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A Guide to
JULIUS CAESAR

by William Shakespeare

Alistair McCallum

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Setting the scene

Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* in or around 1599, when he was in his mid-thirties. He was already a successful dramatist and actor, and a member – and shareholder – of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the most prestigious theatre company in London.

Shakespeare's creative output at this time of his life was prolific and varied: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night* were all written within the space of a few years around the turn of the century.

Julius Caesar was undoubtedly one of the first plays presented at the newly-built Globe Theatre in 1599; in fact, some scholars believe that it was written specially for the opening of the new theatre. With its ambitious presentation of a momentous event in history, and its deft movement between public and private scenes, the play was an immediate and continuing success. A few years later, a rival London theatre company, the Admiral's Men, produced a competing play about Caesar, but failed to create the same impact.

The popularity of *Julius Caesar* continued throughout the Restoration, fifty years after Shakespeare's death, when most other plays of the Elizabethan period had come to be regarded as primitive and obscure. It has remained a favourite through the centuries.

Julius Caesar is a play that involves its audience deeply, forcing us to think about character and motive, to weigh opposing arguments, and to confront the contrast between rhetoric and reality. Above all, it is a compelling examination of the power of language:

"There is a powerful ease in the construction of Julius Caesar *which shows us a Shakespeare master of his means, and it is the play in which the boundaries of his art begin so markedly to widen. We find in it, therefore, a stagecraft, not of a too accustomed perfection, but bold and free ... The whole play is alive; it is alive in every line."*

Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*

Another victory for Caesar

For five years, Rome has been convulsed by civil war. Two factions have been locked in a ferocious struggle for control of the vast, wealthy, ever-expanding Roman Republic.

The dominant group in this conflict is led by Julius Caesar, a populist politician and military hero. Caesar had relentlessly pursued his principal rival, Pompey, as far as Egypt, where he was put to death. After a series of battles, taking place across the Republic, Pompey's sons and remaining supporters were finally hunted down to southern Spain. In the ensuing battle, Caesar has again been victorious.

News of the victory has just reached the city of Rome. The streets are crowded with citizens celebrating Caesar's success and the end of the war, and eagerly hoping for a glimpse of the great man himself as his triumphant procession makes its way through the city.

Curtain up

The celebrations are cut short

I, i

Flavius and Marullus, two government officials, are appalled by the boisterous crowds of people who have gathered in the streets, apparently deserting their workplaces. Flavius addresses them angrily:

Flavius: Hence! home, you idle creatures, get you home:
Is this a holiday?

The officials are particularly displeased by the fact that those thronging the streets have left behind the tools of their trade and changed out of their workmen's clothes:

Flavius: Speak, what trade art thou?
Carpenter: Why, sir, a carpenter.
Marullus: Where is thy leather apron, and thy rule?
What dost thou with thy best apparel on?

They question another tradesman, a cobbler, who teases the officials with obscure answers:

Marullus: … what trade art thou? Answer me directly.
Cobbler: A trade sir, that I hope I may use with a safe conscience; which is, indeed, sir, a mender of bad soles.
Marullus: What trade, thou knave? thou naughty [1] knave, what trade?
Cobbler: Nay, I beseech you, sir, be not out [2] with me: yet, if you be out,[3] sir, I can mend you.
Marullus: What meanest thou by that?

[1] *wicked*
[2] *out of temper; angry*
[3] *out at heels; having shoes that need mending*

The cobbler eventually comes to the point:

Flavius: Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?
Cobbler: Truly, sir, to wear out their shoes, to get myself into more work. But indeed, sir, we make holiday to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph.

The officials reprimand the cobbler and his companions sternly. This was not a victory over a foreign power, they assert, but a tragic clash between fellow-Romans; there is no cause for celebration. To make matters worse, the people now rejoicing in the streets did exactly the same for the great general Pompey in the past:

Marullus: Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?
… You blocks, you stones, you worse than
senseless things!
O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The livelong day, with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome …

They should be ashamed of themselves for recklessly celebrating the death of Pompey and his descendants; the only way to make amends, Marullus tells them, is to go home and pray for forgiveness.

Flavius adds that, along with all the others now cheering wildly in the streets, they should weep tears of repentance:

Flavius: Go, go, good countrymen, and for this fault
Assemble all the poor men of your sort;
Draw them to Tiber banks, and weep your tears
Into the channel …

As the crowd quietly disperses, Flavius tells Marullus to remove any decorations that have been hung on statues in Caesar's honour. Marullus is doubtful, and mentions that this is a time of general festivity:

Flavius: Disrobe the images,
If you find them deck'd with ceremonies.[1]
Marullus: May we do so?
You know it is the feast of Lupercal.

[1] *decorated with symbols and ornaments*

... it is the feast of Lupercal.

The Lupercalia was a Roman festival of health, purity and fertility, taking place in mid-February. Its origins probably lay in pre-Roman pastoral rituals relating to cleaning and purification, but the Romans associated this time with Lupa, the mythical she-wolf that nursed the infant Romulus and Remus.

One of the traditions of this festival was for young men, wearing only goatskins, to run through the streets of the city carrying whips made from the skin of sacrificed animals. The Greek biographer Plutarch, writing about 150 years after the time of Julius Caesar, describes the ritual, and explains how women would intentionally put themselves in the runners' path:

"... at this time, many noble youths and magistrates would run through the city naked, striking in sport those that they met with leather thongs. And many noblewomen deliberately stood in their way, holding out their hands like schoolchildren to be struck, believing that the pregnant would be helped in delivery, and that those hoping to become pregnant would be helped to conceive."

Flavius dismisses his colleague’s concerns, and repeats his instruction. All tokens of celebration must be removed, and any large gatherings of people must be broken up. It is imperative that this hero-worship of Julius Caesar is kept in check; otherwise, there is a danger that Caesar will become all-powerful, threatening the freedom of Roman citizens. He compares Caesar’s supporters to the feathers of a menacing young bird of prey:

Flavius: These growing feathers pluck’d from Caesar’s wing
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,[1]
Who else[2] would soar above the view of men
And keep us all in servile fearfulness.

[1] *the height at which a bird of prey flies before swooping on its victim*
[2] *otherwise*

A mysterious warning

I, ii

Caesar, accompanied by a group of important politicians and senators, is preparing for the Lupercalian fertility ritual. Mark Antony, Caesar’s trusted supporter, is one of the runners in this annual ceremony.

Caesar instructs his wife, Calphurnia, to make sure that she stands in Antony’s path when he approaches. Antony, for his part, must take care to touch Calphurnia as he runs past her.

Caesar clearly hopes that strict observance of this time-honoured ritual will help to produce an heir:

Caesar: Forget not, in your speed, Antonius,
To touch Calphurnia; for our elders say,
The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.
Antony: I shall remember:
When Caesar says, “Do this,” it is perform’d.
Caesar: Set on, and leave no ceremony out.

Just as they are about to move on, a voice is heard above the shouting and music that surrounds them:

Caesar: Who is it in the press[1] that calls on me?
… Speak. Caesar is turn'd to hear.
Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March.[2]

[1] *tightly-packed crowd*
[2] *mid-point of the month; 15th March*

Caesar is intrigued, and asks two of his companions, the senators Brutus and Cassius, to bring the man before him. However, he quickly loses interest in the fortune-teller, and orders the crowd to stand aside as his group leaves to watch the running:

Caesar: What man is that?
Brutus: A soothsayer bids you beware the ides of March.
Caesar: Set him before me; let me see his face.
Cassius: Fellow, come from the throng; look upon Caesar.
Caesar: What say'st thou to me now? Speak once again.
Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March.
Caesar: He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass.

Rumblings of discontent

Cassius notices that his fellow-senator Brutus is remaining behind while the others leave. Brutus tells his friend to go ahead without him, but Cassius decides to stay, and takes the opportunity to talk candidly with Brutus.

Recently, says Cassius, Brutus has appeared to be distant, even hostile towards him. Brutus apologizes; the truth is that he has been preoccupied with his own conflicting emotions, and as a result has neglected his friends.

Brutus: Cassius,
Be not deceiv'd: if I have veil'd my look,
I turn the trouble of my countenance
Merely upon myself.[1]
… let not therefore my good friends be griev'd

(Among which number, Cassius, be you one)
Nor construe any further my neglect,[2]
Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shows of love to other men.

[1] *if I have seemed withdrawn, it is because I am frowning inwardly at myself*
[2] *nor interpret my indifference in any other way*

Cassius accepts that he has been mistaken. This misunderstanding of Brutus's remoteness, he says, has meant that Cassius has kept some important thoughts to himself rather than share them with his friend.

Instead of revealing these thoughts, however, Cassius asks Brutus a question:

Cassius: Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?
Brutus: No, Cassius; for the eye sees not itself
But by reflection, by some other things.
Cassius: 'Tis just;
And it is very much lamented, Brutus,
That you have no such mirrors as will turn
Your hidden worthiness into your eye,
That you might see your shadow.[1]

[1] *so that you could see your own hidden qualities*

Cassius says that he is not alone in his admiration; many of the most respected people in Rome – apart from Julius Caesar – have expressed the wish that Brutus might realize his own worth, particularly in these times when freedom is under threat.

Brutus is alarmed; this is dangerous talk. He accuses Cassius of trying to arouse ambitions in him that do not exist:

Brutus: Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself
For that which is not in me?

Cassius is unrepentant. He is determined, he claims, to make Brutus aware of his own worth and his potential. Brutus would be right to be suspicious if Cassius were insincere, or a flatterer, or a gossip; but Cassius, as his good friend knows, is none of these things.

The conversation is interrupted by the sound of cheering in the distance. Brutus suspects that the crowd has proclaimed Caesar king of Rome. Cassius tentatively

The events depicted in *Julius Caesar* took place in 44 BC. At that time Rome was a wealthy, powerful Republic whose lands and provinces included vast swathes of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The Republic had been founded hundreds of years before, when Rome was just a small region centred around the city itself. According to legend, Rome had been governed at that time by a series of tyrannical kings, and the Republic had been created with the overthrow of the last of these kings.

Power in the Republic was shared between a number of individuals who usually held their posts for a limited time. Although Republican politics were often violent and chaotic, many Romans held one principle as sacrosanct: that Rome must not return to the days of one-man rule. Caesar, whose military victories had helped him to dominate Roman political life for several years, was regarded as a threat to this principle:

"It was overweening honours, voted during his lifetime by a compliant senate, combined with his more or less official takeover of the democratic processes that provoked the deadly opposition. He was allowed to wear triumphal dress almost wherever he liked ... Temples and a priesthood in his honour seem to have been promised too, and his statue was placed in all the existing temples of Rome ... Almost worse within the Roman context were the strong hints that he was aiming at becoming a king."

Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, 2015

asks him to say whether he believes that this is a prospect to be feared. Brutus confirms that, despite his personal friendship with Caesar, he does not want to see Rome governed by an all-powerful individual.

Brutus now begins to become impatient with Cassius, and demands to know exactly what is on his mind. He states that his honour – which he values more than his life – will allow him to discuss anything with Cassius as long as it relates to the good of the Republic.

Honour is precisely what he wants to talk about, replies Cassius. He starts by saying that he could never live his life under the dominance of any one individual who, after all, is just a man like himself:

Cassius: I was born free as Caesar; so were you;
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter's cold as well as he …

Cassius recalls an episode when Caesar challenged him to swim across the Tiber one cold, blustery day. Cassius leapt in without hesitation, and Caesar followed. The two of them fought to cross the stormy water, but Caesar, unable to make it across, cried out for help: Cassius had to rescue him and carry him, exhausted, out of the water. Yet this same man, Cassius claims, now considers himself virtually a god.

Another time, when they were in Spain together, Caesar fell ill. Cassius remembers how he turned pale and shook with fever, and how thin and weak his voice became. This man who wields such superhuman power over others, whose every word is revered, is nothing more than a man, and a weak one at that:

Cassius: Ye gods, it doth amaze me
A man of such a feeble temper [1] should
So get the start of [2] the majestic world,
And bear the palm [3] alone.

[1] *constitution*
[2] *gain the advantage over, run ahead of*
[3] *be victorious (in the contest for power)*

Cassius laments the state of Rome

Cheering is heard once again. Brutus assumes that Caesar, as ever, is the object of the crowd's adulation. His friend's response is bitter and sarcastic:

Brutus: I do believe that these applauses are
For some new honours that are heap'd on Caesar.
Cassius: Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.

Cassius now addresses Brutus directly and purposefully. They and their fellow-Romans have become subservient to Caesar, but this is not their inevitable destiny: they have allowed it to happen, and they can change it.

Cassius: Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars …

"Cassius has a philosophy that is more Renaissance than Roman, and which, to Shakespeare's original audience, was personified by the imperfectly-known but notorious figure of Niccolò Machiavelli: this is the concept of man as master of his own destiny, independent of any superhuman power …"

Norman Sanders, Introduction to the New Penguin edition of *Julius Caesar*, 1967

There is nothing special about the name ‘Caesar’, says Cassius; the name ‘Brutus’ is every bit as valid. Indeed, there is nothing special about the man himself. In a passionate outburst, Cassius exclaims that it is shameful that the great Republic of Rome, with its long, proud traditions, has now been reduced to the personal domain of one man:

Cassius: … Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed,
That he is grown so great? Age, thou art sham’d!
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods! [1]
…When could they say, till now, that talk’d of Rome,
That her wide walks encompass’d but [2] one man?

[1] *noble families; people of honourable character*
[2] *only*

Cassius reminds Brutus of his famous ancestor, Lucius Junius Brutus; centuries ago, he had led a revolt against the tyrannical regime of the king of Rome, abolished one-man rule, and founded the Republic:

Cassius: O, you and I have heard our fathers say,
There was a Brutus once that would have brook’d
Th’eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king.[1]

[1] *who would have tolerated the devil as ruler of Rome as soon as a king*

Confronted with this powerful rhetoric, Brutus remains cautious. He does not doubt his friend’s love, he assures him, and understands his reasoning. He intends to discuss his own views with Cassius when the time is right; for the present, however, Brutus needs time to consider, and wishes to keep his thoughts to himself.

Brutus asks Cassius not to pursue the subject any further at the moment, but makes it clear where his sympathies lie:

Brutus: … Brutus had rather be a villager [1]
Than to repute himself a son of Rome
Under these hard conditions as this time
Is like [2] to lay upon us.

[1] *a peasant of no standing (rather than a proud citizen of Rome)*
[2] *likely*

At this point Caesar, surrounded by his followers, returns from the Lupercalian ceremonies. As the entourage approaches, Cassius tells Brutus to attract the attention of the senator Casca, so that they can ask him for the latest news.

However, it quickly becomes clear that there is an uneasy atmosphere around Caesar. He himself looks displeased, and his wife is pale. His followers seem quiet and fearful, and the senator Cicero looks angry and resentful.

> *"The telling comparisons between Brutus and Caesar demonstrate the play's most essential ambivalence: the tyrant and his opponent are not easily distinguishable ... Both Brutus and Caesar have great leadership qualities, and, being certain of his virtues, each is susceptible to flattery and manipulation by lesser men."*
>
> Charles Boyce, *Shakespeare A to Z*, 1990

Caesar distrusts Cassius

Caesar notices Cassius nearby, and remarks to Antony that he is suspicious of intense, austere men of his kind:

Caesar: Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed[1] men, and such as sleep a-nights.
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

[1] *well-groomed*

Antony assures Caesar that Cassius is good-natured and trustworthy, but Caesar is adamant:

Caesar: He reads much,
He is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men.[1] He loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music.
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort[2]
As if he mock'd himself …

[1] *sees men's motives with complete clarity*
[2] *manner*

In short, says Caesar, Cassius is not to be trusted. People like him are always liable to be envious of those greater than themselves, and are potentially dangerous. However, Caesar is at pains to point out that he himself is not fearful:

Caesar: I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar.

Caesar is determined to question Antony further about Cassius, and the two men continue their conversation as they leave.

An eye-witness account

Brutus and Cassius again remain behind as Caesar moves on with his group of followers. Now, however, Casca joins them, prompted by Brutus, who had pulled secretively at his cloak as he passed by. Casca reveals the reason for the cheering they heard earlier. As Brutus had suspected, Caesar was the object of the crowd's appreciation:

Casca: … there was a crown offer'd him; and, being offer'd him, he put it by[1] with the back of his hand, thus; and then the people fell a-shouting.

[1] *pushed it aside*

This scene was acted out three times, says Casca, Antony being the one offering Caesar the crown. Casca describes the episode scornfully, claiming that he was hardly taking any notice of events:

Casca: I can as well be hang'd as tell the manner of it: it was mere foolery; I did not mark it.[1] I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown … and, as I told you, he put it by once; but for all that, to my thinking, he would fain[2] have had it. Then he offered it to him again …

[1] *it was complete nonsense, and I didn't pay any attention to it*
[2] *willingly*

After refusing the crown for a third time, reports Casca, Caesar fell, unconscious, to the ground. Cassius is startled; but Brutus, a close friend of Caesar's, is aware that he suffers from a condition known as the falling-sickness, resulting in occasional fits. Cassius remarks bitterly that is the citizens of Rome who are afflicted rather than Caesar, but his comment is lost on the plain-spoken Casca:

Cassius: … what, did Caesar swound?[1]
Casca: He fell down in the market-place, and foam'd at mouth, and was speechless.

Brutus:	'Tis very like;[2] he hath the falling-sickness.
Cassius:	No, Caesar hath it not; but you, and I, And honest Casca, we have the falling-sickness.
Casca:	I know not what you mean by that, but I am sure Caesar fell down.

[1] *faint*
[2] *likely*

What really struck Casca, however, was not Caesar's fainting but the behaviour of the crowd. Like an audience at a melodramatic play, they went wild with excitement when Caesar refused the crown that was offered to him; and when he recovered from his fainting fit, and asked the people for their forgiveness, they again cheered riotously.

> Are the conspirators right to fear Caesar's ambitions? Did Shakespeare side with the conspirators or with Caesar? And how should we view the conspiracy? Different directors, actors and audiences may have different opinions, but the play itself does not provide straightforward answers:
>
> *"Modern productions have attempted to stabilize the play's political sympathies through topical costuming – the conspirators as freedom fighters against a dictatorship, or the patricians as the self-interested fat cats of an undemocratic state – but in Shakespeare's hands the balance of sympathies is more delicate. Does Caesar have absolutist aspirations to disband the republic and accept the crown? We don't know, because the scene is only reported, not shown."*
>
> Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith,
> *30 Great Myths about Shakespeare*, 2013

Casca is contemptuous of the common people of Rome, and the way in which Caesar manipulates them:

Casca: Three or four wenches, where I stood, cried, "Alas, good soul," and forgave him with all their hearts; but there's no heed to be taken of them; if Caesar stabb'd their mothers, they would have done no less.

However, Caesar was clearly troubled by the fact that he had fainted in public, and this accounted for the tense atmosphere around him as he returned from the Lupercalian ceremonies.

Cassius asks how the senator Cicero reacted to these events. Casca confirms that he heard an enigmatic remark from the famously well-educated Cicero, but was none the wiser:

Cassius: Did Cicero say anything?
Casca: Ay, he spoke Greek.
Cassius: To what effect? [1]
Casca: Nay, and I tell you that, I'll ne'er look you i' th' face again.[2] But those that understood him smil'd at one another, and shook their heads; but for mine own part, it was Greek to me.[3]

[1] *to what purpose, with what meaning*
[2] *if I claimed to tell you, I would be dishonest*
[3] *I couldn't understand a word of it*

Casca adds a chilling footnote: without giving details, he hints that harsh punishment has been meted out to the two officials who earlier ordered the removal of decorations that had been hung on statues in Caesar's honour.

Casca: … Marullus and Flavius, for pulling scarfs off Caesar's images, are put to silence.[1]

[1] *removed from their positions; possibly, exiled or even executed*

Cassius and Casca agree to meet for dinner tomorrow. After Casca has left, Brutus remarks on the bluntness of his character. Cassius replies that his abrupt, sardonic manner hides an astute mind:

Cassius: … This rudeness is a sauce to his good wit,
Which gives men stomach to digest his words
With better appetite.

Brutus now leaves. He too will meet Cassius tomorrow, so that they can continue their discussion.

Alone, Cassius reflects on Brutus's character. Despite his nobility, believes Cassius, he is susceptible to influence. And Cassius knows that, unlike himself, Brutus is a trusted friend of Caesar's; he will be a useful ally.

Cassius has already established that Brutus is unhappy about the way things are going in Rome. To strengthen his resolve, Cassius intends to forge some letters and leave them, anonymously, in Brutus's house. While they will appear to come from different people, they will all emphasize the high regard in which Brutus is held, and hint at the danger posed by Caesar's hunger for power.

If his stratagem succeeds, declares Cassius, Caesar will need to be vigilant:

Cassius: I will this night,
In several hands, in at his windows throw,
As if they came from several citizens,
Writings, all tending to the great opinion
That Rome holds of his name; wherein obscurely
Caesar's ambition shall be glanced at.
And after this, let Caesar seat him sure,[1]
For we will shake him, or worse days endure.

[1] *make himself secure*

A sense of foreboding

I, iii

It is late at night, and a violent storm is sweeping through the streets of Rome. Cicero comes across Casca, who is terrified; this is by far the worst storm he has ever witnessed. The earth itself is shaking, and fire seems to be falling from the sky. Casca fears that the tempest is a sign of the gods' anger, and he is amazed at Cicero's calmness:

Casca: Are you not mov'd, when all the sway[1] of earth
Shakes like a thing unfirm?
… never till to-night, never till now,
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,
Or else the world, too saucy[2] with the gods,
Incenses them to send destruction.

[1] *realm*
[2] *insolent, disrespectful*

Casca describes some other strange, ominous events that he has seen or heard about lately: a man whose hand inexplicably burst into flames and burned brightly, even though it caused him no pain; a lion prowling around the centre of Rome; a group of women huddled in fear, having seen men whose bodies were blazing with fire wandering through the streets; and a screech-owl, a sinister bird of the night, shrieking in the market-place at midday.

"These monstrous and unnatural happenings in the natural world were easily related by the Elizabethans both to man's inner life and to society itself, owing to the infinite series of interlocking correspondences which they perceived between the personal, social, material, and universal levels of life."

Norman Sanders, Introduction to the New Penguin edition of *Julius Caesar*, 1967

Incidents like these, all happening around the same time, cannot be explained away as natural phenomena, claims Casca; there must be a profound significance behind them. Cicero warns him that attempts to find meaning in such events may be misguided:

Cicero: Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time:[1]
But men may construe things, after their fashion,[2]
Clean from[3] the purpose of the things themselves.

[1] *a time when strange things are likely to happen*
[2] *may interpret events to suit their own ideas*
[3] *in a way that bears no relation to*

Cicero asks Casca whether Caesar will be at the Capitol (the political centre of Rome, where the senate-house is located) tomorrow. Casca confirms that he will, and Cicero goes on his way.

Casca is persuaded

Just as Cicero leaves, another voice is heard in the darkness. It is Cassius. Unlike Casca, he is not afraid of the storm; in fact, he is relishing it.

Cassius: For my part, I have walk'd about the streets,
Submitting me unto the perilous night …
And when the cross[1] blue lightning seem'd to open
The breast of heaven, I did present myself
Even in the aim and very flash of it.[2]

[1] *forked, branching*
[2] *exactly at the point where I thought the lightning might strike*