

End of the Republic

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A short story about a fictional debate in the Roman senate.

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Last Days of the Republic

by Matthew Bissonnette

The city of ancient Rome at the time when this republic was in its last hours. At this time it was one of the most prosperous and largest cities in the ancient world. Along the cobblestone streets are many homes and temples to the Gods of the Romans as well as large manors made from marble stone spread out across the city. The Tiber river cut through the city and today the people of this metropolis were rejoicing for Julius Caesar was said to be returning to Rome after many years away. Yet in the senate, the large white cathedral like building near the heart of the city, a debate was raging.

Inside the senate where rows of circular stone ledges where men dressed in white togas, the senators, sat. Dozens of them listened as three men spoke and today the issue was the future of the Roman Republic. One man, Mark Antony, stood in the center of the room as all listened.

He was a man in his thirties, tall and well built with dark hair, imposing in stature and spoke with a commanding voice. He said, "the great republic demands order, it demands to be liberated from many years of uncertainty and civil war; it yearns to know an age where it can be freed from the strife which has haunted our city for many generations. One man can indeed give the Roman people what it longs for, and that man is Julius Caesar. Our people have grown tired of the empty promises of this senate, and surely would demand that absolute power be given to Caesar. All power in our great nation must be put in the hands of a man who would use it to bring back order which so long has been denied to the Roman people. I ask the senate, once Julius Caesar returns from Egypt, give him the title dictator for life."

Then another man stood. He was a portly man with curly brown hair and he spoke up in a reserved yet firm voice for he was Cicero and he talked as all the senators listened.

"You ask Rome to give a title one man which our Republic swore never to bestow on a single individual; and title which is king though you Antony would call such a title dictator. We all know of the time when our ancestors were ruled over by the Etruscans and their kings and how only through bloody conflict we freed ourselves of their despotic rule. The senate and the people of Rome have always stood together, yet now you

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ask to end our Republic and put all authority in to the hands of one man; any man who thinks that it is just to be ruler of the known world must be insane. If we trade freedom and responsible leadership for order; then we have traded in the ideals our people have lived by for many ages for a return to the tyranny our people once lived under. I ask, no, beg the senate to deny Ceaser the title that Mark Antony demands we give him.â

Mark Antony looked at him sternly. â Cicero, who still dwell in the past and deny the realities of the moment. Who should decide the future of our people, and handful of senators or the Roman people? Power now is in the hands of a handful of men and this as led to our people waging war against one another as the mantle of leadership moves our leaders to fight one another for control of the greatest city of the world. You may possess a sharp wit and well spoken tongue Cicero; but you would deny our Republic order and peace just so you may cling to the past.â

Cicero interrupted him. â What I would deny Ceaser is a title and mantle that would destroy our Republic.â

Then another man stood. He was a tall man with red hair and diminutive in stature. For he was Octavian; of the same family of Ceaser, and he spoke confidently.

â Though I in no way support Mark Antony's plea to have Julius Ceaser made absolute ruler of our great nation; imagine what could be accomplished if absolute power were to be given to the right man; perhaps if power was given to one who knew how to use it then Rome could accomplish great feats that would still be spoken of centuries and even millennium from now. Perhaps Julius Ceaser is not this man, but perhaps there is one who with the power of all Rome behind him can make us a beacon of civilization to even the farthest corners of the world.â

Antony then looked at the senators. â Julius Ceaser is that man; and is the only man whom the people of Rome would trust with the mantle of absolute authority.â

Cicero then started to pace about the room as he spoke. â Absolute power in the hands of a despot, even a well intentioned one, is something the Republic can never allow. The people of our great Republic, if such a title were given to one man, may one day surely regret that day when leadership was put behind one man. The future of Rome is being decided here, and this issue is not to be taken lightly.â

Octavian spoke next. â Indeed the future of Rome is at stake, but imagine the accomplishments our people could achieve under the guidance of one who knew how to use power wisely. The future of Rome will be decided by the very people in this room, what is at stake is not only the future of Rome but the future of the known world. Under wise leadership if all power is given to one man; then we could spread the light of civilization to even the darkest places of this Earth.â

Antony looked at him. â Julius Ceaser is the man whom could accomplish that.â

Octavian looked at the rest of the senators. â Ceaser is a general and more knowledgeable when it comes to war; yet authority must go to a man who is not simply a warrior but a leader; a leader with vision.â

Cicero frowned. â Julius Ceaser is not the first to ask for such a mantle, and one who asked for it before was thrown into the Tiber for the crime of asking for something which our Republic could not allow; we should fear the ambition of Ceaser or any other who craves to rule over us and not be accountable to any man but himself. Perhaps at the moment the people of Rome would allow Ceaser to be dictator; but it is the duty of this senate to decide what is best for our people and to protect them from the immoral ambitions of such a man.â

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Octavian turned to the senators. "The people of Rome demand power be given to a man who seeks it not for just the sake of power, but one who would use power to bring about an golden age for our people. I would say that Julius Ceaser is not this man, but he may exist."

Cicero scowled at Octavian and said, "you seek the same end as Ceaser, you think you are fit for the title of absolute authority. You yearn to be absolute master of the Roman people."

Octavian smiled. "I imply that our people demand an end to years of uncertainty and realize that Rome may be able to bring about a golden age, not only for us but countless many across the face of the world. Power must be given to a man who would know how to use it; not for his own good but only to bring about greatness for Rome."

Cicero spoke up next as he faced the senate. "And end ideals like a ruling authority which is accountable to the people. No single man can be trusted with such power, no one man has the right to rule not only Rome but the world."

Antony looked at Cicero and said, "Rome has always governed according to the will of the people, and the many people of our Republic wish that all power be put in the hands of Julius Ceaser. He has spent much of his great wealth for festivals and banquets for the people, he has shown through his actions that he cares for nothing but the majority of the people and their welfare."

Cicero seemed unmoved. "Ceaser cares for nothing but his own ambition, an ambition that we must deny him; an ambition to be our absolute master and dictator. If we entrust such a power to him then after wards such power will never be returned. We would have sacrificed ideals which has set Rome apart from other nations of the known Earth, ideals such as Rome is to be governed by a general consensus of the people and not by the will of many one man."

Octavian looked at Cicero and said, "Rome may be capable of a greatness that will be singularly unique in the history of the world, but to achieve this greatness we must put and end to the futile squabbling of a senate and be led by one man who would use power to only add the the glory of Rome. Power in the hands of one who would know how to use it could not only bring order to Rome but bring order to a world in disorder."

Cicero seemed to stare at Octavian. "A dictator, even a benevolent one, is something which Rome could never afford to attain absolute authority. Such power would only lead to the demise of every belief, every ethic which has guided our people for centuries. Rome does not need a dictator."

Octavian looked at Cicero then the senate. "Rome does not need a dictator, it needs a Emperor."

Then the men of the senate began to talk amongst themselves but became silent as Octavian began to speak. "Rome could spread culture and civility across the face of the world, we could bring knowledge and civilization to the people of the known world. But to achieve such an accomplishment we must give power to one who would use it to achieve such goals and not to fulfill simply his own vanity."

Mark Antony raised his voice. "At the moment, Ceaser is the only man the people would trust with such power."

Octavian replied, "that is because he has spent the past many years trying to win the approval of the people with simplistic gestures of good will at his own expense. Yet is he no different ten the countless generals in Rome's history who sought control through might rather than vision. I would say the Ceaser would not know how to use such power, but there may be one who does."

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Cicero said, "how many generals have come along seeking the same goal, and how many of them ended up having their bodies thrown into the Tiber river. I fear Caesar's ambitions and would also fear that ambition to matter which man possessed such a flaw of character; the flaw of thinking that he is wise enough to know how absolute power should be used."

Mark Antony then addressed the senate. "The people demand the mantle of absolute authority be given to Julius Caesar and the senate should fear preventing the people from giving such power to him. Rome needs to be represented by one clear, strong voice which would speak for our entire nation."

Octavian spoke next. "One voice should speak for Rome, but Julius Caesar is not that voice for is he no different then the countless men before him who have sought the same thing. He would no more know what to do with true power then some beggar on the street. Rome needs a leader with vision, and not a general."

Mark Antony said, "if this senate denies Julius Caesar what he asks, the title of dictator for life, then it should fear what the Roman people would do in response."

Cicero replied, "perhaps it is Caesar who should fear the resolve of the senate and fear those who would defend our Republic at any cost. He should not underestimate those who would protect Rome from despotism and lust for power."

Octavian said, "Rome should fear power going to a man who would not know how to use it best, but power in the right hands could change all of the known world if such a man did not have to compete with a indecisive senate. We have before us a opportunity unique in history, a opportunity to replace barbarism and ignorance with knowledge and civility. But a senate will never be able to achieve such ambitions since it will never be able to unanimously agree on anything."

Cicero raised his voice. "This senate must protect the Republic from one man's ambition and save our people from the tyranny our ancestors once endured, for there is little difference between a king and a dictator and both titles are somethings which we must never allow."

Mark Antony demanded, "give Caesar what he seeks or the people shall force this senate to give him absolute power!"

Cicero pleaded, "I demand this senate to preserve the beliefs and ideals that we have lived by for many generations, I beg this senate to stop Caesar!"

Octavian said nothing but just looked at the two men as the senate argued. For eventually absolute power would be given to one man and the Republic would cease to exist, that man would be Octavian. Though at the moment he was intent to listen to the senate argue as he secretly planned for the realization of his greatness.

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