

Julius Caesar: The Female Perspectives

Act 2, Scene 1 (excerpt) [*Portia pleads with her husband, Brutus, to tell her what is troubling him.*]

PORTIA: Brutus, my lord!

BRUTUS Portia, what mean you¹? Wherefore rise you now?
It is not for your health thus to commit
Your weak condition to the raw cold morning.

PORTIA Nor for yours neither. You've ungently², Brutus,
Stole³ from my bed: and yesternight, at supper,
You suddenly arose, and walked about,
Musing and sighing, with your arms across⁴:
And when I asked you what the matter was,
You stared upon me with ungentle looks.
I urged you further, then you scratched your head,
And too impatiently stamped with your foot:
Yet I insisted, yet you answered not,
But, with an angry wafture⁵ of your hand
Gave sign for me to leave you: so I did,
Fearing to strengthen that impatience
Which seemed too much enkindled⁶, and withal⁷
Hoping it was but an effect of humour⁸,
Which sometime hath his hour with every man.
It will not let you eat, nor talk, nor sleep:
And could it work so much upon your shape⁹
As it hath much prevailed on your condition¹⁰,
I should not know¹¹ you, Brutus. Dear my lord,
Make me acquainted with your cause of grief.

BRUTUS I am not well in health, and that is all.

PORTIA Brutus is wise, and, were he not in health,
He would embrace the means to come by it¹².

BRUTUS Why, so I do. Good Portia, go to bed.

PORTIA Is Brutus sick? And is it physical¹³
To walk unbracèd¹⁴ and suck up the humours¹⁵
Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick?
And will he steal out of his wholesome¹⁶ bed
To dare¹⁷ the vile contagion¹⁸ of the night?
And tempt the rheumy¹⁹ and unpurgèd²⁰ air
To add unto his sickness? No, my Brutus,
You have some sick offence²¹ within your mind
Which by the right and virtue of my place²²
I ought to know of: and upon my knees

I charm²³ you, by my once-commended beauty,
By all your vows of love and that great vow²⁴
Which did incorporate²⁵ and make us one,
That you unfold²⁶ to me, yourself, your half²⁷,
Why you are heavy²⁸, and what men tonight
Have had to resort to²⁹ you, for here have been
Some six or seven who did hide their faces
Even from darkness.

BRUTUS Kneel not, gentle Portia.

PORTIA I should not need, if you were gentle Brutus.
Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted³⁰ I should know no secrets
That appertain³¹ to you? Am I your self
But as it were in sort or limitation³²?
To keep³³ with you at meals, comfort³⁴ your bed
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs³⁵
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot³⁶, not his wife.

BRUTUS You are my true and honourable wife,
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops³⁷
That visit my sad heart

PORTIA If this were true, then should I know this secret.
I grant I am a woman; but withal
A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife:
I grant I am a woman; but withal
A woman well-reputed, Cato's³⁸ daughter.
Think you I am no stronger than my sex
Being so fathered and so husbanded?
Tell me your counsels³⁹, I will not disclose 'em:
I have made strong proof of my constancy⁴⁰,
Giving myself a voluntary wound
Here, in the thigh: can I bear that with patience
And not my husband's secrets?

BRUTUS O ye gods!
Render me worthy of this noble wife! [*Knocking within*]
Hark, hark one knocks. Portia, go in awhile,
And by and by⁴¹ thy bosom⁴² shall partake⁴³
The secrets of my heart.
All my engagements⁴⁴ I will construe⁴⁵ to thee,
All the charactery⁴⁶ of my sad brows:
Leave me with haste. [*Exit PORTIA*]

Act 2, Scene 2 (excerpt) [*Calpurnia, fearful of the ill omens, pleads with her husband, Caesar, to stay at home on the Ides of March.*]

CALPURNIA What mean you, Caesar? Think you to walk forth?
You shall not stir out of your house today.

CAESAR Caesar shall forth. The things that threatened me
Ne'er looked but on my back: when they shall see
The face of Caesar, they are vanished.

CALPURNIA Caesar, I never stood on⁴⁷ ceremonies⁴⁸,
Yet now they fright me. There is one within,
Besides the things that we have heard and seen,
Recounts⁴⁹ most horrid sights seen by the watch⁵⁰.
A lioness hath whelped⁵¹ in the streets,
And graves have yawned⁵², and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fiery warriors⁵³ fought upon the clouds
In ranks and squadrons, and right form⁵⁴ of war,
Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol:
The noise of battle hurtled⁵⁵ in the air,
Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.
O Caesar, these things are beyond all use⁵⁶,
And I do fear them.

CAESAR What can be avoided
Whose end⁵⁷ is purposed⁵⁸ by the mighty gods?
Yet Caesar shall go forth, for these predictions
Are to⁵⁹ the world in general as to Caesar.

CALPURNIA When beggars die, there are no comets seen:
The heavens themselves blaze forth⁶⁰ the death of princes.

CAESAR Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come. [*Re-enter Servant*]
What say the augurers*? soothsayers

SERVANT They would not have you to stir forth today.
Plucking the entrails of an offering forth⁶¹,
They could not find a heart within the beast.

CAESAR The gods do this in shame of⁶² cowardice:
Caesar should be a beast without a heart⁶³
If he should stay at home today for fear.

No, Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well
 That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
 We are two lions littered⁶⁴ in one day,
 And I the elder and more terrible,
 And Caesar shall go forth.

CALPURNIA

Alas, my lord,
 Your wisdom is consumed in confidence⁶⁵.
 Do not go forth today: call it my fear
 That keeps you in the house, and not your own.
 We'll send Mark Antony to the senate house,
 And he shall say you are not well today.
 Let me, upon my knee prevail in this.

CAESAR

Mark Antony shall say I am not well,
 And for thy humour⁶⁶ I will stay at home.

Glossary:

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| 1. <i>Are you doing</i> | 25. <i>Join</i> | 45. <i>Explain</i> |
| 2. <i>Unkindly, rudely</i> | 26. <i>Reveal</i> | 46. <i>Meaning</i> |
| 3. <i>Crept</i> | 27. <i>Wife</i> | 47. <i>Insisted on</i> |
| 4. <i>A gesture of sadness</i> | 28. <i>Sad</i> | 48. <i>Omens</i> |
| 5. <i>Dismissive wave</i> | 29. <i>A meeting with</i> | 49. <i>Who is telling about</i> |
| 6. <i>Too fierce</i> | 30. <i>Acceptable</i> | 50. <i>Guards</i> |
| 7. <i>In addition</i> | 31. <i>Apply</i> | 51. <i>Given birth</i> |
| 8. <i>Bad mood, disordered
temperament</i> | 32. <i>Only with certain limits</i> | 52. <i>Opened</i> |
| 9. <i>Outward appearance</i> | 33. <i>Remain</i> | 53. <i>Comets = bad omens</i> |
| 10. <i>Mind</i> | 34. <i>Bring pleasure</i> | 54. <i>Battle formations</i> |
| 11. <i>Recognize</i> | 35. <i>Outskirts where prostitutes
live</i> | 55. <i>Clashed</i> |
| 12. <i>To get back to</i> | 36. <i>Prostitute</i> | 56. <i>Completely abnormal</i> |
| 13. <i>Medically advisable</i> | 37. <i>Blood</i> | 57. <i>Outcome</i> |
| 14. <i>Unbuttoned clothing</i> | 38. <i>Marcus Porcius Cato a
staunch
republican committed
suicide
rather than follow Caesar</i> | 58. <i>Determined</i> |
| 15. <i>Dampness</i> | 39. <i>Secrets</i> | 59. <i>Directed</i> |
| 16. <i>Healthful</i> | 40. <i>Trustworthiness</i> | 60. <i>Announce</i> |
| 17. <i>Risk</i> | 41. <i>Shortly</i> | 61. <i>Sacrificial animals</i> |
| 18. <i>Infection</i> | 42. <i>Heart</i> | 62. <i>To shame</i> |
| 19. <i>Moist</i> | 43. <i>Take possession of</i> | 63. <i>Cowardly animal</i> |
| 20. <i>Unclean</i> | 44. <i>Dealings</i> | 64. <i>Born</i> |
| 21. <i>Harmful disorder</i> | | 65. <i>Your self-confidence makes
you behave rashly</i> |
| 22. <i>Position, wife</i> | | 66. <i>To keep you happy</i> |
| 23. <i>Beg</i> | | |
| 24. <i>Marriage vow</i> | | |