It was mid-February, time for the Feast of the Lupercalia, in honor of the god of fertility. Ancient Rome was in a holiday mood. Many citizens had gathered along the streets to see the great leader Julius Caesar on his way to the festival games. Some of his well-wishers had been up early, eager to celebrate Caesar’s recent triumph over his enemy Pompey.

Many Gods and Goddesses
The god of fertility is one of only many gods and goddesses believed in by the ancient Romans. In their religious beliefs, the ancient Romans were greatly influenced by the Greeks. For example, the king of the Greek gods, Zeus, became Jupiter to the Romans.
But many citizens of Rome did not hold Caesar in such high regard, for they had known and respected Pompey. They \textit{resented} Caesar’s attempts to glorify himself, and they feared that they would lose the freedom they valued as Roman citizens if he became too powerful.

Soon Caesar came along with a group of his closest followers, including the young officer Mark Antony. Suddenly a voice from the crowd called to Caesar. It was a soothsayer, one who predicts the future.
“Caesar!” the soothsayer cried. “Beware the ides of March.” (The ides was the fifteenth day of the month.)

“He is a dreamer,” said Caesar to his companions. “Let us leave him.”

When Caesar’s procession had moved out of sight, two noble citizens who knew Caesar well remained behind. Their names were Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius, and they were close friends in spite of their very different natures.

No citizen of Rome was more patriotic than Brutus, who prided himself on being a man of honor. Being perfectly honest himself, he assumed that everyone else must be honest as well. He was more a man of books than of action. He was a friend of Caesar and respected by Caesar, but Brutus believed from the bottom of his heart that too much power in the hands of one man was a dangerous threat to the Roman idea of liberty. And so he watched Caesar with growing sadness and worry.

In contrast to the thoughtful Brutus, his friend Cassius had a quick temper. Cassius was driven by
reasons less noble than those that moved Brutus. Cassius disliked Caesar and was jealous of him.

Both Brutus and Cassius were worried about Caesar’s growing power. Rome was a republic, with a Senate that helped make the laws—would Caesar’s growing power threaten this way of government and the freedom of Roman citizens?

As Brutus and Cassius talked, they could hear shouts and applause for Caesar in the distance.

“What means this shouting?” Brutus asked Cassius. “I do fear the people choose Caesar for their king.”

“Ay, do you fear it?” responded Cassius. “Then must I think you would not have it so.”

“I would not,” said Brutus. “And yet I love him well.”

Cassius became agitated and spoke to Brutus. “I know you for an honorable man, Brutus,” he said. “I cannot tell what you and other men think, but for myself, I am not in awe of Caesar. I was born free as Caesar. So were you!”
Brutus and Cassius watch Caesar’s procession.
There was another cheer from the people, and then Cassius continued: “Why, man, Caesar doth stand like a **Colossus** and we **petty** men walk around under his huge legs. In the name of all the gods, upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed, that he is grown so great?”

In Cassius’s angry opinion, while Caesar might see himself as a giant among men, he was no better than his fellow citizens. Cassius’s heated words seemed to trouble Brutus. He turned to Cassius and said, “For the present, say no more. What you have said, I will consider.”

Now Caesar and his followers returned. As they passed by, something about Cassius made Caesar uneasy, and he remarked to **Antony**, “**Yond** Cassius has a **lean** and hungry look. He thinks too much. Such men as he are never at ease while they behold one greater than themselves, and therefore are they very dangerous.” Caesar saw something threatening in Cassius’s expression, but Antony assured Caesar
Antony, dressed for the race, offers Caesar a crown, which Caesar refuses.
that Cassius was “a noble Roman” and presented no danger. Caesar, however, was not so sure.

As Caesar and his followers walked on, Brutus and Cassius stopped their friend Casca to ask the reason for all the shouting and applause they had heard. Casca said that Mark Antony had offered a crown to Caesar three times, and that each time Caesar had refused it, which caused the people to shout their approval. “But, to my thinking,” said Casca, “he would fain have had it.” Cassius sensed that Casca too did not trust Caesar and feared his growing power.

In the weeks that followed, Cassius secretly gathered a number of men who were willing to take violent steps to stop Caesar’s growing power. Among the conspirators were Casca, Decius, Metellus Cimber, Cinna, and Trebonius. But they still needed the support of Brutus. If Brutus were part of their plan, the conspirators thought, then their violent action might be accepted by the Roman people, because the people honored and respected Brutus.