**The Tragedy of Julius Caesar - Scene Summaries**

**Act I Scene 1** The opening scene takes place on the streets of Rome. The common folk are milling around, and the tribune Flavius tells them to go home. (In Ancient Rome, a tribune was an officer who protected the interests of the lower class or common people.) Flavius says that it is not a public holiday, and if the men are on the streets they should be displaying the signs of their profession. He interrogates two men. The first says he is a carpenter, but the second man is in a playful mood and does not answer Flavius directly. Eventually it transpires that he is a cobbler, and in answer to why he is out on the streets and not in his shop, the cobbler replies that they are all out to see Caesar, who has just returned after defeating Pompey's sons in battle. The crowd wants to rejoice in his triumph. The second tribune, Murellus, is impatient with the crowd. He reminds them that not so long ago they were celebrating the triumphs of Pompey. He says that Romans should not celebrate Roman triumphs over other Romans, and he sends the workers home. After the mob has gone, Flavius expresses contempt for the fickleness of the common folk. Then he tells Murellus to go about the city and remove any crowns that have been placed on the statues of Caesar. By limiting his public acclamation, they will help to prevent Caesar from growing too powerful.

**Act I Scene 2** In another public place in Rome, Caesar, accompanied by his followers, encounters a soothsayer, who tells him to beware the ides of March (March 15). Caesar dismisses him as a dreamer. Caesar and his entourage exit, leaving Cassius and Brutus to engage in conversation. Cassius mentions that recently Brutus has not seemed so friendly towards him as he usually is. Brutus replies that it is nothing personal; he is troubled by some private business and this is affecting his behavior towards others. Cassius hints that he knows Brutus better than Brutus himself does. He suggests that others in Rome who are suffering under Caesar's oppression have wished that Brutus would open his eyes to their plight and (Cassius implies) do something about it. He promises to tell Brutus something about himself that he is as yet unaware of.

As shouts are heard from the crowd offstage, Brutus says he fears that the people will choose Caesar for their king. Even though he loves Caesar, Brutus does not want him to be crowned king. Cassius then gives a long speech in which he explains that Caesar is not fit to hold the great office that he does. He expresses his frustration at the inferior position he occupies in relation to Caesar, even though he was born just as free as the man who now rules. Cassius relates an incident that showed he was a better swimmer than Caesar. He also observed Caesar when the latter had a fever, and he was not impressed. Caesar trembled and groaned, his eyes looked dull and his voice sounded feeble, like that of a sick girl. And yet this Caesar, who is physically weak, rules over Rome.

More shouts are heard from the crowd outside, which Brutus takes to be a sign that new honors are being heaped on Caesar. Cassius continues his complaint against Caesar and bemoans the fact that so much power is concentrated in one man. He castigates Romans for allowing it. Brutus says he will consider Cassius's words, but he does not want to commit himself yet.

Cassius and his entourage return. Caesar tells Mark Antony that Cassius is a dangerous man, although he hastens to add that he is not afraid of him, since he fears no one. But men like Cassius, Caesar observes, are never at rest while someone else holds power over them.

After Caesar exits, Casca explains to Cassius and Brutus that Antony just offered Caesar a crown three times. Each time Caesar rejected it, but each time he did so with greater reluctance. The crowd cheered when he rejected it for the third time, at which Caesar had an epileptic fit and fell down foaming at the mouth. Just before he collapsed, he theatrically opened his doublet, offering the crowd his throat to cut. Casca also mentions that Flavius and Murellus have been executed for removing crowns from Caesar's statues. Their acts were considered treasonous.

After all have left, Cassius is left alone. He reflects that although Brutus is a noble man, it is possible to be lure him away from his natural inclinations and persuade him to join the conspiracy to kill Caesar. Cassius plans to write some letters, in different handwriting, to Brutus so that he will not be able to detect which they were written by him. He sets about writing. Eventually it transpires that he is a cobbler, and in answer to why he is in a playful mood and does not answer Flavius directly.

**Act I Scene 3** That night there is a fearsome thunderstorm. Meeting Cicero in a Roman street, Casca tells of strange things he has seen and heard about that night. Women swear they saw a hundred men, covered in fire, walking up and down the streets; he himself saw a lion at the capital and a man with his hand on fire that flamed like twenty torches without burning him. These strange events mean that something ominous is about to take place.

Cassius enters. He has been wandering the streets during the storm. He tells Casca that the unnatural disturbances are a warning that something is badly wrong with Roman society. He says that he could
name a man who is every bit as ominous as the signs in the stormy night. Casca knows that he refers to Caesar, and Cassius says that Romans are weak because they put up with his tyranny. Casca believes that the following day, the Roman Senate will offer Caesar a crown. Cassius boasts that he has the power, and will use it, to overthrow tyranny. Cassia agrees, and Cassius continues, saying that the only reason Caesar acts like a tyrant is because he knows Romans are weak and will not resist. Casca and Cassius agree to spearhead the plot to assassinate Caesar.

Another conspirator, Cinna, enters. Cassius gives him the letters he has written and tells Cinna to throw them into Brutus’s house. After doing this he is to meet Cassius and some other conspirators at Pompey’s Porch, which is the portico of a theatre built by Pompey. Cassius tells Casca that Brutus is three-quarters won over to their cause, and on their next meeting he will embrace it fully.

**Act II Scene 1** Brutus reflects in a soliloquy that he has nothing against Caesar personally, but Caesar must be killed for the general good of Rome. He explains that if Caesar is crowned king, that may change his nature, and he may abuse his power. He must be assassinated to prevent this possibility from taking place; in other words, Caesar must be killed not for what he is but for what he may become.

Brutus’s servant Lucius brings him the letter that Casca has tossed in through the window. Brutus reads it out loud to himself and puzzles over the meaning. The letter urges him to take action for the sake of Rome, and it appears that he has made his decision to join the conspirators. Lucius enters and confirms that the next day is the ides of March. Brutus, alone, confesses that since Cassius first sounded him out about Caesar, he has not slept.

The conspirators, Cassius, Casca, Decius, Cinna, Metellus Cimber and Trebonius enter. Cassius demands that they take an oath to cement their resolve to assassinate Caesar. But Brutus refuses, saying that they need only their own cause to spur them onward. As Romans they are honor-bound to keep any promise they have made. The conspirators then discuss whether to enlist Cicero in their cause. Cicero is old and wise, and his support would give their cause more legitimacy in the eyes of the people. But Brutus advises against this. He says Cicero will never join an enterprise that is led by anyone other than himself. The conspirators agree to leave him out of their plans. Next they discuss whether they should kill Antony as well as Caesar. Cassius advocates killing them both, because as a close friend of Caesar, Antony could prove troublesome to them. But Brutus says no; killing both men will make the conspirators seem too bloodthirsty, and anyway, Antony will be made powerless when Caesar is killed. Brutus hopes that if they go about their purpose with dignity rather than wrathful passion, the common people will see them not as murderers but as cleansers of the body politic. Cassius remains uneasy, but the conspirators side with Brutus and decide not to kill Antony.

It is three in the morning and the conspirators agree to part. But Cassius is concerned that Caesar, whom he believes to be superstitious, may not go to the capital later that morning because of the strange apparitions during the night. Decius says he knows how to talk to Caesar and persuade him. He promises to bring Caesar to the capital. Cassius says they will all be there at eight in the morning to make sure that Caesar comes.

After the conspirators leave, Brutus’s wife Portia enters. Brutus is surprised to see her up in the middle of the night. She knows Brutus is troubled by something and asks if she may know what it is. Brutus replies that he is sick, but Portia does not believe him. She knows that it is Brutus’s mind that is troubled, and again demands to know what is wrong. She reassures him that she is strong enough to know the truth, and that she will not disclose it to anyone. Brutus is touched by her pleas, but then there is a knock at the door, and Brutus sends Portia away, saying that he will tell her everything later.

At the door is Caius Ligarius. Although he is sick, he is willing to join the conspirators.

**Act II Scene 2** It is still night, and the storm continues. Caesar’s wife has a dream in which Caesar is murdered. She tries to persuade Caesar not to leave the house that day. Caesar will not be persuaded, so Calphurnia recounts some of the strange things that have been seen by the night watch. Graves have given up their dead, and there was the noise of battle in the air. But Caesar still insists he will not change his plans. He says that the disturbances pertain to the world in general, not to himself, and anyway, he does not fear death. Then a servant arrives and tells him that the priests, his spiritual advisers, are also telling him not to go out. Again, Caesar will not listen. But Calphurnia tries again, urging Caesar to send Mark Antony in his place to the Senate, with word that Caesar is sick. Caesar finally agrees to stay at home.

But then Decius enters to escort Caesar to the Senate. Caesar explains that he is not going, although he refuses to say that he is sick. Decius says he must give a reason for Caesar’s nonappearance, or the Senate will laugh at him when he delivers the news. Caesar says it is simply his will that he will not come. But for Decius’s own
satisfaction, he confides in him that it is because his wife fears the bad omens in the stormy night. She also had a dream in which she saw his statue running with blood. Decius tells him that the dream has been misinterpreted. It really means that he is the lifeblood of Rome and everyone wants to receive some small aspect of his person, as a blessing. Caesar approves of this interpretation. Decius goes on to say that the Senate plans to award him a crown that day; if he does not arrive in person, they may rethink their decision. Some may say Caesar is afraid. Caesar, convinced by the argument, reverses his decision.

Brutus and the other conspirators enter, as well as Publius, who knows nothing of the plot. Antony also arrives. Caesar invites them all to share some wine with him before they all set forth for the capital.

Act II Scene 3 Artemidorus reads a letter he has written to Caesar, warning that there is a conspiracy against him. He plans to give it to Caesar as he passes by in the street.

Act II Scene 4 Portia is restless and anxious about the welfare of her husband Brutus. She instructs their servant Lucius to go to the Senate building and take note of whether Brutus looks well, and what Caesar does.

The soothsayer enters. He tells Portia that he is planning to go to the streets to wait for Caesar to pass. He fears that ill may befall Caesar, and hopes to speak to him about the matter. Portia sends Lucius off to the capital, with instructions to return and inform her of what is happening.

Act III Scene 1 As Caesar and his company walk to the Senate, Caesar passes the soothsayer, who reminds him that the ides of March are not yet passed. Artemidorus tries to get Caesar to read his letter, and says it is personal. Caesar rejects it, saying that personal items should be dealt with last.

Brutus fears that the plot has been discovered when Publius remarks that he hopes their enterprise will thrive. Publius then goes straight to Caesar, and the conspirators fear that he is warning Caesar of the plot. But then they see Publius smiling and notice that Caesar does not react badly to his words.

Meanwhile, Trebonius draws Antony out of the way, and the conspirators prepare to put their plan into action. First, Metellus Cimber kneels and puts his petition to Caesar. But Caesar refuses his request. Metellus Cimber’s brother will remain banished. Metellus tries again, and Brutus joins him in his plea, to Caesar’s surprise. Then Cassius kneels and joins the appeal to Caesar. But Caesar remains unmoved, declaring that he is as constant as the north star. He prides himself on being unbending.

As Cinna and Decius protest Caesar’s decision, Casca is the first to stab Caesar; the others follow, including Brutus. Cinna and Cassius tell the senators and others who witnessed the assassination to run to the streets and proclaim that tyranny is dead and liberty and freedom live. Brutus tries to reassure the horrified onlookers. He also reassures Publius that they intend no harm to him or anyone else, but he should leave because the people may attack the killers and Publius might be caught in the middle of it. He says that no one should have to face the consequences of this deed except those who performed it.

Trebonius enters and informs them that Antony has fled to his house and the whole city is in an uproar. Brutus tells the assassins to cover their arms and swords in Caesar’s blood and go to the people proclaiming peace, liberty and freedom.

A servant arrives with a conciliatory message from Antony. Antony says that if Brutus will allow him to come safely, he would like to hear their explanation of why Caesar deserved to die. If Brutus will do this, Antony promises him his loyalty. Brutus agrees to these terms and is confident that he will win Antony’s support and friendship.

Antony enters and says he does not know what they intend, but as far as he is concerned they can kill him now if they wish. He cannot think of any better time than this, the hour of Caesar’s death, to die himself.

Brutus explains that they acted as they did because of pity for the condition of Rome under Caesar. He adds that they mean no harm to Antony, and Cassius confirms this. Brutus says that they first must calm the populace and then they will explain exactly why they assassinated Caesar. Antony replies that he does not doubt their wisdom, and one by one he shakes the conspirators’ hands. But then he praises Caesar and asks forgiveness of him for making peace with his killers.

Cassius tries to find out whether Antony will be one of their supporters. Antony replies that he is their friend, but he still wants to hear how they justify their act. Brutus promises they will.

Antony asks that he may be permitted to speak at Caesar’s funeral. Brutus immediately grants this request, but Cassius pulls him aside, saying that they should refuse to let Antony speak, since he may sway people against them. Brutus tries to reassure him by saying that he will speak first and tell the people why Caesar was killed, and
will then emphasize that Antony speaks with their permission. The assassins want Caesar to have all the ceremony that is due to him; Brutus says this will rebound to their advantage. Cassius is not convinced, but he does not oppose Brutus's plan. Brutus gives Antony permission to take Caesar's body. He tells him he may praise Caesar in his speech, but must also say that he does so with their permission.

Everyone exits except Antony, who now reveals his true thoughts. He laments the death of such a great man and apologizes for being so meek with the murderers. He promises revenge against Caesar's killers. There will be fierce civil war. Caesar's spirit, accompanied by Ate, the god of discord, will be hot for revenge.

A servant of Octavius, Caesar's adopted son, arrives, saying that Octavius is on his way to Rome. Antony sends a message that it is too dangerous for Octavius to come. Finally, Antony says that in his funeral oration, he will test the way the people have received the death of Caesar.

**Act III Scene 2** Brutus addresses the crowd, saying that while he loved Caesar, he loved Rome more. He asks them whether they would prefer it if Caesar were alive and they all slaves, or Caesar were dead and they were free? Brutus honors Caesar for his bravery but says he killed him because he was ambitious. Who wants to be a slave? he asks. Who does not love his country? He invites a response from the crowd, which cries out in support of him. Brutus concludes that he can have offended no one by his act.

As Antony enters with Caesar's body, Brutus tells the crowd that he killed his best friend for the sake of Rome, and that he has the same dagger reserved for himself, when his country should need his death. He then leaves to the cheers of the crowd, insisting that everyone stay and make them angry.

The crowd clamors to hear the will, but Antony says it is not good for them to know how much Caesar loved them; it will only inflame them and make them angry. The crowd continues to call for the will. Persuaded by the clamor, tells them to form a circle around Caesar's corpse. Antony points to each of the many wounds in Caesar's mantle, describing which was made by which conspirator. He makes particular play with the wound caused by Brutus, whom Caesar loved. When Caesar saw Brutus stab him, he was overcome by Brutus' ingratitude far more than any physical wounds. For the first time, Antony refers to the assassination as treason.

Then he pulls back the mantle and shows Caesar's body. The crowd is shocked and calls for revenge. Antony asks them to restrain themselves, although as he explains himself, referring again to the "honorable" men who killed Caesar, and saying that he has no gift of oratory, unlike Brutus, to stir men to action. But if he were Brutus, and Brutus Antony, then he would speak with passion and call for mutiny in Rome. The crowd is about to scatter and stir up a rebellion when Antony reminds them that they have not heard the will yet.

Antony announces that Caesar gives to every Roman citizen the sum of seventy-five drachmae. He has also left his forest and orchards to be public pleasure-grounds, where anyone can walk.

The common people rush off, vowing to burn down the assassins' houses. Antony is satisfied at what his words have achieved and
waits for whatever events unfold. A servant enters and tells Antony that Octavius, and Lepidus have arrived. He also says that Brutus and Cassius have fled Rome. Antony assumes it is because they heard of how he had stirred the people up against them.

**Act III Scene 3** In a street in Rome, Cinna the poet is accosted by a crowd of pro-Caesar commoners. He says he is going to Caesar's funeral as a friend. When he says his name is Cinna, the crowd wants to kill him, since they think he is one of the conspirators. Even though he protests that he is Cinna the poet, they drag him off just the same.

**Act IV Scene 2** At a camp near Sardis, Brutus and his generals enter. Brutus hints at some slight he has suffered at the hands of Cassius. He inquires of Lucilius how Cassius received him. Lucilius replies that he was greeted with respect but without the usual friendliness. Brutus interprets this to mean that his friendship with Cassius has grown cold and that he can no longer rely on it. Cassius enters and accuses Brutus of wronging him. Brutus denies it, but does not want to dispute in front of their generals. He takes Cassius inside his tent so they can discuss the matter alone.

**Act IV Scene 3** Cassius explains that Brutus accused a man named Lucius Pella of taking bribes. Cassius wrote to him, saying that he knew Lucius Pella was innocent. But Brutus just ignored him. Brutus says it was unnecessary for Cassius to intervene in such a small matter. Then he says that Cassius himself sometimes allows unworthy people to buy offices in his service. Cassius, angered, says that if anyone other than Brutus made such a remark, he would kill him. But Brutus is not intimidated. He says that they killed Caesar in the name of justice. Should one of them now accept bribes? Cassius warns him to stop, and says he is more experienced than Brutus and therefore able to make management decisions. They fall to quarreling. Brutus tells Cassius he is hot-tempered and should control his anger. But Brutus will not let it disturb him. They quarrel further over whether Cassius said he was a better soldier than Brutus. Cassius says that even Caesar would not have dared to anger him in this way, and Brutus responds by saying Cassius would not have dared to have provoked him to anger. Brutus then goes to the heart of the matter. He wrote to Cassius, asking for money so he could pay his soldiers, because he could not bring himself to raise it by taxing the peasants. But Cassius refused. Cassius denies the charge and blames his messenger. He protests that Brutus exaggerates his faults. He gives a despairing speech in which he says he is weary of the world, and he invites Brutus to kill him with his own dagger. This breaks the tension, because Brutus realizes that it is better just to let Cassius be angry when the mood takes him. It is soon over. Brutus confesses that he spoke in anger too. They are reconciled. Brutus promises that if Cassius should be angry with him in the future, he will not take it so seriously. There is a disturbance outside as a poet urges the two men to be friends. After this, Brutus explains to Cassius that he is weighed down by grief, and that is why he became angry. His wife Portia, distressed by his absence and the strength of Octavius and Antony, committed suicide by swallowing burning coals. Brutus and Cassius drink wine to forget their sorrows.

Titinius and Messala enter and describe the military situation. Octavius and Antony are marching on them with a large army. They have put a hundred senators to death. Brutus has different information, that only seventy senators were killed. Brutus raises the question of whether they should march to Philippi to meet the opposing army. Cassius says it would be better not to. They should let Antony's army advance, so they get exhausted, while Brutus and Cassius's forces stay fresh. Brutus disagrees. He warns that as the opposing army advances, they may pick up new recruits from the towns they pass through, where Brutus and Cassius are unpopular. But if Brutus and Cassius march on Philippi, they can prevent this happening. He insists that the time is right for them to strike. Their forces are at their strongest. If they wait, their strength may decline, while the enemy's will increase. Cassius accepts Brutus's argument and they part on good terms.

Brutus's servant Lucius plays some music. After Lucius falls asleep, Brutus reads a book. He is startled by the appearance of the ghost of Caesar. The ghost says that he will reappear to Brutus at Philippi. Then he disappears. Brutus awakens his servants, but none of them saw the ghost.

**Act V Scene 1** On the plains of Philippi, Octavius and Antony discuss the situation. Octavius says the enemy is planning to attack, contrary to what Antony had suggested. Antony replies that they are just putting on a false show of courage. The two men prepare for battle, although they disagree on tactics. Antony wants Octavius to take the left side of the field, while he takes the right. Octavius wants it the other way around. Before the battle begins, Octavius, Antony, Brutus and Cassius meet and trade insults. Cassius reproaches Brutus for sparing Antony's life. If he had not done so, they would not now have to listen to his
aggressive words. Octavius says he will not stop until Caesar's death is avenged. Cassius denounces him as a schoolboy who does not deserve the honor of being killed by Brutus; he also insults Antony’s love of revelry. Antony and Octavius depart, ready for battle. Cassius tells his servant Messala that it is his birthday. He also tells of an omen: as they journeyed from Sardis, two eagles swooped down and perched on their banner. The eagles remained there all the way to Philippi. But that morning they departed. In their place are ravens, crows and kites, which look down on Cassius’s army as if they were prey. He fears that this is a bad omen. Messala urges him not to believe it, and Cassius says he only partly does, and he is fresh and ready for battle.

Cassius tells Brutus that if they lose this battle, this will be the last time they speak to each other. He asks what Brutus would plan to do in such a situation. Brutus says he does not intend to commit suicide. Cassius asks him if he would allow himself to be led in triumph through the streets of Rome. Brutus says this will never happen. They bid each other an affectionate farewell.

**Act V Scene 2** Brutus sends instructions to his army, telling him to advance immediately against Octavius. Victory is within their grasp if they move quickly.

**Act V Scene 3** The battle goes badly for Cassius’s troops. Cassius angrily reports that his own soldiers have run from the enemy. Brutus appears to have some success, but his soldiers have fallen to looting.

Pindarus tells Cassius to flee because Antony's troops are upon them. Cassius refuses. He sends Titinius to investigate whether there really are enemy soldiers at their tents, as Pindarus told him. He sends Pindarus higher up the hill to gather information. But Cassius knows in his heart that he is defeated. Pindarus reports that Titinius has been captured. This is the final blow for Cassius, who instructs Pindarus to kill him with his sword, the same sword that killed Caesar. Cassius dies.

Titinius and Messala enter, reporting that Brutus has triumphed over Octavius even as Cassius’s army has fallen to Antony. They discover the dead Cassius. Titinius laments that Cassius killed himself because he misunderstood the situation. Titinius had in fact been welcomed and treated like a friend; he had not been captured at all. Filled with grief, he kills himself.

Brutus enters with Messala, who has brought him the news of Cassius’s death. Brutus exclaims that Caesar is mighty yet, and it is his spirit that has caused their defeat. He laments the death of two great Romans, and then tells his generals to prepare for another round of battle.

**Act V Scene 4** On the battlefield, Brutus urges his men on. Cato is killed. Lucilius, claiming that he is Brutus in order to confuse the enemy, is captured. Antony’s soldiers tell him they have captured Brutus, but when Antony asks where he is (knowing that Lucilius is not Brutus) Lucilius tells him that Brutus is safe and will never be taken alive. Antony orders that Lucilius be well treated, since he would sooner have him as a friend than an enemy.

**Act V Scene 5** Brutus and his soldiers, defeated in battle, stop to rest. Brutus makes it clear that he wishes to be killed. Clitus refuses, as does Dardanius. Then Brutus asks Volumnius, telling him that he has twice seen the ghost of Caesar and he knows his time to die has come. Volumnius also refuses. There are sounds of continuing battle, and Clitus, Dardanius and Volumnius flee. Brutus says he will follow. One man remains, Strato, and he holds Brutus’s sword as Brutus runs on to it. Brutus dies.

The victorious Antony and Octavius enter. Antony pays tribute to the dead Brutus by calling him the noblest Roman of them all.