

## The Ides of March

As Caesar establishes himself in Rome as the sole leader of the government, a different Gaius Julius Caesar emerges. The man who was once dynamic, charismatic, and prone to clemency now becomes slightly bitter, vengeful, impatient, and (worst of all) unrestrained. Established as the first man in Rome, Caesar starts to act the part and has no shame in showing this to the people. He celebrates 3 triumphs over various enemies (African, Egyptian, Spanish), but then parades through Rome in triumph of the defeat of other Romans. This did not sit well with the people of Rome.

Another issue related to this action is that of Caesar's contempt and attitude towards the offices of government. Both the triumph and this revealed attitude spit in the face of the *mos maiorum*, which Romans still held near and dear. Instead of revering the offices of consul, praetor, quaestor, etc., Caesar uses them to reward his allies and thus renders the powers of these positions ineffective before the eyes of everybody. If there was any respect or support for Caesar in the Senate, it quickly dissipated when Caesar filled half of the Senate with foreign supporters (owing their citizenship to Caesar) who otherwise wouldn't have fit the property or monetary qualifications to enter the Curia.

Quickly tiring of Caesar's proud and bold antics, the Senators quickly hatch a plot to eliminate him from Rome and from life as they know it. They plan to kill Caesar. Shakespeare (as well as other authors) documents Caesar's last days and the facts are fairly well known. On the Ides of March, a dispatch of Senators waited until Caesar took his seat in the senate and a few Senators approached him with documents so that he was surrounded. At the given signal of a pull at Caesar's toga, the conspirators unconcealed their knives and each had his turn with Caesar, who at first fought back with the only weapon he had, his quill pen, but then soon accepted his inevitable fate. It is said that Gaius Julius Caesar died just a few feet from a statue of Pompey, located in the Theater of Pompey, the location for this Senate meeting. There is much irony in this, but even more so in the fact that his funeral pyre, recklessly begun in the Forum, rages out of control and eventually burns the Senate House (the Curia). In life, Caesar sought to dismantle the powers of the senatorial body, and in death, his body destroyed the physical representation of that power.

### Scene I: The streets of Rome; October, 45 BC

*One citizen is milling around center-stage. Another citizen walks in from stage right.*

Citizen: *Ave* Quintus!

Quintus: *Ave!* What's going on?

Citizen: Haven't you heard? I'm going to the Forum to get a peak at another one of Caesar's triumphs!

Quintus: Oh, I've heard about this triumph alright. Yeah, it was great when he was celebrating his victories over the Egyptians and the Spaniards, but now... against other Romans???? Not a chance!!

You'll never see me celebrating the defeat and murder of a Roman – I don't care who he is. Don't be swayed by all of his free bread and wine – he's a king to us all, no mistake about it.

Citizen: I didn't think about it like that. Yeah, I'm outta here.

*Both exit stage left*

### Scene II: Sacra Via

Caesar is waving to the crowd along the route of his triumph and he passes the Tribune's bench, upon which Lucius Pontius Aquila, the year's chief tribune, is sitting

Caesar passes by and sees that Aquila will not stand at attention in his presence

Caesar (shaking his fist at Aquila): Lucius, as tribune of the plebs, you must stand before me in reverence!

Aquila stands up, folds his hands across his chest and turns his back to Caesar

Caesar: You'll rue the day Aquila! You don't like me – just try and take the state back from me!!

*Caesar's walks across the stage*

All the citizens: Boo! Caesar is a king! Caesar is a tyrant!

Caesar (*looking very angry*): You people know nothing! You don't know what you want! All you want is bread and circus. Bread and circus! I know what is good for you!

*Caesar exits stage left.*

### **Scene III:** The Senate

Caesar: And here are your two new consuls for 44 BC – Marcus Antony and Publius Cornelius Dolabella.

Senator: But Caesar, they aren't even old enough!

Caesar: A small inconvenience. That is a mere formality. After all, didn't we make this exception with your beloved Pompey? You remember him? The *wonderful (sarcastic)* general that I defeated a few years back? You'll overlook this little issue.

Senator (*talking to another Senator*): That's it – he's made a mockery of the Senate and of all of us – something must be done with this tyrant!

Second Senator: You're right! But what should we do?

Senator: Well, if we can't make him leave office, we can make him leave our lives... all of our lives.

Second Senator: Are you saying what I think your saying?

Senator: It's come to that. I mean, look around you! He's built all of these new temples and buildings all in his name – he's infested every part of Rome! We must do whatever it takes, but we must do it as one.

Senator: I'll test the waters with the others and see who I can find to join us.

### **Scene IV:** Secret meeting of Senators

*All the Senators (5 of them) are huddled around each other*

Brutus: No one leaves unbloodied, got it?

Senator: That's right.

2<sup>nd</sup> Senator: It will be my pleasure.

3<sup>rd</sup> senator: Let me be the first one! Just let me at him.

Brutus: Patience, my friend, patience. Remember the signal and don't betray our plan before we unleash it.

**Scene V:** In a Senate meeting at the Theater of Pompey: March 15, 44 BC

*All of the Senators are in the Senate awaiting Caesar to take his place in the middle of them on his curule chair*

*Caesar walks in accompanied by Brutus and 2<sup>nd</sup> Senator*

*Caesar sits down*

Caesar: And what business what must I deal with today Senators?

Brutus: Well Caesar, this business will not take long...

*Brutus walks over to Caesar and stretches Caesar's toga down to bear his neck*

*All of the Senators rush Caesar with concealed knives and one by one stab Caesar*

Caesar: What is the meaning of this? Aghhhh!!!!

*Caesar falls to the ground and accepts his fate*

*Brutus is the last to approach Caesar with a knife*

Caesar: *Et tu, Brute?*

Brutus: *Et ego, rex*

*Brutus plunges his knife into Caesar's chest and Caesar dies.*

*The Senators all scream in victory*

Brutus: The tyrant is dead! The Republic lives! The Republic lives!

*All the senators walk holding their bloody knives up in the air in triumph*

Senator: We are all saved! *Roma victor! Roma victor!!*

End Play