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wounds, then not even the blood already spilled would serve to appease the angry gods. Rome, and the world with her, would be lost to a tide of darkness, and the barbarism would prove universal.

When faced with the need to stave off such an apocalypse, what were the sensibilities of a Cicero or a Brutus? What, indeed, was the Republic? Caesar's impatience with traditions still regarded as sacrosanct by his fellow citizens was growing more palpable by the day. Far from hurrying back to the capital to consult the Senate or put his measures to the people, he lingered in the provinces, planting colonies of veterans, extending the franchise to privileged natives. Back in Rome the aristocracy shuddered at the news. Jokes were told of Gauls peeling off their stinking trousers, draping themselves in togas, and asking the way to the Senate House. Such xenophobia, of course, had always been a Roman's right and privilege. Almost by definition, it was those proudest of the liberties of the Republic who

proved the worst snobs. But Caesar scorned them. He could no longer be bothered to care what traditionalists thought.

Nor, indeed, was he much interested in the traditions themselves. This was just as well, for his policies raised awkward questions about the future functioning of the Republic. If it had been impractical enough for citizens in Italy to come to Rome to cast their votes, then for those in distant provinces, far away across the sea, it would be impossible. The problem was brushed aside. Caesar was not to be diverted by such quibbles. He had the foundations of a truly universal empire to lay—and with it, not coincidentally, a global supremacy for himself. Every native enfranchised, and every colonist settled, was a brick in his new order. Roman aristocrats had always commanded clients, but Caesar's patronage would extend to the very limits of sand and ice. Syrians and Spaniards, Africans and Gauls, the far-flung peoples of a shrinking world, would henceforward owe their

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allegiance not to the lethal amateurism of the Republic but to a single man. As a symbol of this future, nothing was more potent than Caesar's plan for Carthage and Corinth. Flattened by the vengeful legions, these two cities were now to be rebuilt, monuments to a new age of universal peace and to the glory of their patron. Utica, down the coast from the new colony of Carthage, would be put forever in the shade. The future would be raised on the rubble of the past. For the first time citizens living in Rome would be made to feel that they were parts, as well as the masters, of one world.

Which is not to say that Caesar meant to neglect his own city. He had big plans for Rome: a library was to be founded; a new theater to rival Pompey's cut out from the rock of the Capitol; the largest temple in the world built on the Campus. Even the Tiber, Caesar had decided, would have to be diverted, because its course obstructed his building plans. Nothing could better have illustrated the startling nature of his supremacy than this: he could

not only build where and what he wanted, but also, as though he were a god drawing on the landscape with his fingertip, order the city's topography changed. Clearly, the ten years of Caesar's dictatorship were going to alter the appearance of Rome forever. A city that had always expressed through its ramshackle appearance its ancient liberties would soon look radically different—would soon look almost Greek.

And specifically, like Alexandria. There had been an early hint that this might be so in Caesar's choice of houseguests. In September 46 BC, just in time to watch her lover's triumphs, Cleopatra had swept into town. Enconcing herself in Caesar's mansion on the far side of the Tiber, she had refused to make any allowances for republican sensibilities, instead playing up the role of an Egyptian queen to the full. She not only brought her husband—brother and an entourage of eunuchs with her, but also had an heir to parade, a one-year-old prince. Caesar, already married, had

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refused to acknowledge his bastard son, but Cleopatra, nothing daunted, had flaunted the obvious by naming the boy Caesarion. Naturally, Rome was scandalized. Equally naturally, everyone who was anyone flocked across the Tiber to gape. The manner in which Cleopatra greeted visitors reflected her estimation of whether they mattered: Cicero, for instance, who found her hateful, she roundly snubbed. Effectively, of course, the queen had eyes for only one man. In August 45, when Caesar finally returned to Italy, she hurried off to meet him.* The two of them luxuriated together on vacation in the countryside. Only in October did Caesar finally return to Rome.

He found a city convulsed by wild gossip. It was said—and believed—that he planned to move the seat of empire to Alexandria. Less ludicrously, it was also claimed that he wished to marry Cleopatra, despite the fact that he already had a wife. Caesar himself did nothing to discount these rumors by setting up a

golden statue of his mistress in the temple of Venus—an unprecedented and shocking honor. And since Venus was the goddess most closely identified with Isis, there was a hint here of an even greater and more ominous scandal. If Cleopatra were to be represented in the heart of the Republic as a goddess, then what plans did her lover have for himself? And exactly why were workmen adding a pediment to his mansion, as though it were a temple? And what was the truth of the rumor that Antony had been appointed his high priest? Caesar was hardly being reticent in scattering out the clues.

Goddess brides and self-deification: he knew that his fellow citizens were bound to be appalled. But there were others, particularly in the East, who would not be. Rome might have bowed to Caesar, but there were still parts of the globe that had not yet bowed to Rome. Most obdurate of these was Parthia, whose horsemen, taking advantage of the Republic's civil war, had dared to cross the frontier into Syria. There was also Carrhae to avenge,

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of course, and the lost eagles to regain, responsibilities certainly worthy of the dictator's attention. Yet, coming so soon after his return to Rome, Caesar's plan to set off to war again could not help but leave the city feeling diminished, almost spurned. It was as though the problems of the Republic bored the man appointed to solve them, as though Rome herself were now too small a stage for his ambitions. In the East they would appreciate this. In the East they already worshiped Caesar as a god. In the East there were traditions older by far than the Republic, of the flesh becoming divine and of the rule of a king of kings.

And there, for anxious Romans, lay the rub. Late in 45 BC the Senate announced that Caesar was henceforward to be honored as *divus Iulius*: Julius the God. Who now could doubt that he was preparing to break the ultimate taboo and set a crown on his head? There were certainly grounds for such a horrific suspicion. Early in 44 Caesar began appearing in the high red boots once worn by

kings in Italy's legendary past; around the same time he reacted with fury when a diadem that had mysteriously appeared on one of his statues was removed. Public alarm grew. Caesar appears to have realized that he had gone too far. On 15 February, dressed in a purple toga, sporting a golden wreath, he ostentatiously refused Antony's offer of a crown. The occasion was a festival, and Rome was heaving with holiday crowds. As Antony repeated the offer "a groan echoed all the way round the Forum."²² Again Caesar refused the crown, this time with a firmness that brooked no future contradiction. Perhaps, had the crowds cheered, he might have accepted Antony's offer, but it seems unlikely. Caesar knew that the Romans would never tolerate a King Julius. Nor, surely, in the final analysis, did he care. The forms taken by greatness were relative, varying from nation to nation. This was the lesson that his stay in Alexandria had taught him. Just as Cleopatra was both a pharaoh to the Egyptians and a Macedonian queen



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among the Greeks, so Caesar could be at once a living god in Asia and a dictator to the Romans. Why offend the sensibilities of his fellow citizens by abolishing the Republic when—as Caesar himself was said to have pointed out—the Republic had been reduced to “nothingness, a name only, without body or substance”?²³ What mattered was not the form but the reality of power. And Caesar, unlike Sulla, had no intention of relinquishing it.

A few days before Antony offered him the crown the Senate had officially appointed him dictator for life.* With this fateful measure the last feeble hope that Caesar might one day return the Republic to its citizens had been snuffed out. But would the Romans care? Caesar’s calculation was that they would not. The people he had lulled with games, and welfare, and peace. The Senate he had numbed into quietude, not with open menaces but by the threat of what might result from his removal: “Better an illegal tyrant than a civil war.”²⁴ This

was the opinion of Favonius, Cato’s most loyal admirer. It was a judgment widely shared. Caesar, knowing this, scorned the hatred of his peers. He dismissed his guard of two thousand men. He walked openly in the Forum, attended only by the lictors due to his office. And when informers brought him news of a rumored assassination plot and urged him to hunt down the conspirators, he dismissed their anxieties out of hand. “He would rather die, he said, than be feared.”²⁵

Nor was it as though he would be in Rome for much longer. He was due to leave for Parthia on 18 March. True, a soothsayer had advised him to beware the Ides, which fell that month on the fifteenth, but Caesar had never shown much regard for superstitions. Only in his private conversation did he betray any intimations of mortality. On the evening of the fourteenth, one month after being appointed dictator for life, Caesar dined with Lepidus, the patrician who had joined his cause in 49 BC and was now his deputy in the dictatorship, a position



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officially entitled the “Master of Horse.” Confident that he was among friends, Caesar dropped his guard. “What is the sweetest kind of death?” he was asked. Back shot Caesar’s response: “The kind that comes without warning.”²⁶ To be warned was to be fearful; to be fearful was to be emasculated. That night, when Caesar’s wife suffered nightmares and begged him not to attend the Senate the next day, he laughed. In the morning, borne in his litter, he caught sight of the soothsayer who had told him to beware of the Ides of March. “The day which you warned me against is here,” Caesar said, smiling, “and I am still alive.” “Yes,” came the answer, swift and inevitable. “It is here—but it is not yet past.”²⁷

The Senate that morning had arranged to meet in Pompey’s great assembly hall. Games were being held in the adjacent theater, and as Caesar descended from his litter he would have heard the roars of the Roman people thrilling to spectacles of blood. But the noise would soon have been dimmed by the cool marble of the portico,

and even more by that of the assembly hall that waited beyond. Pompey’s statue still dominated the Senate’s meeting space. After Pharsalus it had been hurriedly pulled down, but Caesar, with typical generosity, had ordered it restored, along with all of Pompey’s other statues. An investment policy, Cicero had sneered, against his own being removed—but that was malicious and unfair. Caesar had no reason to fear for the future of his statues. Nor, walking into the assembly hall that morning and seeing the senators rise to greet him, for himself. Not even when a crowd of them approached him with a petition, mobbing him as he sat down in his gilded chair, pressing him down with their kisses. Then suddenly he felt his toga being pulled down from his shoulders. “Why,” he cried out, startled, “this is violence!”²⁸ At the same moment he felt a slashing pain across his throat. Twisting around he saw a dagger, red with his own blood.



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Some sixty men stood in a press around him. All of them had drawn daggers from under their togas. All of them were well known to Caesar. Many were former enemies who had accepted his pardon—but even more were friends.²⁹ Some were officers who had served with him in Gaul, among them Decimus Brutus, commander of the war fleet that had wiped out the Venetians. The most grievous betrayal, however, the one that finally numbed Caesar and stopped him in his desperate efforts to fight back, came from someone closer still. Caesar glimpsed, flashing through the melee, a knife aimed at his groin, held by another Brutus, Marcus, his reputed son. “You too, my boy?”³⁰ he whispered, then fell to the ground. Not wishing to be witnessed in his death agony, he covered his head with the ribbons of his toga. The pool of his blood stained the base of Pompey’s statue. Dead, he lay in his great rival’s shadow.

But if there appeared to be symbolism in this, then it was illusory. Caesar had not been sacrificed to the cause

of any faction. True, one of the two ringleaders of the conspiracy had been Cassius Longinus, one of Pompey’s former officers. But when Cassius had argued for the assassination not only of Caesar but also of Antony and Lepidus, and a wholesale destruction of the dictator’s regime, his case had been overruled. Brutus, the other leader, and the conscience of the conspiracy, had refused to hear of it. They were conducting an execution, he had argued, not a squalid maneuver in a political fight. And Brutus had prevailed. For Brutus was known to be an honorable man, and worthy to serve as the spokesman and avenger of the Republic.

In the beginning there had been kings, and the last king had been a tyrant. And a man named Brutus had expelled him from the city and set up the consulship, and all the institutions of a free Republic. And now, 465 years later, Brutus, his descendant, had struck down a

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second tyrant. Leading his fellow conspirators out of Pompey's great complex, he stumbled and ran in his excitement across the Campus. Holding his bloodstained dagger proudly aloft, he headed for the Forum. There, in the people's meeting place, he proclaimed the glad news: Caesar was dead; liberty was restored; the Republic was saved.

As though in derisory answer, from across the Campus came the sound of screams. The spectators at Pompey's theater were rioting, crushing one another in their panic. Wisps of smoke were already rising into the sky; shops were being smashed as looters set to work. More distantly, the first wails of grief could be heard as Rome's Jews began the mourning for the man who had always served as their patron. Elsewhere, however, as news of what had happened spread across the city, there was only silence. Far from rushing to the Forum to acclaim the liberators, citizens were rushing to their homes and barring their doors.

The Republic was saved. But what was the Republic now? Stillness hung over the city, and no answer could be discerned.

* This celebrated phrase is found only in much later sources, but even if it is apocryphal, it is entirely true to the spirit and the values of the Republic.

* At least according to the testimony of Diodorus Siculus (17.52), who had visited both Alexandria and Rome: "The population of Alexandria outstrips that of all other cities."

* Or possibly the entire Library of Alexandria, a disaster for which Christians and Muslims have also been blamed.

* Varro, yet another of Posidonius's pupils. He was a Pompeian, one of the three generals defeated by Caesar during his first Spanish campaign. He was widely held to be Rome's greatest polymath. The quotation is from his treatise "On Customs," and is cited by Macrobius, 3.8.9.

