

Julius Caesar Summary and Analysis of Act 1

Act One, Scene One

Two Roman tribunes, Flavius and Murellus, see the common people parading in the streets instead of working in their shops. They demand to know why the men are not working. A cobbler informs them that the people are celebrating Caesar's victory. Murellus is infuriated by this information, and calls the workers, "you blocks, you stones" (1.1.34). He then tells them that Caesar has not defeated an enemy, but rather that Caesar has killed the sons of Pompey the Great. Pompey previously ruled Rome along with Caesar until their alliance fell apart, at which point they went to battle over the right to rule.

Flavius's speech then causes the commoners to be ashamed of celebrating Caesar's victory. They depart in a more sober mood. Flavius and Murellus then prepare to remove the imperial crowns placed on all the statues of Caesar and next decide to drive the commoners back into their houses in an effort to prevent Rome from celebrating Caesar's victory.

Act One, Scene Two

Julius Caesar triumphantly returns to Rome on the festival of Lupercalia, celebrated on February 15. He is followed by Antony and Brutus, their wives, and many followers. Caesar tells Antony to strike his wife Calpurnia during the festival (during which two men, including Antony, run through the street of Rome and hit those they meet with goatskin thongs) to rid her of her sterility. Antony responds with, "When Caesar says 'Do this', it is performed" (1.2.12).

A soothsayer approaches Caesar and calls out for attention. Caesar allows him to speak, and the man tells Caesar, "Beware the ides of March" (1.2.25). Caesar ignores this warning and calls the man a dreamer. Caesar then leaves with his assembled men.

Brutus and Cassius remain on the stage. Cassius tells Brutus that he has noticed Brutus acting more serious lately. Brutus tells him that he is "with himself at war" (1.2.48) and that Cassius should not worry about it. After a shout and cheering from offstage, Brutus remarks he is afraid the people will crown Caesar king. Cassius is thrilled to hear this, and tells Brutus that they were both born as free

men the same way Caesar was. He tells Brutus a story in which he and Caesar were holding a swimming contest across the Tiber river, and Caesar started to drown. Cassius claims that he rescued Caesar and carried him to the shore. He then complains that Caesar has become so powerful that even though he once saved Caesar's life, he must now bow before him.

Cassius then tells Brutus that "Brutus" is just as good a name as "Caesar", and that both names could just as easily rule Rome. He invokes the image of Brutus' ancestor who founded the Roman Republic and expelled the former kings. Brutus, afraid that Caesar will become a king, struggles to decide whether to join Cassius in taking action against Caesar, but ultimately decides against it.

Caesar returns, accompanied by his followers. He turns to Antony and remarks, "Let me have men about me that are fat, / Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights. / Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look. / He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous" (1.2.193-196). Antony dismisses Caesar's concern, but Caesar is not convinced that Cassius is completely trustworthy. He tells Antony to come with him and let him know if there is anything to be worried about.

Casca remains onstage with Brutus and Cassius and tells them that the three shouts they heard were because Antony offered Caesar the crown three times, but he turned it down each time. Casca then says that Caesar swooned and fell down with his mouth foaming at the lips. (Caesar was considered to be epileptic, called the "falling sickness".) When Caesar awoke, he begged to be forgiven for his infirmity. Casca adds that the people forgave Caesar and worshipped him even more for turning away the crown. He also explains that Murellus and Flavius, the public tribunes, were removed from office for pulling the decorations off of Caesar's statues. Cassius, hoping to lure him into the conspiracy against Caesar, invites Casca to dinner the next night. Brutus also takes his leave, but agrees to meet with Cassius the next night as well. In a soliloquy, Cassius informs the audience that he will fake several handwritten notes and throw them into Brutus' room in an attempt to make Brutus think the common people want him to take action against Caesar.

Act One, Scene Three

Casca meets with Cicero, one of the great Roman orators, and tells him he has seen many strange things on the streets of Rome that night including a slave with a burning yet uninjured left hand, a lion loose in the streets, and an owl hooting in the daytime. Cicero tells him men interpret things in their own way, and takes his leave.

Cassius then arrives and tells Casca that there is a reason behind all of the strange events taking place in Rome. Casca asks him, "'Tis Caesar that you mean, is it not, Cassius?" (1.3.78). Casca tells him that the senators are planning to make Caesar a king the next morning. At this news, Cassius draws his dagger and threatens to die before ever allowing Caesar to achieve so much power. Casca shakes hands with Cassius and they agree to work together to prevent Caesar from seizing power.

Cinna, a co-conspirator, arrives and takes a piece of paper from Cassius. Together they then leave to go throw Cassius' handwritten notes through Brutus' window. Cassius indicates that he is quite sure Brutus will join them within the next day.

Act 2

Act Two, Scene One

Brutus is in his garden and has decided that Caesar must be killed. His reasons for reaching this conclusion are that Caesar is abusing his power and that has ascended far too quickly. Lucius, Brutus' servant, brings him a letter (planted by Cassius) he has found in Brutus' private room. The first line of the letter reads, "Brutus, thou sleep'st. Awake, and see thyself" (2.1.46). Brutus interprets the letter as if it were a request from all of Rome to slay Caesar and restore the republic.

Brutus then asks Lucius what day it is, and he informs his master that it is the ides of March, or March 15th. A knock sounds on the door and Lucius leaves to answer it. Alone, Brutus states he has not slept since Cassius first incited him against Caesar.

Cassius, Casca, Decius, Cinna, Metellus and Trebonius, all of them conspirators against Caesar, have arrived at Brutus' home. Brutus invites them in and Cassius takes him aside. Soon Brutus rejoins the group of men and shakes all their hands, agreeing to join them in their murderous quest. The men then discuss whether they should invite Cicero, the great orator, to join their plot, but Brutus convinces them against it. Cassius states Mark Antony should be killed along with Caesar, but again Brutus is against the plan, fearing they will be perceived as too bloody. The group plans to commit Caesar's murder at the Senate at eight o'clock that morning (it is only three in the morning at this point). However, they are worried that Caesar will not attend the Senate because he has become increasingly superstitious over the past few months. Decius tells the group that he knows how to flatter Caesar, and assures them he will convince Caesar to go to the Senate. Cassius and his followers then depart, leaving Brutus alone.

Brutus' wife Portia arrives and tells him he has left her bed and given her unkind looks. She begs him to tell her why he is so upset. He lies, telling her he is sick, to which she responds that it appears to be a sickness of the mind, not of the body. A strong woman of brave lineage, she again begs him to tell her what is wrong, asking him, "Think you I am no stronger than my sex, / Being so fathered and so husbanded?" (2.1.295-6). She then stabs herself in the thigh as proof of her courage. Brutus finally agrees to tell her what is concerning him, but sends her away before he is able to explain, because there is another knock on the door. Ligarius enters, pretending to be sick. He tells Brutus that he could be cured if only Brutus had a noble undertaking in mind. Brutus tells him that he does, and Ligarius pledges to follow Brutus on whatever task he leads him to.

Act Two, Scene Two

Caesar, still in his nightgown, is terrified by a dream his wife Calpurnia has had in which she cried out, "Help, ho! They murder Caesar!" He orders a servant to go to the priests and have them sacrifice an animal in order to read the entrails for predictions of the future. Calpurnia arrives and tells him that he dare not leave the house that day. Caesar acts brave and tells her that he fears nothing, and that he will die when it is necessary for him to die. The servant returns and tells him that the sacrificed animal did not have a heart, a very bad omen. Caesar insists on misinterpreting the omens, but Calpurnia begs him to blame her for his absence from the Senate, to which he finally agrees.

However, Decius soon arrives to fetch Caesar to the Senate House. Caesar tells him to inform the Senate that he will not come this day. Decius claims that he will be mocked if he cannot provide a good reason for Caesar's absence. Caesar then tells Decius about Calpurnia's dream, to which Decius replies that the dream was misinterpreted. The fountains of blood pouring from Caesar's body that Calpurnia saw reflected the new life Caesar is giving to Rome, not his death. Decius overwhelms Caesar's resistance by asking him if the Senate should dissolve until a better time when Calpurnia has more favorable dreams. Caesar tells Calpurnia that he was acting foolishly, and agrees to go to the Senate. Cassius and the other conspirators then arrive to accompany him to the Senate. Antony also appears and joins the group of men who then escort Caesar out of his house.

Act Two, Scene Three

Artemidorus has written Caesar a letter in which he names all of the conspirators against Caesar. He stands on a street near the Capitol and waits for Caesar to pass by on his way to the Senate so that he can hand Caesar the note.

Act Two, Scene Four

Portia orders the servant Lucius to go to the Senate House. He asks her what he should do there, but she is so distracted that she is unable to tell him the purpose. She remarks to the audience, "I have a man's mind, but a woman's might. / How hard it is for women to keep counsel!" (2.4.7-8). She is alluding to the fact that she knows what Brutus is planning to do to Caesar, and is unwilling to keep it a secret. The soothsayer who previously warned Caesar sees her and speaks with her, informing Portia that he will try to once again warn Caesar about his fate.