaded Calpurnia, her fears increasing a thousand-fold as a troubled servant came to tell that the morning’s sacrifice had been unlucky: no heart had been found in the slaughtered beast, “do not go forth today!”

She knelt and, weeping, implored him to send Mark Antony to say he was not well and would not come to the Capitol today. Caesar gazed down. A single word from him would turn Calpurnia’s trembling fear to boundless joy. He raised her to her feet.

“Mark Antony shall say I am not well,” he said; but even as Calpurnia burst into sunshine smiles, a gentleman arrived, a gentleman whose looks were fresh and merry. It was Decius. It was eight o’clock and he had come to take Caesar to the Capitol.

“Bear my greeting to the senators,” said Caesar, “and tell them I will not come today.”

Decius stared, and the freshness seemed to wither on his cheeks.

“Say he is sick,” said Calpurnia quickly.

Caesar frowned. “Shall Caesar send a lie? Go tell them Caesar will not come.”

“Most mighty Caesar,” pleaded Decius, plainly distressed, “let me know some cause—“

“The cause is in my will. I will not come. That is enough to satisfy the Senate.” Then, taking pity on the bewildered Decius, he explained that Calpurnia had begged him, on her knees, to stay at home. She had had bad dreams. She had dreamed that Caesar’s statue had spouted blood, and that smiling Romans had come to bathe their hands in it.

Decius, clever Decius, listened carefully. He shook his head. Calpurnia had interpreted her dream quite wrongly. Its true meaning was life, not death. The spouting blood plainly signified the nourishment that Caesar was to give to Rome. Caesar nodded thoughtfully. He picked up his laurel wreath and absently fingered the leaves as Decius went on to say that he’d heard the Senate meant to offer Caesar the crown that very day; but if Caesar did not come, Decius feared they’d change their minds and even whisper that Caesar had been frightened by his wife’s dreams.

Caesar’s brow grew dark. “Give me my robe,” he commanded, outraged that a pack of feeble old men should dare to think Caesar afraid. “I will go!”

Calpurnia cried out in dismay; but her voice was lost and she was brushed aside and forgotten as the room was suddenly filled with smiling friends who had come to drink wine with Caesar, and then to take him to the Capitol and his death.

Act II, Scene 3

They were betrayed! A man stood in the crowd outside the Capitol, with a letter for Caesar in his hand. In it, the conspiracy was revealed and every guilty name written down! There was a sound of cheering from afar. Caesar was coming! Trembling with excitement, the man began to push his way towards the front...
Portia in her house also heard the cheering, but to her distracted ears it sounded ragged and dismayed. Every noise from the Capitol excited her, every silence drove her mad. A dozen times she’d bade Lucius run to the Senate House; but still he stayed, for she could think of no likely reason for his errand. Her husband’s secret struggled in her breast, and it needed all her strength to keep it confined.

“O Brutus,” she whispered, “the heavens speed thee in thine enterprise!” and once more she bade Lucius run to her husband, for no better purpose than to tell him she was merry!

Act III, Scene 1

The sun glared down after the night’s storm, as if to see where all the monsters had gone. It was past nine o’clock and Caesar, walking in the midst of his friends, approached the Capitol. He paused. He had spied a face that he remembered among the waiting crowds. It was the mad old man who had spoken to him yesterday. He beckoned and the old man came forward, leaning on his staff.

“The Ides of March are come,” said Caesar mockingly.

“Ay, Caesar,” answered the soothsayer, “but not gone.”

Caesar laughed, and passed on.

“Hail, Caesar! Read this—”

A man had rushed out of the crowd and, before anyone could stop him, had thrust a letter into Caesar’s hand! Swiftly Decius interposed with a letter of his own for Caesar to read.

“O Caesar, read mine first,” begged the man, “for mine’s a suit that touches Caesar nearer!”

“What touches us ourself shall be last served,” said Caesar royally; and thrust the fatal letter into the oblivion of his sleeve.

“Delay not, Caesar,” cried the man, “read it instantly!”

“What, is the fellow mad?” demanded Caesar; and Cassius bustled him back into the crowd.

Then, with a last smile and wave to the people of Rome, Caesar mounted up the steps of the Capitol and disappeared within.

“Caesar, beware of Brutus. Take heed of Cassius. Come not near Casca . . .” warned the letter in his sleeve; but in vain.

Trebonius was deep in talk with Mark Antony, and was gently leading him away. It had been agreed. Caesar’s was the only blood to be shed. There was to be no frantic butchery. It was to be done swiftly and sternly, in a spirit of justice, not revenge.

Casca was to strike the first blow. With his right hand hidden in his gown, he walked as if on eggshells, and sweated like an actor fearful of mangling his part. Every sight, every sound was betrayal — the echoing footsteps on the huge marble floor, the murmuring of senators as they moved among the tall shadowy columns to take their places in the solemn circle of chairs; the quick glances, the sudden silences . . . Cassius was pale, anxious; his eyes were burning as if his brain was on fire. But Brutus, as always, was upright and calm . . .

Suddenly there was a stirring. The senators were standing. What had happened? What had they seen? But it was for Caesar. He had taken his place in the chair of state. He motioned graciously with his hand and the senators seated themselves again. They leaned forward, like an expectant audience at the beginning of a play.

It was to begin with Metellus Cimber. Casca moved quietly to the back of Caesar’s chair. He waited. Metellus had not moved. He had been forestalled. Someone else was addressing Caesar, and speaking at length. Metellus was rubbing his hands together, as if to wipe off the skin. At last it was his turn. Quickly he came forward and knelt before Caesar and began to plead for the pardon of his banished brother. Coldly, Caesar denied him. Then Brutus came forward, then Cassius, then Cinna . . . until all were kneeling, pleading:

“Most high, most mighty . . . Pardon, Caesar, pardon . . . O Caesar . . .”

But Caesar was unmoved.

Casca stood directly behind. His heart was knocking violently. Of a sudden, the man seated in the chair seemed immense! He towered above the crouching figures before him like a god! Cinna had clutched the hem of his robe, in abject supplication. Caesar spurned him.

“Great Caesar——” cried Decius, and Casca’s hidden hand was out!

“Speak,” he screamed, “hands for me!” and, reaching forward, plunged his dagger into Caesar’s neck!
Caesar cried out! He clapped his hand to his wound as if an insect had stung him. He rose to his feet, turned, seized Casca by the wrist—but Casca’s cry had been answered! The kneeling figures were up, their arms were lifted, and in every hand was a weapon!

Amazed, Caesar stared from face to terrible face. He knew them all. They were his friends.

Then they fell upon him. With gasps and cries and savage grunts, they stabbed and slashed and hacked where they could, driving him this way and that, until Caesar was no more than a swaying, staggering remnant, everywhere spouting blood. But still he would not die; until Brutus, with a sad look, struck the last blow.

“Et tu, Brute?” he sighed as his friend’s dagger pierced him through. “Then fall Caesar!” and with his ruined face muffled in his slashed gown, he fell at the base of Pompey’s statue. Caesar was dead.

There was silence. It was as if the heart of the world had been torn out, leaving an emptiness. Then Cinna cried out:

“Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead” and the world awoke!

There was an uproar of overturned chairs and stumbling feet as terrified senators, squealing like chickens rushing from the axe, fled from the men of blood.

“Fly not, stand still!” shouted Brutus. “Ambition’s debt is paid!” but the senators, seeing only wild-eyed murderers and streaming knives, stumbled out of doors, leaving behind one old man, grey-faced and trembling, who had been too frightened to move.

“There’s no harm intended to your person,” Brutus assured him; and Cassius led him gently away.

The conspirators were alone. They stared down at the fallen Caesar. The hugeness of their deed filled them with awe and robbed them of all thought and action. Then Brutus proposed they should stoop and bathe their hands, ceremonially, in Caesar’s blood, to sanctify what they had done.

“How many ages hence,” murmured Cassius, as his kneeling friends, some boldly, some fearfully, fumbled in the dead man’s wounds, “shall this our lofty scene be acted over in states unborn and accents yet unknown?” and he gazed round at the wrenched and broken circle of empty chairs, as if the countless generations to come were already crowding in and looking on.

“How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport?” wondered Brutus.

“So oft as that shall be,” said Cassius proudly, “so often shall the knot of us be called the men that gave their country liberty!”

A shadow fell across them. There was a figure standing in the open doorway. It was a servant of Mark Antony. He came quickly forward and knelt to Brutus. His master had sent him. Antony asked for no more than safe conduct to come before Brutus; and, if Brutus should satisfy him that Caesar’s death had been necessary, he would be content to follow where the noble Brutus led.

“He shall be satisfied,” said Brutus, and sent the servant back. It would be well to have Mark Antony for a friend.

“I wish we may,” said Cassius quietly. “But yet I have a mind that fears him much.”

Mark Antony came directly. His eyes were still looped with shadows from a long night’s drinking and his step was unsteady; for he was a lover of wine and good company. Then he saw Caesar, huddled in his torn and bloody gown, like a dead beast roughly covered over, to keep the flies away. He stopped, and tears filled his eyes.

“O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?” he wept helplessly. “Fare thee well!”

He was a young man of quick, strong feelings which, try as he might, he could not hide. His heart was breaking, for he had loved and admired Caesar above all other men. He turned to Brutus and his friends and begged them, if they bore him any ill-will, to kill him there and then, with the very weapons with which they had killed Caesar.

“O Antony,” protested Brutus, much moved by the young man’s grief, “beg not your death of us!” and he promised that, when the frightened people had been calmed, he would satisfy him with good reasons for Caesar’s death.

Antony nodded; and, on a sudden impulse that was the mark of his nature, he shook each man by his bloody hand, as if to enroll himself among the givers of liberty. Brutus’s wish was gratified. Mark Antony was their friend. All he asked in return was leave to speak at Caesar’s funeral. A small request.

“You shall, Mark Antony,” said Brutus warmly.

“Brutus, a word with you!”
It was Cassius. He beckoned Brutus away.

“You know not what you do,” he warned. “Do not consent!”

He did not trust Mark Antony and feared what he might say. But Brutus brushed his fears aside. He had foreseen that danger and was prepared. Antony would speak only after he himself had addressed the people and given them the reason for Caesar’s death. He was not to blame Brutus and his companions, nor was he to say more in praise of Caesar than was proper for a friend. If Antony did not agree to these conditions, he was not to speak at all.

“Be it so,” murmured Antony when Brutus told him. “I do desire no more.”

“Prepare the body, then, and follow us,” said Brutus; and, with a reassuring smile at the still troubled Cassius, led the way outside to face the people of Rome.

Antony was alone in the silent building. Around him, the pale columns grew upward, losing themselves in shadows; and on the floor, like the track of a hunted deer, were smears and spots and puddles of blood.

Antony knelt. With trembling hands he uncovered Caesar’s face. He stared at it long and hard, as if to engrave each savage wound upon his memory for ever. Then he looked up; and with eyes that blazed with grief and rage, he vowed so terrible a revenge for the foul crime that all Italy would bleed for it!

Act III, Scene 2

The news of Caesar’s death rushed through the city like a wind, whipping up excitement, fear, and bewilderment. The great man, the fixed star that had held all in place, was gone! The world was in darkness, even at noon!

But to Brutus, the world was already a brighter and a nobler place now that the danger of Caesar’s ambition had been cut off. He stood on the steps of the Capitol with all Rome crowding to hear him.

“Romans, countrymen, and lovers,” he shouted, striving to calm the huge tide of people that rose and fell before him like an unruly sea, “hear me for my cause!”

He told them why Caesar had been killed; and they cheered. He told them that they were free; and they cheered. He told them they were proud Romans, and they cheered till the very air was dazed; not for what he said, but because he was the noble Brutus who would tell them what to do. Then, when Mark Antony appeared, with two servants bearing Caesar’s sheeted body, which they laid upon a hastily prepared bier, he waved his dagger, still bright with Caesar’s blood, over his head and cried that even as he had killed Caesar for the good of Rome, he would kill himself if Rome should ever need his death!

“Live, Brutus, live, live!” roared the crowd. “Let him be Caesar!”

Brutus stared at them, amazed. Was it possible that they wanted another tyrant so soon after they had been saved from one?

“My countrymen—” he pleaded, but they would not listen; and he was compelled to beg them, over and over again, to stay and hear Mark Antony before they let him depart, with “Let him be Caesar!” still ringing in his ears.

Brutus and the conspirators had gone. Antony was alone before the people of Rome. He came forward. The crowd stirred impatiently. After the success of Brutus, Antony was a slight figure on the steps. He began to speak, humbly. He said he spoke by permission of Brutus and his friends; but the crowd, catching only the name, angrily warned him to speak no ill of the noble Brutus. Antony bowed his head.

“You gentle Romans—” he began again; but the crowd was still restless. Suddenly he took a step towards Caesar’s bier. The dead man’s arm had slipped from the shroud and was hanging down, like butcher’s meat. Quickly, Antony took it up, and, kissing the half-clenched hand, laid it across Caesar’s breast. It was simply done, and with perfect naturalness; but, like the artless gesture of a skillful actor, it caught every eye.

“Friends, Romans, countrymen,” he shouted, in a voice that shook the very stones of Rome, “lend me your ears!”

But there was no need. He had already seized attention by the throat; and he held it fast! The vast crowd stood motionless; wives turned from their husbands, young men from their loves, and even the ever-running children stopped, stared, and listened as Mark Antony spoke of the dead.

Cautiously at first, and ever-mindful of the need to please his hearers with praise for Brutus, he began to conjure up the Caesar they had lost: a Caesar men might weep for, a Caesar who was good and just; a Caesar whose only ambition was for his country, and in whose mighty heart there was room enough for love of every soul in Rome.
He spoke as a simple, honest man to simple, honest men. As Cassius had feared, he spoke not to their reason, but to their feelings—

“Bear with me,” he cried, his eyes fiery with tears, “my heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, and I must pause till it come back to me!”

A murmur of pity sprang up, ruffling through the crowd and shivering it, like a sudden change of wind. Swiftly, he began to work upon it, until the shivering became a heaving and swelling, like the breathing of a giant beast. He showed the people a parchment. It was Caesar’s will. The crowd pressed forward. Antony drew back. It was wrong for the people to know that their Caesar had loved them so well that he had made them all his heirs. It might turn them against the “honorable men” who had stabbed Caesar to death!

“They were villains, murderers!” shouted the crowd, enraged with grief and greed. “The will! Read the will!”

But still Antony held off, knowing that each time he dammed the ever-increasing tide it would gather in strength.

“If you have tears, prepare to shed them now!” he cried, and held up, for all to see, Caesar’s robe, torn and bloody from dagger-thrusts, as if wild beasts had been rending it; and then, with one fierce movement, he snatched away the shroud and showed the people Caesar himself, the man who had loved them, hacked and mangled by his friends!

Only then, when the people’s fury had mounted to its utmost pitch, did he read the will. For every man, a sum of money, and Caesar’s orchards and gardens and walks had been left to the people for them to enjoy forever!

“Here was a Caesar!” shouted Antony, as the crowd roared and howled for vengeance on the cruel murderers. “When comes such another?”

“Never, never!” came the huge reply; and there was scarcely time for Antony to cover the body for decency’s sake, before, like a bloody banner, it was borne triumphantly aloft!

“Mischief, thou art afoot,” whispered Antony as he hastened away. “Take thou what course thou wilt!” and the maddened multitude, like a monstrously swollen river, burst its banks!

It rushed through the city, smashing windows, tearing out the frames and sweeping all to destruction in its path, with the dead Caesar, like a piece of wreckage on a raging tide, tossed this way and that, now down, now bolt-upright and grinning horribly at his revenge!

Act III, Scene 3

There was a man walking peaceably in a street. He was a quiet, humble fellow, a poet, a dreamer of sweet dreams, who had never done the world any harm. Suddenly the crowd came upon him. Fiercely, they demanded his name. By ill-luck, it was Cinna—

“Tear him to pieces!” screamed the crowd. “He’s a conspirator!”

“I am Cinna the poet! I am Cinna the poet!” pleaded the poor wretch; but his name was still Cinna so they tore him, shrieking, limb from limb. Tyranny was dead; and so was Cinna the poet.

Then with howls and yells and blazing brands, the crowd, more terrible by far than the wild apparitions that had stalked the streets in the prophetic storm, rushed away to wreak its vengeance on the conspirators!

Act IV, Scene 1

In Mark Antony’s house, three men sat at a table that was coldly laid for death. One was Antony himself; another was Lepidus, a sturdy soldier with valuable legions at his command; the third was a pale, precise young man, younger, even, than Antony, who glanced with thin-lipped disapproval at the empty bottles and faded remembrances of ladies that littered the room. He was Octavius, grand-nephew of Caesar and heir to his mighty name.

“Prick him down, Antony,” he murmured, nodding towards a list of names that lay upon the table between them.

Antony looked down and, with a careless stroke of his pen, condemned yet another man to death. Not for such men as these was there the foolish magnanimity of a Brutus who had once spared Antony’s life! It needed but the faintest shadow cast on a man’s loyalty for him to be dragged from his bed, his throat cut, and his possessions seized.

It was a dangerous time. The murder of Caesar had split the land and unleashed the terror of war. Brutus and Cassius had fled from the wrath of the people and were, even now, gathering armies beyond Rome. More and more money was wanted for
soldiers to march against them. With a wave of his hand, Antony dispatched Lepidus to Caesar’s house to fetch his will. The promised legacies would have to be cut off. Everything was needed to pay for the war.

“This is a slight unmeritable man,” said Antony contemptuously, when Lepidus had gone; and he proposed that, once the fellow had served his turn, he and Octavius should rid themselves of him.

“But he’s a tried and valiant soldier,” protested Octavius.

“So is my horse,” said Antony.

Octavius let it pass. He had no wish to quarrel with Antony. Young as he was, he was already politician enough to know better than to mingle feelings with policy. Nothing must be allowed to deflect them from their chief purpose, which was the destruction of Brutus and Cassius and all who had inclined to them. He stood up, and, looking over Antony’s shoulder, observed with cold satisfaction that the list of names was black with spots of death.

Act IV, Scene 2

Brutus, encamped near Sardis in far-off Asia Minor, also needed money for war. He had sent to Cassius; but had been denied. Now, with his huge army stretched out across the fields like a monstrous harvest of steel, waving and glinting as far as the eye could see in the setting sun, he waited outside his tent for some explanation from his friend.

Brutus’s old calmness had forsaken him. His heart, already heavy with bad news from home, had been stirred to anger by Cassius’s doubtful behavior, not only in denying him money, but because Cassius had dared to plead for a man that he, Brutus, had punished for taking bribes. Even in war, their hands must be clean and their hearts unspotted.

“Most noble brother, you have done me wrong!” were Cassius’s first words when they met, and spoken loud.

He had come with his officers, ahead of his marching legions, and now confronted Brutus. He, too, was an angry man; and, unlike his friend, made no effort to hide it. He had not liked the manner in which Brutus had reproached him for seeking to defend his guilty officer. He stood, breathing deeply, his brow dark and his fists clenched; and saw himself reflected, Medusa-like, in Brutus’s too-bright breastplate: a frowning fellow in armor that was worn and soiled from hard fighting, very like the man himself.

Quietly, Brutus bade him come inside his tent. It was not wise for discord between generals to be in the public gaze. Accordingly, they dismissed their officers and, with an outward show of harmony, retired into Brutus’s tent. But once the heavy, dim interior had enclosed them and shut them away from curious eyes, the division between them sprang wide apart.

Act IV, Scene 3

The cause was money: money denied, and money got from bribery, which Brutus hated and despised. Private grief and the multiplying troubles of war had so stiffened his pride and encased him in the armor of his honor, that he could not forgive even the smallest falling away from honesty, least of all when he saw it in his friend.

“Let me tell you, Cassius,” he said, as if to an underling, “you yourself are much condemned to have an itching palm . . .”

“I an itching palm!” cried Cassius, unable to believe that Brutus could address him so contemptuously.

“Remember March, the Ides of March remember. Did not great Julius bleed for justice’s sake?” went on Brutus, as if careless of the deep hurt he had inflicted. “Shall we now contaminate our fingers with base bribes? . . . I had rather be a dog and bay the moon, than such a Roman.”

“Brutus, bait not me,” Cassius pleaded, striving with all his might to control his outraged hart. “You forget yourself. I am a soldier. I, older in practice, abler than yourself to make conditions!”

“Go on! You are not, Cassius.”

“I am.”

“I say you are not.”

“Urge me no more!” warned Cassius, his hand going helplessly to his sword. “Have mind upon your health!”

“Away, slight man!” jeered Brutus; and, while Cassius spent himself in useless rage, he pricked and stabbed and hacked him with words as cold and sharp as steel, never giving him rest, ever accusing, ever condemning, until Cassius, staggering even as Caesar had staggered under the dagger-thrusts, could endure no more.
“Come, Antony, and young Octavius, come,” he wept, sinking to his knees, “revenge yourselves alone on Cassius, for Cassius is awearie of the world . . .” He drew his dagger and offered it to Brutus. “Strike as thou didst at Caesar,” he begged; “for I know, when thou didst hate him worst, thou lov’st him better than ever thou lov’st Cassius.”

They stared at one another, these two friends who had come so far together since the Ides of March, and marveled that it should have come to this: that one should now be begging his death of the other.

“Sheathe your dagger,” muttered Brutus, suddenly ashamed; and, with an effort, thrust aside his private sorrow and confessed that he had been ill-tempered.

At once, Cassius, as quick to forgive as he was in everything, smiled. “Give me your hand!” he cried.

“And my heart too,” answered Brutus gladly; and their hands were clasped once more in friendship. He called for his servant Lucius to bring a bowl of wine.

“I did not think you could have been so angry,” murmured Cassius, as they waited.

“O Cassius,” sighed Brutus, “I am sick of many griefs,” and then, unable any longer to hide the aching desolation in his heart, he told Cassius that Portia was dead.

Cassius drew in his breath sharply. “How ‘scaped I killing when I crossed you so?” he whispered, in a rush of pity for his friend.

“O insupportable and touching loss! Upon what sickness?”

No sickness but fear: fear for her husband, and fear of Antony and Octavius’s growing strength. She had killed herself.

“Speak no more of her,” pleaded Brutus, as Lucius came in with wine and with lighted tapers that changed the dark tent into a solemn golden cave.

The friends drank. There was a sound of voices outside. Lucius departed and a moment later, brought in two officers, Messala and Titinius. Brutus bade them be seated . . .

“Portia,” sighed Cassius, his thoughts still with the lively lady whose dear love and sweet honesty had lightened Brutus’s life, “art thou gone?”

“No more, I pray you!” whispered Brutus urgently; and, turning to the officers was, in a moment, his calm, unshaken self.

He had letters from Rome. Mark Antony and Octavius, with their armies, were marching towards Philippi. Messala nodded. He also had had letters confirming it. In addition, he had heard that a hundred senators had been put to death. Brutus had heard the same.

“Had you your letters from your wife, my lord?” asked Messala gently.

Brutus shook his head. Messala asked if his letters had contained any news of his wife? Again Brutus shook his head. Messala glanced quickly at Titinius, and in that glance it was plain that he knew of Portia’s death and dreaded telling Brutus of it. Cassius scowled and turned away. His heart ached for his friend.

“Then like a Roman bear the truth I tell,” said Messala steadily, “for certain she is dead . . .”

Brutus bowed his head. “Why, farewell, Portia,” he murmured, and Messala and Titinius marveled at his fortitude; but Cassius knew that such fortitude was paid for with a sea of inward tears.

“Well, to our work,” said Brutus, abruptly dismissing all grief for the immediate necessity. “What do you think of marching to Philippi presently?”

Cassius was against it. It was wiser, he reasoned, for the enemy to come to them, and so waste himself with journeying. But Brutus knew better. The enemy was more likely to gain in strength from marching through a friendly countryside, whereas they themselves were already at the height of their power and could only decline.

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,” he said, “which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries.” He paused; then went on: “We must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.”

There was silence. Then one by one, his companions, their faces glowing in the tapers’ yellow light, nodded. It was agreed. Tomorrow they were to set out for Philippi and the battle that would decide their fates. Quietly they took their leave.

Presently Brutus was alone. All but one of the tapers had been extinguished and the camp was quiet; but he could not sleep. He called for Lucius to play some music to him. The boy came, stumbling and clutching his lute, still half in his dreams.
“This is a sleepy tune,” smiled Brutus as the music began. Then it ceased; the boy was fast asleep. Brutus gazed at him, enviously; but did not wake him. Gently he took the instrument from his hands and put it aside, lest it break in falling to the floor. He drew his seat close to the taper and tried to read; but the flame was sickly: it shook and trembled like a fevered spirit.

“How ill this taper burns!” he muttered, and laid his book aside.

The sleeping boy was smiling; he was in a happier time. Brutus sighed, and gazed into the crowding shadows that shifted, like uneasy thoughts, in the quiet tent. Smoke from the taper weaved up into the air, where it hovered curiously, as if it had met with an invisible obstruction. As he watched, it seemed to grow pale and form itself into the shape of a robe.

Drops of sweat gathered on Brutus’s brow as, little by little, the robe became inhabited, and flowers of blood began to blossom amid the folds.

“Ha! Who comes here?” he whispered, as if to deny the fearful evidence of his senses.

“Thy evil spirit, Brutus,” answered the apparition, fixing him with a pallid stare. It was Caesar, torn and bloody in his murder gown, even as Brutus had seen him when he’d stabbed him to death.

“Why com’st thou?”

“To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi.”

“Well; then I shall see thee again?”

“Aye, at Philippi,” came the solemn answer; and, with a gesture of farewell, the ghost of murdered Caesar faded and dissolved into the air.

**Act V, Scene 1**

The plains of Philippi swarmed with armed men, thick as bees.

“Mark Antony, shall we give sign of battle?” asked Octavius eagerly, his thin blood suddenly heated to a youthful rashness as a little group of horsemen, their breastplates glittering, came rapidly towards them, under the scarlet banner of war.

Antony, the seasoned soldier, smiled contemptuously, and shook his head.

“No, Caesar,” he said, as Brutus and Cassius and their officers drew near, “the generals would have some words.”

Presently they were face to face: the mighty enemies whose quarrel had divided the world. They stared at one another, silently noting the change that had been wrought by time and struggle; how much older and harsher they all looked, like men of rough-hewn stone! Their meeting was brief and bitter. Antony savagely denounced the murderers of Caesar, and they flung back his words with angry scorn.

“A peevish schoolboy,” jeered Cassius, “join’d with a masker and a reveler!”

“Old Cassius still!” mocked Antony, yet with an unwilling affection for the man of passion who, in some ways, was more his fellow than was the bloodless youth by his side.

“Come, Antony,” cried Octavius, wearied of insults and impatient for deeds, “away!” And so they parted, returning to their waiting legions, to make ready for the coming battle that for many would be their last.

“Messala,” called Cassius, while Brutus was conferring apart with another of his officers.

Messala came to his side. Cassius smiled; but there was no pleasure in it. It was the saddened smile of a man suddenly tired of the fury of life. “This is my birthday,” he confided; and, as Messala shook him by the hand, he charged him to bear witness that he had been compelled, against his better judgment, to risk all on the outcome of a single battle. He had strong forebodings of disaster.

“Believe not so,” urged Messala; and Cassius, for a brief while, put on a cheerful face; but when he spoke with Brutus, it was of what should be done if the battle was lost, and how they should end their lives.

There was a grave solemnity between the friends as they spoke together. “This same day,” said Brutus quietly, “must end that work the Ides of March begun, and whether we shall meet again I know not. Therefore our everlasting farewell take.” He held out his hand, and Cassius took it firmly in his own. “For ever, and for ever, farewell, Cassius. If we do meet again, why, we shall smile; if not, why then this parting was well made.”

Then they turned, and, with a last wave of the hand in a last farewell, rode away, each to his own command.
Act V, Scenes 2-4

The bright morning grew still, as if, for a moment, all Nature was holding its breath. Then, with a sudden scream of trumpets and a roaring of drums, the legions began to move. As they did so, a vast cloud of dust rose up from the plain, and the earth shook under the tread of the opposing armies, like the mighty heartbeat of the world.

Now more clouds, tossed with pennants and pricked with sharp glints of steel, began to roll and billow down from the hills until, with a thunderous uproar, all met together like rushing waters, tumbling down, one upon another.

All day long the battle raged, with ever-changing fortunes, now inclining this way, now that, until the very sun was steeped in blood, and sank, dying, below the hills.

At last it was over, and a thankful darkness overspread the field, turning those who had died in triumph and those who had fallen in defeat, all alike into quiet black shapes. A single torch, like a flaring moth, wandered hither and thither, sometimes hovering to illumine upturned faces, like pale streaked flowers; then it moved on, with a little group of men wearily following after.

Act V, Scene 5

“Come, poor remains of friends,” sighed Brutus, “rest on this rock.”

They halted, and, with heavy looks and aching hearts, sank down, some sitting with dazed head falling forward onto huddled knees, some leaning back against the rock and staring up at the cold stars. Brutus alone remained standing, sword in hand, as if to kill a ghost.

All was lost. Antony and Octavius had won the day. Cassius was dead. Rather than be taken by the enemy, he had killed himself with the very weapon that had stabbed Caesar.

“O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet,” Brutus had wept when he’d looked down on the still face of his friend, whose eager fire was out, “thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords in our own proper entrails.”

Softly Brutus called to one of the pitiful few who seemed to cling about the rock like the sea-torn remnants of a wreck. The man came and Brutus whispered an urgent request. The man stared at him in dread. He shook his head and shrank away.

“What ill request did Brutus make of thee?” asked one of his companions.

“To kill him . . .”

Now Brutus summoned another, and made the same terrible request. But the man would not; and the third he asked, answered:

“That’s not an office for a friend, my lord.”

Suddenly there was heard a distant trumpet and a sound of shouting. Hastily, the friends arose . . . all save one who had been fast asleep: a fellow by the name of Strato, a thick-necked, sturdy fellow with an honest, albeit sleepy face.

Urgently, they begged Brutus to fly. He promised that he would; and, as his friends left him, he laid a hand on Strato’s arm and asked him to stay behind. Strato, as slow to leave a friend in need as he was to save himself, stayed by Brutus’s side.

“Thy life,” said Brutus, to this last companion, “hath had some smack of honor in it. Hold then my sword, and turn away thy face, while I do run upon it. Wilt thou, Strato?”

Strato, dull of wit but stout of heart, did not like the office; but he knew there was no other way. He was not a thinker, as Brutus was; but, like Brutus, he counted honor above mere life.

“Give me your hand first,” he demanded; and, as Brutus clasped his hand, he took the sword and held it firmly. “Fare you well, my lord,” he murmured, and turned away his face.

“Farewell, good Strato,” whispered Brutus; and, with a last sad look about him, sighed: “Caesar, now be still. I killed not thee with half so good a will!”

Then, with one swift movement, he ran upon the sword; and, as the sharp steel entered him, his life rushed gladly out.

Gently, Strato withdrew the sword and laid it by his master’s side. Then he arranged the body so that it should lie decently; and stood beside it to tell the world that Brutus had died as he had lived, with courage and with honor.

He was still there, the solitary sentinel, when the victors, their triumphant faces glowing in torchlight as they searched the battlefield for the chief of their enemies, at last came upon Brutus, dead.
“I held the sword,” Strato told them proudly, “and he did run on it.”

Mark Antony nodded. He understood such a death, even if he did not understand such a life.

“This was the noblest Roman of them all,” he said, gazing down with respect upon the calm, proud face of his enemy, the man who had committed the worst of deeds for the best of reasons. “His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him, that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, ‘This was a man!’”

Even as he said it, he glanced sideways at the cold, precise young man who stood beside him; and slightly shook his head.

“According to his virtue let us use him,” said Octavius, impatient to have done with wasteful generosity to the dead, “and let’s away, to part the glories of this happy day.”

Then together they left the field . . .