

Rome EXTRA Readings Part One

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A Bad Beginning

HAVE you ever heard of the Seven-League Boots, the boots in which one could take many miles at a single step?

Well, there is a still bigger boot; it is over five hundred miles long, and it is in the Mediterranean Sea.

No, it's not a real boot, but it would look like one if you were miles high in an airplane and looking down upon it.

It is called Italy.

Something very important happened in Italy, not long after the First Olympiad in Greece. It was so important that it was called the Year 1, and for a thousand years people counted from it as the Greeks did from the First Olympiad and as we do now from the birth of Christ. This thing that happened was not the birth of a man, however. It was the birth of a city, and this city was called Rome.

The history of Rome starts with stories that we know are fairy tales or myths in the same way that the history of Greece does. Homer told about the wanderings of the Greek, Odysseus. A great many years later a poet named Virgil told about the wanderings of a Trojan named Æneas.¹

Æneas fled from Troy when that city was burning down and started off to find a new home. Finally after several years, he came to Italy and the mouth of a river called the Tiber. There Æneas met the daughter of the man who was ruling over that country, a girl by the name of Lavinia, and married her, and they lived happily ever after. The children of Æneas and Lavinia ruled over the land, and they had children, and their children had children, and their children had children, until at last boy twins were born. These twins were named Romulus² and Remus.³ Here endeth the first part of the story and the trouble begins, for they did not live happily ever after.

At the time the twins were born, a man had stolen the kingdom, and he feared that these two boys might grow up and take his stolen kingdom away from him. So he put the twins in a basket and set them afloat on the river Tiber, hoping that they might be carried out to sea or upset and be drowned. This, he thought, was nearly all right, so long as he didn't kill them with his own hands. But the basket drifted ashore instead of going out to sea or upsetting, and a mother wolf found the twins and nursed them as if they were her own babies. A woodpecker also helped and fed them berries. At last a shepherd found them and brought them up as if they were his own sons until they grew up and became men. This sounds a good deal like the story of Paris who was left out to die and was found and brought up by a shepherd also.

Each of the twins then wished to build a city. But they could not agree which one was to do it, and in quarreling over the matter, Romulus killed his own twin brother Remus. Romulus then built the city by the Tiber River, on the spot where he and his brother had been saved and nursed by the mother wolf. Here there were seven hills. This was in 753 B.C., and he named the city Roma after his own name, and the people who lived there were called Romans. That is why, ever afterward, the Roman kings always said they were descended from the Trojan hero Æneas, the great-great-great-grandfather of Romulus.

Don't you believe this story? Neither do I. But it is such an old, old story everyone is supposed to have heard it even though it is only a legend.

In order to get people for the city which he had started, it is said that Romulus invited all the thieves and bad men who had escaped from jail to come and live in Rome, promising them that they would be safe there.

Then as none of the men had wives, and there were no women in

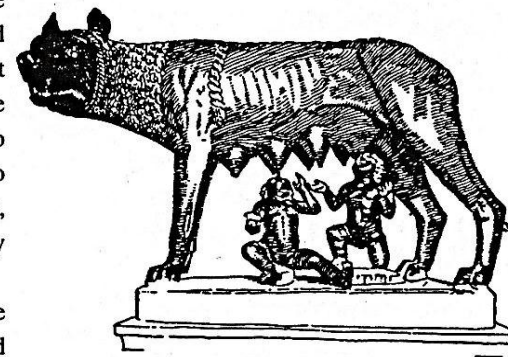
his new city, Romulus thought up a scheme to get the men wives. He invited some people called Sabines,⁴ who lived nearby, both men and women, to come to Rome to a big party.

They accepted, and a great feast was spread. In the middle of the feast, when everyone was eating and drinking, a signal was given, and each of the Romans seized a Sabine woman for his wife and ran off with her.

The Sabine husbands immediately prepared themselves for war against the Romans, who had stolen their wives. When the battle had begun between the two armies, the Sabine women ran out in the midst of the fighting between their new and old husbands and begged them both to stop. They said they had come to love their new husbands and would not return to their old homes.

What do you think of that?

It sounds like a pretty bad beginning for a new city, doesn't it? and you may well wonder how Rome turned out—a city that started with Romulus killing his brother and that was settled by escaped prisoners who stole the wives of their neighbors. We'll see if the Romans continued to do such wicked things as their city grew older.



Romulus and Remus with the wolf

Rome Kicks Out Her Kings

IN 509 B.C. something happened in Rome. There were two classes of people in Rome, just as there were in Athens: the wealthy people who were called patricians, and the poor people who were called plebeians. We use the same words now and call people who are rich and aristocratic *patricians*, and the people who are poor and uneducated *plebeians*. The patricians were allowed to vote, but the plebeians were not allowed to vote.

At last, however, the plebeians had been given the right to vote. But in B.C. Rome had a king named Tarquin.¹ He didn't think the plebeians should be allowed to vote, and so he said they should not. The plebeians would not stand this, and therefore they got together and drove Tarquin out of the city, as the Athenians had driven out their king. This was in 509 B.C., and Tarquin was the last king Rome ever had.

After King Tarquin had been driven out, the Romans started what is called a republic, something like our own country, but they were afraid to have only one man as president for fear he might make himself king, and they had had enough of kings.

So the Romans elected *two men* each year to be rulers over them, and these two men they called consuls. Each consul had a bodyguard of twelve men. These men were given the name *lictors*, and each lictor carried an ax tied up in a bundle of sticks. This bundle of sticks with the ax-head sticking out in the middle or at the end was known as *fasces* and signified that the consuls had power to punish by whipping with the sticks or by chopping off one's head with the ax. Some modern coins and postage stamps have fasces pictured on them.

Perhaps you have seen fasces used as ornaments or decoration around monuments or public buildings.

One of the first two consuls was named Brutus² the Elder, and he had two sons. The king, Tarquin, who had been driven out of the city, plotted to get back to Rome and become king once more. He was able to persuade some Romans to help him. Among those whom he persuaded were, strange to say, the two sons of Brutus—the new consul of Rome.



Lictor carrying fasces

Brutus found out this plot and learned that his own children had helped Tarquin. Then Brutus had his sons tried. They were found guilty, and in spite of the fact that they were his own children, he had the lictors put both of them to death as well as the other traitors to Rome.

Tarquin did not succeed in getting back the rule of Rome in this way. The next year he tried again. This time he got together an army of his neighbors, the Etruscans, and with this army he attacked Rome.

Now, there was a wooden bridge across the Tiber River, which separated the Etruscans from the city of Rome. In order to keep the Etruscans from crossing into the city, a Roman named Horatius,³ who had already lost one eye in fighting for Rome, gave orders to have this bridge broken down.

While the bridge was being chopped down, Horatius, with two of his friends, stood on the far side of the bridge and fought back the whole Etruscan army. When the bridge was cracking under the blows of the Roman soldiers, Horatius ordered his two friends to run quickly to the other side before the bridge fell.

Then Horatius, all by himself, kept the enemy back until at last the bridge crashed into the river. Horatius then jumped into the water with all his armor on and swam toward the Roman shore. Though arrows the Etruscans shot were falling all around him, and though his armor weighed him down, he reached the other side safely. Even the Etruscans were thrilled at his bravery, and, enemies though they were, they cheered him loudly.

There is a very famous poem called *Horatius at the Bridge*, which describes this brave deed.

A few years after Horatius, there lived another Roman named Cincinnatus.⁴ He was only a simple farmer with a little farm on the bank of the Tiber, but he was very wise and good, and the people of Rome honored and trusted him.

One day when an enemy was about to attack the city—for in those days there always seemed to be enemies everywhere ready to attack Rome on any excuse—the people had to have a leader and a general. They thought of Cincinnatus and went and asked him to be dictator.

Now, a dictator was the name they gave to a man who in a case of sudden danger was called upon to command the army and in fact all the people during the time of the danger. Cincinnatus left his plow, went with the people to the city, got together an army, went out and defeated the enemy, and returned to Rome, all in twenty-four hours!

The people were so much pleased with the quick and decisive way in which Cincinnatus had saved Rome that they wanted him to keep right on being their general in time of peace. Even though they hated kings so much, they would have made him king if he would have accepted.

But Cincinnatus did not want any such thing. His duty done, he wanted to return to his wife and humble home and his little farm. In spite of what many would have thought a wonderful chance, he did go back to his plow, choosing to be just a simple farmer instead of being king.

The city of Cincinnati in Ohio is named after a society which was founded in honor of this old Roman, who lived nearly five hundred years before Christ.

The Rise of Julius Caesar



Caesar is Kidnapped

Do you remember the stories we already read about Rome? Rome grew from a small village to a rich, powerful city. Roman builders made roads so people could travel faster, aqueducts to bring water into the city, and apartments so many people could live within the city's walls. Rome also had a strong army. They defeated the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, and even sailed across the Mediterranean Sea to attack Hannibal's home city of Carthage!

The great city of Rome became the richest, strongest city in the world. People from far away knew about Rome. They admired its beautiful buildings and splendid roads. They came from all over to trade in Rome, to watch the gladiator fights, and to admire Roman art. The Romans were the most powerful and prosperous people anywhere.

One day, a baby boy was born to a rich family in Rome. His parents named him Julius Caesar. The Caesars were important people. They claimed to be descended from Romulus, the founder of the city of Rome! Julius's father was a rich nobleman who helped to make the laws of Rome. And Julius's uncle was a *consul* – one of the two rulers of Rome. "My little boy will accomplish great things!" Julius's father declared. "He will become one of the most famous men in Rome!"

As soon as Julius was old enough, his father sent him to school to learn reading, writing, mathematics, and *rhetoric* – the art of speaking in public. Julius Caesar became very good at speaking in public! He grew up to be tall and strong, with keen black eyes and a deep, powerful voice. Whenever he made a speech, crowds gathered to listen to him. Soon Julius decided that he wanted to help govern Rome. He threw big parties for the people he needed to vote for him. He did favors for them. He became more and more popular.

But Julius decided that he needed even more lessons in rhetoric, so that he could convince even more Romans to vote for him. And the most famous rhetoric teacher of all lived in an island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. So Julius Caesar hired a ship to take him out to the island. "It'll cost you extra," the captain of the ship told him. "There are pirates all over the Mediterranean. Their ships are faster than anyone else's. They steal cargo and kidnap important people. No one can control them. Are you sure you want to go?"

"I'm not afraid of pirates!" Julius answered. He paid the captain of the ship and got on board.

But no sooner was the ship out of sight of land than another ship came into view behind it – a sleek, fast ship. "Pirates!" the captain shouted. He tried to sail faster, but the pirate ship gained on him. All the sailors ran up to the deck to fight, but the pirates boarded the ship and took it over. They stole the cargo – and then they saw Julius Caesar, standing in the middle of the captured sailors. They could tell by his clothing that he was a rich, important man.

"We'll keep you for ransom," the pirate captain said. "Who are your relatives? We'll tell them that we'll send you back as soon as they pay us \$100,000!"

Julius Caesar burst out laughing. "Is that all?" he said. "I'm worth at least \$250,000!"

"You think you're so important?" the pirate said. "Very well, we'll keep you and see how much money we can make from you!"

"I'm warning you," Caesar said, "as soon as I'm free, I'll return and execute all of you."

The pirates laughed; they didn't take Caesar's threats seriously. They took him back to their ship and kept him for more than a month. But Caesar treated them as though *they* were the prisoners. "Savages!" he would call out. "Be quiet! I'm napping! And be sure that the food I'm served for supper is better than what I had for lunch!"

The pirates thought Caesar was funny. Finally, the government of Rome sent them Caesar's ransom. They took the money and told Caesar goodbye. "Go back to Rome, little boy," they mocked him. "Go back to where it's safe! The sea belongs to us."

But as soon as Caesar got back to Rome, he convinced the Roman navy to lend him three warships and several troops of soldiers. He sailed back out into the Mediterranean. Sure enough, as soon as the warships lost sight of land, the pirates appeared, sailing up fast behind them.

This time Caesar was ready. He told his soldiers, "Get ready to fight!" He circled his warships around and met the pirates head on. The soldiers and pirates fought hand-to-hand, climbing from one ship to another, until the pirates were defeated.

"Now who does the sea belong to?" Caesar said to the pirate captain. He took the pirates back to Rome – and had them all executed!

After this, everyone in Rome knew who Caesar was. They knew that he was a strong leader and a fierce fighter. Julius Caesar's name was on everyone's lips. The people of Rome were ready to vote for Caesar!



The Consuls of Rome

Once he was back in Rome, Julius Caesar decided that he wanted to be a consul. Do you remember who the *consuls* were? Rome got rid of its kings because the kings were tyrants who did whatever they wanted. Instead they had two rulers called *consuls*. Each consul was supposed to keep the other one from getting too much power.

But there was a problem: Rome already had two consuls! There was no room for Caesar.

Instead, Caesar was given the job of governing the Romans who lived all the way over in Spain. Many Romans had settled here, and they needed a Roman leader to run their colony.

Governing Spain was not Caesar's idea of an important job! But he knew that he could not become consul in Rome yet. So he gathered together his men and his possessions, and set off for Spain. He traveled up through Italy, over the Alps.

On the way through the Alps, Caesar and his

friends came to a tiny, shabby village high up in the mountains. The streets were made of mud. The people were dressed in rags. Goats ran around between the houses, and the children played barefoot in the dirt.

"What a disgusting place to live!" one of Caesar's friends exclaimed. "Can you imagine spending your life here?"

Caesar turned around to him. "I would rather be the most important man here," he snapped, "than second in command in Rome."

They traveled on to Spain. In Spain, Caesar worked hard and became popular. He drove away the mountain bandits that kept attacking the Roman cities in Spain. But all the time, he longed to go back to Rome and become powerful there, in his home town.

One day, he was sitting in his library reading about the life of Alexander the Great. His friends were there with him, talking about life in Spain and when they might be able to return to Rome. Slowly they noticed that Caesar had stopped reading. He sat with his book on his knee, staring out the window. On the page in front of him was a picture of Alexander the Great, riding his great warhorse Bucephalus, with hundreds of cheering soldiers following him into battle. Suddenly Caesar burst into tears.

His friends had never seen him weep before. "Caesar! Caesar! What is wrong?" they asked.

"Don't you think I have reason to be sad?" Caesar asked them. "By the time he was my age, Alexander the Great was already the king of five or six different countries! And I haven't done anything remarkable yet! I should weep and be sad! When will I have the chance to become famous?"

Finally, Caesar was allowed to return to Rome. He convinced the two consuls who ruled Rome that he should become consul as well. Now three powerful men ruled Rome – and Caesar was one of them! The three rulers were called the *triumvirate*. "Tri" means three. How many wheels does a tricycle have? Three! How many children are there when triplets are born? Three! *Triumvirate* means "three leaders."

But Caesar became more and more popular with the people of Rome. They knew that he was a good general and a strong fighter, and they thought that Caesar could keep them safe. Before long, no one paid much attention to the other two consuls. Caesar was the only one who mattered!

Caesar and the Senate

Julius Caesar was popular with the people of Rome. But he wasn't popular with the Senate.

The Senate was a group of rich, powerful men who had most of the power in Rome. The Senate helped to take care of Rome. The consuls were supposed to listen to what the Senate said. But Caesar didn't pay very much attention to the Senate. He did what he pleased!

The Senate was unhappy about this! They were suspicious of Caesar. "What if he wants to become king?" they asked each other. "What will happen to Rome? What will happen to us? One man should not rule Rome! We should govern Rome together, so that no single man has all the power in Rome! If only Caesar were like Cincinnatus!"

Cincinnatus was the ideal Roman! He served his city when he was needed – but then he gave his power back to the Senate. But Caesar wouldn't behave like Cincinnatus. He kept on gathering power. He became more and more popular.

"One day," the Senators said to each other, "Caesar will try to become king of Rome. Then what will we do?"

Caesar the Hero



Caesar Fights the Celts

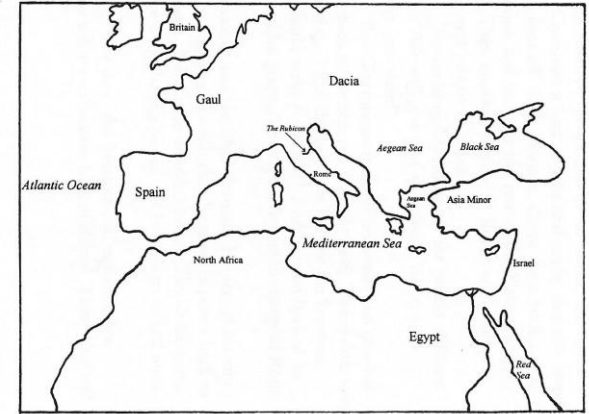
Caesar didn't have any intention of going back to his fields, like Cincinnatus. But he knew that the Roman people wouldn't make him king yet. Before he could be king, the Romans would have to love him and trust him even more.

So Caesar set out to be the greatest war hero ever. If he won many battles and conquered a great deal of land for Rome, maybe he could convince the people of Rome that he would make a good king.

Caesar took good care of his army. He trained them to fight. He paid them well and gave them plenty to eat. The soldiers weren't used to being treated so well! Soon they were completely loyal to Caesar. They followed him into battle against Rome's neighbors. Caesar didn't always win his battles – but he didn't let the people of Rome know that. Instead, he only sent them messages about his victories! He pretended that he never lost a fight.

The country Caesar wanted to conquer most was called Britain. Caesar thought that Britain would be easy

Caesar, Britain, and the Rubicon



to conquer. But he had to build ships and sail his army across the water to get to Britain's shores.

He built the ships, and put the soldiers onto them. The ships set out for Britain. But some of them got lost on the way. And the soldiers who did make it to Britain were cold, wet, and tired. They were sick of the ocean and ready to get back to dry land.

"Look!" one of them shouted at last. "Land!"

The soldiers clustered at the side of the boat, anxious to see Britain for the first time. They saw a misty green island – with an army waiting for them on its shore.

The people who lived in Britain were called Celts. They were tall, muscular, warlike men. They were so proud of their height and strength that they went into battle naked! They wore only metal collars and tall metal helmets that made them look even bigger. They carried heavy iron swords and wooden clubs. And they painted their bodies blue all over, because they thought that the blue lines would magically protect them from swords and arrows.

The Romans stared up at these huge, painted warriors. They began to murmur among themselves: "We can never beat them! They are too big and fierce!"

When the boy who held Caesar's flag heard the soldiers murmuring, he jumped out of his ship, into the shallow water near the beach. He started to wade ashore, holding the flag high. The other soldiers didn't want to see Caesar's flag captured, so they leaped in after him. The Celts attacked. They fought there, ankle-deep in the water, for hours. Finally the Celts retreated. The Romans landed triumphantly on the beaches of Britain!

But the Romans only stayed in Britain three weeks. A huge storm wrecked many of the Roman ships. More Roman soldiers were ambushed and defeated.

Finally Caesar decided to leave Britain and come back with a bigger army.

He came back a year later with more soldiers. This time he was able to stay in Britain longer. He forced some of the Celts to pay money to the Roman army as tribute. But the other British tribes remained free of Roman control.

Caesar hadn't exactly conquered Britain. But he didn't tell the people in Rome about his defeats! Instead, he kept sending messages of victory back to Rome. He even wrote a book about his wars in Gaul and Britain, called *The Gallic Wars*. In his book, Caesar hardly even mentioned the times when he was defeated. He only talked about his successes! He didn't exactly tell lies – but he certainly talked about his battles in a way that made him sound even more victorious and successful than he was.



Caesar Crosses the Rubicon

Caesar's victories made him a hero to the people of Rome. But the Senators were afraid of Caesar.

"If he comes back to Rome now," the Senators said to each other, "the people will want him to be king of Rome! And then what will happen to us? We won't be able to run Rome any more!"

Two of the Senators decided that they would try to make one of the other consuls, Pompey, turn against Caesar. This was hard to do – because Pompey had married Caesar's daughter! But Pompey was jealous of Caesar. He knew that Caesar was much more popular than he was.

So Pompey agreed to listen to the Senators. "Listen," they said to him. "Tell the people of Rome that Caesar is a traitor! Tell them that he isn't loyal to Rome. Take away Caesar's position of consul before he gets back to Rome. Then you will be the strongest man in the whole city!"

An ancient Roman statue of Julius Caesar



So Pompey agreed. He sent a message to Caesar, telling him that he would be arrested when he returned to Rome. He told Caesar to give up command of his army. And all the people of Rome were told that Caesar was a traitor.

Far away in Britain, Caesar got the bad news. His own city was calling him a criminal and a traitor! And the Senate wanted to arrest him and put him on trial! What should he do?

Caesar knew that the Senate didn't like him. But he was convinced that the Roman people still thought of him as a great hero. So he took his army and marched back towards Rome.

Soon Caesar came to the Rubicon River. The Rubicon was the border of Roman land. Caesar knew that as soon as he crossed over the Rubicon, he would be in the land controlled by the Senators. The Senators would try to arrest him – and he would have to fight them. His army would end up fighting against other Romans! If he crossed over the Rubicon, he would start a civil war – a war that the country fights against itself. Should he do it?

He stood at the river for a long time, staring at the bridge. "Even yet," he said to the captain of his army, "we may turn back. But once we cross that little bridge... we will have to settle this with our swords."

Finally Caesar drew his sword and stepped onto the bridge. "My enemies have forced me to do this!" he announced. "We will march into Rome. Let the die be cast!" He crossed the Rubicon, and his army followed him.

Back in Rome, Pompey and the Senators were trying to raise an army of their own. But no one wanted to fight against Caesar's soldiers! After all, they had spent years fighting. They were tough, strong, and ready to fight! When Caesar and his army came in sight of Rome, all of Pompey's soldiers ran away. And before Caesar could enter the city, Pompey fled as well.

Caesar marched triumphantly into Rome. No one dared to arrest him! Now the Senate had to admit that Caesar was too powerful to drive away. Caesar wasn't king yet — but he was the strongest man in Rome.

Today, when someone has to make an important decision, people still say "You're about to cross the Rubicon." "Crossing the Rubicon" means that you're about to do something that you can't undo! We get this expression from the story of Julius Caesar's return to Rome.



Caesar and Cleopatra

Caesar now ruled all of Rome and all of Rome's territories. The army obeyed him. The people loved him. And the Senate couldn't drive him out.

But Caesar still wanted to get rid of Pompey. He knew that Pompey had run away to Egypt. And down in Egypt, Pompey was trying to convince the Egyptians to help him attack Caesar and take Rome back.

"I can't leave him down there!" Caesar thought to himself. "He'll come marching back up here with a whole army of Egyptians and attack me again. As long as Pompey is free, this civil war will never end. I'll have to go down to Egypt and arrest Pompey and put him in jail before I can have any peace."

So he started down to Egypt. But the Egyptians were having troubles of their own. They had two pharaohs – a queen named Cleopatra and her brother. Cleopatra and her brother were supposed to rule Egypt together. But

they didn't get along with each other. They fought constantly, because each one wanted to rule Egypt alone.

But when Cleopatra and her brother heard that Caesar was coming, they stopped quarrelling with each other. They were terrified! The whole world had heard of Caesar. The Egyptians were sure that Caesar was coming to conquer them. "What will we do?" Cleopatra and her brother asked each other. "We've got to make friends with him quickly, or else he will attack us with his invincible army!"

"I know," Cleopatra's brother exclaimed, suddenly. "Caesar's old enemy Pompey is living in Egypt. Let's arrest him and send him to Caesar as a prisoner. Then Caesar will know that we want to be his allies."

"I have a better idea," Cleopatra answered. "Let's cut off Pompey's head and send that to Caesar instead."

So that is what they did! Caesar was startled to get Pompey's head in a bag. And he was sad, too. He and Pompey had once been friends. They had been consuls together for years. And Pompey had been his son-in-law! He hadn't intended to kill Pompey. He just wanted to put him in prison where he couldn't cause any more trouble.

Caesar marched the rest of the way to the Egyptian palace, intending to tell the pharaohs of Egypt how unhappy he was. Meanwhile, though, Cleopatra had an idea. "If I can get Caesar to like me," she thought, "maybe he will help me get rid of my brother! Then I will be the only pharaoh of Egypt!"

So she arranged to meet Caesar all alone. She put on her prettiest clothes and surrounded herself with beautiful treasures of Egypt: gold, spices, monkeys, slaves, and jewelry. When Caesar was shown into Cleopatra's room, he was dazzled by her beauty – and by the riches all around her!

"Caesar," Cleopatra said sweetly, "if you'll help me get rid of my brother, so that I can rule Egypt all by myself, I will share Egypt's riches with you."

Caesar was overcome by Cleopatra. He fell madly in love with her and agreed to do everything she said. He told his army to fight against the Egyptians who were loyal to Cleopatra's brother. The Roman soldiers did as they were told. Cleopatra's brother was killed in the battle – and Cleopatra became the sole ruler of Egypt!

It was time for Caesar to go back to Rome, but he delayed. He didn't want to leave Cleopatra! Instead he stayed in Egypt, keeping his new love company.

But that wasn't smart, because the Senators back in Rome still wanted to get rid of Caesar. "This is our last chance," they said to each other. "Let's raise an army of Romans who are loyal to the Senate and try to defeat Caesar, one last time!"

So they gathered together an army and marched down towards Egypt, ready to attack Caesar. But Caesar got his own soldiers together and defeated the Senate army in record time! His victories were so fast that when a friend asked him to describe the battle, he answered, "I can do it in three words: Veni, Vidi, Vici." In Latin, the language of the Romans, this meant, "I came, I saw, I conquered!"



The Death of Caesar

Caesar finally left Egypt and came back to Rome. No one could fight against him any more! And the people loved him. So when he came back to Rome, Caesar was made Dictator for life.

A dictator can do whatever he wants. And once Caesar was dictator, he took power away from the Senate. Now, only Caesar could declare war, pass laws, and raise taxes! He started to make money with his own picture on it. He paid for gladiator fighting and chariot racing to amuse the people of Rome. Everything seemed to be going his way.

But then Caesar did two things that made many people angry. First, he called the Senate together. "I am the dictator of Rome," he told them, "but the kings of other countries will respect me more if you call me 'King Caesar.' So from now on I want you to call me 'king.'"



Second, I want my nephew Octavian to be king after me. I'm going to adopt him to be my son! I want him to inherit my power too."

The Senate was horrified! They wanted to choose the next leader of Rome. They didn't want another Caesar on the throne.

"We have to get rid of Caesar once and for all," said one Senator, named Brutus. He had been a friend of Caesar's, but now he too was worried about Caesar's power in Rome. "Tomorrow is the fifteenth of March. We'll attack him as he enters the Senate – and stab him to death!"

Other Senators agreed, and the plans were made. Caesar was doomed!

Caesar didn't know anything about the plot to kill him. But a Roman writer named Suetonius tells us that many strange things happened to Caesar that day. He went out to visit his favorite herd of horses, and found that the horses weren't eating. Instead, they were crying! This made Caesar so nervous that he went to the temple, to ask the gods why his horses were so sad. But while he was in the temple, a fortune-teller came up to him and whispered, "Caesar! Caesar! Beware the fifteenth of March!"

Note: the Fifteenth of March = "the Ides of March"

When he got home, Caesar told his wife all about the strange things that had happened that day. During the night, she had a terrifying dream. She dreamed that she was holding her husband in her arms – and that he had been stabbed to death. She cried out, "Caesar! Caesar!" and woke up. She sat straight up in bed, and the door of their room flew open – all by itself.

When Caesar got up the next morning, his wife pleaded with him, "Don't go to the Senate today! It's the fifteenth of March. Stay home where it's safe!"

"Nonsense!" Caesar said. "Nothing will happen to me." He dressed and headed for the Senate building. He walked up the smooth marble steps. The sun shone on the white stone, and the sky was blue and peaceful overhead. "How silly of me to be nervous!" he thought. "Nothing will go wrong today!"

He went into the room where the Senate met, and sat down in his special chair.

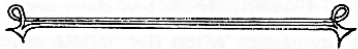
“Caesar,” said one of the Senators, “today I want to ask you to bring my brother back to Rome. He was banished several years ago.”

“Let’s talk about that later,” Caesar said, still thinking about his wife’s dream.

The Senator leaped to his feet. “Friends!” he shouted, “what are we waiting for!” He ran forward and grabbed Caesar by his purple robe. Brutus and two other Senators leaped at him with knives drawn. Caesar fought back, but they stabbed him. He staggered, and fell down at the feet of a statue of Pompey. When he looked up, he could hardly believe that his old friend Brutus had helped plot against him?

“Et tu, Brute?” he gasped. In Latin, this meant, “You, too, Brutus?” And then Caesar died, there on the marble floor of the Senate building. His slaves came and carried his body home. Caesar, the greatest Roman, had been killed by his own friends and countrymen.

The First Roman Prince



After Caesar died, Rome was in an uproar! Who would be in charge of Rome now? The people had loved Caesar. They were angry about his death. Some of the Senators were angry about Caesar’s death too. Other Senators were glad that Caesar was gone. The Senators quarreled with each other. The people of Rome were restless. Fights broke out. Rome was a mess! No one was in charge.

Caesar’s nephew, Octavian, was only nineteen when Caesar died. But he had inherited all of Caesar’s money, because he was Caesar’s adopted son. He took Caesar’s money and threw a big party in memory of Caesar. The party lasted ten days, and the whole city of Rome was invited. Then Octavian gave presents and money to every poor family in Rome. Suddenly Octavian was very popular! The people of Rome loved him because he was generous. The army loved him because he was Caesar’s adopted son.

When he saw how popular he was, Octavian went to the Senate and demanded to be made a consul. The Senate

didn’t want to make Octavian a ruler of Rome. He was too young. And he was too much like Caesar! But the people of Rome and the army wanted Octavian to be a consul, and the Senate was afraid to say “no.”

So Octavian became a consul of Rome. Just like Julius Caesar, he led the army into nearby countries and conquered them for Rome. Just like Julius Caesar, he made the Roman empire bigger and richer.

But Octavian didn’t make the same mistakes that Caesar had made. He knew that Caesar had made the Senate angry when he demanded to be called “king.” Octavian wanted to be like Cincinnatus instead. We read the story of Cincinnatus a few days ago. He was taking care of his grapes when the Senate asked him to be head of the army. But when all the Romans asked him to be king, he gave his power back to the Senate and went back to taking care of his grapes.

One day, Octavian called the whole Senate together. “I have made Rome bigger and wealthier than ever,” he said. “Now there is peace, all over the Roman empire. No one is fighting. No enemies are attacking us. Rome is strong and healthy. So I have decided to quit my job. I don’t need to be consul any more. I won’t lead the army any more. You can be in charge from now on.”

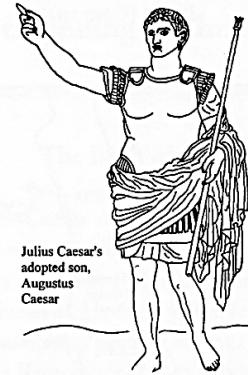
The Senators were horrified! “But you brought peace to Rome!” they protested. “If you stop being consul, Rome will fall apart again! Please, stay on and be consul!”

“No, no,” Octavian said. “Rome shouldn’t have a king, and if I stay people will want me to be king. I’m just a Roman citizen like everyone else.”

“We won’t call you king, then,” the Senators promised him. “We’ll call you the ‘First Citizen’ instead.”

Then the whole Senate met together and voted to make Octavian the “First Citizen” of Rome. In Latin, the word “princeps” means “first citizen.” Our English word “prince” comes from the word “princeps.” A prince is the most important citizen in his country! And even though Octavian was called “First Citizen,” he acted like a prince. He ruled Rome, led the army, and had complete control over the whole Roman empire. He was actually the first emperor of Rome.

The Senate also gave Octavian a new name. His old name was “Octavian Caesar,” because he was Caesar’s adopted son. But his new name was “Augustus Caesar.”



“Augustus” means “Blessed” and “Majestic.” To show how much they honored Augustus Caesar, the Senate even decided to name a month of the year after him! Can you guess which month of the year is named after Augustus Caesar? The month of August.

They also agreed to name a month of the year after his adopted father, Julius Caesar. Can you guess which month is named after Julius Caesar? The month of July! Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar lived a very long time ago. But every time we look at a calendar, we are reminded of them.

Important Dates

Julius Caesar

Born - 100 BC
Praetorship in Spain - 60-61 BC
In Britain - 55-54 BC
Crosses the Rubicon - January 7, 49 BC
Arrived in Egypt - 48 BC
(He was aged 52 and Cleopatra was 21)
Assassinated - March 15, 44 BC

Augustus Caesar

Consul - 43-27 BC
Emperor - 27 BC-14 AD