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## *Julius Caesar*

### CHARACTER/ACT BREAKDOWN

#### **KEY CHARACTERS:**

*Julius Caesar*- elected ruler of Rome

*Mark Antony*- friend of Caesar, co-ruler of Rome after Caesar's death

*Brutus*- conspirator against Caesar

*Cassius*- conspirator against Caesar

*Calpurnia*- wife of Caesar

*Octavius*- nephew of Caesar, co-ruler of Rome after Caesar's death

*Lepidus*- co-ruler of Rome after Caesar's death

#### **Introduction:**

This tragedy is not so much about the title role, but about Brutus and how a good person can be swayed to do bad things.

Caesar was a political and military hero, beloved by his people.

Politics in ancient Rome were notoriously corrupt; Julius Caesar labored hard for years and years to rectify these issues. As a result, Caesar had many enemies in government, vengeful and envious alike.

Historically, the assassination of Julius Caesar took place in 44 B.C.. The events which follow in Shakespeare's play actually took place over the next two years. But, William had but one evening in which to fit the play, so he condensed these events into five acts.

#### **ACT 1:**

It's February 15<sup>th</sup> in ancient Rome, and the people are celebrating The Feast of Luprecal, a time of purification and renewal. They decorate Caesar's statues throughout Rome...that is until two tribunes interrupt their celebration and scold them for leaving their jobs, and finally send them home. Along with these tribunes are many other Roman politicians are wary of Caesar and his massive popularity. They are afraid that he will make himself King of Rome and take all power away from elected government.

During a race for the Luprecal, Mark Anotony tries three times to crown Caesar – but Caesar refuses each time. This refusal endears him even more to his people, as they also are wary of kings. Caesar is approached by a soothsayer, who warns him “beware the ides of March...” (this means March 15<sup>th</sup>), but Caesar ignores him; he is preoccupied with Cassius. He determines that Cassius is not to be trusted, but rather to be feared.

Rightly so! Cassius is particularly concerned about Caesar's popularity and his political ambitions. Cassius has already enlisted the support of other conspirators, but what he needs is the support of Brutus who is known for his honor and integrity...if he can win Brutus to his side, the conspiracy against Caesar will have a credible, clean façade. He sends a letter (disguising his writing as an average Roman citizen) and indirectly asks him to intervene and end Caesar's ambition.

A month passes. The night before the conspirators are to act against Caesar, a violent storm overtakes Rome....

## **ACT 2:**

The storm keeps Brutus awake while he weighs his options. He doesn't want to see Caesar crown himself, but the only prevention seems to be assassination. Cassius and the other conspirators meet with Brutus to finalize their plans, but Cassius want to add Mark Antony to the hit list...Brutus objects. To Brutus, killing Caesar is a noble act, necessary to defend Rome from a would be king, but killing Mark Antony is a different thing entirely. They finally agree that it shall only be the death of Caesar.

In the middle of the night, Caesar is awakened repeatedly by his wife's screams as she has nightmares. In the morning, after the storm, she warns him that her dreams are prophetic and coupled with the feverish, almost supernatural storm. She also begs him not to go to the capitol, and he finally agrees.

Then one of the conspirators arrives to bring Caesar to the capitol and meet the senate. He offers a different interpretation of Calpurnia's dreams. And he goes on to inform him that the senate intends to offer him a crown, but it might withdraw this offer if he doesn't show up. Caesar changes his mind and agrees to go to the Senate as originally planned.

### **ACT 3:**

So, here we are...the ides of March has come. Caesar is traveling to the capitol to address the Senate, when someone tries to pass a message of warning to him. Caesar says he'll read it later. The soothsayer is there as well, again warning him, which he blows off all together.

The conspirators gather around Caesar and stab him...23 times. They then try to calm the senators, telling them that Rome is free and safe, but everyone flees the bloody scene.

Mark Antony asks for safe passage to speak with the conspirators, which Brutus allows. Antony asks only that he be allowed to carry Caesar's body to the marketplace and there address the crowd for the funeral. Brutus will speak first, giving the conspirators' reasons for their actions, then Antony can speak...provided he does not speak against the conspirators, but only in Caesar's praise. Cassius is against this idea, thinking it unsafe for the conspirators, particularly himself. Brutus knows that allowing Caesar's friend Antony deliver the eulogy is the honorable thing to do.

Brutus addresses the crowd...the conspirators killed Caesar for the good of Rome. He also points out that Mark Antony wanted to crown Caesar and make him king, against the will of the public. His speech wins the hearts of the people, and they want to give Brutus the honors that they recently gave to Caesar. He stops the crowd and tells them to listen to Antony's eulogy.

Mark Antony takes the stage as Brutus departs. In his speech, as he promised, he does not speak against the conspirators...directly. He asks whether Caesar was ambitious and reminds the crowd that Caesar refused the crown at the Luprecal. He reveals Caesar's will...Caesar gives the people his lands and each citizen money. Antony's speech is so compelling and persuasive that the fickle mob turn their favor away from Brutus and toward Caesar and Antony. They build a pyre for

Caesar and take torches to the homes of the conspirators. They run Cassius and Brutus out of town.

The public is out of control.

#### **ACT 4:**

Antony meets with Lepidus and Octavius and the three seize control of Rome and quickly eliminate anyone standing in their way...particularly the conspirators and their allies.

Brutus and Cassius have raised an army to attack Rome. They are linked by their joint guilt in Caesar's murder and they begin to turn on each other, one accusing the other of accepting bribes and one accusing the other of not saving him from financial ruin. They fight it out and finally resolve the issues by agreeing to stay focused on the battle at hand and show a united front.

#### **ACT 5:**

Brutus faces Octavius. Cassius faces Antony. The armies meet and Brutus's forces gain the upper hand...initially. But not Cassius; he sees no hope for himself or his army. Aided by one of his soldiers, he kills himself.

Brutus is not long behind him, when the tables turn and Octavius and Antony's army gain ground. When it becomes clear that he has lost, he too falls on his sword and kills himself, rather than being led captive back to Rome.

Antony honors the death of Brutus...he recognizes that Brutus acted out of honor; the other conspirators were envious of Caesar, but Brutus truly believed that he was helping Rome.