**The Rise and Fall of Julius Caesar**



**Birth of Caesar**: Julius Caesar was born on July 12, 100 BC. According to legend, his mother had difficulty giving birth and Caesar had to be surgically removed from his mother’s womb, thereby becoming the first “Caesarean section.” His father, senior Julius Caesar, governed the province of Asia and his mother, Aurelia Cotta, was a noblewoman. While some people in Rome believed in the superiority of nobility and wanted to uphold traditional values that favored the upper classes, both of Caesar’s parents held the ***Populare*** ideology, a belief that the people in the lower class should have more rights. The concept of siding with the common men, rather than siding with the Roman Senate or the other Patricians, would work well for Caesar later in life.

**YOUTH & MILITARY SERVICE**

Young Caesar’s father died when he became sixteen years. Therefore, Caesar became the head of the family. Deciding that becoming a priest would bring the most benefit to the family, he managed to have himself nominated as the new High Priest of Jupiter. Since a priest had to marry a patrician, Caesar broke off his engagement to a plebian girl and instead married a patrician woman named Cornelia, the daughter of a high profile and influential member of the Populares. However, a ruler that was opposed to the Populare ideology came to power, he began a systematic purge of his enemies. Caesar was stripped of his position as priest and his wife’s **dowry** (money she brought to the marriage) was taken. Left without a way of supporting himself or his family, Caesar joined the army.

He proved himself an effective soldier, even being awarded the civic crown for saving a life in battle, and was quickly promoted. He continued to make a name for himself during his time as a soldier. When things settled down in Rome, Caesar decided to return and try his luck as an orator (a modern-day lawyer). His success continued and he became well known as a dynamic speaker.

**THE FIRST TRIUMVIRATE**

Back in Rome, Caesar was elected military tribune. He wanted to gain even more power, so he used his popularity to support Gaeus Pompeius (later known as Pompey the Great) to become a general in the Roman legion. During this time he also became friends with the wealthiest man in Rome, Marcus Licinius Crassus. These three would eventually form what was called the First Triumvirate (try-UM-ver-ut), a trio of very powerful people that would have a great deal of influence on Rome.

In 61 BC he became the governor of Spain. He defeated the warring rival tribes, brought stability to the region, and won the admiration of his troops through his skill on the battlefield. He was awarded a **consulship** (there were two consuls, the highest political position in Rome) by the senate. Returning to Rome with high honors, Caesar entered into a business/political agreement with Pompey and Crassus, known as the First Triumvirate, in 60 BC. To strengthen their bond, Caesar made his daughter Julia marry Pompey.

The three men together then effectively ruled Rome, Caesar as consul, by passing laws favored by Pompey or Crassus in the senate. Caesar proposed policies for reform of government, and redistributing land to the poor. For the moment, the three-way partnership was working very well.

**CAESAR'S CONQUEST OF GAUL**

Recognizing the wealth to be gained through conquest, Caesar left Rome and the position of consul, with his legions and went to Gaul (modern-day France) in 58 BC. He defeated the tribes there just as he had done in Spain. When the Germanic tribes seemed threatening to invade, Caesar built a bridge over the Rhine River, marched his legions across in a show of force, then marched them back and had the bridge dismantled. The message was clear. Caesar had the power to attack them whenever he wanted. The Germans got the message loud and clear and never invaded. By 52 BC, Caesar had completed his conquest of Gaul, and in doing so had become extremely wealthy and powerful.

Back in Rome, however, The First Triumvirate had disintegrated/fallen. Crassus was killed in battle in 54 BC. That same year, Julia died in childbirth. Pompey had become the consul in the absence of Caesar. Now, with no connection to Ceasar and fearing he had grown too powerful, Pompey had the senate remove Caesar’s right of governing Gaul. The senate also ordered him to return to Rome as a private citizen, without his army. Caesar knew what this meant. If he came back without his army, Pompey would strip him of his powers, or worse.

**CROSSING THE RUBICON & CLEOPATRA**

Rather than returning to Rome as ordered, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with his legions and marched on the city in 49 BC. This was considered an act of war as the Rubicon was the border between Gaul and Rome. According to legend, as he crossed the body of water he exclaimed, “The die is cast,” meaning that what was now done could not be undone. Pompey, rather than meet Caesar’s legions in battle, fled to Spain and then to Greece where he was defeated by Caesar. Pompey himself escaped from the battle and went to Egypt where he thought he would be safe. News of Caesar’s victory reached Egypt before him, however, and the Egyptians, believing that the gods favored Caesar over Pompey, had Pompey killed the moment he stepped on shore. This left Caesar the unquestioned ruler of Rome.



Caesar, who had chased Pompey to Egypt, pretended to be angry over Pompey’s death. Since Egypt was part of the Roman Empire, he proclaimed martial law, and took over the royal palace. This is where he met the famous pharaoh, Cleopatra. He and Cleopatra became romantically linked shortly after meeting, and he remained in Egypt with her nine months. In 47 BC, Cleopatra gave birth to a son, Ptolemy Caesar (known as Caesarion) and proclaimed him her heir and successor to the throne.

**THE ROMAN REFORMS**

Despite having a son with Cleopatra, Caesar, named his grandnephew, Gaius Octavius Thurinus (Octavian) successor to the throne. When he returned to Rome, he initiated many reforms including transferring more land for the rich and giving it the poor, as well as political reforms which proved unpopular with the senate. The senate remained a part of Rome, but Caesar really did not listen to them. Instead, he usually simply told them which laws he wanted passed. He reformed the calendar, created a police force, and abolished the tax system, among many other pieces of legislation. He also became the first living Roman ever to appear on Roman coins. Normally, the honor was reserved for gods.

His time as a dictator is generally regarded as a prosperous one for Rome but the senators feared that he was becoming too powerful and could soon dismantle the senate entirely and rule as the unquestioned king. Therefore, they decided to control his power and hatched a plan to do away with Caesar.

**CONSPIRACY TO ASSASSINATE CAESAR**

The time had come to save the Republic from this would-be king, and so a plan was made to kill Caesar. Perhaps the most famous was Marcus Junius Brutus who had once been Caesar’s protege (someone who is advised by a mentor). Brutus was the son of Caesar’s mistress and Caesar trusted him. In fact, he supported Brutus for a position as a praetor, which was a stepping stone to a consulship. There were other conspirators of course, some claim the number was as high as 60. To these men power had to be, at any cost, taken from Caesar and returned to the Roman Senate.

**THE PLAN**

The conspirators met together secretly, in small groups to avoid detection. Luckily for them, Caesar had dismissed his bodyguard in October of 45 BC, believing no one would dare attack him. The conspirators realized the attack had to be soon since Caesar was making plans to lead his army on a three-year campaign against the Parthians (modern-day Iran), leaving on March 18. But where and when should they strike? After considerable debate, the final decision was to strike during a session of the Senate at the Theater of Pompey on March 15, 44 BC, the Ides of March. The attackers had chosen their weapon of choice wisely - a double-edged dagger about eight inches long instead of a sword. Daggers were better for close contact and could be hidden under their togas.

**THE ATTACK**

A large crowd accompanied Caesar on his way to the Senate.  Just as he entered the theater a man named Artemidorus tried to warn him of eminent danger by thrusting a small scroll into his hand, but Caesar ignored it. The dictator entered and sat on his throne. A trusted friend and general Mark Antony, who had accompanied Caesar, was conveniently delayed outside by one of the conspirators, as planned.



In the theater there were 200 senators in attendance along with 10 tribunes and a number of slaves and secretaries. One of the conspirators approached Caesar, pretending to ask a question, and when he was close enough he grabbed at Caesar’s toga and pulled it back. Caesar reportedly said, *“Why, this is violence?”* Caesar immediately tried to defend himself by raising his hands to cover his face. The remaining conspirators surrounded the shocked Caesar. He attempted to get away from his attackers, but, blinded by blood, he tripped and fell; the men continued stabbing him — 23 times. The historian Suetonius wrote that a physician who performed an autopsy confirmed that only one wound — the second one to his chest — had been fatal. The autopsy report — the earliest known autopsy in history — describes Caesar's death as mostly caused by blood loss from his wounds. Ironically, Caesar died at the foot of a statue of his old enemy Pompey. The remaining senators in attendance ran from the theater.

Afterwards, Rome was in a state of confusion. Suetonius wrote that there were some who disliked Caesar and wanted to take his corpse and throw it into the Tiber River, confiscate his property, and revoke his laws. However, Mark Antony maintained a cool head and stopped any such plans.

**AFTERMATH AND CONCLUSION:**

Brutus believed the death of Caesar would be welcomed by the people, but the citizens didn’t respond the way he’d hoped. They became increasingly more hostile to the conspirators and on March 17 the Senate sought a compromise with the urging of Caesar’s friend Mark Antony: The laws and reforms of Caesar would remain, and in exchange there would be no punishment for the conspirators.

Unfortunately, there would be no peace in Rome. The conspirators eventually fled from Rome and the young Octavian, the adopted son of Caesar, received Caesar’s wealth and the support of the army. Octavian would soon change his name to Augustus, and become the first emperor of the Roman Empire.