

**Julius Caesar**  
**by William Shakespeare**  
Presented by Paul W. Collins

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## Chapter One

### Ceremony and Dissent

A crowd of jubilating common folk gathers in celebration along a thoroughfare near the Capitol in ancient Rome—smiling artisans, tradesmen clerks and laborers, and mothers laughing happily with their young children. Everyday chores have been left to wait, as the people come forth to hail their popular leader.

They are welcoming him in ceremonial triumph as he returns from battle in Spain, where he has defeated a rebellion led by sons of the late ruler Pompey and several generals supported by hidebound Senate factions—in a conflict of Roman against Roman.

Two stern old noblemen watch, grim-faced; fine togas and headpieces assert their status among the wealthy and privileged, long accustomed to governing.

They scowl at the celebrants. “Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home!” shouts Flavius angrily. “Is this a *holiday*?”

“What? Know you not?—being *workers* you ought not walk upon a labouring day without the sign of your occupation!” He stops a man just joining the crowd. “Speak: what trade art thou?”

“Why, sir, a carpenter.”

Murellus asks him, “Where is thy leather apron—and thy rule? What dost thou with thy best apparel on?” He challenges another man: “You, sir—what trade are *you*?”

The man replies stolidly. “Truly, sir, in respect of a fine workman, I am but, as you would say, a cobbler.”

Murellus, expecting sarcasm, hears it: *cobbler*—a slapdash *bungler*. “But what *trade* art thou? Answer me directly!”

“A trade, sir, that, I hope, I may use with a safe conscience. Which is, indeed, sir, a mender of bad soles.”

*Bad souls!* “What *trade*, thou knave? Thou wayward *knave*, what *trade*?” demands Murellus angrily.

The workman’s chin juts forward; chided for flippancy, summons it: “Nay, I beseech you, sir, be not out with me. Yet, if you *be* out, sir, I can mend you!”

“What meanest thou by *that*?” cries Murellus, flushing. “*Mend* me, thou saucy fellow?”

“Well, sir—*cobble you!*”

The noblemen are two of five called *tribunes of the people*; among their duties is preserving the Roman Republic’s long traditions, many of which are being changed by its highly successful ruler, who has recently been named dictator—and for a lifetime term.

Flavius, less irascible, intervenes. “Thou art a cobbler, art thou?” he asks, calmly.

“Truly, sir, all that I live by is with the awl: I meddle with no *tradesman’s* matters—nor *women’s* matters but *with awl!*” He sees that, despite the rudely ribald jest playing on *withal*, Flavius is listening politely. “I am, indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes; when they are in great danger, I recover them. As proper men as ever trod upon neat’s leather have gone upon *my* handiwork,” the stooped and grizzled man says proudly.

“But wherefore art not in thy shop today?” asks Flavius. “Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?”

The cobbler grins. “Truly, sir, *to wear out their shoes*, to get myself into more work!” he says with a wink. “But, indeed, sir, we make holiday,” he adds earnestly, “to see *Caesar*, and to rejoice in his triumph!”

“Wherefore *rejoice*?” demands Murellus, red-faced. “What *conquests* brings *he* home? What *tributaries* follow him to Rome to grace in captive bonds his chariot-wheels?” He shouts at the people on the street: “You *blocks*, you stones, you worse than senseless *things!*” The younger

men laugh at the graybeard: *stones* is a term for testicles, *thing* for penis. “O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome, knew you not *Pompey*?

“Many a time aloft have you *climbed!*—up the walls and battlements to towers and windows, yea, to *chimney*-tops, your infants in your arms—and there have sat the livelong day, in patient expectation of seeing great *Pompey* pass in the streets of Rome!

“And when you saw but his *chariot* appear, have you not made *an universal shout?*—so loud that *Tiber* trembled underneath her banks, hearing the replication of your sounds made on her concave shores!

“And do you *now* put on your best attire—and do you now cull out a *holiday*—and do you now strew flowers in his way that comes in triumph over *Pompey’s blood?*

“*Be gone!*” he shouts. “Run to your houses, fall upon your *knees*; pray to the gods to intermit the *plague* that needs must light on this ingratitude!”

Some citizens have paused; they are annoyed by the harangue, but intimidated by the powerful officials. Most drift away, muttering, to find another place to wait.

“*Go, go, good countrymen!*” cries Flavius. He too urges penitence: “And, for this fault, assemble all the poor men of your sort; draw them to Tiber banks, and *weep* your *tears* into the channel, till the lowest stream do kiss the most exalted shores of all!”—heaven’s.

Flavius watches as the commoners disperse. He has faith in reproving rhetoric: “See whether their basest mettle be not *moved!*—they vanish, tongue-tied in their guiltiness!

“Go you down that way towards the Capitol; this way will I,” he tells Murellus. “Disrobe the images, if you do find them decked with ceremonies,” he says. The two will confiscate the wreaths of laurel leaves—symbolic crowns—placed on the city’s statuary of Julius Caesar by his admirers, who want to elevate him to *emperor*.

Even the militant Murellus wavers “May we do so? You know it is the feast of Lupercal....” The festival and its ancient fertility rites hold great religious significance for Romans.

Flavius is adamant. “It is no matter!—let no images be hung with *Caesar’s* trophies! I’ll about, and drive away the vulgar from the streets. So do you too, where you perceive them thick.

“Those growing feathers when plucked from Caesar’s wing will make him fly an *ordinary* pitch, who else would soar above the view of men—and keep us all in *servile fearfulness!*”

Near Palatine Hill, where the traditional run is about to begin, trumpets sound a regal flourish, alerting the throng that Julius Caesar, fifty-six, is arriving, on his way to a session in the Forum. With him at the head of the large procession of nobles and attendants is his closest friend, Mark Antony.

Marcus Antonius, thirty-eight, is a general and a politician, but today his loins are girded in the goatskin worn by ceremonial participants in Lupercalia. He joins the others who are preparing for the dash, as musicians play dulcet melodies.

Caesar looks for his wife. “Calphurnia!”

Caska, a large nobleman, patrician senator and tribune, shouts to the onlookers: “*Peace, ho! Caesar speaks!*”

“Calphurnia!” calls Caesar.

She hurries to him. “Here, my lord.”

“Stand you directly in Antonius’ way, when he doth run his course,” he tells her. “Antonius...”

Antony turns to him. “Caesar, my lord?”

“Forget not, in your speed, Antonius, to touch Calphurnia,” urges the general, “for our elders say the barren, touchèd in this holy chase, shake off their sterile curse.” The ruler has so far been without an heir.

Antony smiles. “I shall remember. When Caesar says ‘Do this,’ it is performed!”

“Set on, and leave no ceremony out.”

As the onlookers move away in the sunshine toward the festive annual event's starting point, two noblemen in Caesar's train are quietly taken into custody by soldiers of the Praetorian Guard. Murellus and Flavius, angry and indignant, are arrested and led away.

A blare of brass horns announces that Caesar is now proceeding to his regimen of meetings with Roman officials.

Over the sounds of the crowd comes an audacious cry. "*Caesar!*"

The ruler pauses. "Who calls?"

Caska waves for silence. "Bid every noise be *still! Peace* yet again!"

Caesar looks around. "Who is it in the push that calls on me? I hear a tongue, shriller than all the music, cry 'Caesar!' Speak. Caesar is turned to hear."

"Beware the ides of March!"

"What man is that?"

Marcus Brutus tells Caesar quietly, "A soothsayer bids you beware the ides"—the 15<sup>th</sup>—"of March." At forty, Brutus is renowned as Rome's chief praetor—magistrate.

"Set him before me; let me see his face."

A senator, Caius Cassius, motions the man forward: "Fellow, come from the throng; look upon Caesar."

Caesar watches as a centurion pulls back the hood that has kept the old man's features in shadow. "What say'st thou to me, now? Speak once again."

The soothsayer is staring intently. "Beware!—the ides of March!" he utters feverishly.

Caesar turns away, dismissing the man. "He is a dreamer; let us leave him." He waves his procession forward. "Pass." A sennet sounds, and the nobles follow Caesar to Capitoline Hill, the highest of Rome's seven. The area soon clears—except for two noblemen.

Nodding toward the Lupercalian run, Cassius asks his friend Brutus, "Will you go see the order of the course?"

"Not I."

"I pray you, *do*."

Brutus demurs. "I am not gamesome; I do lack some part of that quick spirit that is in *Antony*," he says—with a tone of resentment. "But let me not hinder, Cassius, *your* desires. I'll leave you."

The older lord wants to talk. "Brutus, know I do observe you: of late I have not from your eyes that gentleness and show of love as I was wont to have; you bear too stubborn and too strange a hand over your friend that loves you," he complains mildly.

Brutus reassures him. "Cassius, be not deceived. If I have veiled my look, I turn the trouble of my countenance merely upon *myself*. Vexèd I am of late with passion over some differences, conceptions only proper to myself, which give some soil, perhaps, to my behaviors.

"But let not therefore my good friends be grievèd—among which number, Cassius, be you one—nor construe any further my neglect than that poor Brutus, with himself at war, forgets the shows of love to other men."

Cassius regards his companion—*with himself at war*, he is encouraged to note. "Then, Brutus, I have much *mistook* your passion—by means whereof this breast of mine hath *buried* thoughts of great value, worthy cogitations....

"Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face, now?"

"No, Cassius; for the eye sees not itself but by reflection in some other thing."

"'Tis just so—and it is very much *lamented*, Brutus, that you have no such mirrors as will turn your hidden *worthiness* unto your eye, so that you might see your image! I have heard, when many of the best respect in Rome—except immortal *Caesar*—speaking of Brutus, and groaning underneath this age's yoke, have wished that noble Brutus had *his* eyes!"—shared his esteem.

Brutus gives a slight smile, accepting the flattery—but guardedly. "Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius, that you would have me seek into myself for that which is not in me?" He means *political ambition*.

Cassius is ready to answer: “Therefore, good Brutus, be prepared to hear!

“And since you know you cannot see yourself so well as by reflection, I, as your glass, will modestly reveal to yourself that in yourself which you yet know not of.

“And be not suspicious of me, gentle Brutus,” he adds. “Were I a *common laugh*, or did use to stale my love with ordinary oaths to *every new protester*—if you’d found that I did fawn on men and hug them hard, then after *scandal* them; or if you’d found that I professed myself by *banqueting* all the *rout*—then hold me dangerous.”

Sounds drift up from the valley nearby, at the Forum: a muffled flourish, and echoes of cheering.

“What means this shouting?” wonders Brutus aloud, frowning. “I do fear that the people choose Caesar for their *king*.”

“Aye. Do you *fear* it? Then must I think you would not have it so....”

“I would *not*, Cassius; yet I love him well.

“But wherefore do you hold me here so long? What is it that you would impart to me? If it be aught toward the general good, set *honour* in one eye and *death* i’ the other, and I will look on both impartially; for let the gods so speed me as I love the name of honour more than I fear death.”

Cassius nods. “I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus, as well as I do know your outward favour.” He knows that Brutus is dedicated to Rome’s timocracy—and to sharing in it. “Well, honour *is* the subject of my story.

“I cannot tell what you and other men think of this life; but as for my single self, I had as lief not *be* as to live to be in *awe* of such a thing as myself! *I* was born free as *Caesar*—so were *you*! We both have fed as well, and we can both endure the winter’s cold as well as he.

“For, once upon a raw and gusty day, the troubled Tiber chafing with her shores, Caesar said to me, ‘Darest thou, Cassius, now leap with me into this angry flood, and swim to yonder point?’ Upon the word, accoutered as I was, I plunged in, and bade him follow! So indeed he *did*!

“The torrent roared, but we did buffet it with lusty sinews, throwing it aside, and stemming it with hearts of controversy!

“But ere we could arrive the point proposed, Caesar cried, ‘*Help* me, Cassius, or I *sink*!’

“I—as Aeneas, our great ancestor, did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder the old Anchises bear—so from the waves of Tiber did I the tired Caesar!

“And *that* man is now become a *god*!—and Cassius a wretched *creature* who must bend his body if Caesar but nod at him carelessly!”

Cassius offers another tale, from Caesar’s recent military victory over the two sons of Pompey—once a triumvir who had shared power with Caesar—and their forces, aligned with seditious senators. “He had a *fever* when he was in Spain; and when the fit was on him, I did mark how he did shake—’tis true!—this *god* did *shake*!

“His coward *lips* did from their colours fly, and that same *eye* whose bend doth awe *the world* did lose its lustre! I did hear him groan—*aye*! And that *tongue* of his, that bade the Romans mark him, and write his speeches in their books—‘*Alas*,’ it cried ‘give me some *drink*, Titinius!’—as would a sick *girl*’s!

“*Ye gods*, it doth amaze me that a man of such a feeble temper should so get the *leading* of the majestic *world*!—and bear the palm *alone*!”—as sole sovereign.

They hear, from down at the Forum, a regal flourish, followed by more cheering.

“Another general shout,” notes Brutus. “I do believe that these applauses are for some new honours that are heaped on Caesar.”

“Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world like a Colossus!—and we *petty* men walk under his huge legs, and peep about to find ourselves dishonourable graves!”

He moves closer. “Men at some time are masters of their fates: the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in *ourselves*, that we are underlings!”

Cassius proceeds quickly—before the proud praetor can voice objection to that term. “Brutus and Caesar—what could be *in* that ‘Caesar?’—why should that name be sounded more than *yours*? Write them together, yours is as fair a name; sound them, it doth become the mouth as well; weigh them, it is as heavy—*conjure* with ’em,” he says, pointedly, “*Brutus* will start a spirit as soon as *Caesar*!

“Now, in the names of *all* the gods at once, upon what meat doth this Caesar *feed*, that he is grown so great?

“Our *age*, thou art *shamed*! *Rome*, thou hast lost the breeding of noble *bloods*! When went there by an age since the great Flood but it was famed with more than with *one man*? When could they who talked of Rome say—till *now*—that her wide walls encompassed *but one man*? Now is it *Rome* indeed, and with room enough, when there is in it *but only one man*!

“Oh, you and I have heard our fathers say there *was* a Brutus, once, who would as easily have brooked the eternal *Devil* to keep his state in Rome as a *king*!” Tradition holds that, five centuries before, Brutus’s own ancestor had founded Rome—as a republic.

“That you do love me I do not doubt,” Brutus assures the senator. “What you would work me to I have in some aim,” he admits. “How I have thought of this, and of these times, I shall recount hereafter; at present I would not. So, with my love I might entreat you to be *further* moved; what you have said I will consider. What you have to say I will with patience *hear*—and find a time meet both to hear and to *answer* such high things.

“Till then, my noble friend, mull over this: Brutus had rather be a *villager* than to repute himself a son of Rome under the hard conditions as *this* time is likely to lay upon us!”

Cassius nods and smiles. “I am but glad that my weak words have struck thus much show of fire from Brutus!”

The praetor looks toward the dispersing Lupercal celebrants, then down the hill. “The games are done,” Brutus sees, “and Caesar is returning.”

“As they pass by, pluck Caska by the sleeve and he will—in his sour fashion—tell you what hath proceeded worthy of note today.”

“I will do so.” Brutus watches the dictator and his procession approach. “But look you, Cassius—a livid spot doth glow on Caesar’s brow!—and all the rest look like a *chidden* train! Calphurnia’s cheek is pale; and Cicero looks with such feral, fiery eyes as we have seen in him at the Capitol when being crossed in conference by some senators!”

Cassius, too, wonders what has happened. “Caska will tell us what the matter is.”

As the majestic train moves along, Caesar beckons Mark Antony nearer, into private conversation. “Antonio...”

“Caesar?”

The sovereign gives a polite nod, past Antony, to the two senators watching from the side; but he says, quietly, “Let me have men about me that are *fatted*—sleek-haired men, and such as sleep o’ nights. Yond Cassius has a lean and *hungry* look; he *thinks* too much—such men are dangerous!”

Antony, a fierce warrior, is mellow in peacetime. “Fear him not, Caesar; he’s not dangerous. He is a noble Roman, and well given out”—spoken of.

Caesar looks again. “I *fear* him not. But I would he were fatter...” Antony merely chuckles. “Yet, if my name *were* liable to fear,” says Caesar—wryly; he is well aware of how he’s regarded, “I do not know the man I should avoid so soon as that spare *Cassius*.”

“He reads much; he is a great observer, but he looks quite through the *deeds* of men. He loves no plays, as thou dost, Antony, and he hears no *music*. Seldom he smiles—then smiles in such a sort as if he mocked himself, and scorned that his spirit could be moved to smile at *anything*.”

“Such men as he are never at heart’s ease whiles they behold a greater than themselves; and therefore are they *very dangerous*!”—because they always will.

The war's fighting may be done, but strife will continue, he knows. "I tell thee what is to be feared, rather than what I fear; for always I am *Caesar*. Come on my right hand, and tell me truly what *thou* think'st of him; for *this* ear is deaf," he says, nodding and smiling to onlookers at the left. Increasingly insulated in his civilian role as a public icon, he values only a few frank assessments.

The last of the noble contingent passes—flanked by sharp-eyed soldiers guarding Caesar and his wife as they return to their home.

"You pulled me by the cloak," the tribune says to Brutus. "Would you speak with me?"

"Aye, Caska. Tell us what hath chanced today, that Caesar looks so solemn."

"Why? You were *with* him, were you not?" asks Caska—in his usual arch and challenging manner.

The accused truant only smiles. "I should not then ask Caska what had chanced."

"Why, there was a *crown* offered him! And, it *being* offered him, he put it *aside!*—with the back of his hand, thus,"—he makes a slow gesture of humility. "And then the *people* fell a-*shouting!*"

"What was the second noise for?"

"Why, for that too!"

"They shouted thrice," Cassius notes. "What was the last cry for?"

"Why, for that *too!*"

Brutus is surprised. "Was the crown offered him *thrice?*"

"*Aye, marry, was 't!*—and he *put it by* thrice, each time gentler than *other!* And at every putting-by, mine honest neighbours *shouted!*" says Caska, clearly disdainful of the plebian crowd.

"Who offered him the crown?"

"Why *Antony!*" *Of course*, his tone implies.

"Tell us the manner of it, gentle Caska," says Brutus.

"I can as well be *hanged* as tell the *manners* of it!—it was mere *foolery!* I did not mark it," claims Caska haughtily.

But of course he *did*—and he does tell: "I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown—yet 'twas *not* a crown neither, 'twas one of these *coronets*—and, as I told you, he put it by once. But, for all that, to my thinking, he would fain have *held* it!

"Then he offered it to him again; then *he* put it by again. But, to my thinking, he was very loath to keep his fingers off it!

"And then he offered it the third time; *he* put it the third time by. And even as he refused it, the rabblement *shouted*, and clapped their chappèd *hands*, and threw up their sweaty *night-caps*, and uttered such a deal of *stinking breath* because Caesar refused the crown that it almost *choked* Caesar—for he *swooned* and *fell down* at it!

"And as for mine *own* part," he says, disgusted, "I durst not *laugh* for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air."

"*But, soft*, I pray you!" says Cassius. "*What?*—did *Caesar* swoon?"

Caska nods. "He *fell down in the market-place*, and foamed at mouth, and was *speechless!*"

Brutus has heard that Caesar is afflicted with epilepsy. "'Tis very likely; he hath the falling sickness."

"No, *Caesar* hath it not!" says Cassius angrily. "But *you and I*, and honest Caska, *we* have the *falling* sickness!"

"I know not what you mean by that," says Caska cautiously, "but I am sure Caesar *fell down*." His annoyance grows. "If the tag-rag people did not *clap* him and *hiss* him—according as he pleased and displeased them, as they use to do the *players* in the *theatre!*—I am no true man!"

Brutus wants facts. "What said he when he came unto himself?"



But Caska has a tale to tell. “Marry, before he fell down, when he pretended to the common herd he was *glad* he refused the crown, he plucked ope his doublet and offered them his *throat* to cut!

“If *I* had been a man of any *occupation*”—a common laborer, “if I would not have *taken him at his word*, I would I might go to hell *among* the rogues!

“And so he fell. When he came to himself again, he said if he had done or said anything *amiss*, he desired *their worships* to think it was his infirmity!

“Three or four wenches where I stood cried, ‘*Alas, good soul!*’—and *forgave* him with all their hearts! But there’s no heed to be taken of *them!*—if Caesar had *stabbed their mothers* they would have done no less!”

“And after that he came thus gravely away?” says Brutus.

“Aye.”

Cassius asks, “Did *Cicero* say anything?” That intellectual senator, long opposed to Caesar, is a renowned orator.

“Aye—he spoke *Greek!*”

“To what effect?”

Caska laughs. “Nay, if *I* tell you *that* I’ll ne’er look you i’ the face again! Those that *understood* him smiled at one another and shook their heads—but as for mine own part, it was Greek to *me*”—a common jest, here with a literal twist.

His eyebrows rise. “I could tell you *more* news, too! *Murellus* and *Flavius*, for pulling scarves off Caesar’s images, are put to silence!” The cloths and laurel headbands they were confiscating suggested crowns.

“Fare you well,” he says, making as if to go. “There was yet *more* foolery, if I could remember it...” he says coyly.

“Will you sup with me tonight, Caska?” asks Cassius.

“No, I am promised forth.”

Cassius is not dissuaded: “Will you dine with me tomorrow?”

Caska sighs. “Aye, if I be *alive*, and your *mind* hold—and your *dinner* worth the eating!”

“Good. I will expect you.”

“Do so. Farewell, both.” And he goes on his way, to confer with other senators.

Brutus smiles at Caska’s harsh candor. “What a *blunt* fellow is this grown to be! He was quick-metal”—like mercury, heavy but fluid—“when he went to school!”

“So is he now, in *execution* of any bold or noble enterprise, however he puts on this sluggish *form*,” says Cassius. “This rudeness is, to his good wit, a *sauce* which gives men stomach to digest his words with better appetite.”

Brutus nods slowly. “And so it does.” He has a good idea what else the two may have been discussing. “For this time I will leave you. Tomorrow, if you please to speak with me, I will come home to you. Or, if you will, come home to *me*, and I will wait for you.”

“I will do so,” says Cassius. “Till then, think of the *world!*”

Brutus heads for his mansion, pondering what he has just heard.

Cassius watches, calculating. *Well, Brutus, thou art noble—yet I see that thy honourable metal may be wrought away from how it is disposed! Therefore it is meet that noble minds keep ever with their like—for who is so firm as cannot be seduced?*

*Caesar doth bear me hardly, but he loves Brutus.*

Cassius envies the other nobleman’s high standing; his own efforts to find favor have met with frustration. *If I were Brutus now and he were Cassius, Caesar would honor me!*

He intends to proceed with his scheme against Caesar by drawing Brutus into the growing opposition, and by making use of the praetor’s influence and stature.

*I will this night in at his windows throw writings in several hands, as if they came from several citizens, all tending to the great opinion that Rome holds of his name—wherein obscurely Caesar’s ambition shall be glanced at.*

*And after this, let Caesar seat himself securely—for we will shake him, or worse days endure!*

## **Chapter Two** **Portents, Plotters**

Night has fallen in Rome, bringing with it a turbulent lightning storm. Passing the high stone mansions along a street not far from the Capitol, Cicero is making his way through the gusty darkness when he encounters a tribune. “Good even, Caska. Brought you Caesar home?”

Cicero is surprised to see that the other lord has his sword drawn and held at the ready, and is looking about warily as he walks. “Why are you breathless? And why stare you so?”

Increasingly, Caska’s political fears, even more intense after dark, inhibit his frankness; he equivocates. “Are not *you* moved, when all the sway of earth shakes like a thing unfirm?”

He elaborates—wryly adopting the high rhetorical style of the other senator, who is famous for declamatory oration. “O Cicero, I have seen *tempests*, when the scolding winds have riven the knotty *oaks*, and I have seen the ambitious *ocean* so swell and rage and foam as to be exalted along with the threatening *clouds*!—but never till *tonight*, never till *now*, did I go through a tempest *dropping fire*!

“Either there is a civil strife in *heaven*, or else the world, too saucy with the gods, *incenses* them to send *destruction*!”

Cicero laughs, unoffended; Caska jeer at everything. “Why, saw you anything *more* wonderful?”

Caska, aware that Cicero is no friend of Caesar’s, continues; he mockingly recounts the day’s events, already known to his companion. “A common slave—you know him well by sight—held up his left hand, which did *flame* and burn like *twenty torches* joined!—and yet *his* hand, not sensible to fire, remained unscorched!” Antony’s repeatedly offering a coronet to Caesar infuriated Caska.

“Besides—I have not since put up my sword!—close to the Capitol I met a *lion* who gazed upon me, but went surly by without assailing me!” He felt, as had Cassius, the cold stare of Caesar as the ruler passed.

“And *there*, drawn into a *heap*, were a hundred ghastly *women*!—*transformèd* by their *fear*!—who swore they saw men *all on fire* walk up and down the streets!” Caska was disgusted at the trepidation shown by many senators when elated citizens had welcomed Caesar.

“And yesterday the bird of night did sit even at *noon-day* upon the market-place, hooting and shrieking!” The owlish Cicero laughs again, amused at being so characterized.

“When such *prodigies* do so conjointly *meet*, let men not say, ‘These have their reasons; they are *natural*,’” says Caska, “for I believe they are things *portentous* unto the climate that they point upon!”—an earnest assertion, despite its facetious cover.

Caska’s speech, if it were to be quoted, concerns only the weather; but the other politician understands the satire, and his reply is guarded as well. “Indeed it *is* a strangely disposed time—but men may *construe* things after their fashion, clean away from the purpose of the things themselves.

“Comes Caesar to the Capitol tomorrow?” Cicero has heard talk that the Senate itself will offer the general a crown.

“He doth; for he did bid Antonius send word to you he would be there tomorrow.”

Cicero frowns. “*Good night*, then, Caska! This disturbèd sky is not to *walk* in,” he says, pointedly, as he hurries on toward his home, where a summons awaits him.

“Farewell, Cicero.” Caska now hears the approach of another man; he raises the sword.

“Who’s there?” calls the figure, approaching in the dark.

“A Roman.”

“Caska, by your voice...”

“Your ear is good.” Lightning strikes close by with a loud crack; thunder booms and rumbles away. “Cassius, what a *night* is *this!*”

“A very *pleasing* night to *honest* men.”

Caska peers skyward, as if trying to read the clouds. “Who ever knew the heavens to *menace* so?”

“Those who have known the *earth* so full of *faults!*”

“For my part, I have walked about the streets, submitting me unto the perilous night, and, thus unbracèd, Caska, as you see, have bared my bosom to the thunderbolt! And when the cross blue lightning seemed to open the breast of heaven, I did present myself even in the *aim* and very *flash* of it!”

Caska often sounds bold, but he is in fact quite cautious. “But wherefore did you so much tempt the heavens? It is the part of men to *fear* and *tremble* when the most mighty gods by tokens send such dreadful heralds to astonish us.”

Cassius challenges: “You are *dull*, Caska, and those sparks of life that should be in a *Roman* you do lack—or else you *use* not! You look pale, and gaze, and put on fear, and cast yourself in wonder, to see the strange impatience of the heavens.

“But if you would consider the true *cause*—*why* all these *fires*—*why* all these gliding *ghosts*; *why* birds and beasts leave quality and kind: *why old men fool*, and *children calculate!*—*why* all these things change their natures from their ordinance and preformèd faculties to *monstrous* quantity—you shall find that *Heaven* hath infused them with these spirits to make them instruments of *fear*—and *warnings* about some monstrous *state!*”

“Now could I, Caska, *name* to thee a man most *like* this dreadful night, who thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars as doth the lion, in the *Capitol!*—*a man*, no mightier than thyself or me in personal action, yet *prodigious* grown—and as frightful as these strange eruptions are!”

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

Cassius may not fear lightning, but he is very careful with words. “Let it be who it is.

“For Romans now have thews and limbs like their ancestors’, but—woe the while!—our fathers’ *minds* are dead, and we are governed by our *mothers’* spirits—our yoke and sufferance show us womanish!”

“Indeed!—they say the *senators* tomorrow mean to establish Caesar as a *king!*” says Caska, angrily. “And he shall wear his crown by *sea and land!*—in every place save here in Italy!” Roman conquest extends around the Mediterranean and beyond—from Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine west to Spain and Gaul; from upper Africa north through Greece and Macedonia.

Cassius glowers grimly. “I know where *I* will wear this *dagger*, then!—Cassius from bondage will *deliver* Cassius!” Romans consider suicide a noble option. “*Therein*, ye gods, you make the weak most strong; *therein*, ye gods, you *tyrants* do *defeat!* Neither stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass, nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron can be retentive to the strength of *spirit!* Life, being weary of these worldly bars, never lacks power to *dismiss itself!*”

“If *I* know this, know all the *world* besides: that part of tyranny *I* do bear I can *shake off* at pleasure,” he says, dourly, as another clap of thunder assails the murky hills beyond.

Caska shrugs, unimpressed. “So can I. So every *bondman* in his own hand bears *that* power to cancel his captivity.”

Cassius persists. “And why should Caesar *be* a tyrant, then? Poor man! I know he would not be a *wolf* but that he sees that Romans are *sheep!*—he were no *lion* were not Romans *hinds!*”

“Those who with haste will make a mighty fire begin it with weak *straws*; what *trash* is Rome, what *rubbish* and what *offal*, when it serves as the base matter to elevate so vile a thing as Caesar!”

“But—O grief, where hast thou led me?” He regards Caska warily. “I perhaps speak this before a *willing* bondman; then I know my answer must be made!”—to criminal charges. “But I am armed, and dangers are to me indifferent...”

“You speak to *Caska*, and to such a man as is no fleeing *tell-tale!*”

“Hold,” he says, to cut off further sparring, and sheathes his sword. He reaches forward. “My hand.”

“Be *factious* for *redress* of all these griefs, and I will set this foot of mine as far as whoever goes farthest!”

Cassius grasps the hand firmly. “There’s a bargain made!”

“Now know you this, *Caska*: I have moved already some certain of the noblest-minded Romans to undergo with me an honourable enterprise of dangerous consequence! And I do know that by now they wait for me at Pompey’s porch,”—the portico of *Theatrum Pompei*, “because *this* fearful night there is no stir, nor walking in the streets—and the frowning complexion of the elements comports with the *work* we have in hand—most *fiery*, most terrible and *bloody!*”

*Caska*, looking down the street, steps forward. “Stand close awhile, for here comes one in haste!”

“’Tis *Cinna*,” Cassius tells him. “I do know him by his gait; he is a friend. *Cinna*, where haste you so?” he asks the deputy praetor.

“To find out *you!* Who’s that? *Metellus Cimber?*”

“No, it is *Caska*, one incorporate to our attempts. Am I not stayed for, *Cinna?*”

The young lord is pleased that *Caska* is joining them. “I am glad of ’t! What a fearful night is *this!*—there’s two or three of us have seen *strange sights!*”

Cassius is impatient: “Am I not stayed for? *Tell me!*”

“Yes, you are! Oh, Cassius, if you could but win the noble *Brutus* to our party—”

“Be you *content!* Good *Cinna*, take this paper, and look you lay it on the praetor’s chair, where *Brutus* must find it.” He hands him two more folded sheets: “And throw this in at his window; set *this* up with wax upon old *Brutus*’ statue”—one depicting the famous forebear. “All that done, repair to Pompey’s porch, where you shall find us.”

“Are *Decius* and *Trebonius* there?”

*Cinna* nods. “All but *Metellus Cimber*—and he’s gone to seek you at your house. Well, I will hie, and so bestow these papers as you bade me.”

“That done, repair to Pompey’s theatre!” calls Cassius, as *Cinna* runs down the street.

“Come, *Caska*, you and I will yet ere day see *Brutus* at his house. Three parts of him is ours already, and the man *entire* upon the next encounter yields him ours!”

*Caska* is delighted. “Oh, *he* sits *high* in all the people’s hearts!—and that which would appear *offence* in us, *his* countenance, like richest alchemy, will change to *virtue* and to *worthiness!*”

“Him and his worth—and our great *need* of him—you have right well perceived,” says Cassius. “Let us go; for it is after midnight; and ere day we will awake him and be sure of him!”

Troubled and unable to sleep, *Brutus* paces in the dark, but familiar, stillness of an elaborate formal garden beside his huge house. He calls to wake a young servant. “What, *Lucius, ho!*” Limned by frequent lightning, dark clouds loom in long, ominous ranges that conceal the black sky. *I cannot, by the progress of the stars, give guess how near to day.*

“*Lucius*, I say!” *I would it were my fault to sleep so soundly!* “When, *Lucius, when? Awake, I say! What—Lucius!*”

The boy of fourteen comes to the open door rubbing his eyes. “Called you, my lord?”

“Set me a taper in my study, *Lucius*. When it is lighted, come and call me, here.”

“I will, my lord.” He wanders back into the house, yawning.

*Marcus Brutus*, who once fought against *Caesar*, received his pardon, and was appointed by him to be Rome’s chief magistrate, ruminates about preserving the long-cherished republic—and the unpleasant conclusion he has drawn.

*It must be by his death.*

*As for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him; but the populace would have him crowned! How that might change his nature—there's the question. It is the bright day that brings forth the adder—and that craves wary walking!*

*Crown him... then, grant, we put a sting in him that at his will he may do danger with! The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power!*

*Yet, to speak truth of Caesar, I have not known when his affections swayed more than his reason.*

*But 'tis a common proof that lowliness is young ambition's ladder, whereto the climber-upward turns his face; but when he once attains the upmost round, he then unto the ladder turns his back—looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees by which he did ascend!*

*So Caesar may. Then, lest he may, prevent!*

*But, since the quarrel will bear no colours—inspire no support—for the thing it is, fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented, would run to these and those extremities! And therefore think of him as a serpent in its egg, which hatchèd would, as does its kind, grow mischievous! Then kill him 'in the shell!'*

The lad returns. “The taper burneth in your study, sir. Searching by the window for a flint, I found this *paper*, thus sealed up!—and I am sure it did not lie there when I went to bed.”

“Get you to bed again; it is not day. Is not tomorrow, boy, the first of March?”

“I know not, sir.”

Brutus is aware that a fortnight has passed since the festival, but he wants to be certain. “Look in the calendar, and bring me word.”

“I will, sir.” He goes inside to light another taper, and to find the almanac.

Brutus looks up at the sky. *The exhalations whizzing in the air give so much light that I may read by them.* He opens the letter:

*'Brutus, thou sleep'st! Awake, and see thyself! Shall Rome...'* He has heard all of these arguments. “*Et cetera,*” he mumbles, glancing ahead. He reads the end: *'Speak, strike, redress! Brutus, thou sleep'st! Awake!'*

*Such instigations have been often dropped where I have took them up. 'Shall Rome...'*

*Et cetera!—thus must I piece it out: shall Rome stand under one man's awe?*

*What, Rome?—my ancestors did from the streets of Rome the Tarquin drive, when he was called a king!*

*'Speak, strike... redress!'*

*I am entreated to speak and strike. O Rome, I make thee a promise: if the redress will follow, thou receivest thy full petition at the hand of Brutus!* He pockets the paper as Lucius returns.

“Sir, March is wasted fifteen days.”

Brutus nods. “'Tis good.” He looks up, startled by a sharp rapping. “Go to the gate; somebody knocks.”

*Since Cassius did whet me against Caesar, I have not slept! Between the first conception of a dreadful thing and its acting, all the interim is like a phantasma, or a hideous dream: the thinking and the mortal instruments are then in council, and the state of a man, like to a little kingdom, suffers then the nature of an insurrection!*

Lucius is back. “Sir, 'tis your brother”—fellow patrician—“Cassius at the door, who doth desire to see you.”

“Is he alone?”

“No, sir, there are more with him.”

“Do you know them?”

“No, sir—their hats are pulled down to their ears, and half their faces buried in their cloaks, so that by no means I may discover them by any mark or favour.”

“Let them enter.”

*They are the faction! O Conspiracy, shamest thou to show thy dangerous brow by night, when evils are most free? Oh, then by day where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough to mask thy*

*monstrous visage? Seek none, Conspiracy—abide in smiles and affability: for if thou pass with thy native semblance on, not Erebus itself—the underground chamber of the dead—were dim enough to hide thee from prevention!*

Cassius leads the others into the garden. “I think we are too bold upon your rest,” he says courteously, bowing. “Good morrow, Brutus; do we trouble you?”

“I have been *up* this hour, *awake* all night. Know I these men that come along with you?”

“Yes, every man of them!—and no man here but *honours* you; and every one doth wish you had but that opinion of yourself which every *noble* Roman bears of you!

“This is Trebonius.”

“He is welcome hither.”

“This, Decius.”

“He is welcome, too.”

“This, Caska; this, Cinna; and this, Metellus Cimber.”

“They are all welcome. What watchful cares do interpose themselves betwixt your eyes and night?”

“Shall I entreat a word?” Cassius draws Brutus aside, to relate what the others know.

Decius glances toward the still-gloomy horizon. “Here lies the east,” he says, peering. “Is not the day breaking here?”

“No,” says Caska.

“Oh, pardon, sir, it doth,” says young Cinna, “and yon grey lines that fret the clouds are messengers of day.”

“You shall confess that you are *both* deceived.” Caska tilts the weapon hanging at his side upward—toward Caesar’s home. “There, as I point my sword, the *son* arises who is on a great way *southward*, in weighing the youthful season of the year. Some two miles hence, up higher toward the north, he first presents his fire.

“But the *high east* stands at the *Capitol*—directly *there!*”

As the noblemen solemnly ponder the different dawn approaching Rome, Brutus rejoins them; he now understands the conspirators’ full scheme. “Give me your hands, all, over one by one,” he says. They come around him, and each lays a hand atop his.

“And let us swear our resolution!” says Cassius.

But Brutus demurs. “No, not an oath. If not the fears of *men*, the suffering of our *souls*, the time’s *abuse!*—if these motives be *weak*, break off betimes, and every man hence to his idle bed; and so let high-sighted tyranny range on, till each man drop by lottery!

“But if these, as I am sure they *do*, bear *fire* enough to kindle *cowards*, and to steel with valour the melting spirits of *women*, then, countrymen, what need we any spur but *our own cause* to prick us to redress?—what other bond than of secret *Romans* who have spoken their word and will not falter!—and what other oath than *honesty* to *honesty engaged* that *this shall be*, or we will fall for it!

“Let swear *priests* and *cowards* and men cautelous—old, feeble *carrions* and such suffering souls as *welcome* wrongs! Unto *bad* causes swear such creatures as men *doubt!* But do not stain the even virtue of *our* enterprise, nor the insuppressible mettle of our *spirits*, to think that either our cause or our performance did need an *oath!*—when every drop of blood that every Roman bears, and *nobly* bears, is guilty of a semblable *bastardy* if he do break the smallest particle of any promise that hath passed from him!”

And thus, bringing his authority, prestige and intellect to the plotters, Brutus assumes command.

“But what of Cicero?” Cassius asks him. “Shall we sound him? I think he will stand very strong with us.”

Caska concurs—“Let us not leave *him* out!” And so does Cinna: “No, by no means!”

“Oh, let us *have* him,” adds Metellus Cimber, “for his silver hairs will purchase us a good opinion, and buy men’s voices to commend our deeds! It shall be said his judgment ruled our hands—our youth and wildness shall no whit appear, but all be buried in his gravity!”

That hardly suits proud Brutus. “Oh, name *him* not! Let us not break with him, for he will never follow anything that other men begin.”

“Then leave him out,” says Cassius.

“Indeed he is not fit,” Caska now thinks.

Decius puts forward an important question: “Shall no man else be touched, but only Caesar?”

“Decius, well urged,” says Cassius grimly. “I think it is not meet Mark Antony, so well beloved of Caesar, should *outlive* Caesar. We shall find in him a shrewd contriver; and you know that his means, if he improve them, may well stretch so far as to annoy us all. Which to prevent, let Antony and Caesar fall together.”

Decius and the others nod.

But Brutus overrules them: “Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius, to cut the *head* off and then *hack the limbs*, like *wrath* in death and *envy* afterwards!—for Antony is but a limb of Caesar.

“Let us be *sacrificers*, but not butchers, Caius. We all stand up against the *spirit* of Caesar—and in the spirit of men there is no blood; ah, if only we could come by Caesar’s spirit, and not *dismember* Caesar! But, alas, Caesar must bleed for it. Then, gentle friends, let’s kill him boldly, but not *wrathfully*; let’s carve him as a dish fit for the *gods*, not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds!

“And let our hearts, as subtle masters do, stir up their servants”—hands—“to an act of rage, then *after* seem to chide ’em! This shall make our purpose *necessary*, not envious—and so appearing to the common eyes, we shall be called *purgers*, not murderers.

“And as for Mark Antony, think not on him; for he can do no more than Caesar’s arm when Caesar’s head is off.”

“Yet I fear him,” insists Cassius. “For in the ingrafted love he bears to Caesar—”

“Alas, good Cassius, do not think of him!” says Brutus, cutting him off. “If he love Caesar, all that he can do is unto himself take the thought, and *die* for Caesar—and if he should, that were *much*, for he is given to sports, to wildness and company!”

Trebonius, long one of Antony’s libertine companions, concurs. “There is no threat in *him*; let him not die—for he will live and laugh at this hereafter!”

“*Peace*,” says Brutus, as a distant bell begins to sound. “Count the hour.” They listen.

“The chime hath stricken three,” says Cassius.

“’Tis time to part,” says Trebonius.

Cassius continues to fret. “But it is doubtful yet whether Caesar will come forth today or no. For he is *superstitious* grown of late—quite departed from the main opinion he held once of ceremonies, of *dreams* and *fantasy*.

“It may be that these apparent prodigies, the unaccustomed terror of this night, in the persuasion of his augurers may hold him from the Capitol today.”

“Never fear that,” Decius assures him. “If he be so resolved, *I* can o’ersway him; for now he loves to hear that *unicorns* may be betrayed with trees—and bears with mirrors, elephants with holes, lions with toils—and *men* with *flatterers*.” He laughs. “And when I tell him *he* hates flatterers, he says he *does*—being then most flattered!

“Let me work; for I can give his mood a new bent, and I will bring him to the Capitol.”

“Aye, we will *all* of us be there to fetch him,” says Cassius.

“By the eighth hour,” Brutus recalls. “Is that the uttermost?”

Cinna nods. “*Be* that the uttermost—and fail not then!”

Metellus Cimber suggests an old nobleman who might join them. “Caius Ligarius doth bear grudge against Caesar, who berated him for speaking well of Pompey. I wonder none of you has thought of him.”

Brutus approves. “Now, good Metellus, go along to him. He loves me well, and I have given him reason to; just send him hither and I’ll fashion him.”

“The morning comes upon us,” says Cassius. “We’ll leave you, Brutus. And, friends, disperse yourselves—but all remember what you have said, and show yourselves true Romans!”

“Good gentlemen, *look* fresh and merry,” Brutus urges, as they file out. “Let not our looks put on our *purposes*, but bear it as our Roman actors do, with untired spirits and formal constancy.

“And so good morrow to you, every one!”

### Chapter Three The Sleepless

**B**rutus, alone again, paces, thinking further. Manifold concerns compete for the nobleman’s attention as he contemplates the day ahead. “Boy! *Lucius!*” There is no answer. *Fast asleep? It is no matter; enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber. Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies which busy care draws in the brains of men; therefore thou sleep’st so sound.*

“Brutus, my lord...” says a woman’s voice.

He turns, and goes to kiss his wife. “Portia, what *mean* you?—wherefore rise you now? It is not good for your health thus to commit your weak condition to the raw, cold morning.” She has been feeble for several days.

“Nor neither for *yours!* You urgently, Brutus, stole from my bed,” she notes, “and yesternight, at supper, you suddenly arose and walked about, musing and sighing, with your arms across. And when I asked you what the matter was, you stared upon me with un-gentle looks! I urged you further; then you scratched your head, and impatiently stepped away.

“Yet I insisted; yet you answered *not*, but with an angry wafture of your hand gave sign for me to leave you. So I did, fearing to strengthen that impatience which seemed too much enkindled—and withal hoping it was but an effect of *mood*, which sometime hath its hour with every man.”

Worried, she touches his arm tenderly. “It will not let you eat, nor talk, nor *sleep*—and could it work so much upon your *shape* as it hath much prevailed on your condition, I should not *know* you, Brutus!

“Dear my lord, make *me* acquainted with your cause of grief.”

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

She shakes her head. “Brutus is wise—and were he not in *health*, he would embrace the means to *come by it*.”

“Why, so I *do*,” he tells her, mindful of the scheme. “Good Portia, go to bed.”

“Is Brutus *sick*? And is it healthful to walk unbracèd, and suck up the humours of the dank morning? *What?*—is Brutus sick, and will he steal out of his wholesome bed, to dare the vile contagion of the night, and tempt the rheumy and unpurgèd air to *add* unto his sickness?

“No, my Brutus; you have some sick offence *within your mind*, which, by the right and virtue of my place, I ought to know of!”

She beseeches: “And, upon my *knees* I charm you, by my once commended beauty, by all your vows of love and that great vow which did incorporate and make us one, that you *unfold* to me—your *self*, your *half!*—why you are heavy-hearted, and what men tonight have had to resort to you! For here have been some six or seven who did hide their faces even from darkness!”

He takes her hands, helps her to rise. “Kneel not, gentle Portia.”

“I should not *need*, if you were *gentle*, Brutus, within the bond of *marriage!* Tell me, Brutus, is it expected I should know no secrets that appertain to you?—am I your self, but, as it were, in a sort of *limitation?*—to keep with you at meals, comfort your bed, and talk to you *sometimes!*”



Dwell I but in the suburbs of your good pleasure?" Her eyes flash. "If it be no more, Portia is Brutus's *harlot*, not his wife!"

"You are my *true* and *honourable wife*, as dear to me as are the ruddy drops that visit my solemn heart!"

"If that were true, then should I know this secret!" she argues. "I grant I am a *woman*—but withal, the woman that *Lord Brutus* took to *wife*! I grant I am a woman—but withal, a woman well-reputed: *Cato's* daughter! Think you I am no stronger than my sex, being so fathered and so husbanded? *Tell* me your counsels; *I* will not disclose them!"

She reveals to him a votaress's incision. "I have made strong proof of my constancy, giving myself a voluntary wound here, in the thigh! Can I bear *that* with patience, and not my husband's secrets?"

Brutus is moved: "O ye gods, render me worthy of this noble wife!"

But a sound at the gate interrupts them.

"Hark, *hark!* One knocks!" he says. "Portia, go in a while—and by and by thy bosom shall partake the secrets of my heart: all my engagements I will construe to thee, all the charactery of my sad brows!" he promises earnestly. "Leave me, with haste!"

She accepts his kiss on the cheek, and hurries into the house, frowning and biting her lip.

"Lucius, who's that knocking?"

The boy comes to him, helping an unsteady old lord to walk. "He is a sick man, that would speak with you."

Brutus is pleased. "Caius *Ligarius*, that Metellus spake of! Boy, stand aside." He takes the visitor's hand gently. "Caius Ligarius! How—"

"Vouchsafe 'good morrow' from a feeble tongue," says Ligarius, his voice reedy. Once prosecuted for fighting on the side of Pompey, defended by Cicero, and pardoned by Caesar, he has been in a long convalescence. He holds a cloth intended to protect his lungs.

"Oh, what a time have you chosen out, brave Caius, to wear a kerchief!" It looks like a mask. "I would you were not sick!"

"I am *not* sick," declares Ligarius, "if Brutus have in hand any exploit worthy the name of *honour!*"

Brutus smiles. "Such an exploit *have* I in hand, Ligarius, had you a healthy ear to hear of it!"

"By all the gods that Romans bow before," says Ligarius, "I here *discard* my sickness!"

"*Soul* of Rome!—brave *son*, derived from honourable loins!—thou like an exorcist hast conjured *up* my mortifièd spirit! Now bid me *run*, and I will strive with *things impossible*—yea, get the *better* of them!" says the creaking voice. "What's to do?"

"A piece of work that will make sick men whole."

"But are not some whole that we must make *sick*?"

"That must we also," Brutus admits. "What it is, my Caius, I shall unfold to thee as we are going to whom it must be done."

Ligarius motions him forward. "*Set on* your foot, and with a heart new-fired I follow you, to do I know not what! But it sufficeth that *Brutus* leads me on!"

"Follow me, then!"

**L**ightning and thunder have interrupted Caesar's sleep, and he has risen quite early. A difficult day lies ahead: despite some patrician politicians' continuing opposition to his popular reforms, the Senate is poised to crown him—to make him *emperor* of Rome's many territories.

As dawn approaches, deep rumblings trouble the sky over the capital.

*Neither heaven nor earth has been at peace tonight!* he muses. His wife has been disturbed by the storm, vexed with a night of evil dreams. *Thrice hath Calphurnia in her sleep cried out, 'Help, ho! They murder Caesar!'*

The general is hardly a credulous man, but he dislikes foul omens. He calls into the next room, "Who's within?"

"My lord," says a servant, entering and bowing.

"Go bid the priests do immediate sacrifice, and bring me their opinions of success." In the augural reading, the entrails may offer assurance—or warning.

"I will, my lord."

Calphurnia passes the man as he leaves. She sees that her husband is dressing—and she frowns. "What *mean* you, Caesar?—think you to walk forth? You shall *not* stir out of your house today!"

"Caesar shall forth," he says calmly. "The things that threatened me ne'er looked but on my *back*. When they shall see the *face* of Caesar, they are vanished."

"Caesar, I never balked at circumstances, yet now they fright me," says Calphurnia. "There is one within who recounts, besides the things that *we* have heard and seen, most *horrid sights* seen by the *watch!*"

She paces, wringing her hands, again pondering an unnerving admixture of her nightmares and commoners' wry reports: "A *lioness* hath whelpèd in the streets!—and *graves* have yawned, and yielded up their *dead!* Fierce, fiery warriors fought upon the *clouds*, in ranks and squadrons and right form of *war* drizzled *blood* upon the *Capitol!* The noise of *battle* hurtled in the air—horses did *neigh*, and dying men did *groan!*—and *ghosts* did shriek and squeal about the streets!"

"Oh, Caesar!" she moans, "these things are beyond all we are used to, and I do fear them!"

He shrugs. "What can be avoided whose end is purposed by the mighty gods? Yet Caesar shall go forth," he says, undisturbed, "for these predictions are to the world in general as to Caesar."

"When *beggars* die there are no *comets* seen; the *heavens themselves* blaze forth the death of *princes!*"

The soldier is stoical. "Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that men should *fear*, seeing that death—a necessary end—will come when it will come."

His servant has returned from the temple. "What say the augurers?" asks Caesar, as he buckles on his sword.

"They would not have you to stir forth today!" warns the artless young man, wide-eyed and pale. He pauses. "Plucking the entrails of an offering forth, they *could not find a heart* within the beast!"

But Caesar, sending him away, is privately amused; the reading—from priests awakened well after midnight—is not surprising: *heartless*. And he, too, can employ divination's ambiguity. "The gods do this in shame of *cowardice*: Caesar should be a beast without a heart, if he should stay at home today for *fear!* No, Caesar shall not.

"*Danger* knows full well that Caesar is more dangerous than *he!*" says the ruler, with mock ferocity. "We are two lions littered in one day—and *I* the elder and more terrible! And Caesar *shall* go forth!"

But Calphurnia's concern is genuine—and deep. "*Alas*, my lord, your *wisdom* is consumed by *confidence!* Do not go forth today—call it *my* fear that keeps you in the house, and not your own. We'll send Mark Antony to the Senate-house, and he shall say you are not *well* today. Let me, upon my knee, prevail in this!"

Now Caesar *is* surprised: his wife often pretends direct the dictator, but she never implores.

He relents. "Mark Antony shall say I am not well, and, for thy concern, I will stay at home." He sees a senator arriving. "Here's Decius; he shall tell them so."

"Caesar, all hail!" cries the visitor. "Good morrow, worthy Caesar! I come to fetch you to the Senate-house!"

“And you are come just in time to bear my greeting to the senators, and tell them that I will not come today,” Caesar replies. He considers that wording. “*Cannot*, is false, and that I *dare* not, *falsar*. . . I *will* not come today—tell them so, Decius.”

“Say he is *sick*,” says Calphurnia.

He objects: “Shall Caesar send a *lie*? Have I in *conquest* stretched mine arm so far, to be afraid to tell *graybeards* the *truth*? Decius, go tell them Caesar will not come.”

“Most mighty Caesar, let me know *some* cause,” pleads Decius, “lest I be *laughed* at when I tell them so!”

“The cause is my *will*: I *will* not come; that is enough to satisfy the Senate. But for your private satisfaction, because I love you, I will let you know: My *wife*, Calphurnia here, stays me at home; she dreamt tonight she saw my statue, which, like a fountain with a hundred spouts, did run *pure blood*!—and many lusty Romans came *smiling*, and did bathe their hands in it!

“And these does she apply as *warnings*, and portents, as evils *imminent*, and on her knee hath begged that I will stay at home today.”

“This dream is all *amiss* interpreted,” Decius contends. “It was a vision *fair* and *fortunate*!—your statue’s spouting blood from many pipes, in which so many smiling Romans laved, signifies that from you great Rome shall draw *reviving* blood!—and that great men shall press for tinctures, stains, *relics*—in recognition! *That* by Calphurnia’s dream is signified!”

Caesar is flattered—but unmoved. “And that way have you well expounded it.”

Decius persists. “I *will have*, when you have heard what I can say! And, know it *now*: the Senate have concluded to give this day a *crown* to mighty Caesar!” He stares expectantly. “If you shall send them word you will not come, their minds may *change*!

“Besides, it were a mock apt to be rendered for someone to say, ‘Break up the Senate till another time, when Caesar’s *wife* shall meet with better *dreams*!’

“If Caesar *hide* himself, shall they not whisper, ‘*Lo*, Caesar is *afraid*?’” He sees that the frowning ruler is disturbed by the idea. “Pardon me, Caesar; my dear dear love for our proceeding bids me tell you this—and *reason* is liable to my love.”

As more visitors arrive, a window reveals that dawn’s light is growing. Brutus and Ligarius have come; with them are Caska, Trebonius, Cinna, and Metellus.

Faced with so many, the general is loath to disappoint. “How foolish do your fears seem now, Calphurnia! I am ashamed I did yield to them! Give me my cloak, for I will go!”

A long-bearded senator unaware of the conspiracy arrives as well; he hopes to witness today the crowning of an emperor.

“And look where *Publius* is come to fetch me!” cries Caesar, quite pleased, as his wife brings the white ceremonial vestment. He drapes it over his shoulders.

Publius beams. “Good *morrow*, Caesar!”

“*Welcome*, Publius! What, Brutus, are you stirred so early, too?” He smiles at the guests.

“Good morrow, Caska!” And he pats the ailing old man’s shoulder. “Caius Ligarius, *Caesar* was ne’er so much your enemy as that same *ague* which hath made you lean!”

“What is the hour?”

“Caesar, ’tis stricken eight,” says Brutus.

“I thank you for your pains and courtesy,” Caesar tells the noblemen, adjusting his cloak as Mark Antony joins them. “See! Antony, who revels *long* o’ nights, is notwithstanding up! Good *morrow*, Antony!”

“So to most noble Caesar!”

He turns to Calphurnia. “Bid them prepare within; I am *to blame*, to be thus waited for!” She hurries to tell servants to set out food and drink. “Now, Cinna—now, Metellus!

“What, Trebonius!” He recalls that they are scheduled to meet in the afternoon. “I have an hour’s talk in store for you; remember that you call on me today. Be near me, so that I may remember you.”

“Caesar, I will,” says Trebonius. *And so near will I be that your best friends shall wish I had been further!*

Caesar motions his companions into the corridor leading to the dining hall. “Good friends, go in, and taste some wine with me; and we, like friends, will straightway go together.”

Brutus follows him. *That not every ‘like’ is the same, O Caesar, the heart of Brutus learns to think upon!*

## **Chapter Four** **One Day in Rome**

**O**n a street near the Capitol, a teacher of Greek rhetoric—who has recently overheard some alarming private conversations—unfolds the letter of warning he has written.

As fearful Artemidorus reads it again, his hands tremble. *‘Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed of Cassius; come not near Caska; have an eye to Cinna; trust not Trebonius! Mark well Metellus Cimber! Decius loves thee not; thou hast wronged Caius Ligarius!’*

*‘There is but one mind in all these men, and it is bent against Caesar! If thou beest not immortal, look about you! Security gives way to conspiracy!’*

*‘May the mighty gods defend thee!’*

*‘Thy admirer, Artemidorus.’*

He folds the paper carefully. *Here will I stand till Caesar pass along, and as a petitioner will I give him this.* He will pretend he has an ordinary request. *My heart laments that virtue cannot live beyond the teeth of envy!*

*If thou read this, O Caesar, thou mayst live; if not, the Fates with traitors do connive!*

**N**ot far away down the same long avenue, at Brutus’s door his worried wife, Portia, urgently calls young Lucius. “I prithee, boy, run to the Senate-house!—stay not to answer me, but get thee gone!” He stares. “Why dost thou *stay*?” she demands.

“To know my *errand*, madam.”

“I would have had thee there and *here again*, ere I can tell thee what thou shouldst do there!” She glances back into the house, distraught. *O constancy, be strong upon my side; set a huge mountain ’tween my heart and tongue! I have a man’s mind, but a woman’s might! How hard it is for women to keep counsel!*

She turns—and sees Lucius. “Art thou here *yet*?”

“Madam, what should I *do*? Run to the Capitol, and nothing else?—and so return to you, and nothing else?”

“*Yes!*” Then: “Bring me word, boy, if thy lord look well... for he went sickly forth!—and take good note what *Caesar* doth—what suitors press to him!” Suddenly she looks up, startled: “*Hark*, boy!—what *noise* is that?”

“I hear none, madam...”

“*Prithee*, listen *well!*” she insists, highly agitated, seizing his arm. “I heard a *bustling* rumour—like a *fray!*—and the wind brings it from the *Capitol!*”

“Sooth, madam, I hear nothing!”

She spots the frail old seer on the street. “Come hither, fellow! Which way hast thou been?”

“At mine own house, good lady.”

“What is the time?”

“About the ninth hour, lady.”

“Is Caesar yet gone to the Capitol?”

“Madam, not yet; I go to take my stand to see him pass on to the Capitol.”

“Thou hast some suit to Caesar, hast thou not?”

“That I *have*, lady. If it will please Caesar to be so good to Caesar as to hear me, I shall beseech him to befriend *himself*.”

“Why?—know’st thou any *harm* that’s intended towards him?”

“None that I *know* will be—much that I *fear* may chance.” The soothsayer bows. “Good morrow to you. *Here* the street is narrow,” he says, stating on his way. “The throng that follows Caesar at the heels—of senators, of praetors, common suitors—will crowd a feeble man almost to death! I’ll get me to a place more void, and there speak to great Caesar as he comes along.”

Portia watches him amble away. *I must go in! Ay, me! How weak a thing the heart of woman is! Oh, Brutus, the heavens speed thee in thine enterprise!*

She notices Lucius, rubbing his arm gingerly and watching her curiously. *Surely the boy heard me!*

*Brutus hath a suit that Caesar will not grant! Oh!—I grow faint!*

“Run, Lucius, and commend me to my lord!—say I am *merry!*” The lad bows, glad to leave her, and trots away.

“Come to me again,” she calls, growing frantic, “and bring me word what he doth *say* to thee!”

Near the Capitol a crowd gathers as morning sunshine dissipates the mist and warms the tall marble columns, still damp from the storm. A burst of cheering greets the great leader of the Roman Republic, arriving on his way to the Senate. Trumpets blare out a flourish to herald the guarded procession led by a jovial Julius Caesar, who is accompanied today by senators.

Caesar spots, among those waiting to welcome him, a silent onlooker. “The ides of March are come,” he dryly reminds the soothsayer in passing.

“Aye, Caesar; but not *gone*,” says the old man—unheard, as the noblemen brush by amid the loud applause.

“*Hail*, Caesar!” cries Artemidorus, waving his list. “Read this list!”

But Decius hands Caesar another document. “Trebonius doth desire you to o’rread, at your best leisure, this his humble suit.”

The teacher pushes forward, thrusting out his letter. “O Caesar, read mine *first!*—for mine’s a suit that touches Caesar nearer! *Read* it, great Caesar!”

The general accepts the folded paper. “What touches us ourself shall be *last* served,” he tells the onlookers humbly, sliding it into a pocket.

Artemidorus is alarmed. “*Delay not*, Caesar!” he cries. “Read it *instantly!*”

Caesar turns away; his other petitioners are calmly obsequious. “What, is the fellow mad?” he asks Decius.

Publius pushes Artemidorus away. “Sirrah, give place!”

And Cassius glares at him. “What, urge you your petition in the *street?*” he demands. “Come to the *Capitol*,” he tells the man gruffly, as Caesar moves on, with all the rest following.

In the Senate-house, Popilius Lena, a silver-haired legislator, has approached Cassius. “I wish your enterprise today may thrive!” he says, with a broad smile. Then he sees that Caesar is motioning for him to come near.

Cassius pales. “What enterprise, Popilius?”

“Fare you well,” says the aging lord, nodding to Caesar and going to join him.

Brutus is immediately at Cassius’ side. “What said Popilius Lena?” he asks, urgently but quietly.

Only Brutus hears the hushed reply: “He wished today our *enterprise* might *thrive!* I fear our purpose is discovered!”

“Look how he makes toward Caesar,” says Brutus. “Mark him....”

Cassius turns as another conspirator joins them. “Caska, be *sudden*,” he whispers, “for we fear prevention!” Caska nods, and walks more quickly toward Caesar.

Cassius is alarmed. “Brutus, what shall be *done*? If this be *known*... Cassius to *Caesar* shall never *turn back*!” he hisses. “I will slay *myself*!”

“Cassius, be *constant*,” warns Brutus firmly, watching the dictator. “Popilius Lena speaks not of our purposes—for, look, he *smiles*; and Caesar doth not change.”

Seeing that for himself, Cassius calms, and looks around. “Trebonius knows his time, for, look you, Brutus...” Trebonius, smiling in animated conversation with Mark Antony, throws an arm around his shoulder and draws him into a side hall, away from the large chamber.

Decius comes to Brutus. “Where is Metellus Cimber? Let him go immediately and prefer his suit to Caesar!”

Brutus sees that their accomplice is already petitioning the ruler. “He is *addressed*; press near, and *second* him!”

Behind Caesar, Caska and Cinna are moving closer. The young man whispers, “Caska, you are to be first that rears his hand!”

Caesar is raising his arms to open the formal session, where he will hear the day’s requests. “Are we all ready?” He steps forward and sits in his carved chair at the front. “What is now amiss that Caesar and his Senate must redress?”

One of the conspirators comes first, bowing, then dropping to his knees in supplication. “Most high, most mighty, and most puissant Caesar! Metellus Cimber throws before thy seat an humble heart—” he begins.

“I must prevent thee, Cimber!” Caesar is annoyed. “These couchings and these lowly courtesies might fire the blood of *ordinary* men, and swerve pre-ordinance and first decree into the lane of *children*; but be not so simple as to think that *Caesar* bears such rebel blood, that will be thawed from the true quality with that which melteth *fools*!—I mean *sweet words*, low-crookèd court’sies, and base, spaniel *fawning*!”

“Thy brother by decree is *banishèd*! If thou dost bend and pray and fawn for *him*, I spurn thee like a cur out of my way. *Know*: Caesar doth not punish but with just *cause*—nor without cause will he be *satisfied*.”

Metellus Cimber looks up and around. “Is there no voice more worthy than my own to sound more sweetly in great Caesar’s ear for the repealing of my banished brother?”

Brutus moves forward and kneels. “I kiss thy hand not in flattery, Caesar, but desiring of thee that Publius Cimber may have immediate freedom of repeal.”

Caesar is surprised: “What?— *Brutus*!”

“Pardon, Caesar,” says Cassius, moving to kneel beside Brutus. “Caesar, pardon! As low as to thy foot doth Cassius fall, to beg enfranchisement for Publius Cimber.”

Caesar has pardoned many defeated opponents; his reasoned policies have been clear and consistent. “I *could* well be moved, if I were as *you*; if I could pray to move, prayers would *move* me.

“But I am constant as the northern star, of whose true, fixèd, and resting quality there is no fellow in the firmament. The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks; they are *all* fire, and every one doth *shine*—but there’s but one in all doth *hold its place*.

“So in the world: ’tis furnished well with men; and men are flesh and blood—and apprehensive. Yet in their number I do know of *one* who unassailable *holds* to his rank, unshaken by motion—and that *I am he*, let me a little show even in *this*: I was constant that Cimber should be banished, and constant do remain to *keep* him so.”

“O Caesar—” says Cinna, stepping before the sovereign to kneel.

“Hence!” says Caesar, irked now. “Wilt thou lift up *Olympus*?”

Decius, too, comes forward. “Great Caesar—”

The ruler looks down at them, perplexed by the lords’ unseemly—and futile—display. “Doth not *Brutus* bootless kneel?”

Caska's sword flashes up, then slices downward. "*Speak, hands, for me!*"

Caesar is stunned by the blow, and his right arm dangles. The supplicants rise as he staggers, gaping, and each one draws a dagger and stabs him. Brutus is the last.

Caesar's face registers the pain—and deep disappointment. "*Et tu, Brute? Then fall, Caesar.*" He collapses to the floor, surrounded by his assailants.

"*Liberty! Freedom!*" shouts Cinna. "*Tyranny is dead! Run hence!—proclaim!—cry it about the streets!*"

Cassius directs fellow conspirators: "Some to the commoners' pulpits, and cry out, '*Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!*'" Several dash out to disseminate the news.

Shocked by the sight—and fearful of the killers' bloody blades—the many others in the hall have pulled back, staring aghast.

Brutus addresses them. "People and senators, be not affrighted!—fly not; stand still!" He looks down at the corpse. "*Ambition's debt is paid.*"

"Go to the pulpit, Brutus!" urges Caska, motioning toward the dais.

"And Cassius too!" says Decius.

Brutus looks for the senator of greatest experience. "Where's Publius?"

Cinna points to the dazed old man. "Here—quite confounded with this mutiny!"

"Stand fast *together*," Metellus Cimber warns the others, "lest some friend of Caesar's should chance—"

"Talk not of *standing!*" insists Brutus sharply; he does not want to assume a defensive posture. "Publius, good cheer!" he says, smiling. "There is no harm intended to your person, nor to any Roman else!" he says reassuringly. "So *tell* them, Publius."

"And *leave* us, Publius," Cassius tells the tremulous nobleman, "lest that the people, rushing on to us, should do your age some mischief."

"Do so," says Brutus; he nods to the other witnesses. "And let no man abide this deed but we the doers."

Publius, still shaken, leaves the hall, soon followed by all but conspirators.

Nearly out of breath, Trebonius runs in from the street. "Where is Antony?" he asks Cassius.

"Fled to his house, amazed! Men, wives and children stare, cry out, and run as if it were *doomsday!*"

In the high marble chamber, Brutus looks upward as the last observers clear out. "*Fates, we will know your pleasures!*"

"That we shall die, we know," he murmurs. "'Tis but their time of drawing out days that men stand upon...."

Says Cassius, now relieved and elated, "Why, he that cuts off twenty years of life cuts off so many years of fearing *death!*"

"Grant *that*, and is death a *benefit*," says Brutus wryly, staring at the body lying in pooled blood. "So then are we, who have abridged his time of fearing death, Caesar's *friends.*"

But to the city's populace he wants to express grim pride—and immediately; he turns to the other assassins. "Stoop, Romans, *stoop*, and let us *bathe* our hands in Caesar's blood, *up to the elbows*—and besmear our *swords!*"—so they will imply a fight, rather than an ambush. "Then walk we forth, even to the market-place, and, waving our red weapons o'er our heads, let's all cry, '*Peace, freedom and liberty!*'"

"Stoop, then, and '*wash!*'" cries Cassius, drawing his sword. "How many ages hence shall this, our lofty scene, be acted over in states unborn, and accents yet unknown?"

Brutus kneels beside the dead man lying at the foot of another general's statue, and daubs his hands with gore. "How many times shall Caesar, who now at Pompey's basis lies, no worthier than the dust, bleed in *diversions?*"—plays.

The other killers smear their hands and swords with crimson.

"So oft as that shall be," Cassius prophesies, "so often shall the knot of us be called the men that gave their country *liberty!*"

Decius sees that they are ready. “What, shall we forth?”  
“Aye,” says Cassius, “every man away! Brutus shall lead!—and we will grace his heels with the *boldest* and *best* hearts of Rome!”

But just then they see a servant warily entering the Senate chamber. “Soft!—who comes here?” says Brutus. He recognizes the young man: “A friend of Antony’s.”

The emissary comes to him and drops to his knees. “*Thus*, Brutus, did my master bid me *kneel!*—thus did Mark Antony bid me fall down!” He moves to his hands and knees, touching his forehead to the stone floor. “And being prostrate, thus he bade me *say*: ‘Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest; Caesar was mighty, bold, royal, and loving.’”

The lad thinks for a moment. “Say: ‘I love Brutus, and I honour him’ . . . say: ‘I feared Caesar, honoured him and loved him.’” He looks up, frowning, trying to get it right. “If Brutus will vouchsafe that Antony may safely come to him and be resolvèd how Caesar hath deserved to lie in death, Mark Antony shall not love Caesar dead so well as Brutus living, but will follow the fortunes and affairs of noble Brutus thorough the hazards of this untrod state with all true faith.”

“So says my master, Antony.” The youth rises.

Brutus is pleased. “Thy master is a *wise* and valiant *Roman!* I never thought him worse! Tell him: so please it him to come unto this place, he *shall* be satisfied!—and, by my honour, depart untouched!”

The lad nods. “I’ll fetch him immediately.” He bows, turns, and hurries away.

Brutus tells the others, “I know that we shall do well to have him a friend!”

“I wish we *may*,” says Cassius, “but *yet* have I a mind that fears him much!—and my misgiving always falls shrewdly to the purpose,” he claims.

Brutus turns to the door. “And here *comes* Antony! *Welcome*, Mark Antony!”

Antony’s gaze is fixed; he stares at the bloody cloak as he walks slowly to the body crumpled at the foot of the statue.

“O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low? Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, shrunk to this little measure?” Tears well up, and his voice is choked with grief. “Fare thee well . . .”

Antony turns to the conspirators. “I know not, gentlemen, what you intend—who else’s blood must be let, who else is rank. If I *myself*, there is no hour so fit as *Caesar’s* death-hour, nor no instrument of half that worth as those your *swords*—made rich with the most noble blood of all this world!

“I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard, *now*, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smolder, fulfill your pleasure! Live a thousand years, I shall not find myself so apt to die!—no place will please me so, no means of death, as here by *Caesar*, and by *you* cut off, the choice and master spirits of this age!”

“O Antony, beg not your death of *us!*” says Brutus. “Though now we must *appear* bloody and cruel—as, by our hands and this our present act, you see we *do*—yet see you but our hands and this the bleeding business they have done—our *hearts* you see not! They are full of *piety*, in pity for the general wrong of *Rome!* As fire drives out *fire*, so pity—*pity* hath done this deed on Caesar!

“As for your part, to *you* our steel swords have *leaden* points, Mark Antony! Our arms constrained from *malice*, and our hearts with *brothers’* temperament do receive you in, with all kind *love*, *good* thoughts, and *reverence!*”

Cassius watches Antony closely. “Your voice shall be as strong as any man’s in the disposing of new dignities,” he offers.

“Only be patient till we have appeased the *multitude*, now beside themselves with fear,” says Brutus, “and then we will deliver to you the cause why I—who did *love* Caesar when I struck him—have thus proceeded.”



Antony regards him. "I doubt not of your wisdom," he says evenly. "Let each man render me his bloody hand; first, Marcus Brutus, will I shake with you. Next, Caius Cassius, do I take your hand. Now, Decius, yours; now yours, Metellus; yours, Cinna; and, my valiant Caska, yours. Though last, not last in love, yours, good Trebonius.

"Gentlemen all, alas, what shall I say? My crediting now stands on such slippery ground that one of two bad ways you must conceive me: either a coward or a flatterer!"

He looks at the body. "That I did love thee, Caesar—oh, 'tis true! If, then, thy spirit look upon us now, shall it not grieve thee more than thy death to see thy Anthony making his peace, shaking the bloody fingers of thy foes—most *noble!*—in the presence of thy corpse?"

"Had I as many *eyes* as thou hast wounds, weeping as fast as *they* streamed forth thy blood, it would become me better than to come together in terms of *friendship* with thine enemies! *Pardon* me, Julius! Here wast thou bayed, brave hart; here didst thou fall; and here thy hunters stand, signed in thy despoil, encrimsoned with thy leaving!

"O *World*, thou wast the forest to *this* hart; and this, indeed, O World, the heart of thee!

"How like a deer, stricken by many princes, dost thou here lie!"

Cassius frowns. "Mark Antony—"

"Pardon me, Caius Cassius; even the *enemies* of Caesar shall say thus; and in a friend it is cold reserve."

"I blame you not for praising Caesar so," says Cassius. "But what *compact* mean you to have with us? Will you be pricked in the numbering of our *friends*,"—marked as an ally, "or shall we go on and not depend on you?"

"Therefore I took your hands," Antony replies, "but was, indeed, swayed from the point by looking *down* on *Caesar*. Friends am I with you all, and love you all—upon this hope: that you shall give me *reasons*, why and wherein Caesar was dangerous."

Brutus nods, eager for approval. "Or else were this a *savage* spectacle! Our reasons are so full of good regard that were you, Antony, the *son* of Caesar, you should be satisfied!"

"That's all I seek—and am, moreover, suitor that *I* may produce his body to the market-place; and in the pulpit, as becomes a friend, speak in the order of his funeral."

Antony's participation will be seen as acceptance of the murder. "You *shall*, Mark Antony," says Brutus.

Cassius hastily pulls him aside. "Brutus, a word with you.

"You know not what you *do!*" he whispers. "Do *not* consent that Antony speak in his funeral!—know you not how much the people may be angered by that which he will utter?"

Brutus is piqued by the interruption—and the challenge to his authority. "By your *pardon*," he says haughtily, "I will *myself* go into the pulpit first, and show the *reason* for our Caesar's death. What Antony shall speak I will profess he speaks by leave, by *permission*, and that we are contented Caesar shall have all true *rites* and lawful *ceremonies*. It shall advantage more than do us wrong."

Cassius glares: "I know not what may *befall*; I like it *not!*"

Brutus turns away. "Mark Antony, hear: take you Caesar's body. You shall not in your funeral speech blame us, but speak all good you can devise of Caesar, and say you do't by our permission," he insists, "else shall you not have any hand at all about his funeral. And you shall speak in the same pulpit whereto I am going, after *my* speech is ended."

Antony nods. "Be it so. I do desire no more."

"Prepare the body then, and follow us." Brutus and the other conspirators set forth on their urgent task of securing support among the populace.

Alone, Antony kneels beside Caesar—and sobs.

*Oh, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth, that I am meek and gentle with these butchers!  
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times!*

*Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood! Now do I prophesy over thy wounds, which, like voiceless mouths, do ope their ruby lips to beg the voice and utterance of my tongue: a curse shall light upon the limbs of men!*

*Domestic fury and fierce civil strife shall cumber all the parts of Italy; blood and destruction shall be so in use, and dreadful objects so familiar, that mothers shall but smile when they behold their infants quartered by the hands of War!—all pity choked with custom of fell deeds!*

*And Caesar's spirit, raging for revenge with Ate by his side, come hot from Hell, shall in these confines with a monarch's voice cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war!—so that this foul deed shall smell, above the earth, of carrion men groaning for burial!*

Antony rises slowly, staring at his right hand—crusted with drying blood from the killers' hands.

He looks up, surprised to see a messenger, dusty from riding, enter the hall, cap in hand, and look around. "You serve Octavius Caesar, do you not?"

"I do, Mark Antony."

Gaius Octavius, twenty, the grandson of Caesar's younger sister Julia, had served with the general's forces in Spain; after the victory, he went to Greece to study.

Antony remembers: "Caesar did write for him to come to Rome."

"He received his letters, and is coming, and bid me say to you by word of mouth—" He spots the dead man. "*Oh, Caesar!*" He rushes forward. Kneeling before the body, he is moved to tears.

"Thy heart is big," says Antony kindly. "Get thee apart and weep; anguish, I see, is catching, for mine eyes, seeing those beads of sorrow stand in thine, begin to water.

"Is thy master coming?"

The rider stands, wiping his eyes. "He lies tonight within seven leagues of Rome."

"Post back with speed, and tell him what hath chanced. Here is a *mourning* Rome, a *dangerous* Rome!—no Rome of safety for Octavius yet. Hie hence, and tell him so.

"Yet, stay a while—thou shalt not back till I have borne this corpse into the market-place.

"There shall I learn, from my oration, how the people take the cruel issue of these bloody men—according to the which thou shalt discourse to young Octavius on the state of things."

Antony kneels and straightens the dead man's limbs. "Lend me your hand."

## **Chapter Five** **The People Hear**

Cries echo in the Forum, part of the huge marketplace stretching along the valley between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills, as Romans learn of the violent death of Julius Caesar. Varying accounts have spread across the city, enlarged by speculation with each retelling. Many citizens have rushed here, alarmed, seeking news—and demanding answers.

Brutus and Cassius, entering through the clamoring throng, hear the angry shouts: "We will have satisfaction!" "Let us have satisfaction!"

Brutus, surrounded, lifts his stained hands. "Then follow me and give me audience, friends!" he exclaims. "Cassius, part these numbers, and go you into the other street.

"Those that will hear *me* speak, let 'em stay here," he shouts. "Those that will follow Cassius, go with him!" He calls out to the multitude: "And public *reasons* shall be rendered for Caesar's death!"

The noise partly subsides, as the citizens consider. "I will hear Brutus speak," a man tells his neighbor. His friend nods. "I will hear Cassius, and *compare* their reasons when severally we've heard them tendered."

Cassius, well regarded as a public speaker, draws a good number of people outside to hear him, while Brutus climbs the wide marble steps and enters a pulpit on the high dais overlooking the remaining crowd of legislators, tradesmen, and other citizens.

A voice calls out below: “The noble Brutus is ascended! *Silence!*”

Brutus raises a hand. “Be patient till the last,” he asks, coming forward. The listeners look up. “Romans, countrymen, and admirers—*hear* from me my cause, and be silent so that you may hear.

“Believe me for mine *honour*, and have *respect* for mine honour, so that you may believe; judge me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, so that you may the better consider.

“If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar’s—to him I say that Brutus’ love to Caesar was *no less than his!* If then that friend demand why Brutus rose *against* Caesar, this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that *I loved Rome more!*”

“Would you rather that Caesar were living, and die as *slaves*, than that Caesar were dead, and live as *free men?*”

“As Caesar loved me, I weep for him! As he was fortunate, I rejoiced at it; as he was valiant, I honoured him. But as he was *ambitious* I *slew* him! Here are tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour—and *death* for his *ambition!*”

“Who is there so base that he would be a *bondman?* If any, speak!—for him have I offended.

“Who is here so rude that he would *not* be a *Roman?* If any, speak!—for *him* have I offended.

“Who here is so *vile* that will *not love his country?* If any, *speak!*—for *him* have I *offended!*”

He surveys the citizens’ upturned faces. “I pause for a reply.”

Calls one man, “None, Brutus, *none!*”

Brutus leans forward at the podium. “Then *none* have I *offended!*” he declares boldly. “I have done no more to Caesar than *you* could do to *Brutus.*”

“The explanation for his death is enrolled in the Capitol,”—embodied in the record, “his glory not diminished wherein he was *worthy*, nor the *offences* heightened for which he suffered death!”

Attention suddenly shifts away, to the side, where Antony—who has been waiting outside, and listening—enters the building; others with him bring Caesar’s remains, now in a wooden coffin borne on a wheeled litter.

Brutus turns toward it. “Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony, who—though he had no hand in his death—shall receive the benefit of his dying: a place in the *commonwealth!*—as which of *you* shall not?”

“With this, I depart: as it slew my most admirèd for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for *myself*, when it shall please my country to need *my* death!”

But the crowd applauds roundly, with calls of “*Live, Brutus! Live! Live!*” and “Bring him with triumph home unto his house!” “Give him a *statue* with his *ancestor’s!*”

“Let him be *Caesar!*” “Caesar’s *better* parts shall be crowned in *Brutus!*”

“We’ll take him to his house with shouts and clamours!”

Brutus raises his arms, acknowledging the acclaim. “My countrymen—”

“*Peace, silence! Brutus speaks!*” “*Peace, ho!*”

“—good countrymen, let me depart alone; and, for my sake, stay here with Antony!

“Do grace unto Caesar’s corpse, and grace his speech tending to Caesar’s glories—which Mark Antony, by our permission, is allowed to make.

“I do entreat you, not a man depart, save I alone, till Antony have spoken.”

A cry rises from the crowd: “Stay, *ho!*—and let us hear Mark *Antony!*” A man calls out, “Let him go up into the public chair!” “We’ll hear him! Noble Antony, go up!” shouts another.

Brutus waves, and, still receiving applause, leaves the Forum.

**A**ntony climbs the stone steps to the rostrum and looks out. “For Brutus’ sake, I am beholding to *you.*”

There are puzzled murmurs below. “What does he say of Brutus?” “He says, for Brutus’ sake, he finds himself beholding to *us all.*”

“’Twere best he speak no harm of *Brutus* here!” warns one man. “This Caesar was a *tyrant!*” asserts another. “Aye, that’s certain!—we are blest that Rome is *rid* of him!” says a third.

“Peace! Let us hear what Antony can say!”

Antony gazes solemnly at the agitated crowd. “You gentle Romans—”

“Peace, *ho!* Let us *hear* him!”

Antony is patient. “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

“I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interrèd with their bones. So let it be with Caesar.

“The noble Brutus hath told you Caesar was ambitious. If it were so, it was a grievous fault—and *grievously* hath Caesar answered for it!

“Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—for Brutus is an honourable man; so are they all, all *honourable* men—come I to speak in Caesar’s funeral.

“He was my *friend*, faithful and *just* to me—but, Brutus says he was ambitious; and Brutus is an honourable man.

“He hath brought many captives home to Rome whose ransoms did the general coffers fill. Did that in Caesar seem ambitious?

“When the poor have cried, Caesar hath *wept!* Ambition should be made of sterner stuff. Yet Brutus says he was ambitious—and Brutus is an *honourable* man.

“You all did see that on the Lupercal I thrice presented him a kingly *crown*—which he did thrice *refuse*. Was *that* ambition? Yet Brutus says he was ambitious—and, surely, he is an *honourable* man.

“I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke; I am here but to speak what I do *know*: you all did *love* him once—and not without *cause!* What cause withholds you, then, from mourning for him?”

Some among the crowd glance downward, remembering; many indeed must consider how well they prospered under Caesar’s commands, and by his rule.

“O *Judgment!*” cries Antony, overwhelmed, “thou art fled to brutish *beasts*, and *men* have lost their *reason!*”

“Bear with me,” he says sadly. “My *heart* is in the coffin there with Caesar, and I must pause till it come back to me.”

His listeners are moved. A worried-looking man tells another, “Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.”

“If thou consider rightly of the matter, Caesar has had great wrong!”

“Has he, masters?” wonders a third—but he adds, “I fear there will a *worse* come in his place....”

“Marked ye his words?” a senator asks them. “He *would not take* the crown!—therefore ’tis certain he was *not* ambitious!”

“If it be found so,” says another dourly, “some will pay dearly for it!”

A woman is watching the handsome Mark Antony. “Poor soul! His eyes are red as fire with weeping!”

“There’s not a nobler man in *Rome* than *Antony!*” cries a tall man.

“Now mark him!—he begins again to speak!”

“Even yesterday,” says Antony gravely, “the word of *Caesar* might have stood against the *world!* Now lies he there, and no one is so poor as not to do him reverence.

“O masters, if I were disposed to stir your hearts and minds to *mutiny* and *rage*, I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong—who, you all know, are honourable men. I will *not* do them wrong—I’d choose rather to wrong the dead—to wrong *myself*, and *you!*—than to wrong such *honourable* men.

“But here’s a parchment with the seal of Caesar. I found it in his quarters; ’tis his *will*. Let the commons but hear this testament—which, pardon me, I do not mean to read out—and they would go and *kiss* dead Caesar’s *wounds*, and dip their kerchiefs in his sacred blood!—yea, beg for a

hair of his for memory, and, dying, mention it within *their* wills, bequeathing it as a rich legacy unto their issue!”

“We’ll *hear* the *will!*” demands a citizen. “*Read* it, Mark Antony!”

The crowd, still growing, and moving closer, concurs. “The will, the *will!*” “We will hear *Caesar’s will!*”

Antony raises a palm. “Have patience, gentle friends. I must not read it; it is not meet that you know how Caesar *loved* you! You are not *wood*, you are not *stones*, but *men!* And, being men, hearing the will of Caesar—it will *inflame* you!—it will send you *mad!*”

“’Tis good you know not that *you* are his *heirs*; for, if you should—oh, *what would come of it?*”

“*Read the will!*” demands a rotund senator. “We’ll *hear* it, Antony! You *shall* read us the will—*Caesar’s will!*”

“Will you be patient?” pleads Antony. “Will you stay awhile? I have o’ershot myself to tell you of it: I fear I wrong the *honourable* men whose daggers have *stabbed Caesar!*—I do fear it!”

“They were *traitors*,” cries an indignant voice. “*Honourable* men!” calls another scornfully.

“*The will!*” cry others loudly. “*The testament!*”

“They were villains, *murderers!*” “*The will!*” “*Read the will!*”

Antony unfolds it. “You will compel me, then, to read the will?” The crowd so insists—loudly.

“Then form a ring about the corpse of Caesar,” Antony tells them, “and let me show you him who *made* the will. Shall I descend? And will you give me leave?”

“Come down!” “Descend!” “You shall have leave!”

Antony comes down the steps and stands beside the coffin, as the onlookers move nearer.

“A *ring*; stand round!” “Stand from the hearse, stand from the body!” “Room for Antony, most noble Antony!”

The speaker motions for space. “Nay, press not so upon me; stand farther off.” He wants his voice to carry unimpeded.

Several urge the others: “Stand *back*... *Room!*... Bear back...”

“If you have tears,” says Antony sadly, “prepare to shed them now.”

He raises the coffin’s lid, and lifts one edge of Caesar’s gore-stiffened cloak to show it. After gasps of dismay, the spectators fall silent, gazing and stunned.

“You all do know this mantle. I remember the first time ever Caesar put it on: ’twas on a summer’s evening, in his tent, that day he overcame the Nervii”—a military victory, they all know, in which Caesar showed great personal bravery in rescuing some of his men.

Antony points to the cloak. “Look—in this place ran *Cassius’* blade through.” He lifts the torn cloth higher. “See what a rent the envious *Caska* made!

“Through *this* the well-belovèd *Brutus* stabbed—and as he plucked his cursèd steel away, mark how the blood of Caesar followed it—as if rushing out of doors to be resolved if *Brutus* so unkindly knocked, or no! For *Caesar*, as you know, was *Brutus’s* *angel!* Judge, O you gods, how dearly *Brutus* loved *him!*”

“This was the most unkindest cut of all: for when the noble Caesar saw *him* stab, *ingratitude*, more strong than traitors’ arms, quite vanquished him!” Antony’s brimming eyes search the crowd.

“Then burst his mighty heart!” he says, his voice strained with sorrow. “And even at the base of *Pompey’s* statue, muffling up his face in this mantle, which all the while ran blood, *great Caesar* fell!”

Antony cries out: “Oh, what a fall was *there*, my countrymen! Then I, and you, and *all* of us fell down, whilst bloody *treason* flourished over us!”

“Oh, now you *weep!*—and, I perceive, you feel the dint of *pity!*” He smiles through tears. “Those are *gracious* drops!”

Gently he lowers Caesar’s savaged raiment

“Kind souls, what?—weep you when you behold but our Caesar’s *vesture* wounded? Look you here: here is *himself!*—marred, as you see, by *traitors!*” He wheels the coffin around and tilts one end down to the floor, revealing the corpse within.

The crowd draws back, appalled. From the citizens come moans, sobs. “Oh, piteous spectacle!” “O noble Caesar!” “Oh, woeful day!”

Cries ring out: “Oh, *traitors—villains!*” “Oh, most bloody *sight!*”

*Angry* cries: “We will be *revenged!*”

The sovereign’s riven remains infuriate all who see, and other push forward. “*Revenge!*” “*About!*”

Furious calls now compete for attention. “Seek!” “*Burn!*”

“*Fire!*” “*Kill!*”

“*Slay!*” “*Let not a traitor live!*”

Ignoring the turmoil, Antony levels the coffin, and slowly, solemnly, lowers its cover. He glances at Ocatvius’s messenger, who nods and silently leaves.

Antony looks about, as if just noticing the livid, angry faces. He raises a hand. “Stay, countrymen!”

Around him, citizens demand quiet. “*Peace*, there! Hear the noble *Antony!*”

“We’ll *hear* him, we’ll *follow* him—we’ll *die* with him!”

Antony addresses them. “Good friends, sweet friends, let *me* not stir you up to such a sudden flood of mutiny! They that have done this deed are *honourable*.” He shrugs. “What private griefs they have, alas, I know not, that made them do it. They are wise and *honourable*, and will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.

“I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts. I am no *orator*, as Brutus is, but, as you know me, all, a plain, blunt man who loved my *friend!*”

“And that they know full well who gave me public leave to speak of him. For I have neither wit nor words—not with action nor utterance, nor the power of speech—to stir men’s blood. I only speak right on. I tell you but that which you *yourselves* do know, show you sweet Caesar’s *wounds*—poor, poor silent mouths!—and bid them speak *for* me.

“But were I Brutus, and Brutus, Antony—*there* were an ‘Antony’ that would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue in every wound on Caesar that should move the *stones* of Rome to *rise in mutiny!*”

Growing fury among the milling throng is obvious: “*We’ll mutiny!*”

“We’ll *burn* the house of Brutus!”

“*Away*, then! *Come*, seek the *conspirators!*”

But Mark Antony has more to say. “Yet *hear* me, countrymen; yet hear me *speak!*”

Attention is immediate: “*Peace, ho!*” “Hear Antony!” “Most noble Antony!”

“Why, friends, you go to do you *know not what!* And wherein hath Caesar thus *deserved* your loves? Alas, you know not!

“I must *tell* you, then!—you have forgot the *will* I told you of!”

The uproar shifts in tone. “*Most true!*” is the consensus. “The *will!*” “Let’s stay and hear *the will!*”

“Here is the will, and under Caesar’s seal!” cries Antony, raising it aloft. “To every Roman citizen he gives—to every several man!—*seventy-five drachmas!*”

“Most *noble* Caesar!”

“We’ll *revenge* his death!”

“Oh, *royal* Caesar!”

Antony—holding up the will—commands attention. “*Hear* me with *patience!*”

“*Peace, ho!*” is the general cry.

Antony looks at the document. “Moreover, he hath left you *all his walks*—his private arbours and new-planted orchards—on this side of Tiber! He hath left them to *you!*—and to your *heirs* forever, common *pleasures*, to walk abroad and recreate yourselves!”

He spreads his arms wide. "Here was a *Caesar!* When comes such *another?*"

"Never, *never!* *Come!*—*away, away!*" "We'll burn his body in the holy place—and with the brands *fire the traitors' houses!*"

"Take up the body!" As the citizens close in, men rush to lift Caesar's coffin into the air and carry it, held above the heads of the moving crowd, out of the Forum.

"Go fetch *fire!*" demands a young senator at the front, as the seething citizens surge from the building.

"Pluck down benches!" calls a mason. "Pluck down forms, windows—*anything!*" cries a carpenter.

The multitude, inflamed to violent action, streams out into the hot afternoon street, vowing revenge on those who murdered Julius Caesar.

Inside, Antony, suddenly very weary, sits on the steps by the pulpit, watching the angry men storm away. He hears their harsh voices as the mass disperses into clusters bent on finding the killers.

"Now let it work," he mutters. *Mischief, thou art afoot!—take thou what course thou wilt.*

The market is eerily silent as a man enters; the rider, sent to inform Octavius of the ruler's fate, has returned.

Antony quietly greets him. "How now, fellow?"

"Sir, Octavius is already come to Rome."

"Where is he?"

"He and Lepidus are at Caesar's house."

Antony rises. "And thither will I straight to visit him. He comes upon a wish; Fortune is merry, and in this mood will give us anything."

"I heard him say that Brutus and Cassius have ridden like *madmen* through the gates of Rome!"

Antony's smile is wan. "Belike they had some notice of the people... how I had moved them.

"Bring me to Octavius."

**A**fter his meager meal of dry bread, stale cheese and weak wine, a mild-mannered, middle-aged man steps from his home into an alley, then walks up to the street.

Gaius Helvius Cinna, a poet of some distinction, muses. *I dreamt last night that I did feast with Caesar—and things unlucky charged my imagination; I have no will to wander forth of doors, yet something leads me forth....*

A gang of five angry-looking tradesmen approaches—and, to his surprise, they surround him.

"What is your name?" one demands. "Whither are you going?" asks another.

"Where do you dwell?" "Are you a married man or a bachelor?"

The first, a burly, red-faced man, grabs the poet's arm. "Answer every man directly!"

"Aye, and briefly!"

"Aye, and wisely!" warns another.

"Aye—and *truly*, you were best!"

Soft-spoken Cinna is a contemplative man. "What is my name? Whither am I going? Where do I dwell? Am I a married man or a bachelor?"

"Then, to answer every man directly and briefly, wisely and truly: *wisely*, I say, I am a *bachelor*—"

"That's as much as to say they are *fools that marry!*" growls a big man, stepping closer.

"You'll bear a *bang* from me for that, I fear! Proceed—*directly!*"

"Directly I am going to Caesar's funeral."

"As a friend or an enemy?"

"As a friend."

A tall man nods. "That matter is answered directly."

"As for your dwelling?—*briefly!*"

“Briefly: I dwell by the Capitol.”

“Your *name*, sir—truly.”

“Truly, my name is Cinna,” says the poet.

“*Tear him to pieces!*” shouts the big man, enraged. “He’s a *conspirator!*”

“I am Cinna the *poet!*” cries the writer, as they batter him down with heavy blows. “I am Cinna the *poet!*”

The tall man kicks their victim, now cringing on his knees and trying to rise. “Tear him for his bad *verses*, tear him for his bad *verses!*” he growls, enjoying himself.

“I am *not* Cinna the *conspirator!*” screams the man of words—before being knocked senseless by a blow to the back of the head.

“It is no matter; his name’s *Cinna!*” says the tall patriot, rubbing his sore fist. “Just pluck his *name*”—it sounds like *sinner*—“out of his heart, and turn him going!”

“*Tear him,*” grunts the burly one, again kicking the downed man, as the others crouch to plunge knives through his tunic of worn linen. “*Tear him!*”

“*Come!—brands ho! Fire-brands—to Brutus’s—to Cassius’—burn all! Some to Decius’ house and some to Ligarius’—some to Caska’s! Away—Go!*”

## Chapter Six The New Order

After the death of Julius Caesar, a triumvirate has formed. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus—once a consul serving with Caesar, now commander of the legion of soldiers who are quartered in the city—has joined Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar.

The new rulers of Rome and its many territories meet around a table to negotiate further consolidation of their shared power. Antony examines a wax tablet listing men’s names—some with marks scratched beside them. “These many, then, shall die; their names are pricked.”

Octavius regards the general. “Your *brother*, too, must die; consent you, Lepidus?”

“I do consent—”

“Prick him down, Antony,” says Octavius.

“—upon condition that *Publius*—who is your sister’s son, Mark Antony—shall not live,” says Lepidus.

Antony nods. “He shall not live; look, with a spot I damn him.

“But, Lepidus, go you to Caesar’s house; fetch the will hither, and we shall determine how to cut off some charges in legacies.” The conspirators and their allies will not be permitted to inherit from Caesar.

Lepidus rises. “What, shall I find you here?”

Octavius nods. “Either here or at the Capitol,” he says, as Lepidus goes.

In the assassination’s aftermath, they have made good use of Lepidus’s troops to maintain order. But now, says Antony, “This is a slight, unmeritable man, meet to be sent on *errands*. Is it fit that, the three-fold world divided, *he* should stand one of three to share it?”

“So *you* thought him—and took his voice who should be pricked to die, and in our black sentence and proscription”—orders detailing the property and wealth to be confiscated.

Antony rises. “Octavius, I have seen more days than you. And though we lay these honours on this man to ease ourselves of divers *slandrous* loads,”—dangerously unpopular tasks, “he shall but bear them as the *ass* bears *gold*, to groan and sweat under the business, either led or driven as we point the way. And having brought our treasure where we will, then take we down his load, and turn *him* out like an empty ass to shake his ears and graze in the commons.”

“You may do your will,” says Octavius, also rising, “but he’s a tried and valiant soldier.”

“So is my *horse*, Octavius; and for that I do appoint him store of provender. It is a creature that I teach to fight: to wend, to stop, to run directly on, his corporal motion governed by my



spirit. And in some regard is Lepidus but so: he must be taught and trained, and bidden go forth—a barren-spirited fellow!—one that feeds on objects, arts and imitations which, out of use and staled by other men, *begin* his fashion! Do not talk of him but as a property.”

Antony regards the young man gravely. “And now, Octavius, hear about *great* things.

“*Brutus and Cassius are levying powers!*”—building armies. “We must straight make head! Therefore let our alliance be combined, our best friends made, our means stretched! And let *us* now go sit in council as to how *covert* matters may best be disposed, and *open* perils surest answered.”

Octavius agrees fully. “Let us do so. For we are at the stake, and bayed about with many enemies—and some who *smile* have, in their hearts, I fear, millions of mischiefs!”

They leave Lepidus’s house together.

Near the city of Sardis, in Asia Minor about fifteen leagues east of the Aegean Sea, Brutus rides ahead of his marching troops toward a large tent his men have set up for a meeting of the rebellious generals.

He has traveled here east from Macedonia; Cassius is bringing his own forces west from Syria. They intend to unite their armies to fight the triumvirate’s legions.

“*Stand, ho!*” calls Brutus, dismounting.

His second in command turns to shout, “Give the word, *ho!*—and stand!” As young Lucius leads the horse away to water, the order is passed back from captain to captain to halt the long columns of soldiers. The drum-beat cadences soon stop.

“What now, Lucilius?” asks Brutus. “Is Cassius near?”

“He is at hand.” The officer gestures toward an approaching servant. “And Pindarus is come to do you salutation from his master.”

Cassius’s man reaches them and bows deeply.

“He greets me well,” says Brutus. “Your master, Pindarus—at his own charge, or by ill offices—hath given me some worthy cause to wish things done *undone!* But if he be at hand I shall be resolvèd . . .”

Pindarus is polite. “I do not doubt but that my noble master will appear such as he *is*: full of regard and honour.”

“He is not doubted,” says Brutus, dismissing the man with a nod. “A word, Lucilius.” He watches as Pindarus bows and returns to the tent, then asks about Cassius. “How he received you, let me be satisfied.”

“With courtesy, and with respect enough,” the officer tells him, “but not with such familiar instances, nor with such free and friendly conference, as he hath used of old.”

“Thou hast described a hot friend *cooling*. Ever note, Lucilius: when love begins to sicken and decay, it useth an enforced *ceremony*. There are no tricks in plain and simple faith; but *hollow* men, like horses not at hand”—mounted for battle—“make gallant *show* and *promise* of their mettle. Then, when they should endure the bloody *spur*, they let fall their crests, and, like deceitful jades,”—whores, “*sink* in the trial!

“Comes his army on?”

“They mean this night in Sardis to be quartered,” Lucilius tells him. “The greater part, the horse soldiers and general troops, are come with Cassius.”

Brutus hears trumpets, and looks toward a nearby pass that opens into the upland hills. “*Hark!* He is arrived! March gently on to meet him.”

Cassius, leading men who have not deserted him after Caesar’s death, reins in his horse and turns in the saddle. “Stand, ho,” he tells an officer.

“*Stand, ho!*” calls his lieutenant. “Speak the word along!” Behind him, the command is repeated, heard each time more faintly from farther back through the ranks: “Stand!” “Stand!” “Stand!”

Cassius dismounts, hands the reins to the waiting Pindarus, and comes directly to Brutus.  
“Most noble brother, you have done me *wrong!*”

Brutus scoffs. “Judge me, you gods—I wrong mine *enemies!* But even if not so, why would I wrong a *brother?*”

Cassius shakes his head angrily. “Brutus, this sober *form* of yours hides *wrongs!*—and when you do them—”

“Cassius, be content to speak your griefs *softly!* I do know you well.

“Before the eyes of both our armies here, which should perceive nothing but love from us, let us not wrangle! Bid them move away; then in my tent, Cassius, enlarge your griefs, and I will give you audience.”

Cassius’ pride is smarting—Brutus will *grant audience*. But he complies. “Pindarus, bid our commanders lead their charges off a little from this ground.”

“Lucius, do you the like,” says Brutus, “and let no man come to our tent till we have done with our conference.

“Let Lucilius and Titinius guard our door.” He pulls back the canvas flap, and leads the other general inside.

Cassius starts immediately—and hotly. “That you have *wronged* me doth appear in *this*: you have *noted* and *condemned* Lucius Pella for taking bribes here from the Sardians—while my letters praying on his side, because I knew the man, were slighted off!”

Brutus frowns: “You wronged *yourself* to write in such a case.”

“In such a time as this,” Cassius insists, “it is not meet that every trivial offence should bear its comment!”

“Let me tell you, Cassius: *you yourself* are much condemned for having an itching palm—marting and selling your offices for *gold* to *undeservers!*”

“I an itching palm!” cries Cassius, indignant. “Know that you are *Brutus* who speak thus, or, by the gods, this speech were else your *last!*”

“The name of *Cassius* honours this corruption,” says Brutus, “and therefore doth chastisement *hide its head!*”

“*Chastisement!*”

“Remember March—the *ides of March!*—remember? Did not great Julius bleed for *justice*’ sake? What villain touched his body that did not stab for *justice*?

“*What!*—shall some of us who struck *the foremost man of all this world* but for his supporting *robbers*,”—for appeasing commoners, and thus diminishing patricians’ privilege, “shall we now contaminate our fingers with base *bribes*, and sell the mighty space of our large honours for so much *trash* as may be graspèd thus?

“I had rather be a *dog*, and bay at the *moon*,” he shouts, “than such a Roman!”

Cassius is livid. “Brutus, bay not at *me!*—*I’ll not endure it!* You forget yourself to hedge *me* in! I am a *soldier!*—older in *practise*, abler than yourself to make conditions!”

“Go to! You are *not*, Cassius!”

“*I am!*”

“I say you are *not!*”

“Urge me no more!—I shall forget myself!” warns Cassius angrily. “Have mind upon your health!—tempt me no *further!*”

“*Away*, slight man!” mutters Brutus scornfully.

Cassius glares, stunned. “Is’t possible?”

“*Hear* me, for I will *speak!*—must *I* give way and room to *your* rash choler? Shall *I* be frightened when a *madman* stares?”

“O ye gods, ye *gods!* Must *I* endure all this?”

“*All this?*” cries Brutus. “Aye!—*more!*—fret till your proud heart *break!* Go show your *slaves* how choleric you are, and make your *bondmen* tremble! Must *I* budge? Must *I* observe you? Must *I* stand and crouch under *your* testy moods?”

“By the gods, you shall *digest* the venom of your spleen though it do *split* you! For, from this day forth, I’ll use you for my *mirth!*—yea, for my *laughter!*—when you are waspish.”

Cassius is amazed. “Is it come to this?”

Brutus sneers: “You say you are a better *soldier*: let it *appear* so!—make your vaunting *true*, and it shall please me well! For mine own part, I shall be glad to learn from *noble* men!”

Cassius protests. “You *wrong* me every way; you *wrong* me, Brutus! I said an *elder* soldier, not a ‘better!’ Did I say *better?*”

“If you *did*, I care *not!*”

“When *Caesar* lived, *he* durst not thus have angered me!”

“Peace, *peace!*” cries Brutus. “You durst not so have tempted *him!*”

“I *durst* not?”

“No!”

“What, durst not *tempt* him!”

“For your *life* you durst not!”

“Do not presume too much upon my love,” Cassius cautions. “I may do that I shall be sorry for!”

“You have *done* that you *should* be sorry for! There is no terror, Cassius, in *your* threats, for I am armed so strong in *honesty* that they pass by me as the idle *wind*, which I respect not!

“Because *I* can raise no money by *vile* means, I did send to you for certain sums of gold—which you *denied* me! By heaven, I had rather *coin* my *heart*, and drip my *blood* for drachmas, than to wring from the hard hands of *peasants* their vile trash by *indiscretion!*”

“I did send to you for gold to *pay* my *legions!*—which you *denied* me! Was that done like *Cassius?* Would *I* have answered Caius Cassius *so?*”

“When *Marcus Brutus* grows so covetous as to lock such rascal counters”—fleeting tokens—“from his friends, be ready, gods, with all your *thunderbolts!*—dash him to *pieces!*”

Cassius scowls. “I denied you not!”

“You *did.*”

“I did *not!* He was but a *fool* that brought my answer back to you!

“Brutus hath *riven* my *heart!*—a *friend* should bear his friend’s... *infirmities*, but Brutus makes mine *greater* than they are!”

“I do *not*—till you *practise* them on me!”

Cassius looks away, sullen. “You love me not.”

Brutus folds his arms and stares down. “I do not like your faults.”

“A *friendly* eye could never *see* such faults!”

“A *flatterer*’s eye *would* not—though they do appear as huge as high Olympus!”

Cassius turns piteous. “*Come*, Antony and young Octavius! *Come!*—revenge yourselves on *Cassius alone!* For Cassius is a-weary of the world!—hated by one he loves!—berated by his brother; checked like a bondman! All his faults *observed!*—set into a note book!—learned and studied by rote to *cast into my teeth!*”

“Oh, I could *weep* my *spirit* through mine eyes!

“There is my dagger,” he says, drawing the knife and proffering the haft to Brutus, “and here my naked breast—within, a heart dearer than *Plutus*’s mine!—*richer* than *gold!* If thou be’st a *Roman*, take it *forth!*—I who denied thee *gold* will give my *heart!*”

“*Strike* as thou didst at Caesar!—for I know when thou didst hate him *worst*, thou lovedst him better than ever thou lovedst *Cassius!*”

But Brutus, suddenly exhausted, turns away. “Sheathe your dagger. Be angry when you will; it shall have scope; do what you will, dishonour shall be ‘humour’”—be regarded as but a passing

mood. “Oh, Cassius, you are yokèd with a *lamb* that carries anger as the *flint* bears *fire*—only much *enforcèd* shows a hasty spark, then straight is *cold* again.”

The older man regards him sadly. “Hath Cassius lived to be to his Brutus but *mirth* and *laughter*, when grief and blood ill-tempered are vexing him?”

Brutus closes his eyes for a moment, and sighs deeply. “When I spoke that, I *was* ill-tempered,” he says quietly.

“Do you confess so much?” Cassius is moved. “Give me your hand!”

Brutus grasps his warmly. “And my *heart*, too!”

Cassius looks pained. “Oh, *Brutus*...”

“What’s the matter?”

“Have you not love enough to *bear with me*, when that rashness which my mother gave me makes me forgetful?”

Brutus smiles. “Yes, Cassius—and, from hence forth, when you are over-earnest with your Brutus, he’ll think your *mother* chides, and so give you leave.”

They hear a disturbance outside the tent—a gravelly, entreating voice: “Let me go in to see the generals! There is some grudge between ’em—’tis not meet they be alone!”

They hear Lucilius: “You shall not come to them.”

“Nothing but death shall stay me!” is the reply—and suddenly the speaker bursts through the flaps of the tent, followed by Lucilius and Titinius—both dismayed—and young Lucius.

“How *now!* What’s the *matter?*” demands Cassius.

“For *shame*, you generals!” cries the ragged man—unarmed, a poor, aging civilian. “What do you *mean?*” He tilts his head to one side and clasps his hands together in a gesture intended to suggest harmony. “*Love*, and be *friends*, as two such men *should* be!—for I have seen more *years*, I’m sure, than *ye!*” he says, watching them hopefully.

Cassius surprises the others by laughing: “How vilely doth this cynic *rhyme!*”

But the ancient’s plea only annoys proud Brutus. “Get you *hence*, sirrah!—saucy fellow, *hence!*”

“Bear with him, Brutus; ’tis his fashion.”

“I’ll know his humour when *he* knows his *time!* What should the warriors *do* with these jiggling fools?” He waves the younger troops’ wizened follower away. “Companion, *hence!*”

“Away, *away!*” laughs Cassius, “be gone.”

“Lucilius and Titinius,” says Brutus, as they seize the intruder’s arms, “bid the commanders prepare to lodge their companies tonight.”

Adds Cassius, “And come yourselves and bring Messala with you immediately to us.”

The officers nod as they haul away the would-be peacemaker.

“Lucius, a bowl of wine,” says Brutus. The boy bows and goes to fetch it.

Cassius tells Brutus sheepishly. “I did not think you could have been so angry....”

“Oh, Cassius, I am sick with many griefs.”

“Of your philosophy you make no use, if you give place to accidental evils.”

Brutus frowns. “No man bears sorrow better.” He looks down, then regards his friend sadly. “Portia is dead.”

“Portia!”

“She is dead.”

Cassius stares. “How ’scaped I *killing* when I *crossed* you so? Oh, insupportable and touching *loss!*”

“Upon what sickness?”

Brutus sinks onto a bench by the table before answering. “Grievèd at my absence, and impatient that young Octavius and Mark Antony have made themselves *so strong*—for with word of her death *those* tidings came. With that she fell into delirium, and, her attendants absent, swallowed *fire.*”

Cassius stands aghast. "And died *so*?"

"Even so."

"O ye immortal gods!"

"Speak no more of her." Brutus tells the returning boy gruffly, "Give me a bowl of wine."

The sun is setting, and the tent grows dim as Lucius brings wine and cups, and sets a lighted taper on the table. "In this I bury all unkindness, Cassius."

Cassius sits across from him. "My heart is thirsty for that noble pledge! Fill, Lucius, till the wine o'erswell the cup; I cannot drink too much of Brutus's love!"

Lucius pours for them, then goes back outside to sit with the soldiers by the fire.

Brutus sees Cassius's lieutenant at the tent opening. "Come in, Titinius." With him is one of Brutus's own chief commanders. "Welcome, good Messala. Now sit we close about this taper here, and call in question our necessities."

Cassius is shaking his head sadly. "Portia, art thou gone?" he murmurs.

"No more, I pray you," says Brutus. As the officers seat themselves, he begins. "Messala, I have here received letters that young Octavius and Mark Antony come down upon us with a mighty power, bending their expedition toward Philippi."

Marcus Valerius Messala nods. "Myself have letters of the selfsame tenor."

"With what addition?"

"That by proscription and bills of outlawry, Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus have put to death an hundred senators!" Under Julius Caesar's governance nine hundred senators were in office.

"Therein our letters do not well agree; mine speak of *seventy* senators that died by their proscriptions—Cicero being one."

Cassius is startled. "*Cicero* one!"

"Cicero is dead, and that by order of proscription," Messala confirms. He looks at Brutus. "Had you your letters from your wife, my lord?"

"No, Messala."

"Nor nothing in your letters writ of her?"

"Nothing, Messala."

"That, methinks, is strange...."

Brutus wants to know what is being said in Rome. "Why ask you? Hear you aught of her in yours?"

Messala looks down. "No, my lord."

"Now, as you are a Roman, tell me true!"

Messala faces his general sadly. "Then like a Roman *bear* the truth I tell: for certain she is dead, and by strange manner."

The general seems stoical to his officer. "Why, farewell, Portia," he says. "We must die, Messala. Having meditated, once, that she must die, I have the patience to endure it now."

His lieutenant nods. "Even so. *Great* men should endure *great losses*."

Cassius admires Brutus's military demeanor; he, too, has schooled himself in calm acceptance. "I have as much of this in *art* as you, but yet my *nature* could not bear it so."

"Well, to *our* work, we *alive*," says Brutus briskly. "What do you think of marching to Philippi immediately?"

"I do not think it good," Cassius tells him.

"Your reason?"

"This it is: 'tis better that the enemy *seek us*—thus shall he waste his means, weary his soldiers, doing himself offence whilst we, lying still, are full of rest, defense, and nimbleness."

"*Good* reasons," says Brutus, "must, of force, give place to *better*. The people 'twixt Philippi and this ground do stand but in a *forcèd* affection, for they have begrudged us *contribution*. The enemy, marching along past them, from them shall make a fuller number up, come on refreshed, new-added, and *encouraged*—from which advantage shall we cut him off if at *Philippi* we do face him—there with these people at our *backs*."

“Hear me, good brother—” Cassius begins.

The younger general interrupts. “Under your pardon: you must note, beside, that we have tried our friends to the *utmost*, our legions are *brim full*, our cause is *ripe*! The enemy increaseth every day; *we*, at the height, are ready to decline.

“There is a *tide* in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads them on to fortune!—*omitted*, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are *we* now afloat—and we must take the current when it *serves*, or lose our ventures!”

Cassius, more experienced and hardly convinced, nevertheless yields. “Then with your will go on. We’ll along ourselves, and meet them at Philippi.”

“The deep of night is crept upon our talk, and nature must obey necessity; which we will niggard with a *little* rest,” says Brutus. “There is no more to say.”

“No more,” nods Cassius; he and the others stand. “Good night. Early tomorrow will we rise, and hence!”

Brutus calls: “Lucius!” The boy comes in. “My robe.

“Farewell, good Messala. Good night, Titinius. Noble, noble Cassius, good night, and good repose!”

“Oh, my dear brother,” says Cassius, “that was an ill beginning of the night! Never come such division ’tween our souls! Let it not, Brutus!”

Brutus clasps an arm around his shoulders. “Everything is well.”

Cassius heads out. “Good night, my lord.”

“Good night, good brother!”

The other men bow. “Good night, Lord Brutus,” says Titinius, as he and Messala leave.

“Farewell, every one!”

Brutus is satisfied; he will be in command.

## *Chapter Seven* **Confrontations**

“Give me the robe,” says Brutus, very tired, as Lucius returns. Brutus craves soothing music. “Where is thy instrument?”

“Here in the tent,” says the boy, yawning.

“What, thou speak’st drowsily! Poor knave, I blame thee not; thou art overly on watch.” He thinks for a moment. “Call Claudio and some other of my men. I’ll have them sleep on the cushions in my tent.”

Opening the flap, Lucius tells the sentry, “Varrus and Claudio.”

The officers arrive as Brutus finishes changing. “Calls my lord?” asks Varrus.

“I pray you, sirs, lie in my tent and *sleep*; it may be I shall raise you by and by, on business to my brother Cassius.”

“So please you, we will stand, and watch at your pleasure.”

“I will not have it so,” Brutus says kindly. “Lie down, good sirs; it may be I shall otherwise bethink me.” Varrus and Claudio accept blankets from the servant, and lie at one side of the tent.

“Look, Lucius—*here’s* the book I sought for so! I had put it in the pocket of my robe.”

“I was sure Your Lordship did not give it me.”

“Bear with me, good boy, I am much forgetful. Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes awhile, and touch thy instrument a strain or two?”

“Aye, my lord, an’t please you.”

“It does, my boy. I trouble thee too much, but thou art willing.”

“It is my duty, sir.”

“I should not urge thy duty past thy might; I know young bloods look for a time of rest....”

“I have slept, my lord, already,” Lucius lies, unpacking his cittern.

Brutus smiles. "It was well done—and thou shalt sleep again; I will not hold thee long. If I do live, I will be good to thee." Lucius plays softly. Brutus yawns. "This is a sleepy tune." After a moment the music becomes slower, softer—and stops; the lad has fallen asleep.

*O murderous Slumber, lay'st thou thy leaden mace upon my boy, who plays thee music?* thinks Brutus.

*Gentle knave, good night; I will not do thee so much wrong as to wake thee. If thou dost nod, thou break'st thy instrument; I'll take it from thee—and, good boy, good night!*

He sets the cittern aside and opens the book. *Let me see, let me see... is not the leaf turned down where I left reading? Here it is, I think.*

He moves to the table. *How ill this taper burns!...* Startled, he looks up—and drops the book; a hazy figure is hovering before him—and now it moves closer.

*Who comes here? I think it is the weakness of mine eyes that shapes this monstrous apparition! It comes upon me!...* "Art thou any *thing*?—art thou some god, some angel?—or some *devil*, that makest my blood cold, and my hair to stand! Speak to me what thou art!"

The ghastly image of Julius Caesar stares. "Thy *evil* spirit, Brutus!" it utters.

His gaping assassin swallows. "Why comest thou?"

"To tell thee thou shalt see *me* at Philippi!"

Brutus struggles to comprehend. "Well... then I shall see thee again?"

"*Aye!*" says the deep, sepulchral voice. "At *Philippi*."

Brutus backs away, unnerved. "Why... I will see thee at Philippi, then..."

As the general watches, the vision dissolves away. He looks around—and thinks of the coming battle. *Now that I have taken heart thou vanishest, ill spirit! I would hold more talk with thee...*

"Boy, Lucius! Varrus! Claudio!" he cries. "Sirs, *awake! Claudio!*"

"The *strings*, my lord, are false!" mumbles Lucius.

*He thinks he still is at his instrument*, Brutus realizes. "Lucius, awake!"

The boy sits up and rubs his eyes. "My lord?"

"Didst thou *dream*, Lucius, that thou so criedst out?"

"My lord, I do not know that I did cry...."

"Yes, that thou didst! Didst thou see... anything?"

"Nothing, my lord."

Brutus pats his shoulder. "Sleep again, Lucius. Sirrah, *Claudio!*" He kneels and jars Varrus's foot. "Fellow, *thou*—awake!"

"My lord?"

Claudio wakes up, too. "My lord?"

"Why did you so cry out, sirs, in your sleep?"

"Did we, my lord?" asks Claudio.

"*Aye!* Saw you anything?"

"No, my lord," Varrus tells him, "I saw nothing."

"Nor I, my lord."

As the soldiers rise and glance at each other, waiting, Brutus ponders. He decides: he will push forward to Philippi—but prudently. He stands. "Go and commend me to my brother Cassius. Bid him set on his powers betimes *before*, and we will follow."

"It shall be done, my lord," says Varrus. He and Claudio bow, and they go to arrange for the armies' sunrise departure.

Three leagues north of the Aegean in the Roman province of Macedonia lies the city of Philippi, built three centuries ago by Phillip II, father of Alexander the Great. On the plain west of the city, Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar have readied their legions for imminent warfare.

Close by, they know, are the forces of Cassius and Brutus.

“Now, Antony, our hopes are answered!” says Octavius. “You said the enemy would not come down, but keep to the hills and upper regions; it proves not so: their armies are *at hand!*—they mean to warm us at Philippi, here answering before we do demand of them!”

Antony, shifting in the saddle, scoffs: “I am in their bosoms, and I know wherefore they do it. They should be content to visit at other places, but come now with a *fearful* bravery, thinking by this *face* to fasten in our thoughts that they have courage. But ’tis not so!”

One of their scouts rides back at a gallop, dismounts; and hurries to look up at the triumvirs. “*Prepare* you, generals! The enemy comes on in gallant show!—their bloody sign of battle is hung out, and something is to be done immediately!”

Says Antony, “Octavius, lead your army softly on, upon the left hand of the even field.”

“Upon the right hand I; keep *thou* the left.”

Antony is annoyed: “Why do you *cross* me in this exigent?”

“I am *not* crossing *you*,” the confident younger man retorts, “but I will do as I said.”

And now they watch as the forces of Cassius and Brutus march steadily forward. Drums pound out a steady pace for their combined troops, following Titinius, Messala and Lucilius.

—  
Brutus, eyes fixed on the two triumvirs, points. “They stand, and would have parley.”

Cassius turns in the saddle. “Stand fast, Titinius; we must out and talk.”

—  
“Mark Antony, shall we give sign of battle?”

“No, Caesar, we will respond to *their* charge. Make fast,” he says, adding with contempt, “the *generals* would have some *words*.”

Octavius issues the order for their troops. “Stir not until the signal.”

They ride forward to meet the rebellious Romans.

—  
Four angry men meet between the poised pairs of armies.

“*Words* before blows!” chides Brutus, based on his reading of the triumvirs’ waiting. “Is it so, countrymen?”

“Not that *we* love words better—as *you* do!” retorts young Caesar.

“*Good* words are better than bad strokes, Octavius.”

Antony sneers: “You give good words *with* your bad strokes, Brutus!—witness the hole you made in Caesar’s heart, crying ‘Hail! *Long live Caesar!*’”

Cassius replies in kind, remembering the handshakes and subsequent oratory. “Antony, the power of your blows is yet unknown—but as for *your* words, they rob the Hybla bees and leave them *honeyless!*”

“But not *stingless*,” warns Antony.

“*Oh, yes!*—and *soundless* too,” Brutus counters, “for you have stolen their *buzzing*, Antony, and very wisely *threaten* before you sting!”

“*Villains!*” cries Antony, “*you* did not so when your vile daggers *hacked one another* within the sides of *Caesar!* You showed your teeth like *apes*, and fawned like *hounds*, and bowed like *bondmen*—kissing Caesar’s *feet* whilst damnèd Caska, like a *cur*, from *behind* struck Caesar on the neck! *Oh, you flatterers!*”

Cassius turns to his partner. “Now, Brutus, thank yourself!—this tongue had not offended us today, if Cassius might have ruled!”—and killed Antony too.

Octavius is impatient. “Come, come—to the *cause!* If *arguing* it make us *sweat*, the *proof* of it will turn to *redder* drops!

“Look! I draw a sword against *conspirators!*” he declares, pointing it at them. “When think you that this sword goes back again?”

“*Never,*” he cries, “till Caesar’s three-and-thirty wounds be *well avenged!*—or till *another* Caesar have added slaughter to the swords of *traitors!*”



Brutus feels no allegiance to Octavius. “Caesar, thou canst not die by *traitors*’ hands unless thou bring’st them with thee!”

“So I hope,” says Octavius. “I was not born to die on *Brutus*’s sword!”

“Oh, if thou wert the *noblest* of thy strain, young man, thou couldst not die more *honourably!*” says Brutus.

Cassius gestures contemptuously toward Octavius. “A peevish *schoolboy*, worthless of such honour—joined with a *masker* and a *reveller!*”

Antony laughs; the younger man has again sunk to sneering. “Old Cassius still!”

“Come, Antony, away.” says Octavius.

The generals all return to their respective legions.

“*Defiance*, traitors, hurl we in your teeth!” calls Octavius. “If you dare *fight*, come today to *the field!*—if not, when you have the *stomachs!*”

Cassius sounds exuberant, eager for action. “Why, now *blow*, wind, *swell*, billow—and *swim*, *lark!*—the *storm* is up, and all is on the hazard!”

But Brutus is pensive; he turns away, and motions to one of the troops’ commanders. “*Ho*, Lucilius!—hark, a word with you.”

“My lord?” says Lucilius. They speak together, quietly and urgently, reviewing the armies’ organization for battle.

Cassius summons Brutus’s lieutenant. “Messala.”

“What says my general?”

“Messala, this is my birthday—on *this* very day was Cassius *born*,” he says solemnly; he has experienced an unpleasant epiphany. “Give me thy hand, Messala—be thou my witness that *against my will* I am compelled, as was Pompey, to set all our liberties upon *one battle!*”

They shake hands, and Cassius explains. “You know that I held *Epicurus* to be strong in his opinion; now I change my mind, and partly credit things that do *presage*.

“While we came from Sardis with our former ensign,”—Rome’s banner, hung from the crossbar on a pole, “two mighty *eagles* alighted over it, and there they perched, gorging and feeding from the hands of our soldiers who to Philippi, here, consorted us.

“This morning are they *fled away* and *gone*—and in their steads do *ravens*, crows and hawks fly o’er our heads, and downward look on us as if we were *sickly prey!* Their shadows seem a canopy most *fatal*, under which our army lies, ready to give up the ghost!”

Messala frowns. “Believe not so!”

“I believe it only *partly*—for I am fresh of spirit, and resolved to meet all perils very constantly.”

Brutus, his conference done, turns back, nodding. “Even so, Lucilius.” The commander goes to array the troops.

“Now, most noble Brutus,” says Cassius, “the gods today stand *friendly*, so that *we* may lead our days on to age, as friends at peace!

“But since the affairs of men rest ever uncertain, let’s reason with the worst that may befall. If we do *lose* this battle, this is the very last time we shall speak together. What, then, have you determined to do?”

Brutus answers: “I go now but by the rule of that philosophy by which I did blame Cato for the death which he did give himself.” Two years before, Marcus Porcius Cato, sternly stoical, righteous and rigid, had killed himself after defeat in battle, rather than fall prisoner to Julius Caesar. “I do find it *cowardly* and *vile* so to prevent the full time of life for fear of what might befall.”

And Brutus remembers the death of his proud but brittle wife—Cato’s daughter, choked with searing embers. “I arm myself with *patience*, to await the providence of some high powers that govern us here below.”

Cassius challenges that resolve: “Then, if we lose this battle, you are contented to be *led in triumph*”—as a shackled captive—“through the streets of Rome?”

“*No, Cassius, no!*—think not, thou noble Roman, that ever *Brutus* will go *bound* to Rome! He bears too great a mind!

“But this same day must end that work the ides of March began; and whether we shall meet again I know not. Therefore our everlasting farewell take: for ever, and forever, *fare well*, Cassius! If we *do* meet again, why, we shall *smile*; if not, why then this parting was well made.”

Cassius grips his hand firmly. “For ever and forever, farewell, Brutus! If we do meet again, we’ll smile *indeed!* If not, ’tis true this parting *was* well made!”

“Why, then, lead on,” says Brutus. “Oh, that a man might know the end of his day’s business ere it come! But it sufficeth that the day *will* end—and then the end is known.

“*Come, ho! Away!*”

## Chapter Eight At Philippi

The battle is joined. Riding high, standing on stirrups, the Roman cavalry, with swords slashing and pounding hooves trampling, charge through and among the lines of Roman infantry, as they stand fighting each other on foot. Behind shields of hide-covered wood, otherwise protected only by straps of leather, the helmeted warriors all combat valiantly with spear and sword, then viciously with daggers, then wearily, with bloody fists and boots.

Amid the horrors—the sights, sounds and smells of carnage—all seek glory, and few expect to die. Few find glory, but thousands do die.

Brutus suddenly hails an officer. “*Ride, ride, Messala! Ride*, and take these halberds”—troops with the tall axes—“unto the legions on the other side!

“Let them *set on at once*,” cries Brutus, “for I perceive but *cold* demeanor in Octavius’ wing—and a sudden push gives them the *overthrow!*”

“*Ride, ride, Messala!*” he shouts, as a clamor rises nearby: angry shouting and the sharp clanking of steel against steel. “Let them *all* come down!”

Cassius watches angrily as his soldiers run in retreat from Antony’s forces, now advancing to surround. “Look, Titinius, *look!*—the villains *fly!*” he cries, disgusted, tipping up again the staff displaying his colors. “Myself have to mine *own* turned *enemy!*—this ensign of mine here was *turning back!* I slew the coward,” he says, kicking the dead man lying at his feet, “and did take it from him!” He thrusts the pole’s pointed base into the soil.

Titinius reports, alarmed: “Oh, Cassius, Brutus, having some advantage on Octavius, took it *too eagerly!*—he gave the word *too early!*” he wails. “His soldiers *fall to spoil*,”—are despoiling the slain, “whilst *we* by Antony are all *enclosed!*”

Pindarus, running up to Cassius, motions for him to go. “*Fly further off*, my lord, *fly further off!*” the servant urges, gasping for breath. “*Mark Antony is in your tents*, my lord! *Fly*, therefore, noble Cassius, fly far off!”

Cassius fumes. “This hill is *far enough!*” But he points eastward. “Look, *look*, Titinius!—are those my tents where I perceive the *fire?*”

“They are, my lord!”

Cassius spots a distant contingent of cavalry approaching. “Titinius, if thou lovest me, mount thou my horse, and hide thy spurs in him till he have brought thee up to yonder troops, then here again, that I may rest assurèd whether yond troops are friend or enemy!”

Titinius runs to the roan steed. “I will be here again even with a thought!” he cries, and rides away at a gallop.

“Go, Pindarus, get higher on that hill,” Cassius orders his attendant. “*My sight was ever thick! Regard Titinius, and tell me what thou notest around the field!*”

He watches the man hasten up the rise. *This day I breathèd first; time is come round, and where I did begin, there shall I end; my life has run its compass.* “Sirrah, what news?” he calls.

“*Oh, my lord!*”

“What news?”

“Titinius is *enclosèd round about* with horsemen that make to him on the spur!”—are chasing after. “Yet he spurs on! Now they are almost on him. *On, Titinius! . . .* Now some of them *alight*”—dismount. “Oh, *he alights too!*—he’s *taken!*”

“And, *hark!*—they shout for joy. . . .”

Cassius—overruled, surrounded, his chief lieutenant lost—despairs. “Come down,” he tells Pindarus, defeated. “Behold no more.”

*Oh, coward!—that I am, to live so long!—to see my best friend ta’en before my face!*

“Come hither, sirrah,” he says, as Pindarus returns. “In Parthia did I take thee prisoner, and spared thy life; then swore thou that whatsoever I did bid thee do, thou shouldst attempt it.

“Come now, *keep thine oath!* Now be a free man,” he says, unsheathing his weapon, “and with this good sword that ran through Caesar’s bowels, search *this bosom!*”

He raises a palm, barring protest. “Stand not to answer—*here*, take thou the hilts! And, when my face is covered,”—he puts a hand over his eyes, “as ’tis now, guide thou the sword!”

Pindarus is dismayed, but loyal; honoring his pledge, he runs the steel blade into his master.

Cassius staggers down, smiling grimly. “Caesar, thou art revenged,” he groans, “even with the sword that killed thee.” On his knees, he retches, blood gushing from his mouth; he falls forward, dead.

Thinks Pindarus, *So I am free. Yet I would not have been so, durst I have done my will! Oh, Cassius, far from this country Pindarus shall run, where never Roman shall take note of him!*

He hurries away south, toward the seacoast, fishing villages—and liberty.

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Accompanied by the friendly soldiers who hailed him as he headed back—Messala and cavalry troops from Brutus’s army—Titinius rides on to report to Cassius.

“It is but exchange,” Messala tells him, as they dismount, “for *Octavius* is overthrown by noble Brutus’s power just as Cassius’ legions are by *Antony’s!*”

“These tidings will well comfort Cassius!”

“Where did you leave him?”

“All disconsolate, with Pindarus his bondman, on this hill.”

Messala stops. “Is not that he that lies upon the ground?”

Titinius runs ahead. “He lies not like the living! Oh, my heart!”

“Is not this he?” asks Messala, as they reach the body.

“No, this *was* he, Messala; but Cassius is no more!

“O setting sun,” moans Titinius, “as in thy red rays thou dost sink tonight, so in his red blood Cassius’ day is set!—the sun of *Rome* is set! Our day is gone; clouds, dews, and dangers come; our deeds are done!

“Doubt of my success hath done this deed!” he sobs.

Messala shakes his head. “Mistrust of *good* success hath done this deed. O hateful *error*, melancholy’s child, why dost thou show to the ready thoughts of men the things that are not? O error, soon conceivèd, thou never comest unto a happy birth, but kill’st the mother that engendered thee!”

“What?—*Pindarus!*” calls Titinius. “Where art thou, Pindarus?”

“Seek him, Titinius, whilst I go to meet the noble Brutus, to thrust this report into his ears,” says Messala. “I say *thrust* it, for piercing *steel* and darts *envenomed* shall be as welcome to the ears of Brutus as tidings of *this sight!*”

Titinius nods. "Hie you, Messala, and I will seek for Pindarus the while."

As the other officer rides away, Titinius turns the body, grips the fatal sword and pulls it free, then throws it down. He kneels beside his friend, tears flowing.

*Why didst thou send me forth, brave Cassius? Did I not meet thy friends? And did not they put on my brows this wreath of victory, and bid me give it thee? Didst thou not hear their shouts? Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything!*

He lifts off the dead man's helmet, and closes the eyes. He removes the circlet from his own head. *But, hold thee; take this garland on thy brow.* Gently, he places the glossy green leaves. *Thy Brutus bid me give it thee, and I will do his bidding.*

*Brutus, come apace, and see how I regarded Caius Cassius!*

"By your leave, gods—this is a *Roman's* part!" he cries. *Come, Cassius' sword, and find Titinius' heart!* He tugs off his breastplate, positions the wet weapon's hilts on the ground, and sets its point against his chest. He heaves himself forward—and shudders, grasping feebly at the blade as it runs with red.

He falls beside Cassius, eyes open but unseeing.

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As brutal combat continues among Romans, Messala returns, bringing Brutus and four of his men.

Brutus is grief-stricken. "Where?—where, Messala, doth his body lie?"

"*Lo*, yonder; and Titinius mourning it."

"Titinius' face is upward," Brutus sees, as they approach.

"He is slain!" cries Cato—Portia's brother, now serving in her husband's army.

Brutus stands beside the bodies. "Oh, Julius Caesar, thou art mighty *yet!* Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords in our own proper entrails!"

Cato points to the wreath. "Brave Titinius! Look, whether he have not crownèd dead Cassius!"

Brutus holds back tears. "Are yet two Romans living such as these? The last of all the *Romans*, fare thee well! It is impossible that ever Rome should breed *thy* fellows!"

They are disturbed by strident sounds of fighting that is approaching nearby. "Friends, I *owe* more tears to this dead man than you shall *see* me pay." He leans down, and gently straightens the laurel leaves. "I shall find time, Cassius," he whispers, "I shall find time."

Brutus rises. "Come, therefore, and to Thasos send his body. His funeral shall not be in our camp, lest it discompose us.

"Lucilius, come; and come, young Cato—let us to the field! Labeo and Flavius, set our forces on! 'Tis three in the afternoon—and, Romans, yet ere night we shall try Fortune in a second fight!"

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Into desperate battle, Brutus leads his troops forward against Antony's array of ranked centurion. "Yet, *countrymen*, oh *yet* hold up your heads!"

The fiery Cato challenges the others: "What *bastard* doth *not*? Who will go *with me*? I will proclaim my name about the field!—I am the son of *Marcus Cato, ho!*" He dashes ahead to meet the enemy, now hurtling toward them. "A foe to *tyrants*, and my country's *friend!*—I am the son of *Marcus Cato, ho!*"

"And I am *Brutus*—*Marcus Brutus, I!*" He engages a heavy foot soldier, one wielding a bloody sword. "*Brutus!*—my country's *friend!*—know me for *Brutus!*"

With a slash of his blade, Lucilius dispatches a wounded enemy. Then, moving forward, he sees another fallen man, and kneels. "O young and noble *Cato*, art *thou* down? Why, now thou diest as bravely as Titinius!—and mayst be *honoured*, being Cato's son!"

But as Lucilius rises he find himself surrounded by swords' points.

"Yield, or thou *dienst!*" growls a soldier—one of four.

“I only yield *dying!*” cries Lucilius, swinging his own sword. *There is so much that thou wilt kill me straight!* “Kill *Brutus!*—and be honoured in his death!”

The soldiers gape—and let their captive live. “We must not!—a *noble* prisoner!”

“Room, ho!” cries a corporal, “Tell Antony *Brutus is taken!*” He looks around. “I’ll tell the news!—here comes the general!”

“Brutus is ta’*en*, *Brutus* is ta’*en*, my lord!” the soldier tells Antony.

“Where is he?”

Lucilius laughs. “*Safe*, Antony—Brutus is secure enough! I dare assure thee that *no* enemy shall ever take alive the noble *Brutus!*—the gods defend him from so great a shame! When you do find him, alive or dead he will be found like *Brutus*—like *himself!*”

“This is not Brutus, friend,” Antony tells the corporal dryly. “But, I assure you, a prize no less in worth! Keep this man safe; give him all kindness. I had rather have such men my friends than enemies.

“Go on, and see whether Brutus *be* alive or dead.

“And bring us word unto Octavius’ tent how everything is chancèd.”

Night has fallen upon the wide plain near Philippi. A weary voice grates in the near-darkness. “Come, poor remains of friends, rest on this rock,” Brutus tells his companions, as they stumble away from the field of battle.

Clitus looks back to where their last scout was sent. “Statilius showed the torch-light; but, my lord, he came not back. He is or ta’*en* or slain.”

Brutus nods. “Sit thee down, Clitus. *Slaying* is the *word*,” he mutters sourly, “it is the deed in *fashion*.”

“Hark thee, Clitus.” He leans toward the lieutenant and whispers.

“What, *I*, my lord?” asks Clitus. “*No*, not for all the *world!*”

“*Peace*, then!—no words,” Brutus tells him.

Clitus stares. “I’ll rather kill *myself!*”

“Hark thee, Dardanius,” says Brutus, and again he speaks softly.

The officer is stunned. “Shall I *do* such a deed?” Clearly, he will not.

Brutus walks slowly away from the rocks, and stands alone.

Dardanius and Clitus confer, alarmed. “What ill request did Brutus make to thee?”

“To *kill* him, Clitus!” Dardanius nods toward the general. “Look, he meditates.”

“Now is that noble vessel so full of grief that it runs over even at his eyes!”

Brutus looks back, tearfully regarding his exhausted warriors. He motions to a captain. “Come hither, good Volumnius; list to a word....”

“What says my lord?”

“Why, this, Volumnius: the *ghost* of *Caesar* hath appeared to me *two* several times by night—at Sardis once, and, this last night here in Philippi fields.

“I know my hour is come,” he says, drained.

“Not *so*, my lord!” protests his old friend.

“Nay, I am sure it is, Volumnius.” They hear the familiar sounds—the clash and cry of fierce fighting coming nearer. “Thou seest the world, Volumnius, how it goes; our enemies have beaten us unto the pit!”—driven them to the grave. “It is more worthy to leap in ourselves than tarry till they push us.

“Good Volumnius, thou know’st that we two went to school together; even for that, our love of old, I prithee, hold thou my sword’s hilts, whilst I run on it.”

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

The sound of fighting grows louder. Clitus runs to them. “*Fly, fly*, my lord!—there is no tarrying *here!*”

Brutus waves the others away. “*Farewell* to you; and you—and you, Volumnius.”

He smiles at a servant lying on the turf by the rock. “Strato, thou hast been all this while asleep! Farewell to thee, too, Strato.

“Countrymen, my heart doth joy that yet in all my life I found no man but he was *true* to me. I shall have *glory* from this losing day!—more than Octavius and Mark Antony by this vile conquest shall attain unto.

“So fare you well at once; for Brutus’ tongue hath almost ended his life’s history. Night hangs upon mine eyes; my bones, that have laboured but to attain this hour, would rest.”

The clash is almost upon them, and the men run from it, crying, “*Fly, fly, fly!*”

“*Fly*, my lord,” Clitus calls back, “*fly!*”

“Hence,” murmurs Brutus. “I will follow.” The others are gone—except for one, just now waking up.

“I prithee, Strato, stay thou by thy lord. Thou art a fellow of a good respect; *thy* life hath had some smack of *honour* in it,” says Brutus wryly. “Hold then my sword, and turn away thy face while I do run upon it. Wilt thou, Strato?”

The servant nods, tearfully. “Give me your hand first! Fare you well, my lord!” He kneels and positions the blade.

“Farewell, good Strato.” Brutus removes his breastplate, and hurls himself forward; he is pierced through the middle.

“Caesar, now be still,” he gasps. “I killèd *thee* with not *half* so good a will!” He reels back and falls. Soon he is dead.

Strato weeps, unable to rise as the fighting move closer.

A distant horn calls for retreat.

**O**ctavius and Antony, leading the triumvirate’s victorious forces to their encampment, come upon a desolate place where a lone soldier mourns one fallen. “What man is that?” asks Octavius.

Messala, his hands tied before him, answers. “My master’s man. Strato, where is thy master?”

“Free from the bondage *you* are in, Messala!” sobs Strato angrily. “The conquerors can but make a fire of him—for only *Brutus* overcame himself, and no man else hath honour by his death!”

Lucilius, also a prisoner, regards the dead man’s face. “So Brutus *should* be found! I thank thee, Brutus, that thou hast proved Lucilius’ saying true!”

Octavius is magnanimous: “All that servèd Brutus, I will entertain them”—accept their return to the loyal legions; civil war has too long disrupted Rome. “Fellow, wilt thou bestow thy time with *me*?”

Strato looks up, both relieved and defiant. “Aye—if *Messala* will prefer me to you.”

Octavius looks at him. “Do so, good Messala.”

The nobleman asks, “How died my master, Strato?”

“I held the sword, and he did run on it.”

Messala nods, tears in his eyes. “Then, Octavius, take him who did the latest service to my master to follow *thee*.”

Antony stares down at Brutus. “This was the noblest Roman of them all. All the conspirators, save only he, did what they did in envy of great Caesar. He, only in a general, honest thought, and for common good to all, made one of them.

“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!*’”

Octavius signals his officers. “According to his virtue let us use him, with all respect and rites of burial.

“Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie, most like a soldier, ordered honourably.

“So call the field to rest; and let’s away, to part the glories of this day!”