

Julius caesar

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Julius Caesar William Shakespeare THE PLAY THE PLOT The working people of Rome are overjoyed: Julius Caesar has beaten Pompey's sons in battle, and everyone's getting a day off from work to celebrate Caesar's triumphant return. But two Roman officers, Flavius and Marullus, chase the crowds away: how dare the citizens support a tyrant who threatens to undermine hundreds of years of Republican (representative) rule! Don't they know that Caesar wants to be king? Caesar parades by in full glory, just in time to help celebrate the races on the Feast of Lupercal. A soothsayer bids him " Beware the ides of March" (March 15), but Caesar- anxious not to show fear in public dismisses the man as a dreamer. The procession passes by, leaving behind two Roman Senators: Cassius, a long-time political enemy of Caesar, and Brutus, Caesar's friend. Like other members of the Senate, Brutus and Cassius are aristocrats who fear that Caesar will take away their ancient privileges. Cassius now goes to work on Brutus, flattering him, reminding him of his noble ancestry, trying all the while to determine just how unhappy Brutus is with Caesar and just how willing Brutus is to join the conspiracy. Does Brutus know where Cassius is leading him? It's hard to tell. Brutus admits only that he's dissatisfied, and agrees to discuss the matter further. Caesar, now back from the races, tells his friend Antony that he doesn't trust a man like Cassius, with his " lean and hungry look." He has good reason to be suspicious. Casca tells Brutus and Cassius how the Roman people three times offered Caesar the crown, and how three times he refused it. Perhaps Caesar doesn't want to be king- that's what his friends would argue; but to his enemies, Caesar was merely playing on the gullibility of the people, pretending to be humble in order to win their support. On a stormy night full of mysterious omens, Cassius converts Casca to his cause and arranges for

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Cinna, a fellow-conspirator, to throw a message through Brutus' window. The note will, he hopes, win the noble Senator to their side. Alone in his garden, Brutus tries to justify the part he is about to play in the murder of his friend, Caesar. He decides finally that Caesar's ambition poses a grave danger to the future of the Republic and that Caesar should be destroyed, not for what he is, but for what he's likely to become. The conspirators arrive at Brutus' house and agree to murder Caesar the next day at the Capitol. They would like to murder Antony, too, but Brutus, anxious to keep his hands clean and to preserve his precious honor, insists that Antony be spared. After the conspirators leave, Brutus' wife Portia enters. She wants to know what's happening. Brutus worries that the news may be too frightening for her to bear, but nevertheless confides in her. Caesar has had a restless night, too. His wife Calpurnia tries to keep him home- she senses evil in the air- and at first he relents. But the conspirators arrive and persuade him to go to the Senate as planned. What would happen to his reputation if his public thought the mighty Caesar was swayed by a superstitious wife! Calpurnia's fears turn out to be more than superstitions, for the day is March 15, the ides of March. Caesar ignores two more warnings and, after delivering a speech full of extravagant self-praise, he is stabbed by the conspirators and dies. Antony, learning of the murder of his dearest friend, begs the conspirators to let him speak at the funeral. Believing that right is on his side, Brutus agrees, over the objections of his more realistic friends. Left alone, Antony vows to revenge the death of Caesar, even if it means plunging his country into civil war. In the meantime, Caesar's adopted son and heir, Octavius, has arrived on the outskirts of Rome, and Antony advises him to wait there till he can gauge the mood of the country. Brutus' funeral oration is a measured, well-

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reasoned speech, appealing to the better instincts of the people and to their abstract sense of duty to the state. For a moment he wins them over. But then Antony inflames the crowds with an appeal to their emotions. Showing them Caesar's bloody clothes turns them into an angry mob, hungry for revenge. Blind with hate, they roam the streets and tear apart the innocent poet Cinna. Antony and Octavius now join forces with Lepidus to pursue and destroy the conspirators, who have fled from Rome. Anyone who might endanger their cause is coldly put to death. Brutus and Cassius await this new triumverate at their camp near Sardis in Asia Minor. Should Cassius let an officer take bribes? Brutus, standing on his principles, says no, and vents his anger on his friend. At the root of his anger, however, is his unspoken sorrow at the death of his beloved wife Portia. Apparently unable to deal with such an unsettling situation, she went mad and took her life by swallowing hot coals. Sadness over her death brings Brutus and Cassius back together again, closer perhaps than before. At night Brutus is visited by the ghost of Caesar, who vows to meet him again on the battlefield at Philippi in Greece. The next day the two armies- the army of Brutus and Cassius, and the army of Antony and Octavius- stand in readiness at Philippi while the four generals battle each other with words. In the first encounter, Brutus' troops defeat Octavius', and Antony's troops overcome Cassius'. Cassius, retreating to a nearby hill, sends his trusted friend Titinius to find out whether approaching troops are friends or foes. Is Titinius captured? It appears so; and Cassius, believing he has sent his good friend to his death and that the battle is lost, takes his life. If only Cassius hadn't acted so rashly he might have saved his life, for the reports turn out to be false and Titinius still lives. Brutus, not the enemy, arrives, and mourns the death of his friend. The tide now turns

against Brutus. Sensing defeat, and unwilling to endure the dishonor of capture, he runs on his sword and dies. Like Caesar and Cassius, he thinks in his final moments not of power or personal glory, but of friendship. Antony delivers a eulogy over Brutus' body, calling him " the noblest Roman of them all." Octavius agrees to take all of Brutus' men into his service, a gesture of reconciliation that bodes well for the future. Bibliography: Pinkmonkey. com