

Beware the Ides of March

As Simon came into the Rose and Crown he caught sight of Julian and was pleased to see that Julian had two pints ready on the table.

Simon had moved to the area only three months before when his company had done some downsizing and reorganization. He had been a bit put out at having to move and wondered how his wife Rachel would react at leaving her friends.

Soon after he had arrived he discovered that, Julian, an old school friend of his, with whom he had lost contact many years previously, worked in a nearby office and lived not far away. Fortunately Rachel had got on well with Julian's wife, Cathy, and soon made a lot new friends. Simon and Julian often met in the Rose and Crown for a pint, a pub lunch and a chat.

"Hi, Julian!" Simon called out. "Beware the Ides of March."

"Hi, Simon," Julian replied, "but what's this nonsense about the Ides of March?"

"Well, it is the 15th today, isn't it?" said Simon.

"I know," replied Julian. "But I'm *Julian*, not Julius ..."

"... and," laughed Simon, "I don't recall that Parliament made you dictator for life."

"Nor do I," laughed Julian, "besides you're more than two thousand years too late!"

"And if we don't want to be late getting back," said Simon, "we'd better order something to eat."

Each decided what he would have and Julian went up to the bar to order it. When he came back, he said to Simon: "Anyway, the Ides of March are no longer important, but those of May still are."

"How so?" asked Simon.

"Don't you recall what we used to say at school?" asked Julian.

"Do not your winter woollies cast

Until the Ides of May be passed."

"Good heavens!" laughed Simon. "You still remember rhymes from all those years back. OK, that may be good advice, if you simply mean mid-May. But no one bothers about the actual *Ides* now-a-days."

"Don't they though?" said Julian, as the waitress brought them their lunches. "Then I guess you've not heard of the Ides of June Saltwater Fishing Tournament at Boca Raton in Florida."

"I can't say that I have," agreed Simon. "How is it you know about it?"

"I was there on business," said Julian, "at the time of their 13th annual tournament in 2010. It was great fun. I wish I could be there every June 13th."

"Oh well," said Simon, "some crazy Americans happened to have noticed that the 13th June was the Ides. I bet you don't find the mention of the Ides of any other month in the modern world."

"I wouldn't be too sure," said Julian, getting out his iPad. "Let's just have a google."

Julian googled the Ides of various months and so found the Pennsylvania State Monty Python Society's Ides of October Mystery.

"Yes," said Simon, "but look what it says: 'These so-called mysteries often take the form of mock-protests and, for reasons that currently escape us, almost never happen in October.'"

"Well, " laughed Julian, "you don't expect the Pythons to have an Ides of October Mystery either on the Ides or in October, do you? They wouldn't be Pythons if they did that."

"I guess not," agreed Simon, "but that just shows that the Ides don't mean anything much nowadays."

"Umm," murmured Julian, not really paying attention. "Ah, here's the Ides of November."

"Where?" asked Simon, trying to look at Julian's iPad.

"There," said Julian, showing him. "it's a song by a group called 'The Knack'; it looks a bit political, sort of revolutionary."

"Yeah," agreed Simon, "and I can't see anything there either about November or the Ides. I wonder where they got the title from."

"Dunno," murmured Julian, as he carried on googling.

"Looks to me," said Simon, "as though some Americans quite like the word Ides and like using it in titles of songs and so on, but they don't actually keep the Ides or seem to know exactly when they were."

"Ah, I guess you're right," said Julian, putting his iPad away; and they fell to talking about other matters.

Just as they were thinking of going, they noticed a rather odd woman had silently joined them at their table. She turn to Julian and said: "Beware the Ides of March, young man,!"

Julian looked a bit surprised, but Simon, who assumed it was someone Julian knew, just burst out laughing.

"Oh no, not again," he said, "we've been all through that!"

"It's no laughing matter, young man," she said, turning to Simon. "Your friend should beware the Ides of March."

"But he's *Julian*, not Julius," Simon continued laughing, "and besides you're more than two thousand years late."

"I'm never late," replied the old woman, "never late."

"Come off it," said Simon testily, "the joke's wearing a bit thin. You'll be telling us next that you're a soothsayer."

"I always speak sooth," replied the woman. "The Ides of March saw Calpurnia made a widow in 44 BC. Today will see another Calpurnia made a widow."

"Oh," laughed Simon again. "Calpurnia, is it? Another Calpurnia?"

Then turning to Julian, he added, still laughing: "Good thing your wife's called Cathy, eh?"

But Julian was not laughing. In fact he looked rather pale and simply said "Come on, Simon, I think we'd better go!"

Simon was rather taken aback and turned to say to this strange friend of Julian's what he thought about her; he was surprised to see she had gone.

As they were leaving the pub, Simon asked Julian who his strange friend had been.

"Friend?" queried Julian. "What makes you think I know her? I've never seen the woman before in my life, and I hope I never meet her again."

"It must be some crank whose had too much too drink," said Simon. "I mean, all that nonsense about Calpurnia."

"That's just it," said Julian as they walked along, "my wife may be called Cathy, but she isn't a Catherine. Her parents were somewhat eccentric classicists and named her Calpurnia. It got shortened to Cal when she was at school, and

then become Cath or Cathy."

"Oh, I didn't know that," said Simon, "Well, I guess it was someone that knew your Cathy when she was at school and is trying to wind you up with this stupid prank."

"I hope you're right," said Julian, "I hope you're right. Bye!"

'I hope I am too,' thought Simon as he bade Julian good-bye.

Simon soon forgot all about this when he got back to the office, and the afternoon's work put it out of his mind completely.

When he arrived home that evening he was concerned to find Rachel quite upset.

"What's the matter, Rachel?" he asked.

"Oh, Simon," she sobbed. "Cathy rang up about ten minutes ago. It's a .. it's a ... Julian... – something terrible's happened."

"Oh," said Simon, as the strange woman's words suddenly came back to him: 'Today will see another Calpurnia made a widow.'

"He's dead, isn't he?" asked Simon.

Rachel just nodded.

"How? What? Why?" muttered Simon.

Rachel gathered herself together and they both sat down; then she slowly told him what Cathy had said. It seemed that Julian had suddenly complained at work that afternoon that he felt sharp stabbing pains in the chest and then had collapsed. The people in his office had telephoned for an ambulance immediately and the paramedics had done all they could, but it seemed he had suffered a massive cardiac arrest and was dead before they reached the hospital.

"So Calpurnia's been made a widow," murmured Simon, to himself himself rather than to Rachel.

"Strange," said Rachel, "that's the last thing they heard Julian say before he passed into unconsciousness. No one understood this until Cathy explained that her name was really Calpurnia. I had always assumed she was a Catherine."

"So had I," said Simon, "so had I."

He told Rachel what had happened at lunch that day.

"Ugh," she said, "that's spooky. Poor Calpurnia!"

"Yes," agreed Simon, "poor Calpurnia."