

*Et tu, Brute?*<sup>1</sup>

## Literature 23



### The Boastful Shepherd and Julius Caesar, Dictator: How he was Slain

#### 1 Greece

Read “The Boastful Shepherd” You will find it on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive in Volume 3, Classics, “Legends of Greece and Rome” by G. H. Kupfer, no. 34.

#### 2 Rome

*Stories from Roman History* Retold by Lena Dalkeith (1906)

Julius Caesar ruled in Rome, and his will was law. He sat on a golden chair of state in the senate, and wore a wreath of laurel about his brow. Every year his birthday was kept as a holiday, and to his birthday month was given his name – Julius, or July as it is now called.

The senators, once his bitter enemies, now obeyed his slightest word, and sought by every means in their power to do him honour. They made him Dictator for life; they named him 'Imperator,' 'Father of the People,' 'Julius the Invincible.' They took an oath to watch over his safety; they caused his statue to be put beside those of the seven ancient kings of Rome; indeed so eager were they to please him that if he had told them to lie down and let him walk over them I verily believe they would have done so.

The people too were delighted with their generous Dictator, their victorious general who had won four Triumphs and who had made Rome greater than ever before. On his return from the Civil War he had given gold to both the soldiers and the citizens. He had feasted them royally; given them games and circus-shows, gladiator-fights, and all manner of things, and then having amused and pleased his people, Caesar set about ruling them.

He made many good laws, for this wonderful man could rule as well as he could fight. He took

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<sup>1</sup> “And you [too] Brutus?” Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* has Caesar speak these words as he dies. The phrase is still used to signify treachery.

some of the power away from the patricians to give it to the plebeians. He brought wise men over from Egypt to help him to alter the Roman Calendar. He was going to make a great many more changes in the country, but Pompey's sons raised a rebellion in Spain, and he had to leave Rome to go and fight against them.

After a year's hard fighting he returned to Italy, and it was about this time that the people began to accuse him of wishing to be king.

Now some say that Caesar really did long to wear a royal crown, and others say that he did not; however that may be, the Roman citizens believed that he wanted to be king, and their love for him began to cool. This was because ever since the days of Tarquin the Proud the very name of king had been hated in Rome.

Some of the patricians who had fought for Pompey, and whom Caesar had pardoned and taken into favour again, began to say to each other that it would be better for Rome if Caesar were dead. Soon they took to meeting secretly together to plot how best they might slay him. Most of the conspirators were jealous, ambitious men, who envied and hated Caesar's power. Fierce, dark, Caius Cassius was the chief among these, but there was another who joined the plot later, and he was different from all the rest. This was Marcus Brutus.

After Caesar, Brutus was the most powerful man in Rome. Caesar both honoured and loved him dearly, and the two were the greatest of friends. Yet Brutus in the end became leader in the plot to slay this same Caesar whom he loved.

And why? Because Brutus loved the Republic better than his friend. He did not think it right that one man should rule the whole nation, and he believed that if Caesar were slain Rome would become a Republic again; that the power would again be divided equally between the people and the senate.

Meanwhile the common folk were still wondering about Caesar's wish to be king. As he returned from the Latin Festival some citizens hailed him as king; others showed their dislike of the name, and Caesar crying, 'I am no king, but Caesar,' passed on his way. Nevertheless it was believed that he said this only to please the people.

Again, another time at the feast of Lupercalia Mark Antony offered a crown to Caesar. The Dictator refused, again it was offered, again refused, and at last Antony had to lay it aside. Upon this the people, who had been silent during the offering, burst into loud cheers. And yet there were some who said that Caesar, had he dared, would have accepted the kingship.

This was in February, when the Dictator was making ready for a new war with Parthia. Following the usual custom, he sent to the soothsayers to ask if he should be victorious. The answer given was that none but a king could conquer Parthia. 'Let Caesar bear the name of king until the war is over; thus we shall be sure of victory,' said someone, and the senate was to hold a meeting on the Ides of March (that is the 15th of March), to decide whether this should be done or not. That day, the conspirators vowed, should be the day of Caesar's death.

'The Ides of March will bring misfortune to Caesar,' cried the soothsayers, who could, so it was believed, tell what was going to happen. 'The Ides of March?' echoed the wondering people, 'what will happen to Caesar then?' 'He shall die,' whispered the conspirators, but they took care to let no man hear.

The fatal day came at last. Caesar awoke that morning, restless and uneasy, for he had been told

of the dark saying of the sooth-sayers, he knew he had many enemies, and moreover his wife, Calpurnia, had dreamed that he was dead. With tears she begged him to stay away from the senate. Caesar would have given in to her wish had not the conspirators, to make more sure of his coming, sent one of their number to fetch him. And this man spoke so cunningly and softly that Caesar was persuaded to order his litter and set out for the senate.

As he passed through the streets he met with Spurinna the soothsayer.

'Ah, Spurinna,' cried Caesar, 'the Ides of March are come!'

'Ay,' softly spoke the soothsayer, 'but they are not gone, Caesar!'

Many people tried to press through the crowd to warn him of his danger, but some of the conspirators kept these from coming near enough to the litter for speech. One man thrust a scroll of paper into his hand, begging him to read it at once, for it concerned his safety, but every time Caesar opened the scroll he was interrupted, and when at last he entered the senate it was still in his hand unread.

When Caesar had seated himself, one of the conspirators, Metellus Cimber by name, knelt down at his feet on the pretence of asking some favour; the rest crowded round as if they too were anxious to plead their friend's cause. Caesar refused to grant the prayer. Closer and closer they pressed, laying their hands upon his robe, his arms, his shoulders. He tried to push them from him and to rise to his feet; thereupon Cimber, catching hold of Caesar's toga, pulled it firmly down over his arms.

Behind the golden chair stood Casca, the man who was to strike the first blow. He struck, but the dagger barely touched Caesar's shoulder.

'Thou villain Casca! What means this?' cried the Dictator, and swinging round by a great effort he snatched at the other's dagger.

'Brothers, help!' called Casca at one and the same time.

Then each man drew out his hidden weapon, and the treacherous work began. Caesar fought as only Caesar could; but what hope was there for one unarmed man against so many? Still he struggled, wounded and bleeding, until Brutus, – Brutus, whom he loved, and who loved him, – came forward with the rest, dagger in hand.

'Thou too, Brutus!' cried the dying Caesar piteously, and covering his face with his robe he let the murderers have their way. A few moments after he fell dead at the foot of Pompey's statue.

Rome had lost her greatest son. Mighty Caesar ruled no more.

Exercise:

Look at the motto at the top of the first page. Brutus is a second declension masculine noun. In what case is the noun *Brute*? Why? Answers on the next page.

Answers:

*Brute* is in the vocative singular because Brutus is being addressed.