## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene/Act</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act One Scene One</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act One Scene Two</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act One Scene Three</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Two Scene One</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Two Scene Two</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Two Scene Three</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Two Scene Four</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Three Scene One</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Three Scene Two</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Three Scene Three</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Four Scene One</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Four Scene Two</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Four Scene Three</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Five Scene One</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Five Scene Two</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Five Scene Three</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Five Scene Four</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Five Scene Five</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Warren King has been teaching English literature for thirty-five years in English comprehensive and public schools.

During the 1980's he was seconded to the national Shakespeare and Schools project to help develop methods of teaching Shakespeare in the classroom to bring the plays to life for pupils of all ages. After the project ended he continued that work as an adviser in to a London Education Authority, where he worked with teachers in creating Shakespeare projects in schools and helping English teachers, both primary and secondary, to make Shakespeare lively, comprehensible and enjoyable for their pupils.

He has created and conducted workshops in Shakespeare for both teachers and students, visiting schools around the UK and continental Europe.

As well as producing several books about the teaching of Shakespeare and writing articles for educational journals, Warren regularly addresses groups of teachers, showing them ways of developing GCSE, Key Stage 3 and A Level Shakespeare resources.

These modern English Shakespeare novelizations stem from his realisation that although so much good work has been done on textual aspects and the broad grasp of plot, little has been done about resources that would give students a complete grasp of the complexity of a whole Shakespeare text in one short reading.
Modern English Julius Caesar
Flavius and Marullus, the two tribunes on duty, were patrolling the centre of Rome on that sunny morning. Charged with keeping law and order, they noticed a small crowd beginning to form. Although today was the feast of Lupercal, the annual festival of purification and fertility in honour of the god, Lupercus, it was nevertheless a normal working day. The law stated that all workers should be at work, and if they had to be in the streets of the city, they were obliged to wear the clothes of their trade. These people were dressed in their best holiday outfits. The tribunes approached them and Flavius attempted to scatter them.

‘Away!’ he roared. ‘Go home, you idle creatures, go to your homes! Is this a holiday? Don’t you know that manual workers aren’t allowed to walk about on a working day unless they’re wearing the clothes of their trade?’ He grasped the shoulder of one. ‘You! Speak! What’s your trade?’

‘Why sir,’ the man replied, ‘I’m a carpenter.’

Marullus looked him up and down. ‘Where are your leather apron and your rule? What are you doing in your best clothes?’ He turned to the man standing beside the carpenter. ‘You, sir. What’s your trade?’

The second man grinned. ‘To tell you the truth, sir,’ he said. ‘Compared with a more skilled workman, I’m something of a cobbler.’

‘But what trade are you in?’ said Marullus. ‘Give me a straight answer.’

The man grinned more widely. ‘It’s a trade, sir, that I hope I may follow with a safe conscience, which is that I’m a mender of soles.’

Flavius advanced on him threateningly. ‘What trade, knave? You worthless knave, what trade?’

‘No, I beg of you,’ the man said. ‘Don’t be off with me, but if you insist on that I can mend you.’

Marullus was getting angrier by the second. ‘What do you mean by that? Mend me, you cheery fellow?’

‘Why sir,’ the man said. ‘Cobble you.’

The crowd laughed.

‘You’re a cobbler, are you?’ said Marullus.

‘Honestly,’ the man said, ‘all that I make my living out of is with the awl. I have nothing to do with tradesmen, just as I have nothing to do with women, but with all. I am, in fact, a surgeon to old shoes: when they are in great danger I recover them. As good men as have ever worn shoes have walked on my handiwork.’

‘But why aren’t you in your shop today?’ said Flavius. ‘Why are you leading these men around the streets?’

‘To tell you the truth,’ the cobbler said, ‘to wear out their shoes, to get more work.’ When the laughter had subsided he said: ‘But seriously, we’re making a holiday to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph.’

Marullus nodded at Flavius. It was what they had thought. ‘Why rejoice?’ he said. ‘What captured rulers has he brought to Rome, to adorn his chariot wheels with their chains?’ He swung round to the gathering crowd. ‘You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things! You have no hearts, you cruel men of Rome. Have you forgotten Pompey? How many times have you climbed up on walls and battlements, to towers and windows, yes, even to chimney-tops, your babies in your arms, and sat there the whole day, waiting patiently, to see great Pompey pass through the streets?
of Rome? And when you even got a glimpse of his chariot, haven’t you made a universal shout, so that the Tiber resounded to its depths with it? And are you now putting your best clothes on? And are you declaring a holiday? And are you strewing flowers in the path of he who comes in triumph over Pompey’s blood?’ Go! Hurry to your homes, go down on your knees and pray to the gods to prevent the plague that will punish this ingratitude.’

Flavius gestured to them to go. ‘Go, go, good countrymen, and for this fault, get all the poor men of your kind together and take them to the banks of the Tiber and weep your tears into the water until the lowest levels rise up to the highest shores.

The crowd began to disperse, going in different directions towards their homes. The tribunes watched until they had all gone.

‘See how even the lowest orders are moved,’ said Flavius. ‘They vanish, tongue-tied, in their guiltiness. You go down that street towards the Capitol, and I’ll take this one. Pull down any decorations that you see on the statues.’

‘Can we do that?’ said Marullus. ‘You know that it’s the feast of Lupercal.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ said Flavius. Don’t leave any statues with Ceasar’s trophies hung on them. I’ll go round and drive the workers from the streets. You do that too, wherever you see a crowd gathering. If we stop this now we can minimise Caesar’s effect. Otherwise he’ll rise up high above us and keep us in a state of servile terror.’

They went off to do it.
Act One Scene Two

As the two tribunes approached the forum they found that the crowd had become impossible to disperse. All they could do was join them and watch as some of Rome’s most famous and powerful people swept into the square. At the centre of them was Julius Caesar himself and his wife Calphurnia. Caesar’s friend, Mark Antony, was at his side, stripped down like an athlete. Some of the other, almost equally famous people, surrounded them. Brutus and his wife Portia were among them. Cassius was there, and Casca and Decius too.

Caesar was tall and stiff. He stopped and turned majestically to his wife.
‘Calphurnia,’ he said.
Casca gestured to the crowd. ‘Quiet, there,’ he shouted. ‘Caesar is speaking.’
‘Calphurnia,’ Caesar said again.
‘Here my lord,’ she said and moved closer to him.
‘Stand directly in Antonius’ way as he runs in the race.’ He turned his head stiffly. ‘Antonius.’
Antony smiled. ‘Caesar?’ he said. ‘My lord?’
‘Don’t forget in your haste, Antonius, to touch Calphurnia as you run past her. Tradition tells us that barren women who are touched by a runner in this holy race become fertile.’
‘I’ll remember,’ said Antony. ‘When Caesar says do something it’s done.’
Caesar raised his arm. ‘Begin,’ he said, ‘and don’t leave anything out of the ceremony.’
The band began to play and they all started walking. An old man with a long beard called out from the crowd. ‘Caesar!’
Caesar stopped and turned to look at the faces around him. ‘Ha,’ he said.
‘Who called me?’
Casca shouted at the crowd again. ‘All be quiet. Again, quiet!’ The band stopped playing and the noise subsided.
‘Who is it that called me from the crowd?’ said Caesar. ‘I heard a high voice, higher than all the music, cry out ‘Caesar’. Speak. Caesar is turned to hear.’
The old man took a step forward. ‘Beware the ides of March,’ he said in his high-pitched voice.
Caesar took in the man’s scruffy appearance and turned up his nose. ‘Who’s that?’ he said.
Brutus was at Caesar’s side now. ‘It’s a fortune-teller, a soothsayer, telling you to beware the ides of March.’
‘Bring him here,’ said Caesar. ‘Let me look at his face.’
Cassius gripped the man’s arm. ‘Come on, old man, come out of the crowd and face Caesar.’ He pulled the man, who shuffled out and stood before Caesar.
Caesar looked down at him. ‘What did you say to me? Say it again.’
The old man looked up at Caesar’s face. ‘Beware the ides of March,’ he said. Caesar looked thoughtful for a moment then shrugged. ‘He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Move on.’
The band started up again and they walked on, towards the street that led to the stadium.
Two of the senators, Brutus and Cassius, hung back.
‘Aren’t you going to watch the race?’ said Cassius.
’No,’ said Brutus.
’Oh please do,’ said Cassius.
’I’m not sporty,’ said Brutus. ’I’m not like Antony. I don’t have that interest. But don’t let me stop you, Cassius. I’ll leave you to it.’
Cassius made no move to go. They stood for a moment then Cassius spoke.
’Brutus, I’ve been watching you lately. You’ve changed towards me. I don’t see that friendliness in your eyes that I used to. You’ve become too remote from this close friend of yours.’
Brutus frowned. ’You’re mistaken, Cassius,’ he said. ’If I have veiled my look it’s because I’m preoccupied. I’ve been troubled lately with some thoughts that concern only myself. Maybe that’s affecting my behaviour. But I hope my good friends, among which you’re one, won’t be upset, nor put any construction on it other than that I’m at war with myself and that perhaps makes me seem as though I don’t value them.’
’Then Brutus, I’ve mistaken it. And for that reason I’ve not shared some concerns that I have. Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?’
Brutus laughed. ’Of course not, Cassius; for the eye can’t see itself except by reflection off something else.’
’That’s true,’ said Cassius. And it’s a great pity that you don’t have the kind of mirrors that could make you see your hidden merit. I have heard that some of the highest regarded men in Rome, apart from the immortal Caesar, speaking of Brutus, and groaning under the burden of our time, have wished that you could see better.’
Brutus said nothing for a moment, then: ’What dangers are you trying to lead me into, Cassius, that you want me to find something in myself that’s not in me?’
’Alright, then, good Brutus,’ said Cassius, ’be prepared to listen. And since you know that you can’t see yourself without some reflection, I will be your mirror and reveal to you something about yourself that you don’t know. And don’t be suspicious of me, gentle Brutus. If I were a buffoon or told everyone that he was my friend, or if you think I fawn over people, befriend them and then tell lies about them, or if you think that I throw myself around and claim friendship with anyone and everyone when I’m drinking, then think of me as dangerous.’
There was a sudden trumpet flourish and cheering coming from the stadium.
’What does that shouting mean?’ said Brutus. ’I really fear that the people are choosing Caesar as their king.’
’Yes, do you fear it?’ said Cassius sharply. ’Then I must conclude that you don’t want that.’
’I don’t, Cassius, although I love him well. But why are you keeping me here for such a long time? What is it that you want to tell me? If it’s anything beneficial to the general welfare, whatever it is, good news or bad, I’ll look on either impartially. Let the gods prosper me in that I love honour more than I fear death.’
’I know that about you, Brutus,’ said Cassius. ’Just as well as I know your outward appearance. Well, honour is the subject of my story. I can’t tell what you and other men think about this life, but as for myself I’d rather not exist than live in awe of someone no greater than I am. I was born as free as Caesar and so were you. We have both eaten as well as he has and we can both endure the winter’s cold as well as he can. Once, on a raw and gusty day, when the whipped up Tiber was beating on her banks, Caesar said to me: “Cassius, do you dare to jump into this angry flood with me and swim to that point over there?” Immediately, fully dressed, I plunged in and beckoned him to follow; so indeed he did. The torrent roared and we fought against it with youthful muscles, throwing the water aside, breasting it in rivalry. But
before we could arrive at the proposed point Caesar cried out, “Help me Cassius or I’ll drown”. I, like our great ancestor, Aeneas, who carried the old Anchises from the flames of Troy on his shoulders, carried the exhausted Caesar from the Tiber.

Cassius paused. He was almost overwhelmed by emotion. Then he spun round and he faced Brutus squarely. ‘And this man!’ he said bitterly, ‘has now become a god. And Cassius is a wretched creature and has to bend and scrape if Caesar just nods carelessly at him. He had a fever when he was in Spain and when it was at its worst I saw how he shook. It’s true: this god did shake. His coward’s lips lost their colour, and that same eye whose glance awes the world lost its lustre. I heard him groan. Yes, that tongue of his, that told the Romans to take notice of him and record his speeches, “Alas,” that tongue cried, “Give me something to drink Titinius,” like a sick girl. ‘Ye gods! It amazes me that a man of such a feeble disposition should outdo all the majestic Roman world and take all the honour for himself.’

There was another cheer from the stadium and more fanfares

Brutus shook his head. ‘More cheering? I really do believe that this applause is for some new honours that are being heaped on Caesar.’

‘You see?’ said Cassius. ‘He straddles the world like a Colossus, and we mere men walk under his huge legs and peep about to find dishonourable graves for ourselves.’

The two senators stood for a moment, each deep in his thoughts. Then Cassius spoke again. ‘Men can ultimately be masters of their own fates,’ he said. ‘The fault, dear Brutus, is not written in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings. Brutus and Caesar. What is there in the name ‘Caesar’? Why should that name be spoken more than yours? Write them down together. Yours sounds just as good. Speak them, it suits the mouth just as well. Weigh them: it is just as heavy. Conjure with them. ‘Brutus’ will raise a ghost just as soon as ‘Caesar’. Now, in the name of all the gods put together, what food does our Caesar eat that he has become so great?’ He turned and walked away then raised his face up to the heavens. ‘This age, you are shamed,’ he said. ‘Rome, you have lost the breed of noble blood. When did any age go by since the great flood but that it was framed with more than one man? When could one say of Rome before now, that her wide streets contained only one man? Is this really Rome, and with enough room for us all, when there is only one man in it? Oh, we have both heard our fathers say that there was once a Brutus who would have put up with the absolute devil to keep Rome a republic.’

Brutus chose his words carefully and spoke at a measured pace. ‘That you love me I have no doubts. I think I understand what you are trying to work up to. What my thinking about this is, and all these matters about the present situation, I’ll tell you about at another time. For the time being, and I ask you to respect this, I don’t want to hear any more. I’ll consider what you’ve said. Anything else you want to say I will listen to with patience and find a time more suitable to listen and respond to such serious things. Until then, my noble friend, chew on this. Brutus would rather be a villager than think of himself as a son of Rome under the hard conditions that we are likely to see.’

Cassius’ eyes shone. ‘I am glad that my feeble words have produced this much passion from Brutus.’

‘The games are over and Caesar is coming back,’ said Brutus.

‘As they pass us, grab hold of Casca,’ said Cassius. ‘And in his sour way he will tell you anything important that may have happened.’
The dignitaries arrived at the forum.

‘I’ll do that,’ said Brutus. ‘But look at that, Cassius. Caesar looks angry, and all
the others look like a frightened lot. Calpurnia is pale and Cicero looks shifty, like we
have seen him in the Capitol when he has been crossed by some senators.’

‘Casca will tell us what it’s about,’ said Cassius.

Caesar saw the two and stopped. ‘Antonius’, he said.

‘Caesar?’

Caesar began walking again and as he went he talked to his friend. ‘Let me
have men around me who are fat,’ he said. ‘That Cassius over there has a lean and
hungry look. He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.’

‘Don’t be afraid of him, Caesar,’ said Antony. ‘He’s not dangerous. He’s a
noble Roman and well disposed towards you.’

Caesar snorted. ‘I wish he were fatter. But I don’t fear him. Yet if a Caesar
could experience fear I do not know any man I would avoid more than that skinny
Cassius. He reads a lot, he’s very observant and he looks right into the hearts of
men. He doesn’t like plays, as you do, Antony. He doesn’t listen to music; he seldom
smiles, and when he does it is as though he’s mocking himself, scorning the idea that
he could be moved to smile at anything. Such men as he is can never be at ease
when they see someone greater than themselves, and therefore they are dangerous.’

Caesar stopped himself then changed tack. ‘I’m only telling you what there is
to be feared, not what I fear. For I am always Caesar. Come on my right side
because this ear is deaf, and tell me what you think of him.’

Cassius and Brutus waited for their fellow senator, Casca, to pass them and
when he did Brutus tugged at his cloak. Casca stopped. ‘You pulled at my cloak. Did
you want to talk to me?’

Brutus nodded. ‘Yes Casca. Tell us what happened today that’s made Caesar
look so sad.’

‘You were there, weren’t you?’ said Casca.

‘I wouldn’t have asked you if I had been there.’

‘Why, he was offered a crown, and being offered it, he pushed it aside with the
back of his hand, like this.’ Casca demonstrated with a sweep of his arm. ‘And then
the people started shouting.’

‘What was the second noise for?’

‘Why, for that too.’

‘They shouted three times,’ said Cassius. ‘What was the last cry for?’

‘Why, for that too.’

‘Was the crown offered to him three times?’ said Brutus.

‘Yes, indeed, it was,’ said Casca. ‘And he put it aside three times, each time
less emphatically than the last; and at every pushing aside my honest neighbours
shouted.’

‘Who offered him the crown?’ said Cassius.

‘Why, Antony.’

‘Tell us exactly what happened,’ said Brutus.

‘I’ll be hanged if I can tell you what happened,’ said Casca. ‘It was mere
foolery; I took no notice of it. I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown, and yet it wasn’t
really a crown, it was one of those coronets; and as I said, he put it aside once: but
for all that, to my mind he would have liked it. Then he offered it to him again, then he
put it aside again, but to my mind he was very reluctant to keep his hands off it. And
then he offered it the third time; he put it aside the third time, and still, as he refused
it, the rabble were hooting and clapping their hands and throwing up their sweaty
night-caps; and they gave out such a wave of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown, that it almost choked Caesar; because he fainted and fell down at it. And for my own part, I dared not laugh, for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air.'

‘But wait,’ said Cassius. ‘What was that? Did Caesar faint?’
‘He fell down in the market-place and foamed at the mouth and was speechless.’
‘I think he has epilepsy,’ said Brutus.
‘No,’ said Cassius. ‘Caesar hasn’t got it but you and I, and honest Casca, we’ve all got epilepsy.’
‘I don’t know what you mean by that,’ said Casca, ‘but I’m sure Caesar fell down. If the rag-tag people didn’t clap him and hiss him according to how he pleased and displeased them, just as they do to the actors in the theatre, I am no true man.’
‘What did he say when he came to himself?’ said Brutus.
‘I swear, before he fell down, when he saw that the common herd was glad he had refused the crown, he pulled open his doublet and offered them his throat to cut. If I had been a workman I wouldn’t have believed a word of it, I’d sooner go to hell among the sinners. And so he fell. When he came to himself again he said if he had said or done anything amiss he hoped they would realise it was his infirmity. Three or four young women standing near me shouted, ‘Alas, good soul’, and forgave him with all their hearts. But we don’t have to take any notice of them; if Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would have done no less.’
‘And after that he left sadly like that?’ said Brutus.
‘Yes.’
‘Did Cicero say anything?’
‘Yes, he spoke Greek.’
‘About what?’ said Cassius.
Casca laughed. ‘No, if I told you that I couldn’t ever look you in the face again. But those who understood him smiled at one another and shook their heads, but for my own part, it was Greek to me. And I’ve got more news. Marullus and Flavius have been condemned to death for pulling decorations off Caesar’s statues.’ He turned to go. ‘Goodbye. There was even more foolery if I could remember it.’
Cassius stopped him. ‘Will you dine with me tonight, Casca?’
‘No, I’ve got something on.’
‘Will you dine with me tomorrow?’
‘Yes, if I’m still alive, and your mind lasts, and your dinner’s worth eating.’
‘Good, I’ll expect you.’
‘Do that. Goodbye both.’
‘What a blunt fellow he’s become!’ exclaimed Brutus when Casca had left. ‘He was pretty sharp at school.’
Cassius caught Brutus’ eye and held it. ‘He still is when it comes to doing anything bold or noble. However, he puts on this stupid act. This rudeness is sauce to his intelligence and makes it easier to digest the things he’s saying.’
‘I’m sure that’s right,’ said Brutus. ‘Well, I’ll leave you for the present. Tomorrow, if you want to talk to me, I’ll come to your house or, if you’d rather, come to mine, and I’ll wait for you.’
‘I’ll do that,’ said Cassius. ‘Until then, think about the state of Rome.’
As Cassius walked home his mind raced. Brutus was noble. And yet his honourable mettle could nevertheless be worked on to bend it from its natural form. Noble minds should stick together because otherwise, who can be so firm that he
couldn't be seduced? Cassius knew that Caesar hated him but loved Brutus. If he were Brutus now and Brutus was him he wouldn't be taken in by Caesar. He decided that he would employ people to throw some notes in through Brutus' window as though they had come from several citizens. They would be flattering to Brutus, suggesting that he was held in great esteem by Rome, and they would all hint at Caesar's ambition. After that Caesar had better watch his back because they were either going to shake him or endure worse times to come.
Act One Scene Three

The weather changed suddenly in the evening and the sky was lit with lightning. The thunder roared and sent children scattering to hide under their beds. The heavens opened and the rain came down. Cicero, the famous orator, had been caught in it and was battling his way home, pulling his cloak tightly around himself. Turning a corner he almost bumped into someone, and saw that it was one of his fellow senators, Casca.

‘Good evening, Casca,’ he said. ‘Did you see Caesar home? Why are you so breathless and why are you looking so scared?’

‘Aren’t you scared when the whole world shakes like some infirm thing?’ said Casca. ‘I’ll tell you something, Cicero; I’ve seen storms where the punishing wind has uprooted knotty oaks, and I have seen the ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam, trying to rise right up to the threatening clouds. But never, until tonight, did I go through a storm that was dropping fire. There is either a civil war in heaven or else the world, too insolent for the gods, has provoked them to send destruction.’ He pulled Casca into a more sheltered spot in the entrance of a building.

‘Is that all?’ said Cicero. ‘What else did you see?’

‘A common slave – you know him well by sight – held up his left hand, which was flaming and burning like twenty torches joined together; and yet his hand seemed fireproofed – it didn’t get burnt. And,’ continued Casca, ‘I still haven’t put my sword away – right in front of the Capitol I encountered a lion, that stared at me and then passed me haughtily without molesting me. And there were a hundred terrified women gathered together, paralysed with fear, who swore they saw men, all made of fire, walk up and down the streets. And yesterday an owl sat over the market place at noon, hooting and shrieking. When these unnatural events all meet at the same time, no-one can say that there are reasons, that it’s natural. I believe they are ominous things pointing to the place where they are happening.’ He slid his sword into its scabbard.

Cicero nodded thoughtfully. ‘Hmmm. It’s certainly an unusual time. But people interpret things the way they want to in ways that have nothing to do with those things.’ With that he dismissed the topic. Casca made a move to leave. ‘Is Caesar going to the Capitol tomorrow?’ said Cicero.

‘He is,’ said Casca. ‘Because he told Antonius to tell you that he would be there tomorrow.’

‘Good night, then Casca,’ said Cicero. ‘This isn’t the weather to be out in.’

‘Goodbye Cicero.’

Casca waited in the entrance for a moment then, as he stepped out into the blinding storm, he heard a voice beside him say: ‘Who’s there?’

Casca drew his sword again and stepped back to the sheltered spot. ‘A Roman,’ he said.

The other man joined him. It was Cassius. ‘I recognised your voice,’ he said. ‘You’ve got a good ear,’ said Casca. ‘What kind of night is this?’

‘A very good night to do honest things,’ said Cassius.

‘Whoever saw such menacing skies?’

‘Those who have lived in times when there have been as many disorders as there are now,’ said Cassius. ‘For myself, I have been walking about the streets, submitting myself to the perilous night. And lightly dressed like this, as you can see,
Casca, I have bared my chest to the thunder clouts. And when the blue lightning seemed to open the very heart of heaven, I presented myself right in the very aim and flash of it.'

‘But why did you tempt the heavens so much? It’s our place to fear and tremble when the most mighty gods send such dreadful messengers to astonish us.’

‘You are dim-witted, Casca, and you’re lacking those sparks of life that should be in a Roman. You either don’t have them or you’re not using them. You look pale, and you gaze, and you put on a show of fear, and you throw yourself into a state of wonder on seeing this strange impatience of the heavens. But if you were to think about the real cause of it: why all these fires, and these gliding ghosts, why birds and animals of every kind, why old men, and fools, and children can understand why all these things are reversed from their natural state to such monstrosity – then you’ll see that heaven has sent these things to warn us of some monstrous state here in Rome. I could name a man who is most like this dreadful night. Who thunders, flashes, opens up graves and roars like the lion in the Capitol; a man no mightier than yourself or me in personal action, but yet grown as huge and fearful as these strange eruptions are.’

Casca grinned. ‘You mean Caesar, don’t you, Cassius?’

‘Let it be whoever it is,’ said Cassius. ‘Romans have muscles and limbs just like their ancestors had, but sadly, our fathers’ minds are dead and we have our mothers’ minds. Our willingness to be enslaved shows us to have become feminine.’

Casca nodded. ‘I know. They say that the senators are planning to establish Caesar as king tomorrow. And he’s going to wear his crown on the sea and the land everywhere except here in Italy.’

Cassius looked around furtively. ‘I know where I’m going to wear this dagger then,’ he said. ‘Cassius is going to liberate Cassius from slavery.’ He held the dagger up against his throat. ‘With this, you gods, you will make the weak strong. With this, you gods, you defeat tyrants. Stony towers, and walls of beaten brass, stuffy dungeons and strong iron chains can’t defeat the strength of the spirit. Life, when tired of these worldly barriers, always has the power to end itself. Of all the things in the world that I know, I know this: if I am the victim of tyranny I can shake it off at any time I please.’

‘So can I,’ said Casca. ‘Every prisoner holds the power to cancel his captivity in his own hands.’

‘And how is Caesar able to be a tyrant then?’ said Casius. ‘Poor man. I know he wouldn’t want to be a wolf if he didn’t see that Romans are only sheep. He couldn’t be a lion unless the Romans were hinds. Those that want to make big fires start it with small straws. What trash Rome is, what rubbish, and what offal, when its only function is to make such a vile thing as Caesar great!’ Cassius paused to allow his anger to subside. He shook his head slowly. ‘But oh grief, where have you led me to? But perhaps I’m saying all this to a willing prisoner. Then I know you’ll attack me. But I’m armed and all dangers are a matter of indifference to me.’ He turned to go.

Casca put his hand on his friend’s shoulder. ‘You’re talking to Casca,’ he said. ‘And to a man who is not a fawning tell-tale. Wait. Here’s my hand. Do something to organise others and I’ll go as far as all the of them.’

Cassius took the proffered hand. ‘It’s a deal, then. Now you should know, Casca, I have already persuaded some of the most noble-minded Romans to join me in a noble but dangerous project. And I know they’re waiting for me at Pompey’s porch. Because of the weather there’s no-one out doors. The state of the weather is like the work we have before us – bloody, fiery and most terrible.’
Casca pulled him back as he was about to go. ‘Wait, stay hidden for a moment. There’s someone coming. He’s in a hurry.’

‘It’s Cinna,’ said Cassius. ‘I recognise his walk. He’s one of us.’ He stepped out and stopped the senator. ‘Cinna, where are you going in such a hurry?’

‘To look for you,’ said Cinna. ‘Who’s that with you? Metellus Cimber?’

‘No, it’s Casca, one of us. Are they waiting for me, Cinna?’

‘I’m glad he’s with us,’ said Cinna. What a terrible night this is! Two or three of us have seen some strange sights.’

‘Are they waiting for me?’ said Cassius. ‘Tell me.’

‘Yes, they are,’ said Cinna.

Cassius made to go and Cinna stopped him. ‘Oh Cassius,’ he said, if only you could get the noble Brutus to join us.’

‘Don’t worry,’ said Cassius. ‘Good Cinna, take this letter and put it on Brutus’ magisterial desk where he’ll find it. And throw this one through his window. And stick this one on his father’s statue. When you’ve done all that go to Pompey’s porch where we’ll be. Are Decius Brutus and Tebonius there?’

‘They’re all there apart from Metellus Cimber, and he’s gone to your house to look for you. Well I’ll hurry and put these letters where you told me to.’

‘When you’ve done that go to Pompey’s theatre. Come Casca. You and I will see Brutus at his house before morning. He’s three-quarters with us already. And the whole man will be ours at our next meeting.’

‘Good,’ said Casca. ‘He’s so highly regarded by everyone that things that would appear offensive if it were just us, his involvement will change to virtue and worthiness.’

‘You’ve judged that correctly,’ said Cassius. ‘We need him and his qualities. Let’s go because it’s after midnight. We’ll wake him up and secure him before dawn.’
Act Two Scene One

Brutus sat in his living room, thinking things over. He called his young servant. It was late. The storm had subsided but there was still some lightning that obscured the stars and he wasn’t able to calculate the time. There was no answer.

‘Lucius!’ He wished he could sleep so soundly. ‘Where are you, Lucius? Wake up! ………. Lucius!’

The boy appeared, rubbing his eyes. ‘Did you call, my lord?’

‘Put a candle in my study, Lucius. When you’ve done that come and tell me.’

When the boy had gone Brutus sank back into his thoughts. It had to be done by killing Caesar. He had nothing against Caesar personally; it was a public matter. Caesar wanted to be king. The big question was how that would change him. The sunshine brought the adder out and then people have to walk warily. Crown him king and then, admittedly, they would put a sting in him that he would be able to harm them with. It’s abuse of authority when a man uses it to exercise power over others. He had to be honest: he had never known Caesar’s emotions outway his reason. But he also knew that in the first stages of ambition a man will not show his true colours. Once he begins to climb the ladder of ambition, though, he turns his face upwards. And when he reaches the top rung he then turns his back on the ladder, looks up into the clouds and scorns the lower rungs that he has used to climb there. Caesar may do that, so in case he does, the best is to prevent him from getting there. And since the cause Caesar has given for complaint can’t be denied one has to think about it like this: that what he already is, the way he already behaves, points to several extremities. So one should think about him as a snake’s egg that, if allowed to hatch, will grow into a dangerous adult snake, and so should be killed in its shell.

Lucius interrupted his thoughts. ‘The candle is burning in you study, sir. When I was searching the window for a flint I found this letter, sealed up, and I’m sure it wasn’t there when I went to bed.’

Brutus took the letter. ‘Go back to bed; it’s not morning yet. Isn’t tomorrow the ides of March?’

‘I don’t know, sir,’ said the boy.

‘Go and look at the calendar and come and tell me.’

The lightning was providing enough light for him to read the letter by and he opened it.

“Brutus, you’re asleep,’ it said. ‘Wake up and see yourself. Shall Rome etc. Speak out, strike, mend things.”

He sat back. Brutus, you’re asleep. Wake up! He’d had quite a few like that addressed to him. Shall Rome etc. He would have to work it out. Shall Rome stand in awe of one man? What? Shall Rome do that? His ancestors had driven the corrupt king, Tarquin, out and created the republic. Speak, strike, mend things. Was he being asked to speak out and strike? O Rome, he promised. If the mending could follow he would offer himself to strike.

Lucius came back. ‘Sir, tomorrow is the 15th day of March.’

There was a loud knocking on the gate.

‘That’s good,’ said Brutus. ‘Go to the gate. Someone’s knocking.’

Since Cassius had talked to him about Caesar he hadn’t slept. Between the first impulse to a dreadful thing and doing it the interval is like a fantasy or a bad dream. The brain that thinks about the thing and the hands that will do the deed are
then in opposition, and the whole state of the man, like a little kingdom, suffers an uprising.

Lucius was back. ‘Sir, it’s your brother senator at the door. He wants to see you.’

‘Is he alone?’
‘No, sir, there are others with him.’
‘Do you know them?’
‘No, sir, their hats are pulled down around their ears, and half their faces are buried in their cloaks so that I can’t recognise them.’
‘Let them in.’

He knew that they were the faction. This was bad – a conspiracy that was ashamed to show its dangerous face by night, a time when even the worst evil was free. In that case, where will this conspiracy find a dark enough cave to hide its monstrous face by daylight? Conspiracy needn’t find one – it would hide it behind smiles and affability, because if it were to show its true face, not even hell-like Erebus would be dark enough to hide it.

Lucius showed them in. Their faces were still covered.

‘I’m sorry we’re imposing on your sleep,’ said Cassius. Good morning, Brutus. Are we disturbing you?’

‘I’ve been up for an hour, and awake all night. Do I know these men who’ve come with you?’

‘Yes, every one of them, and every one of them admires you. And every one of them wishes that you had the opinion of yourself that every noble Roman has of you. This is Trebonius.’

‘He is welcome here,’ said Brutus.

‘This is Decius Brutus.’

‘He is welcome too.’

‘This is Casca, this, Cinna; and this is Metellus Cimber.’

‘They are all welcome,’ said Brutus, nodding to them all. ‘What troubles are keeping you all awake?’

‘Can I have a private word?’ said Cassius, and the two men went to the other side of the room and began whispering together.

Decius looked out the window. ‘This is the east,’ he said. ‘Is that the sun coming up?’

‘No,’ said Casca.

‘Begging your pardon, it is,’ said Cinna. ‘And those grey lines disturbing the clouds are the messengers of day.’

‘Admit that you’re both wrong,’ said Casca. He went to another window and drew his sword. He pointed it. ‘Here, where I’m pointing my sword, the sun is coming up, towards the south, showing the early season of the year. In two months time, up higher towards the north, it will rise.’ He pointed a little to the left. ‘And the high east stands where the Capitol is, directly there.’

Brutus and Cassius returned.

‘Give me your hands, one by one,’ said Brutus.

‘And let us swear our resolution,’ said Cassius.

‘No, we won’t swear an oath,’ said Brutus. ‘If our suffering and the abuses of the time are not enough motive, then we might as well stop now and every man return to his empty bed.’

Brutus shook each man’s hand as he talked. ‘If we do, then we will be letting ambitious tyranny have free range till each man drops down by chance. But if these
things are bad enough, as I’m sure they are, to arouse even cowards, and inspire
even the retiring spirits of women with courage, then fellow countrymen, what other
spur do we need other than our own cause to hasten us to put things right? What
other bond do we need other than being true Romans who have given our word and
won’t falter? And what other oath do we need than honest men acting together do,
knowing that this has to be or we will die for trying it? Priests and cowards swear,
and cunning, deceitful men, and old living corpses, and such cringing souls that enjoy
tyranny. Men who can’t be trusted swear their allegiance to bad causes. So let’s not
stain the virtue of our enterprise, nor the undaunted quality of our spirits, to suggest
that either our cause or our acting on it needed an oath; when every drop of blood
that every Roman has, and bears nobly, would show it not to be noble blood if he
were to break a single particle of any promise he has made.’

‘What about Cicero?’ said Cassius. ‘Shall we sound him out? I think he’ll stand
stoutly with us.’

‘Let’s not leave him out,’ said Casca.
‘No, by no means,’ said Cinna.
‘Yes, let’s have him,’ said Metellus. ‘His silver hair will give us credibility and
his oratorical skills will persuade people to commend this deed. They will say his
wisdom ruled our hands. They won’t talk about our youth and wildness, but it will all
be buried in his gravity.’

‘Oh don’t bring him into it,’ said Brutus. ‘Let’s not include him, because he will
never follow anything that other men begin.’

‘Then leave him out,’ Cassius decided.
‘Actually, he’s not right for it,’ said Casca.

‘Should we kill anyone else besides Caesar?’ said Decius.
‘Good point,’ said Cassius. ‘I don’t think it would be appropriate that Mark
Antony, so well loved by Caesar, should outlive him. We would find him a dangerous
opponent. And you know, his resources, if he improved them, would stretch so far as
to be a problem for us. So, to prevent that, let Antony and Caesar die together.’

Brutus shook his head vigorously. ‘Our actions will seem too bloody, Caius
Cassius, if we cut off the head and then hack the limbs, like killing out of envy or
spite. Antony is only a limb of Caesar. Let us be sacrificers but not butchers, Caius.
We’re all standing up against the spirit of Caesar and in the spirit of men there is no
blood. Oh, if only we could destroy Caesar’s spirit without disemboweling his body!
But unfortunately Caesar must bleed for it. And, gentle, friends, let’s kill him boldly,
but not in anger. Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods, not hew him like a carcass
fit for dogs. And let our hearts, as subtle employers do, stir up our feelings and limbs
to a deed of murder and afterwards rebuke them. This will show that our action is
necessary and not done in envy. Then, seen by the common man, we will come
across as purgers, not murderers. As for Mark Antony, forget about him because he
can do no more than Caesar’s arm can once his head has been cut off.’

‘But still,’ said Cassius, I’m concerned about him because in the deep-rooted
love he has for Caesar ……’

Brutus interrupted him. ‘Alas, good Cassius, forget about him. If he loves
Caesar, the only thing he will be able to do will be to himself, not us – think about it
and kill himself. And that’s the most he can do because the only things he’s good for
are sports, wildness and partying.’

Trebonius was the first to speak. ‘There’s nothing in him to worry about,’ he
said. ‘Let him not die. He will live and laugh about this in time.’

A clock began to strike. ‘Quiet,’ said Brutus. ‘Let’s count the strokes.’
‘Three,’ said Cassius.
‘It’s time to go,’ said Trebonius.
‘But we still don’t know whether Caesar’s coming out today or not,’ said Cassius, ‘because he’s become superstitious lately. He’s completely changed from the general opinion he once had about fantasy, dreams and religion. It’s possible that these wonders we’ve seen, the unaccustomed terror of tonight and the urging of his augurers, may prevent him from going to the Capitol today.’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ said Decius. He laughed. ‘If that’s what he’s decided I can easily change his mind. He loves to hear stories about animals that are betrayed by their own incaution, like the unicorn who was betrayed into being trapped by piercing a tree with its horn and getting stuck there; like the bear that was caught because it saw its reflection in a piece of glass and thought it was s cub, elephants that can be caught in lightly covered holes in the ground, lions in nets, and men with flatterers. But when I tell him he hates flatterers he agrees, being flattered by that. Let me work on him because I can guide his mood in the right direction, and I will bring him to the Capitol.’

‘We’ll all be there to fetch him,’ said Cassius.
‘By eight o’clock?’ said Brutus, looking around at them. ‘Is that the latest?’
‘Let that be the time, then,’ said Cinna, ‘and all be there.’

As they began to troop out Metellus stopped and turned. ‘Caius Ligarius doesn’t like Caesar, who berated him for speaking well of Pompey,’ he said. ‘I’m surprised that none of you have thought of him.’

‘Now, good Metellus,’ said Brutus, ‘go by his house. He likes me a lot and I’ve given him good reason. Just send him here and I’ll bring him in.’

‘It’s morning,’ said Cassius. ‘We’ll leave you, Brutus. Disperse yourselves, friends: but all remember what you’ve said and show yourselves to be good Romans.’

Brutus unlocked the gate. ‘Good gentlemen, look fresh and perky. Don’t let our looks give us away, but carry it off as our Roman actors do, with energy and endurance. And so good day to you all.’

When he went back in he called his servant but there was no reply. It didn’t matter. He envied him – he was sleeping so soundly because he didn’t have the cares and bad dreams that were plaguing Brutus.

Portia, hearing him call the boy, got up and went out to him.

‘Portia!’ he said. ‘What’s this? Why are you getting up so early? It’s not good for your health to subject yourself to this raw cold morning.’

‘Not for yours either,’ she said. ‘You left my bed suddenly, Brutus, and yesterday at supper you just got up and walked about, thinking and sighing, with folded arms, and when I asked you what the matter was you stared at me coldly. I asked you again and you scratched your head and stamped your foot too impatiently. And when I insisted you didn’t answer. Instead you waved your hand angrily and gestured me to leave. So I did, because I was afraid of strengthening that impatience that was so rooted in you, hoping it was just a bad mood that all men have. It won’t let you eat, nor talk, nor sleep. And it could change you physically as it has changed your nature, so that I wouldn’t know you anymore. Please, my lord, tell me why you’re so unhappy.’

‘I’m not feeling well, that’s all,’ he said.
‘You’re intelligent and if you were ill you would find the way to get better.’
‘I’m doing that. Good Portia; go to bed.’
'Is Brutus sick, and is it healthy to walk around without your coat and suck up all the vapours of the dank morning? What? Is Brutus sick? And so he steals out of his warm bed to dare the vile contagion of the night and tempt the damp and dirty air to add to his sickness. No, my Brutus, you have something on your mind which because I'm your wife I should know about, and, on my knees, I beg you, by my once recognised beauty, by all the vows of love you made, and that great vow of marriage, that you tell me, your other self, your other half, why you are so heavy, and what men have been here tonight. Because there have been about six or seven here who hid their faces even from darkness.'

'Don't kneel, gentle Portia.'

'I wouldn't kneel if you were gentle Brutus. Tell me Brutus, as your wife, do you expect to keep secrets from me? Am I part of you, but only in a limited way, to have meals with you, comfort your bed and talk to you sometimes? Do I live only in the suburbs of your life? If it's no more Portia is Brutus' mistress, not his wife.'

Brutus raised her up and kissed her. 'You are my true and honourable wife, as dear to me as the blood that flows though my sad heart.'

'If that were true then I should know this secret. I grant you that I am a woman, but nevertheless a woman that Lord Brutus took as his wife. I grant that I'm a woman; but nevertheless a well reputed woman, Cato's daughter. Do you think I'm not stronger than my sex generally, with such a father and such a husband? Tell me your secrets, I won't tell anyone. I have proved my loyalty by giving myself a wound here in the thigh. Can I bear that patiently and not my husband's secrets?'

Brutus held her close. 'Oh ye gods!' he exclaimed. 'Make me worthy of this noble wife.'

There was a knocking on the gate.

'Listen, listen, someone's there. Portia, go back for the moment, and by and by you'll know the secrets of my heart. I'll tell you everything; all the reasons for my sad face. Hurry. Lucius! Who's knocking?'

Lucius brought a man in. 'Here's a sick man wanting to talk to you.'

'Caius Larius,' said Brutus. 'Go away, boy. Caius Ligarius, this is a surprise.'

'Please accept a good morning greeting from a feeble tongue,' said Caius Larius, looking very unwell.

'Oh what a time you've chosen to be sick,' said Brutus. 'I wish you weren't.'

'I'm not sick if Brutus has any honourable exploit in mind.'

'I have just such an exploit in hand Ligarius, were you healthy enough to hear it.'

'By all the gods that Romans pray to, I here discard my sickness,' said Caius Ligarius. 'Soul of Rome, brave son, sprung from honourable loins, you have conjured up my dead spirit like an exorcist. Tell me to run and I'll race impossible opponents and beat them. What are we going to do?'

'A piece of work that will cure sick men.'

'But aren't there some who are well that we must make sick?' said Caius Ligarius.

'We have to do that too. What it is, my Caius, I'll tell you on the way, and to whom we are going to do it.'

'Let's go then, and I'll follow you with a heart newly fired, to do what I don't know, but it's sufficient that Brutus is leading me.'

'Follow me then,' said Brutus.
Act Two Scene Two

Caesar couldn’t sleep. The thunder had been crashing furiously and the lightning had made it impossible to fall asleep. Calphurnia kept crying out, ‘Help, they’re murdering Caesar.’ He got up and went to another part of the house without changing out of his night-gown.

‘Is anyone there?’ he called.

‘My lord.’ A servant appeared in the doorway.

‘Go and tell the priests to do an immediate sacrifice and bring me their opinions of success.’

The servant bowed. ‘I will, my lord.’

Caesar turned and saw Calphurnia standing looking at him. ‘What are you doing up?’ she said. ‘Are you thinking about going out? You’re not stirring out of the house today!'

He drew himself up. ‘Caesar will go out. The signs that have been threatening me have only looked at my back. When they see the face of Caesar they will disappear.’

‘Caesar, you know I’ve never taken any notice of omens and portents. And yet, these frighten me. One of the servants, apart from the things that we have seen and heard, recount some most horrid sights that the guards have seen. A lioness gave birth in the streets, and graves opened and shoved their dead out; fierce fiery warriors fought on the clouds in ranks and squadrons, all formed up for war, and the blood drizzled on the Capitol. The noise of battle filled the air; horsed neighed and dying men groaned; and ghosts shrieked and squealed about the streets. Oh Caesar, these things are so unusual, and I’m afraid of them.’

‘No-one can avoid the end that the gods have decreed for them,’ said Caesar. ‘And yet Caesar shall go forth because these predictions are for the world in general, as well as for Caesar.’

‘When beggars die there are no comets,’ she said. ‘The heavens themselves blaze out the death of princes.’

‘Cowards die many times before their deaths,’ said Caesar. ‘The brave taste death only once. Of all the wonders that I have ever heard of the strangest seems to me that men should fear death, seeing that it’s a necessary end that will come when it will come.’

The servant was back.

‘What do the augurers say?’

‘They don’t want you to go out today. When they drew the entrails out of the animal they could not find its heart.’

‘I interpret that as the gods shaming cowardice,’ said Caesar. ‘Caesar would be a beast without a heart if he stayed at home today because he was afraid. No, Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well that Caesar is more dangerous than he is. Danger and I are two lions born on the same day. And I am the elder and more terrible. And Caesar shall go forth.’

Calphurnia sighed and shook her head. ‘Alas, my lord, your wisdom is consumed in confidence. Don’t go out today. Say it’s my fear that keeps you in the house and not your own. We’ll send Mark Antony to the Senate House, and he will say that you aren’t well today.’ She dropped to her knees. ‘Let me beg you on my knees.’
Caesar looked down at her for a moment then drew himself up again. ‘Mark Antony will say I am unwell, and just for you I’ll stay at home.’

A servant showed Decius in.

‘Here’s Decius Brutus. He will tell them,’ said Caesar.

‘Caesar, all hail,’ said Decius. ‘Good morning worthy Caesar. I’ve come to take you to the Senate House.’

‘And your timing is good,’ said Caesar. ‘Bear my greetings to the senators and tell them that I will not come today. Cannot is false, and dare not even more false. I will not come today. Tell them that, Decius.’

‘Say he is sick,’ said Calphurnia.

Caesar turned to her stiffly and frowned. ‘Shall Caesar send a lie? Have I extended my arm so far in conquest to be afraid to tell greybeards the truth? Decius, go and tell them Caesar will not come.’

Decius smiled. ‘Most mighty Caesar, give me some reason; they will laugh at me when I tell them that.’

‘The reason is in my will. I will not come. That is enough to satisfy the senate. But for your own satisfaction, because I love you, I will let you know. Calphurnia here, my wife, is keeping me at home. She dreamt tonight that she saw my statue. Like a fountain with a hundred spouts, it ran pure blood. And many lusty Romans came to it smiling, and washed their hands in it. And she interprets that as a warning of imminent evil. And she has begged me on her knees to stay at home today.’

Decius’ answer came quickly. ‘This dream has been misinterpreted. It was a vision of good fortune. Your statue, spouting blood from many pipes, in which so many smiling Romans bathed, means that great Rome will suck reviving blood from you and that great men will scramble to get honours and recognition from you. This is what Calphurnia’s dream means.’

‘And you have given a good interpretation,’ said Caesar.

‘I have,’ said Decius, ‘considering what I have to tell you. And here it is. The senate has decided to give a crown to mighty Caesar today. If you send them a message that you will not come they may change their minds. Also, it would be an opportunity for some sarcastic senator to say, “Break up the senate till another time, when Caesar’s wife has better dreams.” If Caesar hides away, won’t they whisper, “Look, Caesar is afraid”? Forgive me, Caesar, for my dear dear love for your welfare makes me talk to you like this and my reason over-rules my discretion.’

Caesar had been standing, listening with interest, and he turned to Calphurnia now and sneered. ‘How foolish your fears seem now, Calphurnia. I’m ashamed that I gave in to them.’ He snapped his fingers at a servant. ‘Get my clothes ready. I will go.’

A servant showed Brutus., Ligarius, Metellus, Casca, Trebonius, Cinna and Publius in.

‘And look,’ said Caesar. ‘Here’s Publius come to fetch me.’

‘Good morning, Caesar,’ said Publius.

‘Welcome Publius. What Brutus! Are you also up so early? Good morning Casca. Caius Ligarius.’ Caesar laughed. ‘Caesar was never as much your enemy as that illness that’s made you so thin. What’s the time?’

‘Caesar, it’s eight o’clock,’ said Brutus.

Caesar beamed round at everyone. ‘I thank you for your trouble and courtesy,’ he said. ‘Look, Antony, who revels through the night, is notwithstanding up. Good morning Antony.’

Antony joined the other senators. ‘And to you, most noble Caesar,’ he said.
Caesar was all smiles. He snapped his fingers. 'Tell them to prepare some wine in there,' he said. "It's my fault that you're all kept waiting." He bestowed a warm smile on Cinna. 'Now Cinna ....Metellus.' He gave Metellus a friendly punch on his arm. 'Ah, Trebonius. I have an hour's talk in store for you. Remember that you called on me today. Be close to me so that I may remember you.'

'Caesar, I will,' said Trebonius, thinking that he would be so close that Caesar's best friends would wish that he had been further away.

'Good friends, go in there,' said Caesar, 'and taste some wine with me. And we, as friends, will go together.'

As they went in to drink the wine Brutus was sad. Not all friends were the same. His heart was heavy, thinking about it.
Act Two Scene Three

A Roman citizen, Artemidorus, was on his way to the Capitol early. As he went he read over the letter he had written:

“Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed Of Cassius; don’t go near Casca; keep your eye on Cinna; don’t trust Trebonius; watch Metellus Cimber closely; Decius Brutus hates you; you have wronged Caius Ligarius. These men have only one thing in their minds, and it’s bent against Caesar. If you’re not immortal keep your eyes open. Over confidence leaves the way open to conspiracy. The mighty gods defend you. Your friend, ARTEMIDORUS.”

He would stand at the foot of the stairs to the Capitol until Caesar passed along. He would pose as a petitioner and give it to him. He was sad that good men couldn’t live without being bitten by envy. If Caesar read the letter he might live. If not it would mean that the fates were conspiring with traitors.
Act Two Scene Four

Portia was distraught. She hardly knew what she was doing.

‘Go on, boy, run to the Senate House,’ she told Lucius. ‘Don’t wait to ask questions, just go. What are you waiting for?’

‘To know my errand, madam,’ he said.

‘I want you there and back again before I can tell you what I want you to do there.’

She shut her eyes and prayed for self-control. She wanted to have a huge mountain between her heart and her tongue to keep the secret to herself. She felt that she had a man’s strong mind but a woman’s weakness. It was too hard to keep Brutus’ secret.

‘Are you still here?’ she said.

‘Madam, what do you want me to do? Run to the Capitol and that’s all?’

‘Yes, bring me word if my lord looks well because he was sick when he left. And look to see what Caesar does and what petitioners approach him. Listen, boy, what noise is that?’

‘I don’t hear any, madam?’

‘Listen carefully. I hear a confused sound, like a fight, and the wind is bringing it from the Capitol.’

‘Really madam, I can’t hear anything.’

An old man, the fortune-teller, was passing by the gate.

‘Come here, fellow,’ said Portia. ‘Where have you come from?’

‘My own house, good lady.’

‘What’s the time?’

‘About nine, lady.’

‘Has Caesar gone to the Capitol yet?’

‘Not yet, madam. I’m going there to get a place to watch him pass by to the Capitol.’

‘Do you have some suit to Caesar?’

‘That I have, lady. If it will please Caesar to do himself a favour and listen to me I will beg him to be his own friend.’

‘Why? Do you know any harm that’s intended towards him?’

‘Nothing that I know about definitely but much that I fear may happen. Good morning to you. This street is narrow. The throng that will come along to follow Caesar will crush me almost to death. I’ll have to find a more spacious place and then speak to Caesar as he passes.’

‘I must go in,’ said Portia.

The old man continued down the road and Portia began pacing. Oh gods, how weak a thing a woman’s heart is! Oh Brutus! She prayed that Brutus’ enterprise would be successful. She was sure the boy knew! Brutus had a suit that Caesar would never grant. She felt faint.

‘Run Lucius, and give my love to my lord. Say I’m cheerful. Come back and tell me what he says.’
Act Three Scene One

The senators were arriving at the Capitol. A crowd had gathered in the square to see them and to catch a glimpse of Caesar. Artemidorus had got himself to the front of the crowd, at the bottom of the stairs, and was waiting nervously.

There was a flourish of trumpets and Caesar entered the square, surrounded by some of the most prominent senators. Brutus and Cassius walked beside him, closely followed by Casca, Decius, Metellus, Trebonius, Cinna, Antony, Lepidus. Popilius and Publius. They made their way along the cleared space that the tribunes had created for them.

As the party got to the bottom of the stairs Caesar stopped. He had spotted the soothsayer who had warned him to beware the ides of March. He sneered. ‘The ides of March have come,’ he said.

‘Aye, but not gone,’ the old man said.

Artemidorus rushed forward and thrust his letter at Caesar. ‘Hail Caesar,’ he shouted. ‘Read this letter.’

There was tension among the senators. But Decius blocked the man and pulled a letter out of his own pocket.

‘Trebonius would like you to read this, his humble petition, at your leisure,’ he said.

Artemidorus tried to get round Decius, who continued to block him. He held the letter out. ‘Oh Caesar,’ he pleaded, ‘read mine first because it’s a suit that concerns Caesar directly and urgently. Read it great Caesar.’

Caesar reached out and took the letter and handed it to an aide. ‘What concerns us personally will be read last,’ he said.

‘Don’t wait,’ wailed Artimedorus. Read it now!’

Caesar looked sternly at him. ‘What?’ he said ‘Is the fellow mad?’.

Publius pushed Artimedorus and he went hurtling into the crowd. ‘Give way,’ he said.

Cassius also gave him a push. ‘What do you think you’re doing?’ he said.

‘Urging your petitions in the street! Come to the Capitol.’

The party moved on, climbing the stairs and disappearing through the Capitol doors.

One of the senators approached Cassius in the foyer. ‘I hope the enterprise you’re embarking on today will be successful,’ he said.

Cassius froze. ‘What enterprise, Popilius?’

Popilius put his finger up to the side of his nose. ‘Goodbye,’ he said and walked away, smiling.

Brutus had been watching and he sidled up to Cassius. ‘What did Popilius Lena say?’

‘He wished us well in our enterprise.’ Cassius’ face had gone white. ‘I fear we’ve been found out.’

‘Look, he’s going up to Caesar,’ said Brutus. ‘Watch.’

Casca joined them. ‘Casca, be ready,’ said Cassius, not taking his eyes off Popilius. ‘I think we’ve been discovered. What are we going to do, Brutus? If he knows about it neither of us will leave. I’ll kill him and then myself.’

‘Be calm, Cassius,’ said Brutus. ‘He’s not talking about us. Look, he’s smiling, and Caesar’s expression hasn’t changed.’
As they entered the Senate hall Cassius whispered to Brutus: ‘Trebonius knows his time. Look, Brutus, he’s leading Antony out.’

Trebonius had put his arm across Antony’s shoulders and, talking urgently in his ear, was leading him back out of the hall.

The conspirators were gathering in a group. ‘Where’s Metellus Cimber?’ said Decius. ‘He should go now and present his suit to Caesar.’

‘He’s ready,’ said Brutus. Metellus Cimber was approaching Caesar. ‘Come closer to support him.’

Cinna took Casca’s arm. ‘Casca, you are the first to strike.’

Caesar held up his hand. ‘Are we all ready?’ he said. They all stopped talking and faced him. The conspirators were now at the front, close to Caesar. ‘What are the problems now, that Caesar and his senate must put right?’

Metellus Cimber stepped forward. ‘Most high, most mighty and most powerful Caesar. Metellus Cimber throws before your mightiness a humble heart.’ He went down on his knees.

Caesar gazed down haughtily at him. ‘I must stop you Cimber. This bowing and scraping might inflate the pride of ordinary men and reduce the rule of ancient law into something to be bypassed. Don’t be foolish enough to think that Caesar can be swayed by emotion and melted from his high principles in the way that fools can. By that I mean sweet, flattering words, knee bending courtseis, and base spaniel fawning. Your brother was legally banished by decree. If you bend and pray and fawn for him I will kick you out of my way like a dog. Know that Caesar does no wrong, nor will he be persuaded except with argument.’

Metellus remained on his knees. He looked round at the senators. ‘Is there no voice more worthy than my own that might sound more favourably in great Caesar’s ear to have my brother’s banishment repealed?’

Brutus stepped forward then also knelt and took Caesar’s hand. He raised it to his lips. ‘I kiss your hand, but not in flattery, Caesar; urging that Publius Cimber’s banishment be repealed.’

Caesar looked pained. ‘What? Brutus?’ he said.

Cassius came close. ‘Pardon Caesar; Caesar pardon,’ he said, and also fell to his knees. ‘I fall as low as to your foot to beg for the rehabilitation of Publius Cimber.’

Caesar gazed down scornfully at the three senators. ‘I could be easily moved if I were like you. If I were the kind of person who could beg someone to change his mind then I would be capable of changing mine too. But I am as constant as the northern star, which is so firm that it has no equal in the heavens. The skies are filled with uncountable sparks; they are all fire, and every one of them shines, but there’s only one that holds its place firmly. And so it is in the world – it’s full of men, and men are flesh and blood, and have reason. Yet in that number, I know only one that sticks to his course, unshaken by anything; and that I am he. Let me show you a small part of that, even in this – that I was constant that Cimber should be banished and remain constant to keep him banished.’

Cinna took a step forward. ‘Oh Caesar …..’

‘Go!’ exclaimed Caesar. ‘Do you want to lift up Olympus?’

Decius flung himself to his knees. ‘Great Caesar ….’

‘Isn’t even Brutus kneeling in vain?’ said Caesar.

Casca drew his dagger. ‘Speak hands for me!’ he shouted and thrust the dagger into Caesar’s neck.
The others were on Caesar like a pack of hounds, each one stabbing once. Except Brutus. He stood up and stepped back a few paces, watching. Caesar winced and stooped. He was mortally wounded. There was blood pouring from him and the floor all around him was red. He looked up and saw Brutus, his face sad and his eyes filled with pity. Caesar reached towards him and everyone watched, transfixed, as he took an unsteady step. Then another. Brutus stretched out his hand and Caesar grasped it. Brutus pulled Caesar towards him and put an arm around him. Then with his other hand he stabbed him. Caesar looked startled. ‘Et tu Brute?’ he asked. There was silence. Caesar opened his eyes wide. ‘Then fall Caesar,’ he said. Brutus let go of him. He dropped and lay still.

The whole senate stood in shocked silence. Then Cinna shouted. ‘Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead. Run, go, announce it. Cry it out in the streets.’

Some of the senators ran out in terror. Cassius called after them. ‘Some of you go to the public platforms and cry out Liberty, Freedom and Democracy.’

Brutus also called after them. ‘People and senators, don’t be afraid, don’t run away. Stay. Caesar has paid the price for his ambition.’

‘Go to the public platform, Brutus,’ said Casca.

‘And you too, Cassius,’ said Decius.

‘Where’s Publius?’ said Brutus.

‘There he is,’ said Cinna. ‘He’s bewildered by this uproar.’

‘Let’s stand close together,’ said Metellus, ‘in case some friend of Caesar decides to ……’

‘Don’t talk about standing on the defensive,’ said Brutus. ‘Publius, don’t worry. No harm is intended to you. Nor to any other Roman. Go and tell them that, Publius.’

‘And leave us now,’ said Cassius. ‘In case the people mob us and do your age some harm.’

‘Do that,’ said Brutus. ‘And let no man bear the consequences of this action except us, the doers.’

Trebonius joined them. ‘Where’s Antony?’ said Cassius.

‘Fled to his house, utterly astounded. Men, women and children are staring, shouting and running as though it were doomsday.’

‘We will soon know what fate has in store for us,’ said Brutus. ‘Every one dies eventually. We know that. It’s only the time and how long it takes that matter.’

Casca pulled a wry face. ‘Anyway, he who has twenty years of life cut off avoids twenty years of fearing death.’

‘Given that,’ said Brutus, ‘we are Caesar’s friends who have saved him his time of fearing death. Stoop, Romans, stoop, and let us bathe our hands in Caesar’s blood, up to the elbows. And smear our swords. Then let’s walk out there, right to the market place, and waving our red weapons over our heads, let’s all cry out, “Peace, freedom and liberty!”’

‘Stoop then, and wash,’ said Casca. ‘For ages into the future this mighty deed will be acted out in theatres in states that are not yet born and languages not yet known.’

Brutus nodded. ‘How many times Caesar will bleed in plays, who now lies at the base of Pompey’s statue, nothing more than dust.’

As many times as that occurs, that many times will we be recognised as the men who gave their country liberty,’ said Cassius.

‘All right then,’ said Decius. ‘Shall we go?’

‘Yes, all of us,’ said Cassius. ‘Brutus will lead and we will grace his heels with the most noble, best hearts of Rome.’
By now everyone had left and only the conspirators remained. A young man entered cautiously and walked slowly toward them.

‘Wait,’ said Brutus. ‘Who’s this? It’s one of Antony’s servants.

The servant knelt down in front of Brutus. ‘My master told me to kneel like this,’ he said. ‘He told me to kneel down and once I was right down on my knees I was to tell you this. Brutus is noble, wise, brave and honest. Caesar was mighty, bold, royal and loving. Tell him I love Brutus and I respect him. Say I feared Caesar, honoured him, and loved him. If Brutus will guarantee that I can come to him safely and be reassured why Caesar deserved to be killed Mark Antony won’t love the dead Caesar as much as he will love the living Brutus, and will follow him through this unknown state of things faithfully. That’s what my master, Antony, says.’

Brutus gestured to the servant to stand up. ‘Your master is a wise and brave Roman,’ he said. ‘I always thought that. Tell him if he would like to come here he will be reassured. And I promise you that he will leave untouched.’

‘I’ll get him immediately,’ said the servant.

‘I know that he will be a true friend,’ said Brutus.

‘I hope so,’ said Cassius. ‘But I still feel uncomfortable with it. I don’t trust this. And my misgivings are usually well founded.’

‘Well here he is,’ said Brutus.

Antony was coming towards them across the marble floor of the senate hall.

‘Welcome, Antony,’ said Brutus.

Antony ignored them all and approached Caesar’s body. He stood for a moment. A tear rolled down his cheek. ‘Oh mighty Caesar!’ he said, shaking his head. ‘Are you lying so low? Are all your conquests, glories, triumphs, successes, shrunk to this small size? Farewell.’

He turned slowly and faced the conspirators, who had been standing silently, watching him.

‘I don’t know, gentlemen, who else must be cured; who else is sick. If I am one of them, there is no time more fit as the hour of Caesar’s death, nor no weapon worth half of those swords that have been made rich with the most noble blood of this whole world. I beg of you, if you have a grudge against me, now, while your purpled hands are reeking and smoking, do it. If I could live a thousand years I would never find myself as ready as I am now to die. No place would please me more, nor no means of death, as here by Caesar and cut off by you, the greatest men of this age.’

‘Oh Antony, don’t beg us to kill you,’ said Brutus. ‘Although we must at this moment seem violent and cruel, judging from our bloody hands and this thing you know we’ve done, you’re only seeing our hands and the bloody business they’ve done. You’re not seeing our hearts; they’re full of pity – pity for the wrongs suffered by Rome. And pity for Rome has driven out pity for Caesar. As for you, our swords have points of lead for you, Mark Antony. Our arms in friendship and our hearts in brotherly love, accept you as one of us with all good will, good opinion, and respect.’

Cassius nodded. ‘Your voice will be as strong as ours in distributing new positions.’

‘Just be patient until we’ve appeased the people, who are beside themselves with fear, and then we’ll tell you why I, who loved Caesar when I struck him, have done that.’

‘I have no doubt about your wisdom,’ said Antony. ‘Let each man give me his blood smeared hand. First, Markus Brutus, I’ll shake yours.’ He took Brutus’ hand.

‘Next Caius Cassius, I take yours. Now, Decius Brutus yours; now yours Metellus. Yours, Cinna; and my brave Casca, yours. Last but not least, yours good Trebonius.'
Gentleman all – alas, what can I say? My reputation now stands on such slippery ground that you must be thinking of me in one of two ways – that I’m either a coward or a flatterer.’ He glanced at Caesar’s body. ‘It’s true that I loved you Caesar. If your soul were looking down at us now, wouldn’t it be even sadder than your death to see your Antony making his peace, shaking the bloody fingers of your enemies in the presence of your corpse? If I had as many eyes as you have wounds, all crying as fast as your wounds pour out your blood, it would be more suitable to cry than to come to an agreement with your enemies.’ He went back to Caesar’s body and paused. Then: ‘Pardon me Julius. This is where you were hunted to your death, brave heart. This is where you fell; and here your hunters stand, bearing the marks of your slaughter on them, reddened in your death. Oh world, your were the forest to this hart and this world was your heart. And here you lie, killed by many princes.’

Cassius went and touched him on the shoulder. ‘Mark Antony,’ he said. Antony turned. ‘Excuse me, Caius Cassius. Even Caesar’s enemies would say that. Coming from a friend it’s natural.’

‘I don’t blame you for praising Caesar,’ said Cassius. ‘But what deal do you want to make with us? Are you going to be with us or shall we go ahead without you?’

‘That’s why I took your hands,’ said Antony. ‘But I was distracted when I looked down at Caesar. I am your friend and I respect you all, on this condition: that you will give me reasons why, and in what, Caesar was dangerous.’

‘Otherwise this would be a savage sight,’ said Brutus. ‘Our reasons are so sound that even if you were Caesar’s son you would be satisfied.’

‘That’s all I asked for,’ said Antony. ‘And one more thing: I would like to ask that I may take his body to the market place and on the public platform, as suitable for a friend, that I should be one of the speakers in his funeral ceremony.’

‘You can, Antony,’ said Brutus.

Cassius whispered in Brutus’ ear: ‘Can I have a word with you?’ He took him aside. ‘You don’t know what you’re doing,’ he said. Don’t let Antony speak in his funeral. Don’t you know how much the people will be stirred up by the things he’ll say?’

‘With your permission,’ said Brutus, ‘I’ll go into the pulpit first and give the reasons for our Caesar’s death. I’ll tell them that whatever Antony says will be with our permission. I’ll assure them that Caesar will have the full rites and lawful ceremonies. It will do us more advantage than harm.’

‘I don’t know what will happen,’ said Cassius. ‘I don’t like it.’

‘Mark Antony,’ said Brutus. ‘You take Caesar’s body. In your funeral speech you may not criticise us. Say anything good you want to about Caesar and say you’re doing it with our permission. Otherwise you can’t play any role in his funeral. And you’ll speak in the same pulpit that I’m going to, after my speech has ended.’

‘So be it,’ said Antony. ‘That’s all I ask.’

‘Prepare the body, then, and follow us,’ said Brutus.

They all followed Brutus and Antony was left alone with Caesar’s body. Antony watched them go then he sat down beside the body. He sat for a few minutes, trying to control his emotions, then he addressed the still form of his friend.

‘Oh pardon me, you bleeding piece of earth,’ he said, ‘that I am meek and gentle with these butchers. You are the ruins of the greatest man who ever lived. Curse the hand that shed this precious blood! Over your wounds I prophesy, as these wounds, like silent mouths, are begging me to use my voice. A curse will fall on the people; there will be such violence here in Rome – fierce civil war will cover all of
Italy: blood and destruction will become so common, and terrible acts so familiar, that mothers will merely smile when they see their children mutilated at the hands of war. All pity will be choked by the frequency of foul deeds. And Caesar’s spirit, roaming about to seek revenge and Ate the goddess of destruction, straight from hell, walking at his side, here in Rome, with a powerful voice, will call for destruction and let loose the dogs of war. This foul deed will make the earth stink with corpses begging to be buried.

A man came in and stood beside him. Antony looked up. ‘You work for Octavius Caesar, don’t you?’

‘I do, Mark Antony,’ said the servant.

‘Caesar wrote to him and told him to come to Rome.’

‘He received the letter and is on his way. And he told me to tell you personally….’ The servant looked down and saw Caesar lying there. He gasped. ‘Oh Caesar!’ he said.

‘I see your heart is swollen with grief,’ said Antony. ‘Go away and weep. I can see that grief is catching because my eyes, seeing your tears, begin to water. Is your master coming?’

‘He’s staying within seven leagues of Rome tonight.’

‘Hurry back and tell him what’s happened. This is a mourning Rome, a dangerous Rome, not yet safe for Octavius. Hurry there and tell him that. You mustn’t go back, though, till I have taken this corpse into the market place. That’s where I’ll test things with my speech; see how the people take the cruel act of these violent men. Then you will tell young Octavius what the situation is. Here, help me with Caesar’s body.’
Act Three Scene Two

The Capitol guards were having difficulty keeping order. The people were shouting and jostling and trying to break through the cordon. When Brutus led the conspirators out there was a huge roar and tribunes immediately surrounded him to protect him. As they came down the steps the citizens demanded an explanation. Brutus stopped.

‘Then follow me,’ he said. ‘Come and hear me.’ They fought their way through the crowd, going towards the market place. When they got there it was clear that the crowd was unmanageable. Brutus turned to Cassius. You go down the other street so that there won’t be so many people in one place.’ He turned back to the crowd. ‘Those that want to hear me speak, stay here. Those that want to hear Cassius, go with him. And you will hear the full reasons for Caesar’s death.’

The crowd divided. Brutus ascended the pulpit and waited. The word went round that he was ready to speak. When they were all quiet he began.

‘Romans countrymen and friends, listen to what I have to say and be silent so that you can hear. Trust me for my honour and show respect so that you will follow what I say. Judge me according to your wisdom and use your understanding so that you will be able to judge better. If there is anyone in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar’s, to him I say that Brutus’ love for Caesar was no less than his. If then that dear friend demands to know why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer – not that I loved Caesar less but that I loved Rome more. Would you rather Caesar were living, and all die slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to all live as free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was brave, I honour him; but as he was ambitious, I killed him. There are tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his ambition. Is there anyone here so lacking in pride that we wants to be a slave? If there is, speak, because it’s he I have offended. Who is here so low that he doesn’t want to be a Roman? If any, speak, for it’s him I have offended. Who is here so vile that he does not love his country? If any, speak, for him I have offended.’ Brutus paused. There was silence. ‘I’m waiting for a reply,’ he said.

They all shouted at once, then, all telling him that there was no-one like that.

‘Then I’ve offended no-one,’ said Brutus.

‘I have done no more to Caesar than you would do to Brutus. The things that Caesar died for are recorded in the Capitol. His glory, for which he was renowned, is not understated; not his offences exaggerated, for which he suffered death

Antony walked slowly into the market place, carrying Caesar’s body in his arms.

‘Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony, who, although he had no hand in Caesar’s death, will receive the benefit of his dying – a place in the commonwealth, as which of you won’t? With this I leave you: that as I slew my best friend for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself when it shall please my country to need my death.’ He took the dagger out and held it up.

The people began shouting. ‘Live, Brutus, live! Live’ they shouted. ‘Carry him in triumph home to his house,’ shouted one. ‘Give him a statue along with his ancestors,’ roared another. Another shouted: ‘Let him be Caesar!’ And another called for him to be crowned. They made to lift him to carry him home on their shoulders.

‘My countrymen,’ he said, holding up his hand.
Those at the front of the crowd called to the others to be quiet because Brutus had more to say.

‘Good countrymen,’ he said. ‘Let me leave here on my own. And for my sake, stay here with Antony. Pay honour to Caesar’s corpse and hear Antony speak about Caesar’s glories. Mark Antony is allowed to speak with our permission. I do ask you most seriously that not one of you leave, except me, until Antony has spoken.’

The crowd cheered and urged Antony to go up into the pulpit.

Antony tried to talk above the crowd’s roar. ‘For Brutus sake, I’m obliged to you,’ he began.

The people were discussing this situation. ‘What’s he saying about Brutus?’ said one. His companion told him what Antony had just said. ‘He’d better not say anything bad about Brutus,’ the man said. ‘Caesar was a tyrant. Rome is well rid of him,’ said another. ‘Quiet, let’s hear what Antony could possibly say about it,’ someone said.

Antony tried again. ‘You gentle Romans.’

Some of the crowd hushed the others. ‘Quiet there. Let’s hear him.’ The noise subsided and they watched as Antony prepared to speak. Caesar’s body lay on the platform beside the pulpit.

‘Friends, Romans, countrymen,’ said Antony. ‘Lend me your ears: I have come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The bad things that men do are remembered after their deaths; the good are often buried with their bones. Let it be so with Caesar. The noble Brutus has told you Caesar was ambitious. If that was so it was a terrible fault and Caesar has paid a terrible price for it. Here, with permission of Brutus and the rest – for Brutus is an honourable man, so are they all, all honourable men – I have come to speak in Caesar’s funeral order.’

Antony paused. No-one stirred. He had their full attention.

‘He was my friend,’ he continued. ‘Faithful and true to me. But Brutus says he was ambitious. And Brutus is an honourable man. He has brought many captives home to Rome, whose ransoms filled the treasury. Did this in Caesar seem ambitious? When the poor cried out in their unhappiness Caesar wept. Ambition should be made of something harder. Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honourable man. You all saw on the Lupercal, I presented him with a crown three times, which he refused three times. Was this ambition? Yet Brutus says he was ambitious. And certainly Brutus is an honourable man. I’m not speaking to contradict Brutus, I’m only here to tell you what I know.’

Some of the people were beginning to nod. Antony was talking sense.

‘You all loved him once, not without cause. What cause do you now have to refrain from mourning for him?’ Antony looked up at the sky. ‘Oh reason, you have entered the bodies of animals and men have lost you.’

He began to weep. He stopped talking and his shoulders heaved. The crowd stood silently. Tears began to roll down the cheeks of some of them. Antony finally spoke. ‘Bear with me,’ he said. ‘My heart is there with Caesar’s body and I must pause till it comes back to me.’

‘Hmm,’ one man commented to his neighbour. ‘I think there’s a lot of sense in what he’s saying.’ ‘When you think about it,’ his neighbour replied, ‘Caesar has had a great wrong done to him.’ Another man joined them. ‘Has he? I fear there’s going to be someone a lot worse replacing him.’ The man in front of them turned round. ‘Did you hear what he said? Caesar wouldn’t take the crown. That proves he wasn’t ambitious.’ The first man nodded gravely. ‘If that’s true there are some who are going to regret this.’ A woman was wiping her eyes. ‘Poor soul,’ she said. ‘His eyes are as
red as fire from weeping.' Her husband drew himself up. ‘There’s not a nobler man in Rome than Antony,’ he said. ‘Hush,’ one of them said. ‘Pay attention. Antony’s starting to speak again.’

‘Only yesterday,’ said Antony, ‘Caesar’s word was the most powerful in the world. Now he’s lying there. And now we’re all superior to him. Oh, people of Rome, if I wanted to stir your hearts to rioting and rage I would be doing Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong, who you all know are honourable men. I will not wrong them. I choose rather to wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you, than to wrong such honourable men.’

He reached into his pocket and withdrew a scroll. ‘But here’s a parchment with Caesar’s seal on it. I found it in his study. It’s his will. If the people heard this will which, pardon me, I don’t intend to read, they would go and kiss Caesar’s wounds and dip their handkerchiefs in his sacred blood, yes, beg to have one of his hairs, to remember him by. And when they were dying they would leave it in their wills, bequeathing it as a rich heirloom to their children.’

‘Let’s hear the will,’ shouted someone. ‘Read it Mark Antony.’ A roar went up. ‘The will! The will! We want to hear Caesar’s will!’

Antony held his hand up for silence and got it instantly. ‘Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it. It’s not fitting for you to know how Caesar loved you. You’re not unfeeling wood or stone, you are men; and being men, hearing the will of Caesar, it will inflame you and make you mad. It’s a good thing that you don’t know that you are his heirs because if you did know then oh, what would come of it!’

The crowd shouted loudly, urging him to read the will.

‘Will you be patient?’ said Antony. ‘Will you just wait? I have overdone it even to tell you about it. I fear I’m wronging the honourable men whose daggers have stabbed Caesar. I really do fear it.’

Everyone was now in a rage. ‘They were traitors. Honourable men!’ and ‘The will! Read the will!’ and ‘They were villains, murderers, read the will!’

Antony held the scroll up and there was silence again. ‘You’re compelling me to read the will? Then form a ring around the corpse of Caesar and let me show you the man who made the will. Shall I step down from the pulpit? Will you let me?’

‘Come down.’

‘Yes, you can.’

‘A ring, come on.’

Stand back from the body.’

‘Make room for Antony, most noble Antony.’

‘No, don’t crush me,’ said Antony. ‘Stand back a little.’

‘Stand back, stand back, give Antony room.’

When they were all in place there was a circle with Antony and Caesar’s body in the middle of it.

‘If you have tears prepare to shed them now,’ said Antony. He knelt down and lifted the robe that covered Caesar’s body, which lay covered with a cloth. Then he stood up again. You all recognise this robe. I remember the first time he wore it. It was on a summer’s evening in his tent: the day that he had his greatest victory; over the Nervii.’ He put his hand through one of the blood rimmed holes. ‘Look, this is the place Cassius’ dagger ran through. See what a rent the envious Casca made. Through this one the well-loved Brutus stabbed; and as he pulled the cursed steel out, see how the blood of Caesar followed, as though it wanted to see whether it was Brutus knocking as a visitor or not, because, as you know, Brutus was Caesar’s best friend. Judge, oh you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him. This was the most unkind
cut of all: because when the noble Caesar saw him stab, Brutus’ ingratitude, more powerful than a traitor’s weapon, overwhelmed him. And his mighty heart burst with grief. And in this robe, which muffled up his face, at the base of Pompey’s statue, which was itself shedding blood, great Caesar fell. Oh what a fall that was, my countrymen! When that happened I and you, and all of us, fell down, while bloody treason triumphed over us.’

The people were shocked and their tears flowed profusely.

‘Oh, now you’re weeping and I see that you’re feeling the force of pity. These are holy drops. Kind souls, how you weep when you see only Caesar’s wounded robe?’ He whipped the cloth off Caesar’s corpse. ‘Look at this,’ he said. ‘Here he is himself, mutilated, as you can see, by traitors.’

A gasp went up, then a general wailing.

‘Oh piteous spectacle!’

‘Oh noble Caesar!’

‘Oh terrible day!’

‘Oh traitors, villains!’

‘Oh most bloody sight!’

‘We will be revenged!’

Then rage.

‘Revenge! About! Find them! Burn! Fire! Kill! Murder! Let not one traitor live!’

‘Wait, countrymen,’ said Antony.

‘Quiet there, listen to the noble Antony.’

‘We’ll listen to him, we’ll follow him, we’ll die with him.’

‘Good friends, sweet friends, don’t let me stir you up to such a sudden flood of civil disorder. Those who have done this deed are honourable. What personal grievances they may have had that made them do it I don’t know. They are wise and honourable and will no doubt answer you with their reasons. I didn’t come here to steal your hearts. I’m not an orator like Brutus. I’m as you see me, a plain, blunt man that loves my friend. And those who publicly gave me permission to speak about him know that. I have neither the intelligence, nor the words, nor the worthiness, action, expression nor the power of speech to stir men’s blood: I only speak plainly. I’m telling you what you know already and show you dear Caesar’s wounds, poor poor silent mouths, and I ask them to speak for me. But if I were Brutus and he me, there would be an Antony who would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue in every wound of Caesar that would move the stones of Rome to rise in rebellion.’

The crowd was impatient now.

‘We’ll burn Brutus’ house!’

‘Come on, find the conspirators!’

Antony raised his hand again. ‘Hear me, countrymen, yet hear me.’

‘Quiet there, listen to Antony, most noble Antony.’

‘Why friends,’ said Antony. ‘You’re going off to do things you know nothing about. Why does Caesar deserve your love? Sadly you don’t know. I’ll have to tell you then. You’ve forgotten the will I told you about.’

They looked at other. Of course, the will.

Antony unrolled the scroll. ‘Here is the will, and under Caesar’s seal. To every Roman citizen he gives, to every single man, seventy-five drachmas.’

There was uproar.

‘Most Noble Caesar! We’ll revenge his death!’

‘Oh royal Caesar!’

‘Listen to me patiently,’ shouted Antony.
They hushed again.

‘Moreover, he has left you all his parks, his private gardens, and newly planted orchards on this side of the Tiber; he has left them to you and your heirs forever, public pleasure-gardens to walk in and recreate yourselves. Here was a Caesar. When will there be another?’

‘Never! Never! Come, let’s go, let’s go. We’ll burn his body in the holy place, and with the fire brands burn the traitors’ houses. Bring the body.’

‘Go and get fire.’

‘Get some benches.’

‘Get doorways, windows, anything!’

They rushed in different directions, frenzied, angry. Some of them raised Caesar’s body and carried it away.

Antony watched until he was the only one left in the market place. He nodded. Now let it work. Mischief was afoot. Let it take what course it would.

Octavius Caesar’s servant approached him. ‘Sir, Octavius has arrived in Rome.’

‘Where is he?’

‘He and Lepidus are at Caesar’s house.’

‘I’ll go straight there. He comes at a good time. Fortune is smiling and in this mood will give us anything.’

‘I heard him say that Brutus and Cassius have fled like madmen through the gates of Rome.’

‘They probably knew what the people were up to and how I have moved them. Take me to Octavius.’
Act Three Scene Three

The elderly poet, Cinna, hadn’t been out for some time, but he had a strange feeling that something was drawing him out of doors. He’d dreamt that he had dined with Caesar and that had filled his imagination with foreboding. As he approached the centre of the city a mob surrounded him.

‘What’s your name,’ someone demanded.
They began jostling him. ‘Where are you going?’ another said.
The questions came thick and fast. ‘Where do you live?’ ‘Are you a married man or a bachelor?’
They blocked his way. ‘Answer everything,’ a man said, grabbing the front of his robe.
‘Yes, and make it quick,’ another told him.
‘And tell the truth.’
‘Yes, if you know what’s good for you.’
‘What’s my name?’ said Cinna. ‘Where am I going? Where do I live? Am I a married man or a bachelor? Well, to answer everyone directly and briefly and wisely and truthfully – wisely, I’ll tell you that I am a bachelor.’
One of them sneered. ‘You saying that those who marry are fools? You’ll regret that, I’m afraid. Go on.’
‘I’m going to Caesar’s funeral.’
‘As a friend or an enemy?’
‘A friend.’
‘At least he answered that plainly.’
‘Where you live. Briefly.’
‘Briefly, I live next to the Capitol.’
‘Your name, sir. Honestly.’
‘Honestly, my name is Cinna.’
‘Tear him to pieces,’ one of them shouted. ‘He’s a conspirator.’
They grabbed him and threw him to the ground and began kicking him.
‘I’m Cinna the poet, I’m Cinna the poet,’ the old man screamed.
‘Tear him for his bad poems, tear him for his bad poems,’ one of them yelled.
‘I’m not Cinna the conspirator,’ the old man whined.
‘It doesn’t matter; his name’s Cinna. Pull his name out of his heart.’
‘Tear him, tear him,’ the leader shouted and they punched and kicked him till he lay unconscious at their feet. The leader beckoned. ‘Come, brands, get some. Fire brands. To Brutus, to Cassius; burn everything. Some to Decius’ house, and some to Casca’s; some to Ligarius. Go!’
Act Four Scene One

Antony, Octavius, Caesar’s adopted son, not yet twenty, and their ally, the experienced old politician, Lepidus, sat at a table in Antony’s house. They were examining a long list of names.

‘These are the ones who will die,’ said Antony. ‘The ones whose names are ticked.’

‘Your brother must die too, Lepidus,’ said Octavius. ‘Do you agree to that?’

‘I do……,’ said Lepidus.

‘Mark him down Antony,’ said Octavius.

‘On condition that your sister’s son, Publius, won’t live either, Mark Antony,’ said Lepidus.

‘He won’t live.’ Antony ticked his nephew’s name. ‘Look, with a pen I condemn him. But Lepidus, go to Caesar’s house and bring the will and we’ll examine it to see what we can avoid paying out.’

‘Will you be here?’ said Lepidus.

‘Either here or at the Capitol,’ said Octavius.

When he had left Antony shook his head. ‘He’s a lightweight, without any merit: fit only to be sent on errands. Is it fitting that in dividing the three-fold world of Europe, Africa and Asia, among us, he should be one of the three to share it?’

‘Well you were the one who chose him, and listened to his opinion about who should die when we were planning our purge.’

Antony sighed. ‘Octavius, I’m older than you. ‘And although we’ve given him this honour to take some of the load off us, he will bear his load like a donkey bears gold – to groan and sweat beneath it, either led or driven as we direct; and having taken our treasure to where we want it, we’ll take his load off him and retire him, like the unloaded donkey, to shake his ears and graze in meadows.’

‘You can do what you like, but he’s an experienced and brave soldier,’ said Octavius.

‘So is my horse, Octavius, and for that I give him food. It’s a creature that I teach to perform on the battlefield, to turn, to stop, to run straight, every motion governed by what I want. And Lepidus is just the same. He has to be taught and trained and told what to do. A boring fellow, someone who likes objects, art and imitations, without any independent thought. Don’t talk about him as anything but a tool. And now, Octavius, on to more important matters. Brutus and Cassius are raising forces. We must gather our own together immediately. So we must organise our allies, secure our friends, make the most of our resources, and go and sit in council without delay, to work out what our unknown dangers may be and those that we already know about, deal with.’

‘Let’s do that, then,’ said Octavius, ‘because we are surrounded by enemies, and I’m afraid some of them who seem to be our friends are full of mischief,’
Act Four Scene Two

Brutus received word that an army was approaching his camp and he ordered his two generals to accompany him with a troop of soldiers to meet them. The two parties approached each other and it became clear that the advancing group was Cassius’ army, led by one of his captains, Titanius. Cassius’ servant, Pindaris, was with him.

‘Halt,’ said Brutus.
Lucilius held his hand up to the officer behind him. ‘Give the word. Halt, and wait.’ He galloped to the other party, spoke to its leaders and returned swiftly with Pindarus.

‘What is it, Lucilius?’ said Brutus. ‘Is Cassius coming?’
‘He’s here,’ said Lucilius, and Pindarus has come to bring you greetings from him.’

‘It’s an impressive greeting,’ said Brutus. ‘Your master, Pindarus, either because he has changed his mind or because he’s been badly advised by his officers, has given me reason to wish that some of the things he has done could be undone. But if he’s here I’m sure he’ll give me a satisfactory explanation.’
‘I’m sure that my noble master will display his usual respect for you.’
‘I don’t doubt him at all,’ said Brutus. ‘A word Lucilius.’ He rode a few paces away and Lucilius followed. ‘How did he receive you? Speak plainly.’
‘With courtesy and sufficient respect, but without his usual friendly gestures, not with such informal and friendly chat as he used to.’
‘You’re describing a warm friend cooling off,’ said Brutus. ‘Remember this, Lucius; when friendship begins to cool off it uses a formal politeness. There’s none of that in sincerity, but insincere men, like horses, burning with eagerness at first, making a show of their eagerness and quality…….’

The other party was approaching to the accompaniment of a drum beat.
‘……but when they have to endure the reality of battle, they lower their arched necks and like worthless horses, fail the test. Is his army coming?’
‘They intend setting up camp at Sardis for the night. The biggest division, mainly cavalry, have come with Cassius.’
‘They’re here,’ said Brutus. March slowly forward to meet him.’
The two armies faced each other. The word went along both armies to halt. Cassius and Brutus dismounted and shook hands.
‘Most noble brother you have done me wrong,’ said Cassius.
‘May the gods judge me,’ said Brutus. ‘Do I even wrong my enemies? If I don’t do that am I likely to wrong a brother?’
Cassius shook his head. ‘Brutus, this dignified posture of yours hides injustices, and when you do them ……’
‘Cassius, be calm. Speak your grievances quietly. I understand what you’re saying. With the eyes of both our armies on us, when they should see nothing but harmony between us, let’s not quarrel. Tell them to move away, then explain your concerns to me in my tent and I will listen.’
Cassius beckoned to Pindarus. ‘Tell our commanders to lead their men away a little.’
Lucius, you do that too,’ said Brutus. And don’t let anyone come to my tent until we’ve finished our meeting. Lucilius and Titinius, come and guard the entrance.’
Act Four Scene Three

Brutus poured two cups of water and invited Cassius to sit.
Cassius came straight to the point. ‘This is how you have wronged me,’ he said. ‘You have condemned and reprimanded Lucius Pella for taking bribes from the Sardinians, and my letters defending him, because I know the man, were contemptuously pushed aside.’
‘You were wrong to write in his defence.’
‘At times like this it’s not appropriate to pounce on every trivial offence,’ said Cassius.
‘I have to tell you, Cassius, that you yourself are criticised for having an itchy palm and selling positions to undeserving men.’
‘I an itching palm!’ Cassius sprang up and stood over Brutus. ‘You’re lucky that you’re Brutus saying this, or by the gods, that would be the last thing you ever said.’
‘The only reason you’re escaping censure for your corruption is that your name is Cassius,’ said Brutus.
‘Censure?’
‘Remember March, don’t forget the ides of March. Didn’t great Julius bleed for justice? What villain stabbed him other than for the sake of justice? What? Will one of us, who killed the world’s foremost man for his corruption, now contaminate our fingers with shabby bribes and sell our reputation for so much trash that can be grasped like this?’ Brutus closed his fist. ‘I would rather be a dog, baying at the moon, than be such a Roman.’
‘Brutus, don’t bait me. I won’t take it. You forget yourself, hedging me in like this. I am a soldier, I am, more experienced than you and more competent to make such judgments.
Brutus stood up and faced him. ‘Nonsense! You are not, Cassius.’
‘I am!’
‘I say you are not!’
They had squared up to each other and their eyes were locked.
‘Don’t provoke me further,’ said Cassius. ‘I’ll forget myself. Don’t tempt me any further if you value your health.’
Brutus turned away. ‘Go away, you worthless creature,’ he said.
‘I don’t believe this,’ said Cassius.
Brutus sat down again. He sighed. ‘Listen to me. Do I have to humour your irrational anger? Do I have to be frightened when a madman stares?’
Cassius put his head in his hands. ‘Oh ye gods, ye gods! Must I take this?’
‘Just this? Yes, and more. Pull faces and clutch your head till your proud heart bursts. Go and show your slaves how furious you are and make them tremble. Do you think you can do that to me? Do I have to watch this? Must I cower in the face of your bad mood? By the gods, you can swallow your own bile till it kills you. From now on I’ll use you for my entertainment. Yes, laugh at you, when you’re irritable.’
‘Has it come to this?’ Cassius threw himself down on to his cushion.
Neither spoke for a minute then Brutus broke the silence. ‘You say you’re a better soldier. Show it then. Make good your boasting and I’ll be well pleased. As for myself I’ll be happy to learn from such a good soldier.’
‘You’re wronging me in every way. You’re wronging me, Brutus. I said a more experienced soldier, not a better. Did I say better?’

‘I don’t care what you said.’

‘When Caesar was alive he wouldn’t have dared upset me like this,’ said Cassius.

‘Hush, hush, you wouldn’t have dared tempt him.’

‘I wouldn’t have?’

‘No.’

‘Not dared tempt him?’

‘Not on your life.’

‘Don’t presume too much on our friendship,’ said Cassius. ‘I may do something I’ll regret.’

‘You’ve already done things that you should regret. There is no terror in your threats, Cassius. Because I’m so protected by my principles that they pass by me like a small breeze that I don’t even notice. I sent to you for some money, because I can’t raise money dishonestly, which you denied me. I’d rather sell my heart and drain my blood for drachmas than extort cash from hard-working peasants by crooked dealing. I sent to you for money to pay my troops and you denied me. Was that done like Cassius? Would I have treated Caius Cassius like that? When Marcus Brutus gets so greedy that he would deny money to his friends then the gods had better be ready with all their thunderbolts and strike him down.’

‘I didn’t deny you,’ said Cassius.

‘You did.’

‘I did not. The messenger who brought you my answer was an idiot. Brutus has broken my heart. A friend should tolerate his friend’s weaknesses, but Brutus makes mine greater than they are.’

‘I don’t until you force them on me.’

‘You don’t love me.’ Cassius was almost in tears.

‘I don’t like your faults.’

‘A friend’s eye would never see such faults.’

‘A flatterer wouldn’t, even though they might appear as huge as high Olympus.’

Cassius shook his head sadly. ‘Come Antony and young Octavius, come. Revenge yourselves on Cassius alone; because Cassius is tired of this world, hated by one he loves; defied by his brother; rebuked like a slave; all his faults observed, written down in a notebook, learnt off by heart, to throw at me. Oh I could weep my soul from my eyes.’ He drew his dagger out and offered it to Brutus. ‘Here is my dagger, and here’s my naked breast.’ He opened the front of his shirt. ‘In here there is a heart, richer than Pluto’s mine, richer than gold. If you are a Roman, take it. I who denied you gold will give you my heart. Strike, as you did at Caesar, because I know that when you hated him most, you loved him better than you ever loved Cassius.’

‘Sheathe your dagger,’ said Brutus. ‘You can be angry whenever you want to be; it will go unchecked. Do whatever you like; I’ll take every dishonour as no more than a bad mood. Oh Cassius, you’re like a lamb that shows its anger like a flint to light a fire. When roused up it gives a quick spark then gets cold again.’

‘Has Cassius lived his whole life just to be an amusement to his Brutus when unhappiness and a bad temper trouble him?’ said Cassius.

‘When I said that I was bad tempered too,’ said Brutus.

‘Are you admitting that?’ said Cassius. ‘Give me your hand.’
They stood up and embraced each other. ‘And my heart, too,’ said Brutus. ‘Oh Brutus,’ sighed Cassius. ‘What’s the matter?’
‘Haven’t you got enough love to tolerate me when that rash moodiness that I inherited from my mother makes me forget myself?’
‘Of course, Cassius, and from now on, when you get like that with your Brutus, he’ll take it that it’s your mother raving, and just let you get on with it.’
There was some shouting outside the tent. A camp follower, a poet, come along to record the great events, was trying to get past the officers who were guarding the entrance. ‘Let me go in to see the generals,’ he insisted. ‘There is some grudge between them: it’s not right that they should be alone.’
‘You’re not going in,’ said Lucilius.
The Poet raised his fists. ‘Nothing but death will stop me,’ he said.
Cassius appeared at the entrance. ‘Hello?’ he said. ‘What’s the matter?’
‘For shame, you generals,’ the poet said, following Cassius into the tent, ‘what do you think you’re doing? Make up and be friends, as two such men should be, because I’m much older than ye.’
Cassius laughed. ‘What terrible rhymes this philosopher comes out with!’
‘Get out, sirrah,’ said Brutus. ‘You cheeky fellow, get out!’
‘Put up with him, Brutus,’ said Cassius. ‘That’s just the way he is.
‘I’ll put up with his foolery when he chooses the right time to show it,’ said Brutus. ‘What’s the war got to do with silly rhymesters like this? Get out, you wretched creature!’ Brutus’ face was full of fury.
‘Get out,’ said Cassius. ‘Go!’
The poet scuttled away to the laughter of all the officers.
‘Lucilius and Titanius, tell the commanders to put the men to bed for the night,’ said Brutus. ‘Then come come straight back, and bring Messala with you. Lucius, a bowl of wine.’
‘I didn’t think you could be so angry,’ said Cassius.
‘Oh Cassius, I’m burdened by many griefs.’
To Cassius’ surprise Brutus was weeping. He put his hand on his friend’s shoulder. ‘Your stoic religion isn’t serving you well,’ he said, ‘if you get so upset by such small things.’
‘No man can bear sorrow better than I,’ said Brutus. ‘Portia is dead.’
‘Ha! Portia?’
‘She’s dead.
‘How did I escape killing when I crossed you like that? Oh Insupportable and moving loss! Of what sickness?’
‘Unable to endure my absence, and grief that young Octavius and Mark Antony have made themselves so powerful – because that news came with the news of her death – she became distracted. When her servants were gone she swallowed fire.’
‘And died of that?’
‘Exactly.’
‘Oh you immortal Gods,’ Cassius embraced Brutus.
‘Don’t mention it again,’ said Brutus as the boy arrived with wine and candles. ‘Give me a bowl of wine.’ When they both had wine Brutus raised his bowl. ‘In this I bury all animosity, Caius.’
‘My heart is thirsty for that noble toast,’ said Cassius. ‘Fill, Lucius, till the wine overflows the rim. I cannot drink too much of Brutus’ love.’
‘Come in Titinius,’ said Brutus.
Lucilius, Titinius and Messala joined them as the boy went out.
‘Welcome, good Messala,’ said Brutus. ‘Now let’s gather round this candle and consider what we need.’
Cassius’ thoughts were far away. ‘Portia, have you really gone?’ he said softly.
‘No more, I beg of you,’ said Brutus. ‘Messala, I have letters here that tell me that young Octavius and Mark Antony are bearing down on us with a mighty force, moving towards Philippi.’
‘I’ve got letters confirming that,’ said Messala
‘And what further information?’ said Brutus.
‘That with charges of outlawry Octavius, Antony and Lepidus have put a hundred senators to death.’
‘Our letters don’t entirely agree,’ said Brutus. ‘Mine speak of seventy senators that died by their sentences of death, Cicero being one.’
‘Cicero one of them?’ said Cassius.
‘Cicero is dead,’ said Messala. ‘And by that order of death sentence.’
‘Well to our work,’ said Brutus. What do you think about marching to Philippi immediately?’
‘I don’t think it’s a good idea,’ said Cassius.
‘Your reason?’
‘It’s this. It’s better that the enemy looks for us. In that way he’ll waste his resources, make his soldiers tired, and do himself harm while we are resting, ready and fresh.’
Brutus nodded. ‘That’s a good reason but it has to give way to a better plan. The people between Philippi and here are hostile to us, because they’ve denied us their contribution. The enemy, marching through them, will make up fuller numbers and arrive refreshed, with new additions, and with a high morale. We can cut him off from that advantage, if we face him there, these people behind us.’
‘Listen to me, good brother,’ said Cassius.
‘With your permission,’ said Brutus, ‘don’t forget that we have got the most out of our friends; our legions are brim-full, we are ready. The enemy increases every day. We, at our height, can only decline. There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to success. Missing that tide, all the voyage of men’s life is confined to shallows and failure. We’re now floating on that full tide and we must take the current when it’s right, or lose our project.’
‘If that’s what you want then, proceed,’ said Cassius. ‘We’ll go too, and meet them at Philippi.’
‘It’s late, and we need to sleep,’ said Brutus. ‘There’s nothing more to be said.’
‘No, nothing,’ said Cassius. ‘We’ll rise early tomorrow and go.’
‘Lucius! ‘Get my nightgown,’ said Brutus. ‘Farewell, good Messala. Good night Titinius. Noble, noble Cassius, good night, and sleep well.’
Cassius took his hand. ‘Oh my dear brother! This was a bad beginning to the night. There must never be such a division between us again. Don’t let it happen, Brutus.’
Lucius came in with Brutus’ nightgown.
‘Everything is fine,’ said Brutus.
‘Good night my lord,’ said Cassius.
‘Good night, good brother.’
Titinius and Messala wished him goodnight. ‘Farewell everyone,’ said Brutus. He was left alone. ‘Give me the gown,’ he told Lucius. ‘Where’s your lute?’
‘It’s here, in the tent.’
‘What? You’re sleepy. Poor fellow, I don’t blame you. You’re over worked. Tell Claudius and some other of my guards to come and sleep on cushions in my tent.’

Lucius went and called them.
‘Did you want us, my lord?’ said Varro.
‘Please sleep in my tent tonight,’ said Brutus. ‘It may be I’ll wake you up later to take some business to my brother Cassius.’
‘If it’s alright with you we’ll stay up for your convenience.’
‘I don’t want that. Lie down, good sirs. I may change my mind. Look, Lucius, here’s the book I’ve been looking everywhere for. I put it in the pocket of my gown.’
‘I was sure your lordship hadn’t given it to me,’ said Lucius.
‘Bear with me. good boy, I’m very forgetful. Can you keep your eyes open for a while and play your lute a bit?’
‘It’s my duty, sir.’
‘I shouldn’t stretch your duty. I know youths need a lot of sleep.’
‘I’ve already slept, my lord.’
‘Good, and you’ll get more sleep. I won’t keep you long.’ Brutus smiled at him.
‘If I live I’ll be good to you.’

Lucius began strumming softly and started to sing. Brutus lay back on a cushion and closed his eyes. It was a soothing song. It came to an end and Brutus opened his eyes. Lucius had fallen asleep over his lute. He wouldn’t wake him; if he moved he would break the lute. He got up and gently removed the lute and bid the boy a gentle good night. It was a soothing song. It came to an end and Brutus opened his eyes. Lucius had fallen asleep over his lute. He wouldn’t wake him; if he moved he would break the lute. He got up and gently removed the lute and bid the boy a gentle good night. Hmmmm, the book; now where was he? Hadn’t he folded the corner of the page where he had last been reading? Ah, there it was. He started to read.

The candle seemed to grow dimmer and there was a movement of the tent’s entrance flap. There was someone there. Ha? Who was it? It must be a weakness in his eyes that was shaping a horrible apparition. ‘Are you any thing?’ he said aloud. He shivered. ‘Are you some god, some angel or some devil, that’s making my blood run cold and my hair stand up? Tell me what you are?’

‘Your evil spirit,’ the apparition said in a thin ghostly voice.
Brutus rubbed his eyes. It was still there, and Brutus could see now, that it had taken the shape of Caesar, all pale and rigid. ‘Why have you come?’ he said.
‘To tell you that you will see me at Philippi.’
‘Well. I’ll see you again?’
‘Yes, at Philippi.’
‘Well then I’ll see you at Philippi.’
The ghost faded and disappeared.
‘Just when I’ve overcome my fear you vanish,’ said Brutus. ‘Evil spirit, I want to talk to you more. Boy, Lucius! Varro! Claudius! All of you, wake up. Claudius!’
Lucius thought he was still playing the lute. ‘The strings are out of tune,’ he said, still half asleep.
‘Lucius. Wake up!’
Lucius was wide awake now. ‘My lord,’ he said.
‘Did you dream that you cried out, Lucius?’
‘My lord, I didn’t know that I cried out.’
‘Yes you did. Did you see anything?’
‘Nothing, my lord.’
‘Go back to sleep, Lucius. Claudius! You, wake up!’
The guards got up.
‘Why did you cry out, sirs, in your sleep?’ said Brutus.
‘Did we my lord?’ said Claudius.
‘Yes, did you see anything?’
‘No, my lord, I didn’t see anything,’ said Varro.
‘Nor I, my lord,’ said Claudius.
‘Go and give my compliments to my brother Cassius,’ said Brutus. ‘Tell him to get his troops up early. And we will follow.’
Act Five Scene One

The armies of Octavius and Antony had halted on a plain near Philippi and they were meeting to confer.

‘Now Antony,’ said Octavius, ‘This couldn’t be better. You said the enemy wouldn’t come down here but would stay in the hills and the upper ground. They haven’t done that; their armies are on the plain. They intend to defy us here at Philippi, accepting battle before we’ve even challenged them.’

‘Tut,’ said Antony. ‘I can read their thoughts and I know exactly why they’re doing it. They would rather be in a different position but they’re putting on a show of bravery, hoping to frighten us with their courage, but it’s only a show.’

A messenger arrived, out of breath. ‘Get ready, generals,’ he said. ‘The enemy is advancing with a fearful display; their red flag of battle is flying, and you have to do something immediately.’

Antony tightened his breastplate. ‘Octavius, lead your army stealthily on, to the left side of the plain.’

‘I’ll go to the right,’ said Octavius. ‘You go to the left.’

‘Why are you crossing me at this critical moment?’ said Antony.

‘I’m not crossing you,’ said Octavius, ‘but that’s what I’m going to do.’

As Brutus’ and Cassius’ army came within sight of their opponents it was apparent that the enemy was waiting instead of advancing towards them.

‘They’re waiting there and want to talk,’ said Brutus.

‘Wait here, Titonius,’ said Cassius. ‘We have to go out there and talk.’

The two generals rode out towards their opponents.

When Octavius saw them coming he turned to Antony. ‘Shall we give the signal to start the battle?’ he said.

‘No Caesar, we’ll wait for them to begin. Let’s go to them. The generals want to talk.’

‘Don’t move until the signal,’ Octavius instructed his captains. They rode out and met Brutus and Cassius halfway.

‘Words before blows, is it, countrymen?’ said Brutus.

‘Not that we love words better, as you do,’ said Octavius.

‘Good words are better than bad blows, Octavius,’ said Brutus.

Antony sneered. ‘You give good words when you make bad blows, Brutus. Remember the hole you made in Caesar’s heart, while at the same time crying, “Long live! Hail Caesar!”’

Cassius shook his head and smiled bitterly. ‘Antony,’ he said. ‘We don’t yet know how good your blows are, but as for your words, they rob the Hybla bees, and leave them without honey.’

‘And stingless too,’ said Antony.

‘And soundless too,’ said Brutus. ‘Because you’ve stolen their buzzing, Antony, and very wisely, you threaten before you sting.’

Antony had had enough of this banter. ‘Villains!’ he exclaimed. ‘You didn’t when your vile daggers clashed against each other in the sides of Caesar. You grinned like apes and fawned like dogs and bowed like slaves, kissing Caesar’s feet, while vile Casca, like a mongrel behind, struck Caesar in the neck. Oh you flatterers.’
‘Flatterers?’ said Cassius. ‘Now Brutus, we have you to thank for this. This
tongue would not have offended us like this today if you had listened to Cassius.’

Octavius was getting impatient. ‘Come come, to business. If arguing makes
us sweat, proving who’s right will turn it to redder drops.’ He drew his sword. ‘Look, I
draw my sword against conspirators. When do you think this sword will be returned to
its scabbard? Never, until Caesar’s wounds are fully avenged. Or till another Caesar
has been slaughtered by the sword of traitors.’

‘Caesar, you can’t die at the hands of traitors unless you’ve brought them with
you,’ said Brutus.

‘I hope not,’ said Octavius. ‘I wasn’t born to die on Brutus’ sword.’

‘Young man, if you were the noblest of your family you couldn’t have a more
honourable death,’ said Brutus.

Cassius laughed. ‘A peevish schoolboy, joined with a partying reveller.’

‘The same old Cassius,’ said Antony.

‘Come on Antony, let’s go.’ Octavius turned his horse. ‘We hurl defiance in
your teeth, traitors. If you dare fight today, come to the field. If not, come when you
have the stomach for it.’

As Brutus and Cassius rode back Cassius shouted out to the empty air. ‘Why
now. Blow wind, swell sails and swim ship! The storm is up and everything’s at
stake.’

When they got back to their armies Antony called Lucilius aside for a briefing.
Cassius went up to Messala.

‘Messala,’ he said, ‘it’s my birthday. On this very day Cassius was born. Give
me your hand, Messala. You are my witness that, like Pompey, I’m forced, against
my will, to stake all our liberty on a single battle. You know that I’ve always agreed
with the philosopher, Epicurus, who rejected portents and fortune telling by dreams.
I’ve changed my mind and now I half believe that some things are sent to warn us.
As we came from Sardis two mighty eagles swooped down on our foremost banner,
and perched there, gorging and feeding from the hands of the soldiers who came
with us to Philippi. This morning they were gone and in their place there were ravens,
crows and kites flying over our heads, looking down on us as though we were dying
prey. Their shadows seemed like a fatal canopy, under which our army lay, ready to
die.’

‘Don’t believe in that,’ said Messala.

‘I only half believe it, because I’m in good spirits and determined to meet all
perils full on.’

Brutus and Lucilius joined them.

‘Now most noble Brutus,’ said Cassius, ‘the gods are well disposed towards
us today, so that, friends in peace, we may live to old age. But since the affairs of
men are always uncertain let’s consider what the worst thing is that may happen. If
we lose this battle this is the very last time that we’ll talk to each other. What will you
do if that happens?’

‘According to the stoic philosophy in which it’s considered cowardly to take
one’s own life,’ said Brutus, ‘I criticised Cato for killing himself. I don’t know why, but I
do find it cowardly and vile to end the natural course of life for fear of what may
happen. I’m arming myself with patience to await the destiny that the powers above
us have decided for me.’

‘Then, if we lose this battle you’re happy to be led in triumph through the
streets of Rome?’ said Cassius.
'No Cassius, no. Don’t think, you noble Roman, that Brutus would ever go bound to Rome. He has too proud a mind. But today must end the work the ides of March began, and whether we will meet again I don’t know. So let’s take our everlasting farewell of each other.’ He embraced Cassius. ‘For ever and ever, farewell Cassius. If we do meet again, why, we’ll smile. If not, this parting was properly done.’

‘For ever and forever, farewell Brutus,’ said Cassius. ‘If we do meet again, we’ll definitely smile. If not, it’s true, this parting was properly done.’

‘Well then, lead on. If only one could know the end of this day’s business before it comes. But it’s enough that the day will end and then we will know.’

Brutus mounted his horse. ‘Come! Let’s go!’
Act Five Scene Two

Brutus gave Messala an instruction: ‘Ride, ride and give these letters to the legions on the other side. They must attack at once; for I can see a lack of fighting spirit in Octavius’ wing and a sudden push will overwhelm them. Ride, ride, Messala. Let them attack.’
Act Five Scene Three

‘Oh look, Titanius,’ said Cassius. ‘Look, the villains are fleeing. And I have become the enemy of my own men. This ensign of mine was turning back. I killed the coward and took the banner from him.’

‘Oh Cassius, Brutus gave the word too early,’ said Titanius. ‘When he had the advantage of Cassius he took it too eagerly. His soldiers started robbing the corpses of the dead and Antony surrounded us.’

Pindarus was running towards them.

‘Retreat further away, my lord, go further away. Mark Antony is in your tents. My lord! Go, noble Cassius, go further away!’

‘This hill is far enough away,’ said Cassius. ‘Look, look, Titanius. Are those my tents where the that fire is?’

‘They are, my lord.’

‘Titanius, if you love me, mount your horse and bury your spurs in him till he’s taken you to those troops over there and come back and tell me so that I may rest assured whether they are friend or enemy.’

‘I’ll be back as quick as a thought,’ said Titanius.

‘Go Pindarus, get higher up that hill. My sight has always been weak. Go and look, and tell me what you see on that field.’

Pindarus scrambled up the hill.

It occurred to Cassius that this was the day that he had drawn his first breath. The time had come around and at the point where he began his life he would end it too.’ He called up to Pindarus. ‘What news sirrah?’

‘Oh my lord.’

‘What?’

‘Titinius is being pursued by horsemen who are catching him up. Yet he keeps going. Now they’re almost on him. Go, Titinius! Now some are getting off their horses. Oh, and he’s getting off too. They’ve taken him. And listen! They’re shouting for joy.’

‘Come down,’ said Cassius. ‘Don’t watch any more. Oh what a coward I am to live long enough to see my best friend taken before my very eyes.’

Pindarus joined him.

‘Come here, sirrah,’ said Cassius. ‘I took you prisoner in Parthia. And then I made you swear that, because I saved your life, you would do whatever I told you to. Come now, keep your promise. I’m setting you free in return for this: kill me with this sword. Don’t try and protest. Here, take the hilt and when my face is covered, as it is now, guide the sword.’

Pindarus held the hilt of the sword against his body and Cassius leant against its tip, placing it near his heart. Then he thrust himself hard on to it.

‘Caesar, you are revenged,’ he said, and dropped at Pindarus’ feet.

Pindarus pulled the sword out and threw it on the ground. ‘So I’m free,’ he said. ‘And yet I wouldn’t have been if I had not done this.’ He took a last look at his master. ‘Oh Cassius!’ He looked around. Then he started running. He would keep running till he was far away from this country, to where no Roman would ever see him again.
No sooner had he left than Titanius and Messala came back. ‘It’s the ups and downs of fortune, Titanius,’ Messala was saying. ‘Because Octavius has been defeated by noble Brutus’ army, just as Cassius’ legions have been by Antony.’

‘This news will certainly comfort Cassius,’ said Titanius.

‘Where did you leave him?’

‘Here, on this hill, all disconsolate, and with only Pindarus.’

‘Isn’t that him lying on the ground?’ said Messala.

‘He doesn’t seem to be alive,’ said Titanius. He knelt down beside Cassius’ body. ‘Oh my heart!’

‘Isn’t that he?’ said Messala.

‘No, this is he that was. Cassius is no more. Oh, setting sun, in just the same way as your red rays are sinking tonight, so in his red blood Cassius’ day has set. The sun of Rome has set. Our day is over; clouds, dews and dangers are on their way; our times have gone.’ He stood up. ‘Not waiting till my errand had been completed has caused this.’

‘Not believing that we could be so successful has done it,’ said Messala. ‘Oh terrible mistake – the child of depression – why do you seem to show men things that haven’t happened? Cassius’ depression caused this mistake.’

‘Pindarus! Titinius looked all around. ‘Where are you Pindarus?’

‘Go and look for him, Titinius,’ said Messala, ‘while I go and see the noble Brutus to thrust this sad news into his ears. I say thrust it because sharp steel and poison darts will be as welcome to his ears as news of this sight.’

‘Hurry, Messala, and I’ll look for Pindarus in the meantime.’

When Messla had gone Titinius gazed at Cassius’ body. ‘Why did you send me there, brave Cassius? Didn’t I encounter our friends, and didn’t they put this wreath of victory on my head and tell me to give it to you? Didn’t you hear their shouts? Alas, you misconstrued everything. But wait, put this one on your head.’ He knelt down and placed a wreath on Cassius’ head. ‘Brutus told me to give it to you and I’m doing as he told me. Brutus, come soon and see how I have honoured Caius Casius.’

He lifted Casius’ sword and placed its point on his chest. ‘With your permission gods,’ he said, ‘this is what a Roman has to do. Come Cassius’ sword, and find Titinius’ heart.’ He placed his hands on the hilt and pushed as hard as he could. The blade found his heart and he fell beside his general.

Not long after that Brutus and Messalo arrived to the sound of trumpets. They were accompanied by Strato, Volumnius, Lucilius, Labeo, Flavius and young Cato.

‘Where, where, Messala?’ said Brutus. ‘Where’s his body?’

Messala pointed. ‘Over there, and Titinius is mourning it.’

As they came nearer Brutus said, ‘Titanius is lying on the ground with his face upward.’

‘He’s dead,’ said Cato.

Brutus surveyed the scene. ‘Oh Julius Caesar,’ he said. ‘you are still mighty. Your ghost walks around and turns our own swords on ourselves.’

‘Brave Titinius!’ exclaimed Cato. ‘Look, he’s crowned dead Cassius.’

Brutus stood for a moment with his eyes closed. A tear rolled down his cheek. Then, as they all stood in respectful silence he spoke: ‘Are there two Romans such as these still alive? The last of all the Romans, farewell. It is impossible that Rome should ever produce your equals.’ He turned to his companions. ‘Friends, I owe more tears to this dead man than you will see me shed. I shall find time, Caius, I shall find time. So come, and send his body to Thasos. His funeral ceremonies won’t be in our
camp in case it demoralises us. Lucilius, let’s go, and young Cato, let’s return to the battlefield. Labeo and Flavius, set the battle on. It’s three o’clock; and, Romans, we’ll test fortune in a second fight.'
Act Five Scene Four

Brutus was moving about the battlefield, inspiring his troops. ‘Come on countrymen,’ he shouted. ‘Keep it up, keep going!’

‘What mongrels won’t?’ shouted Cato, brandishing his sword. ‘Who’s coming with me? I’ll shout my name around the field. He ran off until he reached the centre of the action.

‘I’m the son of Marcus Cato,’ he shouted. ‘You hear me? I’m an enemy to tyrants and a friend of my country! I am the son of Marcus Cato!’

Some of the enemy rushed at him and he fought them furiously. He fought and killed as he went, covering a wide area.

A little later in another part of the battlefield, in the thick of the enemy, Lucilius suddenly started shouting. ‘I am Brutus, Marcus Brutus, I am! Brutus, my country’s friend. Know me for Brutus!’ He stopped when he saw Cato lying dead. ‘Oh young and noble Cato, are you killed? Why, now you’ve died as bravely as Titinius and may be honoured, being Cato’s son.’

Two enemy soldiers came up behind him. ‘Give up, or you die,’ one of them said.

‘I yield only to death,’ said Lucilius. He tried to fight but three of them tackled him and brought him down. ‘There’s a great deal in it for you if you kill me outright,’ he said. ‘Kill Brutus and be honoured in his death.’

‘We can’t, one of them said. ‘You’re a noble prisoner.’

A crowd of soldiers had gathered. ‘Make way,’ one of the captors shouted.

‘Tell Antony Brutus is taken.’

‘I’ll take the news to him,’ one of them said. ‘Oh, here he comes. Brutus has been taken. Brutus is taken, my lord,’ he said.

‘Where is he?’ said Antony. He looked at the man whom they were holding, his hands tied with rope behind his back.

‘He’s safe, Antony,’ said Lucilius. ‘Brutus is safe enough. I assure you that no enemy will ever take the noble Brutus alive. The gods will protect him from such a shameful thing. When you find him, alive or dead, he will be the same Brutus, like himself.’

‘This isn’t Brutus, friend,’ said Antony, ‘but I assure you, a prize no less in worth. Keep this man safe and treat him well. I would rather have such men as friends than enemies. Go and look for Brutus, find out whether he’s alive or dead and bring me news of how things are turning out. I’ll be at Octavius’ tent.’
Act Five Scene Five

Brutus’ army had been soundly defeated, and most of his men were dead. The remnants of his force gathered around him.

‘Come, poor survivors, and rest on this rock,’ he said.

Clitus shook his head sadly. ‘Statilius showed the torch light to tell us that everything was well at the camp but he didn’t come back. He has either been captured or killed.’

‘Sit down Clitus,’ said Brutus. ‘Killing is the latest word. It’s the thing that’s in fashion. Listen Clitus.’ Brutus whispered something in Clitus’ ear.

‘Who, me?’ said Clitus. ‘Not for all the world.’

‘Quiet,’ said Brutus. ‘Not so loud.’

‘I’d rather kill myself,’ said Clitus.

Brutus turned to the man on his other side. ‘Listen, Dardanius,’ he said, and whispered in his ear.

Dardanius started back. ‘Would I do such a deed?’

Brutus got up and walked away.

Dardanius and Clitus looked at each other in dismay.

‘What bad request did Brutus make of you?’ said Clitus.

‘To kill him, Clitus. Look, he’s deep in thought.’

‘That noble man is so full of grief that it’s overflowing through his eyes,’ said Clitus.

Brutus beckoned to Volumnius. ‘Come here, good Volumnius, I want a word with you,’ he said.

‘What do you want to say to me my lord?’ said Volumnius.

‘This, Volumnius,’ said Brutus. ‘Caesar’s ghost has appeared to me two separate times at night; at Sardis once, and again last night, here at Philippi. I know my hour has come.’

‘Not so, my lord.’

‘No, I’m sure it has, Volumnius’ said Brutus quietly. ‘You can see the situation, how it’s going. Our enemies have beaten us to the grave. It’s worthier to leap into it than linger till they push us. Good Volumnius, you know that we went to school together. For the sake of that old love, I beg of you, hold my sword’s hilt while I run on it.’

‘That’s not a friend’s place, my lord.’

The sound of the enemy’s trumpets was coming closer. Clitus walked a little away and came hurrying back. ‘Run, run, my lord,’ he urged. ‘There’s no time to linger here.’

Brutus ignored him. He nodded to each man in turn. ‘Farewell to you, and you, and you Volumnius.’ One of them lay sleeping and he opened his eyes. Brutus smiled. ‘Strato, you’ve been sleeping all this time. Farewell to you too, Strato. Countrymen, my heart is full of joy that in all my life every man I’ve known has been faithful to me. This losing day will give me more glory than Octavius and Mark Antony will achieve by this vile conquest. So farewell, now, for Brutus’ tongue has almost ended his life’s history. Night hangs on my eyes; my bones, that have worked only toward this hour of honour, crave rest.’

The trumpets were very close, and men were shouting, “run, run”.

‘Flee, my lord, flee,’ shouted Clitus.
‘Go,’ said Brutus, ‘all of you. I’ll follow.’ They all started running, away from the approaching enemy. Brutus, called Strato back. ‘Please, Strato,’ he said. ‘Stay here with your lord. You are a man of good reputation. Your life has had a taste of honour in it. So hold my sword while I run on it. Will you Strato?’ Strato looked at him sadly. He took the sword and held it. Brutus stood with the point at his stomach. ‘Give me your hand first,’ said Strato. They clasped hands. ‘Farewell, my lord,’ said Strato. ‘Farewell, good Strato.’ Brutus took hold of Strato’s shoulders and pulled himself onto the sword. Strato held him against his body, embracing him, as the sword penetrated his leader.

‘Caesar, be still now,’ gasped Brutus. ‘I didn’t kill you half as eagerly.’ Strato lowered Brutus’ body gently and lay it out on the ground. Trumpets sounded the retreat, signalling to everyone that the battle was over. Octavius, Antony and some officers arrived while Strato was still kneeling beside Brutus’ body. Messala and Lucilius were with them. ‘Who’s that man?’ said Octavius. ‘It’s my master’s man,’ said Messala. ‘Strato, where is your master?’ ‘Free from the captivity you’re in Messala,’ said Strato. ‘The victors can do nothing more than make a fire out of him, because Brutus conquered himself and no other man has honour from his death.’ ‘It’s fitting that Brutus should be found like this,’ said Lucilius. ‘I thank you, Brutus, for proving my words true, that no enemy would ever take you and, alive or dead, you would always be Brutus.’ ‘All those who served Brutus may join me,’ said Octavius. He pointed at Strato. ‘Fellow, would you like to join me?’ ‘Yes, if Messala recommends me.’ ‘Do so, Messala,’ said Octavius. ‘How did my master die, Strato?’ said Messala. ‘I held the sword and he ran on it,’ said Messala. ‘Then take the man who did the last service to my master, Octavius,’ said Messala. Antony held his hand up for silence. ‘This was the noblest Roman of them all,’ he said. ‘All the conspirators, except for him, did what they did in envy of great Caesar. Only he, in general honest thought, and in the common good, became one of them. His life was noble and his qualities so finely proportioned that Nature could stand up and say to all the world, “This was a man.”’ ‘Let us treat him accordingly,’ said Octavius. ‘Give him all respect and full burial rites. His bones will lie in my tent tonight, like a soldier, dressed fittingly. So call the armies to rest and let’s go and share the glories of this happy day.’
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