There were three kinds of men who wanted Caesar dead. The first were old enemies who had sided with Pompey but had been granted pardon. These men, such as Cassius, had joined Caesar's cause due to expediency, not conviction. When they realized the optimates would lose the war, they chose to cut their losses and transfer their loyalty. They followed Caesar out of desire for profit and high office, which he had gladly given them. But as one ancient historian said:

> *They hated him precisely because he had forgiven them and treated them so kindly. They could not stand the thought of receiving as a*

gift from Caesar that which they might have gained on their own through victory.

The second group to plot Caesar's downfall was his friends. Many of these men, like Trebonius, had followed Caesar faithfully since the Gallic war and now found themselves in positions of great favor in Caesar's government. They respected Caesar greatly as a military leader, but deeply resented his policy of reconciliation with his former enemies. They had sided with Caesar because they had seen in him the genius to overthrow the entrenched optimates. However, instead of purging the ruling families as they had hoped, he had brought them into his new government on an equal footing. His disgruntled friends had no interest in Caesar's vision for a harmonious new Rome; they simply wanted the fruits of victory for themselves.

The final conspirators were idealists who truly believed in the Republic. These few, like Brutus, had other motives as well, but their dedication to the ancient Roman tradition of shared power was genuine. The very thought of their beloved Rome ruled by a single man was unbearable. For generations their ancestors had fought and died to preserve their constitutional freedoms, but now they served the uncrowned king of Rome. What did it matter if he named them as consuls or made them governors of some wealthy province? When they returned home at night they still had to face the wax masks of their forefathers, who looked down on them and silently asked how they could have allowed this to happen.

The four leading figures of the conspiracy came from Caesar's longtime companions as well as those who had fought against him. Gaius Trebonius had worked with Caesar since the days of the triumvirate, performing especially valuable service during his last years in Gaul. He had organized the siege of Massalia during the early months of the civil war and had fought for Caesar in Spain as

well. Through Caesar, he had become praetor and served briefly as consul in 45 B.C. Decimus Brutus, from the same family as the more famous Brutus, had masterminded the naval victory against the Gaulish Veneti twelve years earlier and had also been one of Caesar's most reliable commanders in Gaul. He had worked with Trebonius to subdue Massalia for Caesar and had been appointed governor of Gaul, where he had distinguished himself by suppressing a rebellion of the fierce Bellovaci. Caesar had honored Decimus repeatedly and had designated him as consul for 42 B.C. Both Trebonius and Decimus owed everything they had to Caesar, but neither felt it was enough.

Cassius was violent and ruthless, but Caesar respected him as a man who could get things done. He had served brilliantly under Caesar's old triumvirate partner Crassus, then joined Pompey as a naval commander in the civil war. When he heard of the optimate defeat at Pharsalus, however, he quickly appealed to Caesar for pardon. He was made a praetor in 44 B.C. under Caesar's sponsorship, but the dictator never fully trusted him and in fact suspected that he might be planning treachery. More than once Caesar said to friends that Cassius looked much too pale in his presence.

Brutus had long been Caesar's favorite among the younger generation of Roman nobles. Caesar knew Brutus could be greedy and arrogant, but perhaps because he was the son of his long-time mistress, Caesar lavished him with honors. His brief service with Pompey was easily forgiven, after which he was made a pontifex and governor of Italian Gaul. He was chosen as praetor for the city of Rome in 44 B.C. and marked for the consulship three years later. Caesar would not hear a word against Brutus, even when a friend warned he was involved in a plot against his life. "Brutus will wait for this shriveled skin," Caesar replied as he sent the man away. But Brutus was under increasing pressure from Cassius and other disgruntled senators to end Caesar's tyranny, just as his illustrious ancestor, also named Brutus, had overthrown the last Roman king

centuries before. Every night new graffiti would appear on the statues dedicated to this hero of Rome's past with provocative messages:

Oh that you were still alive!
Your seed has failed you.
We need a Brutus!

In the end the pressure was too much for Brutus to resist. He decided to lead the plot to assassinate Caesar in spite of the forgiveness and favor the older man had gladly granted him.

There was no time to spare if they were to eliminate Caesar since he would leave for the Parthian campaign on March 18. Absent from Rome and surrounded by his faithful soldiers, he would be untouchable. Although it might be possible to waylay him on the streets, the conspirators were determined to slay Caesar in a public place. This was not to be a tawdry back-alley murder as if they were thugs stealing a rich man's purse. This was a political statement, the restoration of power to the Senate and people of Rome—it had to be done in the open, yet in a setting they could control. They finally decided on the Senate meeting scheduled for the Ides of March. The Ides were on the thirteenth day of most months, but in March they would fall on the fifteenth. There was no opportunity to get to Caesar before that date and there would be no second chance if something went wrong.

Caesar had little use for signs and wonders, but if he had been paying attention in those days before the Ides he might have noticed some ominous warnings of approaching doom. According to ancient authors, who delighted in reporting such events, strange lights lit the sky, crashing sounds echoed through the night, and birds of ill omen flocked to the Forum. As in a story told of Caesar's ancestor Julus fleeing with his father, Aeneas, from Troy (and the New Testament episode of Pentecost), fire shot from the bodies of men but left them

unharmed. Caesar himself, while conducting a sacrifice, found that one of the animals he had just killed had no heart. Beyond Rome, settlers in one of Caesar's colonies in southern Italy demolishing an ancient tomb found a tablet warning that whenever the bones therein were disturbed a son of Troy would be slain. If this were not clear enough, Caesar was confronted on the streets by an old soothsayer named Spurinna who warned him plainly that grave danger awaited him on the Ides of March.

But Caesar scoffed at such omens and had little fear of death. He had already dismissed his bodyguard, trusting in an oath by the senators to protect his life with their own. On the night of March 14, as he dined with his friend Lepidus, conversation turned to the best kind of death. Caesar mentioned that he had read of the Persian emperor Cyrus, who at death's door had enough time to carefully plan his own funeral. Caesar shuddered at the thought of a lingering demise and said that by far the best kind of death was one that was sudden and unexpected.

On the morning of March 15, Caesar awoke to find his wife, Calpurnia, in a panic beside him. She had been visited that night with horrible dreams that she was holding Caesar's lifeless body in her arms. Calpurnia was not a woman given to premonitions, but she begged Caesar to cancel the meeting of the Senate that day. At first he dismissed her fears as groundless, but she was so insistent that he began to have second thoughts. Just then Decimus arrived to escort him to the meeting. Hearing that Caesar was considering not attending the Senate that morning, he took him aside and urged him to reconsider. How would it look, he asked, if word got out that Caesar was afraid to leave his home because of a woman's dreams? Caesar agreed and bade his wife farewell, urging her not to worry.

On the way Caesar was accompanied by the usual crowd of well-wishers and suppliants seeking a moment of his time. Among these

was a Greek philosophy teacher named Artemidorus who was a frequent visitor to the homes of Brutus and his friends. He had overheard that an attempt was to be made on Caesar's life that very day and was anxious to warn the dictator. Knowing he could scarcely reveal the details to Caesar in public, he quickly prepared a scroll giving Caesar the details of the conspirators' plans. He fought his way through the crowd and thrust the scroll into Caesar's hands saying he must read it, privately, and right away. Caesar agreed, but pressed for time he put the message aside to look at after the meeting.

Passing the soothsayer Spurinna along the way, Caesar cheerfully called out that the Ides of March had arrived and he was still alive. Spurinna replied: "Yes, the Ides have come, but not yet passed."

The Senate meeting that day was to take place in the hall adjoining Pompey's theater to the west of the Forum. Pompey had completed this building, first stone theater in Rome, in 55 B.C. in celebration of his eastern victories. Not a modest man, Pompey had placed a statue of himself in the hall to look down on all who gathered there.

Antony accompanied Caesar to the entrance of the hall but was called aside by Trebonius on supposedly pressing business. Many of the conspirators had wanted to kill Antony as well, but Brutus had insisted that they strike down Caesar alone. If we slay any of Caesar's friends, Brutus argued, it will look like factional fighting rather than the justified killing of a tyrant.

When Caesar entered the meeting, all the senators rose to greet him. He was anxious to finish the proceedings as quickly as possible and so took his seat at the front. A senator named Tullius Cimber, whose brother Caesar had exiled, then approached the dictator with a petition to have his sibling pardoned. Caesar dismissed the man, but Cimber grabbed his toga and beseeched him for mercy. This was the signal. Another senator named Casca rushed at Caesar with his dagger drawn and stabbed him in the neck. Casca was so nervous, however, that he barely scratched Caesar, who in response sprang

from his chair, plunged his stylus (his writing implement) through Casca's arm, and threw him off the podium.

The other conspirators now joined in and began stabbing Caesar with their knives as he fought them off furiously. From the front, side, and back they struck him over twenty times until the pain and loss of blood made him falter. It was then that he saw Brutus approaching, with his dagger raised to strike. Until that point Caesar had been ready to fight for his life against the senators, but as the younger man drew near he could only stare at him in shocked disbelief. Contrary to Shakespeare's immortal question—*Et tu, Brute?*—the last words of Caesar were in fact whispered to Brutus in Greek:

Kai su, teknon?
(Even you, my child?)

With that, Caesar wrapped his toga about his face and died at the foot of Pompey's statue.