

# Summary of Julius Caesar

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## Act 1 Scene 1

The play opens with the citizens of Rome celebrating Caesar's victory in war. The tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, tell them off for reacting that way and taking a holiday to honour Caesar, telling them that he has not brought back any 'conquests' or spoils and that they are forgetting how much they used to love Pompey, the Roman leader who Caesar has defeated. The tribunes say to them 'And do you now strew flowers in his way / That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?' Flavius suggests he and Marullus tear down the decorations from Caesar's statues, saying Caesar will 'soar above the view of men / And keep us all in servile fearfulness.'

## Act 1 Scene 2

Caesar arrives with his entourage, including his wife Calphurnia and loyal friend Antony. A Soothsayer in the crowd calls out a warning to Caesar, saying 'Beware the ides of March', but Caesar dismisses it. The entourage then leaves to go to a ceremonial race, leaving Brutus, a trusted friend of Caesar's, and Cassius alone. Cassius begins to flatter Brutus, but Brutus is distracted by shouts he can hear coming from the race. He fears Caesar is being crowned king and accidentally voices this thought out loud. At this, Cassius begins to openly criticise Caesar, recalling times when Caesar showed physical weakness. Cassius reminds Brutus of his reputation and his concern for the good of Rome rather than personal triumph.

Caesar and his entourage return after the race and Caesar says to Antony that 'Cassius has a lean and hungry look. / He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous' but Antony assures him that Cassius is 'noble'. After Caesar leaves again, Casca tells Brutus and Cassius that Antony offered Caesar a crown three times at the race but that Caesar refused it. Casca adds that Caesar fell down and 'foamed at the mouth' and Brutus confirms that Caesar has 'the falling-sickness'. He tells Cassius he will give his words thought. Left alone with the audience, Cassius points out how easily Brutus' noble nature can be manipulated.

## Act 1 Scene 3

Cassius meets Casca during a violent storm. Casca sees the storm as a bad omen but Cassius dismisses this and compares it to the political turmoil within Rome. Casca tells Cassius that the senators intend to crown Caesar the next day and Cassius speaks strongly against Caesar saying, 'What trash is Rome, / What rubbish, and what offal when it serves / For the base matter to illuminate / So vile a thing as Caesar!' He says that he has the support of several 'noblest-minded Romans' to undertake 'an enterprise / Of honorable-dangerous consequence' and to stop Caesar.

They are then joined by one of these Romans, Cinna. Cassius gives him letters containing material against Caesar to throw into Brutus' house before they visit him. Casca comments that Brutus' involvement will make their 'offence' appear as 'virtue' and 'worthiness' as people love and respect him and believe Brutus is a good man.

## Act 2 Scene 1

Brutus is in his orchard unable to sleep. In a soliloquy, he reveals he can see no way of stopping Caesar except 'by his death'. He reads a letter that Cassius and Cinna have planted. His servant tells him that tomorrow is 15 March (the Ides of March) and that several men have arrived with 'half their faces buried in their cloaks'. Brutus lets the men, or conspirators, in. One of them is Cassius who introduces the rest. Brutus rejects Cassius' wish to 'swear' their 'resolution'. He believes an 'oath' is unnecessary if they are acting as 'countrymen' and 'Romans'. Cassius argues that Antony should also be killed but Brutus says this will make them seem 'too bloody'. They arrange to accompany Caesar to the Capitol the next day and the conspirators leave.

Portia, Brutus' wife, enters. She is worried about him, saying 'you have some sick offense within your mind'. Portia begs him to tell her his 'cause of grief'. Brutus assures her that she is his 'true and honourable wife' and that he will explain later.

## Act 2 Scene 2

The storm rages at Caesar's house. Like Brutus, Caesar has had a troubled night. His wife, Calphurnia, has dreamt about his murder three times. Other omens have been noted in the streets of Rome and Calphurnia begs Caesar not to go to the Capitol as she is afraid of what the signs mean. Caesar maintains he is stronger than fate saying 'Danger knows full well / That Caesar is more dangerous than he.' However, he orders the priests to make a sacrifice to determine his success that day and, out of love for Calphurnia, he agrees to stay at home. Decius, one of the conspirators, arrives to fetch Caesar. Caesar says he's not going because Calphurnia 'saw my statue, / Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts, / Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans / Came smiling and did bathe their hands in it.' Decius informs Caesar there are plans to crown him at the senate and if he does not go because of his wife, he will seem cowardly.

This is enough for Caesar to change his mind. The conspirators enter to escort him to the Capitol.

## Act 2 Scene 3

Artemidorus reads the petition he plans to give to Caesar, warning him against the conspirators.

## Act 2 Scene 4

Portia has been told by Brutus about the plot. She struggles between her fears for her husband and her promise to Brutus to 'keep counsel' and not speak out. The Soothsayer enters on his way to warn Caesar 'to befriend himself' and Portia betrays her nerves as she questions him.

## **Act 3 Scene 1**

Caesar approaches the Capitol. He observes that the 'Ides of March have come' but the Soothsayer points out they are not over yet. Caesar refuses to read Artemidorus' warning. Cassius has a moment of panic and fears the plot has been discovered but Brutus reassures him.

The conspirators surround Caesar, pretending to kneel in appeal, and Caesar is stabbed to death by all the conspirators. Brutus is the last to strike, a betrayal of friendship which shocks Caesar. The conspirators claim publicly that 'Tyranny is dead!' and Brutus invites them to 'bathe' their hands in Caesar's blood, echoing the image in Calphurnia's dream.

Antony, who has fled, returns to the scene. After being promised safety, he shakes hands with the murderers. Brutus tells him he will explain his motives at Caesar's funeral where he will speak to the crowd. Antony asks to speak also. Cassius advises against this but Brutus allows it, as long as Brutus speaks first. When left alone with Caesar's body, Antony weeps and speaks of revenge. We hear that Caesar's great-nephew Octavius is coming to Rome.

## **Act 3 Scene 2**

At Caesar's funeral, the crowd demand an explanation from the murderers. Brutus speaks first. He argues with logic and reason, saying that he loved Rome more than Caesar and asking the crowd if they would rather be free with Caesar dead or 'slaves' with him alive. The crowd are on his side, saying 'Caesar's better parts / Shall be crowned in Brutus.'

Then Antony enters with Caesar's body. He speaks with emotion, reminding the crowd of Caesar's qualities and deliberately repeating that Brutus is 'an honourable man'. Antony shows them the wounds on Caesar's body, where each knife stabbed it before revealing Caesar's will in which he has left the people of Rome money and land. Antony not only wins the crowd but turns them into an angry mob intent on revenge: 'They were traitors: honourable men?' The conspirators flee from the mob. Caesar's body is taken to be burnt 'in the holy place'. A servant announces that Octavius and Lepidus have arrived in Rome.

## **Act 3 Scene 3**

The angry mob of citizens chase and catch Cinna the poet, mistaking him for Cinna the conspirator and calling out 'Tear him to pieces! He's a conspirator!'

Cinna insists that he is a poet, not a conspirator but the mob don't care. They kill Cinna with their bare hands.

## **Act 4 Scene 1**

Octavius, Lepidus and Antony, the three men who will form the new triumvirate of Rome, meet in Antony's house to discuss which conspirators are to die. Antony sends Lepidus to fetch Caesar's will. Alone with Octavius, Antony belittles Lepidus: 'He must be taught and trained and

bid go forth— /A barren-spirited fellow'. Octavius disagrees, saying he is 'a tried and salient soldier'. The subject changes to Brutus and Cassius who are preparing to fight. Octavius and Antony prepare to do the same.

## **Act 4 Scene 2**

Brutus waits for Cassius in the rebel camp. Lucilius comments that Cassius' is not as open and friendly as he once was. Brutus agrees that Cassius is 'cooling' in his friendship. Cassius arrives and directly accuses Brutus of wronging him. To hide the row from their men, Brutus invites him into his tent. The argument escalates and political accusations become personal insults until Cassius offers Brutus his dagger to kill him with. Brutus backs down and they embrace as friends again. Brutus then reveals why he is so angry. Portia, his wife, is dead. She has killed herself: 'Impatient of my absence, / And grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony / Have made themselves so strong'. Not wanting to talk more of Portia, Brutus changes the subject to battle plans. Cassius suggests they wait for Antony and Octavius' armies to reach them so they'll be tired when they fight. Brutus disagrees, wanting to meet them in Philippi. Cassius is overruled. When Brutus is left alone, he is visited by Caesar's ghost: 'Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil, / That mak'st my blood cold and my hair to stare?' Claiming to be Brutus' evil spirit, the ghost says they will meet again at Philippi. Brutus wakes his men but they all deny crying out or seeing anything. Brutus sends word to Cassius to be ready to march ahead of him next morning.

## **Act 5 Scene 1**

At Philippi, Octavius and Antony briefly disagree over tactics. Brutus and Cassius enter with their armies and the two sets of leaders exchange insults: 'when your vile daggers / Hacked one another in the sides of Caesar. / You showed your teeth like apes and fawned like hounds' (Antony). Octavius and Antony lead their armies away. Away from Brutus, Cassius reveals his concern over certain omens he saw on their march, despite never believing in them before. Brutus returns and he and Cassius discuss what will happen if they lose. Brutus vows he will not be taken captive to Rome. The two friends bid farewell to each other and go into battle: 'Forever and forever farewell, Cassius. / If we do meet again, why we shall smile; / If not, why then this parting was well made.'

## **Act 5 Scene 2**

Brutus sends a message to Cassius that he can see a possible weakness in Octavius' army and is going to attack.

## **Act 5 Scene 3**

Cassius watches his troops flee Antony's army. Cassius hears that Antony has entered his camp. He notes that it is his birthday, the day he is also likely to die: 'where I did begin, there shall I end'. Mistaking a victory for Titinius for defeat, Cassius hands his sword to his servant, Pindarus, and asks him to kill him: 'with this good sword, / That ran through Caesar's bowels, search this bosom.' Pindarus kills Cassius and flees. Titinius lays the victory wreath sent by Brutus on his body and kills himself with Cassius' sword. Brutus enters and, seeing the bodies, says that the spirit of Caesar 'walks abroad'. He promises Cassius that he will 'find time' to mourn and speaks fondly of his friend: 'The last of all the Romans, fare thee well. / It is impossible that ever Rome / Should breed thy fellow.'

### **Act 5 Scene 4**

Brutus rallies his men and exits, fighting. Cato is killed. Lucilius pretends to be Brutus and is captured. Antony arrives and praises Lucilius' bravery, telling his men to treat him well: 'I had rather have / Such men my friends than enemies.' (5:4)

### **Act 5 Scene 5**

Recognising that he is defeated, Brutus asks his men to kill him but they refuse. He speaks of his visions of Caesar's ghost, saying that his own 'hour is come'. Alarms sound and his men urge Brutus to flee but he bids them farewell: 'Night hangs upon mine eyes; my bones would rest, / That have but labored to attain this hour.' Brutus runs onto his own sword and dies as Antony and Octavius arrive. Antony praises Brutus' honour: 'All the conspirators save only he / Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.' Octavius agrees and says Brutus will be buried with a soldier's honours.

Source :

[www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare\\_learning\\_zone/Julius-caesar/scene-by-scene](http://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare_learning_zone/Julius-caesar/scene-by-scene) .

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