

CHAPTER XI

THE year before I came of age and married had been a bad year for Rome. There was a series of earthquakes in the South of Italy which destroyed several cities. Little rain fell in the Spring and the crops looked miserable all over the country: then just before harvest time there were torrential storms which beat down and spoilt what little corn had come to ear. The downpour was so violent that the Tiber carried away the bridge and made the lower part of the City navigable by boats for seven days. A famine seemed threatening and Augustus sent commissioners to Egypt and other parts to buy huge quantities of corn. The public granaries had been depleted because of a bad harvest the year before—though not so bad as this. The commissioners succeeded in buying a certain amount of corn, but at a high price and not really enough. There was great distress that winter, the more so because Rome was overcrowded—its population had doubled in the last twenty years; and Ostia, the port, was unsafe for shipping in the winter, so that grain-convoys from the East were unable to discharge their cargoes for weeks on end. Augustus did what he could to limit the famine. He temporarily banished all but householders and their families to country districts not nearer than a hundred miles from the City, appointed a rationing-board composed of ex-Consuls, and prohibited public banquets, even on his own birthday. Much of the grain he imported at his own expense and distributed free to the needy. As usual, famine brought rioting, and rioting brought arson: whole streets of shops were set on fire at night by half-starved looters from

the workers' quarters. Augustus organized a brigade of night-watchmen, in seven divisions, to prevent this sort of thing: this brigade proved so useful that it has never since been disbanded. But enormous damage had been done by the rioters. A new tax was imposed about this time to provide money for the German wars, and what with the famine, the fires, and the taxes, the commons began to get restless and openly discuss revolution. Threatening manifestos were pinned at night on the doors of public buildings. A huge conspiracy was said to be on foot. The Senate offered a reward for all information which would lead to the arrest of a ringleader and many men came forward to win it, informing against their neighbours; but this only made the confusion worse. Apparently no real conspiracy existed, only hopeful talk of conspiracies. Eventually corn began to come in from Egypt, where the harvest is much earlier than ours, and the tension relaxed.

Among the people removed from Rome during the famine were the sword-fighters. They were not numerous, but Augustus thought that if there were any civil disturbances they would be likely to play a dangerous part in them. For they were a desperate crew, some of them being men of rank who had been sold as slaves for debt—to purchasers who had agreed to let them earn the price of their freedom by sword-fighting. If a young gentleman ran into debt, as sometimes happened, through no fault of his own or from youthful thoughtlessness, his distant relations would save him from slavery, or Augustus himself would intervene. So these gentlemen sword-fighters were men whom nobody had regarded as worth saving from their fate, and who, becoming the natural leaders of the Gladiatorial Guild, were just the sort to head an armed rebellion.

When things improved they were recalled and it was decided to put everybody in a good humour by exhibiting a big public sword-fight and wild-beast hunt in the names of Germanicus and myself, in memory of our father. Livia wished to remind Rome of his great exploits with a view to

calling attention to Germanicus, who resembled him so closely and who would soon, it was expected, be sent to Germany to help his uncle Tiberius, another famous soldier, win fresh conquests there. My mother and Livia contributed to the expenses of the show, the main burden of which, however, fell on Germanicus and me. It was considered, however, that Germanicus in his position needed more money than I did, so my mother explained to me that it would be only right for me to contribute twice as much as he did. I was only too glad to do what I could for Germanicus. But when I found out when it was all over what had been spent I was staggered; the show was planned regardless of cost, and besides the usual expenses of a sword-fight and wild-beast hunt we threw showers of silver to the populace.

In the procession to the amphitheatre Germanicus and I rode, by special decree of the Senate, in our father's old war-chariot. We had just offered a sacrifice to his memory, at the great tomb which Augustus had built for himself when he should come to die—and where he had interred our father's ashes, alongside those of Marcellus. We went down the Appian Way and under our father's memorial arch, with the colossal equestrian figure of him on it, which had been decorated with laurel in honour of the occasion. There was a north-east wind blowing and the doctors would not allow me to come without a cloak, so with one exception I was the only person present at the sword-fight—where I sat next to Germanicus as joint-president with him—who was wearing one. The exception was Augustus himself, who was sitting on the other side of Germanicus. He felt extremes of heat and cold severely and in the winter wore no less than four coats besides a very thick gown and a long waistcoat. There were some present who saw an omen in this similarity between my dress and Augustus's, further remarking that I had been born on the first day of the month named after him, and at Lyons, too, on the very day that he had dedicated an altar there to himself. Or, at any rate, that was what they said they had said, many years after. Livia was in the Box

too—a peculiar honour paid her as my father's mother. Normally she sat with the Vestal Virgins. The rule was for women and men to sit apart.

It was the first sword-fight I had been permitted to attend, and to find myself in the President's Box was all the more embarrassing for me on this account. Germanicus did all the work, though pretending to consult me when a decision had to be made, and carried it through with great assurance and dignity. It was my luck that this fight was the best that had ever been exhibited at the amphitheatre. As it was my first, however, I could not appreciate its excellence, having no background of previous displays to use for purposes of comparison. But certainly I have never seen a better since and I must have seen nearly a thousand important ones. Livia wanted Germanicus to gain popularity as his father's son and had spared no expense in hiring the best performers in Rome to fight, all out. Usually professional sword-fighters were very careful about hurting themselves and each other and spent most of their energy on feints and parries and blows which looked and sounded Homeric but which were really quite harmless, like the thwacks that slaves give each other with stage-clubs in low-comedy. It was only occasionally, when they lost their temper with each other or had an old score to settle, that they were worth watching. This time Livia had got the heads of the Gladiatorial Guild together and told them that she wanted her money's worth. Unless every bout was a real one she would have the guild broken up: there had been too many managed fights in the previous summer. So the fighters were warned by the guild-masters that this time they were not to play kiss-in-the-ring or they would be dismissed from the guild.

In the first six combats one man was killed, one so seriously wounded that he died the same day, and a third had his shield-arm lopped off close to the shoulder, which caused roars of laughter. In each of the other three combats one of the men disarmed the other, but not before he had given such a good account of himself that Germanicus and

I, when appealed to, were able to confirm the approval of the audience by raising our thumbs in token that his life should be spared. One of the victors had been a very rich knight a year or two before. In all these combats the rule was that the antagonists should not fight with the same sort of weapon. It was sword against spear, or sword against battle-axe, or spear against mace. The seventh combat was between a man armed with a regulation army sword and an old-fashioned round brass-bound shield and a man armed with a three-pronged trout-spear and a short net. The sword-man or "chaser" was a soldier of the Guards who had recently been condemned to death for getting drunk and striking his captain. His sentence had been commuted to a fight against this net and trident man—a professional from Thessaly, very highly paid, who had killed more than twenty opponents in the previous five years, so Germanicus told me.

My sympathies were with the soldier, who came into the arena looking very white and shaky—he had been in prison for some days and the strong light bothered him. But his entire company, who it appears sympathised very much with him, for the captain was a bully and a beast, shouted in unison for him to pull himself together and defend the company's honour. He straightened up and shouted, "I'll do my best, lads!" His camp nickname, as it happened, was "Roach", and this was enough to put the greater part of the audience on his side, though the Guards were pretty unpopular in the City. If a roach were to kill a fisherman that would be a good joke. To have the amphitheatre on one's side is half the battle to a man fighting for his life. The Thessalian, a wiry, long-armed, long-legged fellow, came swaggering in close behind him, dressed only in a leather tunic and a hard round leather cap. He was in a good humour, cracking jokes with the front-benches, for his opponent was an amateur, and Livia was paying him a thousand gold pieces for the afternoon and five hundred more if he killed his man after a good fight. They came together in front of the Box and saluted first

Augustus and Livia and then Germanicus and me as joint-presidents, with the usual formula: "Greetings, Sirs. We salute you in Death's shadow!" We returned the greetings with a formal gesture, but Germanicus said to Augustus: "Why, sir, that chaser's one of my father's veterans. I know him well. He won a crown in Germany for being the first man over an enemy stockade." Augustus was interested. "Good," he said, "this should be a good fight, then. But in that case the net-man must be ten years younger, and years count in this game." Then Germanicus signalled for the trumpets to sound and the fight began.

Roach stood his ground, while the Thessalian danced around him. Roach was not such a fool as to waste his strength running after his lightly armed opponent or yet to be paralysed into immobility. The Thessalian tried to make him lose his temper by taunting him, but Roach was not to be drawn. Only once when the Thessalian came almost within lunging distance did he show any readiness to take the offensive, and the quickness of his thrust drew a roar of delight from the benches. But the Thessalian was away in time. Soon the fight grew more lively; the Thessalian made stabs, high and low, with his long trident, which Roach parried easily, but with one eye on the net, weighted with small lead pellets, which the Thessalian managed with his left hand.

"Beautiful work!" I heard Livia say to Augustus. "The best net-man in Rome. He's playing with the soldier. Did you see that? He could have entangled him and got his stroke in then if he had wished. But he's spinning out the fight."

"Yes," said Augustus. "I'm afraid the soldier is done for. He should have kept off drink."

Augustus had hardly spoken when Roach knocked up the trident and jumped forward, ripping the Thessalian's leather tunic between arm and body. The Thessalian was away in a flash and as he ran he swung the net across Roach's face. By ill-luck a pellet struck Roach in the eye, momentarily

blinding him. He checked his pace and the Thessalian, seeing his advantage, turned and knocked the sword spinning out of his hand. Roach sprang to retrieve it but the Thessalian got there first, ran with it to the barrier and tossed it across to a rich patron sitting in the front rank of the seats reserved for the Knights. Then he returned to the pleasant task of goading and dispatching an unarmed man. The net whistled round Roach's head and the trident jabbed here and there; but Roach was still undismayed, and once made a snatch at the trident and nearly got possession of it. The Thessalian had now worked him towards our Box to make a spectacular killing.

"That's enough!" said Livia in a matter of fact voice, "he's done enough playing about. He ought to finish him now." The Thessalian needed no prompting. He made a simultaneous sweep of his net around Roach's head and a stab at his belly with the trident. And then what a roar went up! Roach had caught the net with his right hand and, flinging his body back, kicked with all his strength at the shaft of the trident a foot or two from his enemy's hand. The weapon flew up over the Thessalian's head, turned in the air and stuck quivering into the wooden barrier. The Thessalian stood astonished for a moment, then left the net in Roach's hands and dashed past him to recover the trident. Roach threw himself forward and sideways and caught him in the ribs, as he ran, with the spiked boss of his shield. The Thessalian fell, gasping, on all fours. Roach recovered himself quickly and with a sharp downward swing of the shield caught him on the back of his neck.

"The rabbit-blow!" said Augustus. "I've never seen that done in an arena before, have you, my dear Livia? Eh? Killed him too, I swear."

The Thessalian was dead. I expected Livia to be greatly displeased but all she said was: "And served him right. That's what comes of underrating one's opponent. I'm disappointed in that net-man. Still, it has saved me that five hundred in gold, so I can't complain, I suppose."

To crown the afternoon's enjoyment there was a fight between two German hostages who happened to belong to rival clans and had voluntarily engaged each other to a death-duel. It was not pretty fighting, but savage hacking with long sword and halberd: each wore a small highly ornamented shield strapped on the left forearm. This was an unusual manner of fighting, for the ordinary German soldier does all his work with the slim-shafted, narrow-headed assegai: the broad-headed halberd and the long sword are marks of high rank. One of the combatants, a yellow-headed man over six feet tall, made short work of the other, cutting him about terribly before he gave him his final smashing blow on the side of the neck. The crowd gave him a great cheer, which went to his head, for he made a speech in a mixture of German and camp-Latin, saying that he was a renowned warrior in his country and had killed six Romans in battle, including an officer, before he had been given up as a hostage by his jealous uncle, the tribal chief. He now challenged any Roman of rank to meet him, sword to sword, and make the lucky seventh for him.

The first champion who sprang into the ring was a young staff-officer of an old but impoverished family, called Cassius Chærea. He came running to the box for permission to take up the challenge. His father, he said, had been killed in Germany under that glorious general in whose memory this display was being held: might he piously sacrifice this boastful fellow to his father's ghost? Cassius was a fine fencer. I had often watched him on Mars Field. Germanicus consulted with Augustus and then with me; when Augustus gave his consent and I mumbled mine Cassius was told to arm himself. He went to the dressing-rooms and borrowed Roach's sword, shield and body armour, for good luck and out of compliment to Roach.

Soon there began a far grander fight than any that the professionals had shown, the German swinging his great sword and Cassius parrying with his shield and always trying to get in under the German's guard—but the fellow

was as agile as he was strong and twice beat Cassius to his knees. The crowd was perfectly silent, as if it were a religious performance they were watching, and nothing was heard but the clash of steel on steel and the rattle of shields. Augustus said, "The German's too strong for him, I'm afraid. We shouldn't have permitted this. If Cassius gets killed it will create a bad impression on the frontier when the news gets there."

Then Cassius's foot slipped in a blood pool and he fell over on his back. The German straddled over him with a triumphant smile on his face and then . . . and then there was a roaring in my ears and a blackness before my eyes and I fainted away. The emotion of seeing men killed for the first time in my life, and then the combat between Roach and the Thessalian, in which I felt so strongly for Roach, and now this fight in which it seemed that it was I myself who was desperately battling for life with the German—it was too much for me. So I did not witness Cassius's wonderful recovery as the German lifted that ugly sword to crash in his skull, the quick upward thrust with the shield-boss at the German's loins, the sideways roll, and the quick decisive stab under the arm-pit. Yes, Cassius killed his man all right. Do not forget this Cassius, for he twice and three times plays an important part in this story. As for me, nobody noticed that I had fainted for some time, and when they did I was already coming to. They propped me up again in my place until the show had formally ended. To have been carried out would have been a disgrace for everyone.

The next day the Games continued, but I was not there. It was announced that I was ill. I missed one of the most spectacular contests ever witnessed in the amphitheatre, between an Indian elephant—they are much bigger than the African breed—and a rhinoceros. Experts betted on the rhinoceros, for although it was by far the smaller animal its hide was much thicker than the elephant's and it was expected to make short work of the elephant with its long sharp horn. In Africa, they were saying, elephants had

learned to avoid the haunts of the rhinoceros, which holds undisputed sway in its own territory. This Indian elephant however—as Postumus described the fight to me afterwards—showed no anxiety or fear when the rhinoceros came charging into the arena, meeting him each time with his tusks and lumbering after him with clumsy speed when he retired discomfited. But finding himself unable to penetrate the thick armour of the beast's neck as he charged, this fantastic creature had recourse to cunning. He picked up with his trunk a rough broom made of a thorn bush which a sweeper had left on the sand and darted it in his enemy's face the next time he charged: he succeeded in blinding first one eye and then the other. The rhinoceros, distracted with rage and pain, dashed here and there in pursuit of the elephant and finally ran full tilt against the wooden barrier, going right through it and shattering his horn and stunning himself on the marble barrier behind. Then up came the elephant with his mouth open as if he were laughing and, first enlarging the breach in the wooden barrier, began trampling on his fallen enemy's skull, which he crushed in. He then nodded his head as if in time to music and presently walked quietly away. His Indian driver came running out with a huge bowl full of sweetmeats, which the elephant poured into his mouth while the audience roared applause. Then the beast helped the driver up on his neck, offering his trunk as a ladder, and trotted over to Augustus; where he trumpeted the royal salute—which these elephants are taught only to utter for monarchs—and knelt in homage. But, as I say, I missed this performance.

That evening Livia wrote to Augustus:

“MY DEAR AUGUSTUS,

“Claudius's unmanly behaviour yesterday in fainting at the sight of two men fighting, to say nothing of the grotesque twitchings of his hands and head, which at a solemn festival in commemoration of his father's victories were all the more shameful and unfortunate, has at least had this advantage,

that we can now definitely decide once and for all that except in the dignity of priest—for the vacancies in the colleges must be filled *somehow* and Plautius has managed to coach him well enough in his duties—Claudius is perfectly unfit to appear in public. We must be content to write him off as a loss, except perhaps for breeding purposes, for I hear he has now done his duty by Urgulanilla—but I shan't be sure of that until I see the child, which may well be a monster like him.

“Antonia has to-day abstracted from his study what appears to be a notebook of historical material which he has been collecting for a life of his father; with it she found a painfully composed introduction to the projected work, which I send you herewith. You will observe that Claudius has singled out for praise his dear father's one intellectual foible—that wilful blindness of his to the march of time, the absurd delusion that the political forms that suited Rome when Rome was a small town at war with neighbouring small towns could be re-established after Rome had become the greatest kingdom known since the days of Alexander. Look what happened when Alexander died and nobody could be found strong enough to succeed him as supreme monarch—why, the Empire simply fell to pieces. But I should not waste my time and yours in making historical platitudes.

“Athenodorus and Sulpicius, with whom I have just had a conference, say that they had not seen this introduction until I showed it them and agree on its extreme inadvisability. They swear that they have never put any subversive ideas into his head, and suggest that he must have got them from old books. Personally I think that he inherited them—his grandfather had the same curious infirmity, you remember—and it is just like Claudius to have chosen that one weakness to inherit and to have refused any legacy of physical or moral soundness! Thank God for Tiberius and Germanicus! There's no republican nonsense about *them*, so far as I know.

“Naturally I am instructing Claudius that he must desist

from his biographical labours, saying that if he disgraces his father's memory by fainting at the solemn Games given in his honour, he is obviously unfit to write his life: let him find some other employment for his pen.

"LIVIA."

Ever since Pollio had told me about the poisoning of my father and grandfather I had been greatly perplexed. I could not make up my mind whether the old man had been talking senile nonsense, or joking, or whether he really knew something. Who but Augustus himself was sufficiently interested in the monarchy to have poisoned a nobleman merely because he believed in republican government? Yet I could not believe Augustus the murderer: poison was a mean way of killing, a slave's way, and Augustus would never have stooped to it. Besides, he was not a hypocrite and when he talked about my father it was always with admiration and affection. I consulted two or three recent histories, but they told me nothing that I had not already heard from Germanicus of the circumstances of my father's death.

It was only a couple of days before the Games that I happened to be talking to our porter, who had been my father's orderly throughout his campaigns. The honest fellow had been drinking rather too much, because my father's name was on everyone's lips at the time and his veterans had come in for a good deal of reflected glory. "Tell me what you know of my father's death," I said boldly. "Were there any stories current in the camp that he met his death other than by accident?" He replied: "I wouldn't say it to anybody, sir, but yourself, but I can trust you, sir. You're the son of your father and I never knew a man who didn't trust *him*. Yes, sir, there was a rumour going about and there was more in it than in most camp rumours. Your brave and noble father, sir, was poisoned, it's my sure belief. A certain Person, whose name I won't mention because you'll know it without my saying, was jealous of your father's victories and sent him an order of recall. That's not a story, or rumour,

that's history. The order came when your father had broken his leg; not much of a damage either, and it was coming along well enough until that doctor fellow arrives from Rome, at the same time as the message, with his little bag of poisons in his hand. Who sent that doctor fellow? The same person who sent the message. Two and two's four, isn't it, sir? We orderlies wanted to kill that doctor fellow but he got back safe to Rome under special escort."

When I read my grandmother Livia's note telling me to desist from writing my father's life, my perplexity increased. Pollio could surely not have meant to point to my grandmother as the murderess of her former husband and her son? It was unthinkable. And what could have been her motive? Yet when I came to consider the matter I could more easily believe that it was Livia than that it was Augustus.

That summer Tiberius needed men for his East German war; and levies were called for from Dalmatia, a province that had lately been quiet and docile. But when the contingent assembled it happened that the tax-collector was making his annual visit to those parts and exacting from the province not more than the sum fixed by Augustus, but more than it could easily pay. There were loud protests of poverty. The tax-collector exercised his right of seizing good-looking children from the villages which could not pay and carrying them off to be sold as slaves. The fathers of some of the children thus seized were members of the contingent and naturally made a great outcry. The entire force revolted, killing their Roman captains. A Bosnian tribe rose in sympathy and soon the whole of our frontier provinces between Macedonia and the Alps was in a blaze. Fortunately Tiberius was able to conclude a peace with the Germans, at their instance not his own—and march against the rebels. The Dalmatians would not meet him in a pitched battle but broke up into small columns and carried on a skilful guerrilla warfare. They were lightly armed and knew the country well and when winter came even dared to raid Macedonia.

Augustus at Rome could not appreciate the difficulties

with which Tiberius had to contend and suspected him of purposely delaying operations for some secret private ends which he could not fathom. He decided to send out Germanicus, with an army of his own, to spur Tiberius to action.

Germanicus, who was now in his twenty-third year, had just entered, five years before the customary age, on his first City magistracy. The military appointment caused surprise: everyone expected Postumus to be chosen. Postumus had no magisterial appointment, but was busy on Mars Field training the recruits for this new army: he now bore the rank of regimental commander. He was three years younger than Germanicus, but his brother Gaius had been sent to govern Asia at the age of nineteen and had become a Consul in the year following. Postumus was by no means less capable than Gaius, it was agreed, and, after all, he was Augustus's single surviving grandson.

My own feelings on hearing the news, which had not yet been made public, were torn between joy on Germanicus's account and sorrow on Postumus's. I went to find Postumus and arrived at his quarters in the Palace at the same time as Germanicus. Postumus greeted us both affectionately and congratulated Germanicus on his command.

Germanicus said: "It is because of this that I have come, dear Postumus. You know well enough that I am very proud and glad to have been chosen, but military reputation is nothing to me if I injure you by it. You are as capable a soldier as I am and as Augustus's heir you should obviously have been chosen. With your consent I propose to go to him now and offer to resign in your favour. I'll point out the misconception that the City will be sure to put on his preference of me to you. It is not too late yet to make the alteration."

Postumus answered: "Dear Germanicus, you are very generous and noble, and for that reason I shall speak frankly. You are right in saying that the City will treat this as a slight on me. The fact that your duties as a magistrate are being

interrupted by the appointment, while I am perfectly free to be sent, aggravates the matter. But, believe me, the disappointment that I feel is amply recompensed by this further proof you have given me of your friendship; and I wish you a speedy recovery and every possible success."

Then I said: "If you will both forgive me for expressing an opinion, I think that Augustus has considered the situation more carefully than you give him credit for having done. From something I overheard my mother saying this morning, I gather that he suspects my uncle Tiberius of purposely prolonging the war. If he were to send Postumus out with the new forces, after that old history of misunderstanding between my uncle and Postumus's brothers, my uncle might be suspicious and offended. Postumus would seem like a spy and a rival. But Germanicus is his adopted son and would seem to be sent out merely as a reinforcement. I don't think that there is more to be said than that Postumus will get his chance elsewhere, no doubt, and soon enough."

They were both very pleased with this new view of the matter, which did credit to them both, and we all parted on the most friendly terms.

That same night, or rather in the early hours of the following morning, I was working late in my room on the upper story of our house when I heard distant shouting and presently a slight scuffling noise from the balcony outside. I went to the door and saw a head appear over the top of the balcony and then an arm. It was a man in military dress, who threw his leg over the balcony and pulled himself up. I was paralyzed for the moment, and the first wild thought that came into my head was: "It's an assassin sent by Livia." I was just going to shout for help when he said in a low voice: "Hush! It's all right. I'm Postumus."

"O Postumus. What a fright you gave me. Why do you come climbing in at this time of night like a burglar? And what's wrong with you? Your face is bleeding and your cloak's torn."

"I've come to say good-bye, Claudius."

"I don't understand. Has Augustus changed his mind? I thought the appointment had already been made public."

"Give me a drink, I'm thirsty. No, I'm not going to the wars. Far from it. I've been sent fishing."

"Don't talk in riddles. Here's the wine. Drink it quick and tell me what's wrong. Where are you going fishing?"

"Oh, to some small island. I don't think they've chosen it yet."

"You mean . . . ?" My heart sank and my head swam.

"Yes, I'm being banished; like my poor mother."

"But why? What crime have you committed?"

"No crime that can be officially mentioned to the Senate. I expect the phrase will be 'incurable and persistent depravity'. You remember that *Pillow Debate*?"

"O Postumus! Has my grandmother . . . ?"

"Listen carefully, Claudius, for time is short. I am under close arrest but just now I managed to knock down two of my escort and break away. The Palace guard has been called out and every possible way of escape is blocked. They know I am somewhere in these buildings and they'll search every room. I felt I had to see you, because I want you to know the truth and not believe the charges that they have trumped up against me. And I want you to tell Germanicus everything. Send him my most loving greeting and tell him everything, exactly as I tell it you now. I don't care what anybody else thinks of me, but I want Germanicus and you to know the truth and think well of me."

"I'll not forget a word, Postumus. Quick, tell it me from the beginning."

"Well, you know that I've been out of favour with Augustus lately. I couldn't make out why, at first, but soon it was obvious that Livia was poisoning his mind against me. He is extraordinarily weak where she is concerned. Imagine living with her for nearly fifty years and still believing every word she says! But Livia was not the only one in this plot. Livilla was in it too."

"Livilla! Oh, I am so sorry!"

**“Yes. You know how much
I have suffered on her account.
year ago, that she wasn’t worth
remember how angry I was wi
you for days. I am sorry now
But you know how it is when o**

she knew nothing about it at all, but that she believed Castor capable of any crooked dealing. She forced out a tear or two and said that Castor was rotten through and through and that nobody could ever guess how much she had suffered from him, and that she wished she were dead."

"Yes, that's an old trick of hers. She can cry whenever it suits her. It takes everyone in. If I'd told you all that I knew of her, you'd have hated me perhaps for a time, but it would have saved you all this. Then what happened?"

"This evening she sent me a verbal message by her lady-in-waiting that Castor would probably be out all night on one of his usual debauches and that when I saw a light at her window shortly after midnight I was to come to her. A window would be left open immediately underneath the light and I was to climb in quietly. She wanted to tell me something very important. Of course, that could only mean one thing and it set my heart pounding. I waited in the garden for hours until I saw the light appear for a moment at her window. Then I found the window open below and climbed in. Livilla's maid was there and guided me upstairs. She showed me how to get into Livilla's room by climbing across from one balcony to another until I reached her window; this was to avoid the guard posted in the passage near her door. Well, I found Livilla waiting for me in her dressing-gown, with her hair down and looking infernally beautiful. She told me how cruelly Castor had behaved to her. She said that she owed him nothing as a wife, because on his own confession he had married her by fraud, and he had behaved most brutally to her. She flung her arms around me and I picked her up and carried her over to the bed. I was mad with desire for her. Then suddenly she began to scream and pummel me. I thought for the moment that she had gone mad, and put my hand over her mouth to quiet her. She struggled free, knocking over a little table with a lamp and a glass jar on it. Then she screamed "Rape! Rape!" and then the door was battered

down and in came the Palace guard with torches. Guess who was at their head? ”

“Castor?”

“Livia. She brought us just as we were into Augustus’s presence. Castor was with him, though Livilla had told me that he was dining at the other side of the City. Augustus dismissed the guard, and Livia, who had hardly said a word until then, began her attack on me. She told him that on his suggestion she had gone to my quarters to acquaint me privately with Æmilia’s charges and ask me what explanation I had to offer.”

“Æmilia! Which Æmilia?”

“My niece.”

“I didn’t know she had anything against you.”

“She hasn’t. She was in the plot too. So Livia said that, not finding me in my quarters, she had made enquiries and had been told that the patrol had seen me sitting in the garden under a pear tree on the south side. She sent a soldier to find me but he came back and said that I wasn’t there but that he had something suspicious to report: a man climbing from one upper balcony to another just above the sundial. She knew whose rooms those were and was greatly alarmed. By good luck she had arrived just in time. She had heard Livilla’s screams for help: I had broken into her bedroom by way of the balcony and was on the point of raping her. The guards had burst down the door and pulled me away from ‘the terrified and half-naked young woman’. She had brought me here at once, and Livilla as a witness. While Livia was telling her story that whore Livilla was sobbing and hiding her face. Her dressing-gown was ripped across—she must have torn it herself deliberately. Augustus called me a beast and a satyr and asked me whether I had gone mad. Of course, I couldn’t deny that I had been in her bedroom or even that I had been making love to her. I said that I had come by invitation, and tried to explain things from the beginning, but Livilla began screaming, ‘It’s a lie. It’s a lie. I was asleep and he came in by the window and

tried to rape me.' Then Livia said, 'And I suppose your niece Æmilia invited you to assault her too? You seem very popular with the young women.' That was clever of Livia. I had to justify myself about Æmilia and leave the Livilla story. I told Augustus that I had dined with my sister Julilla the night before and that Æmilia was there, but that this was the first time I had seen the girl for six months. I asked on what occasion I was supposed to have assaulted her and Augustus said that I knew very well when it was—after dinner in the temporary absence of her parents who were called away by an alarm of thieves—and that I had only been prevented by the return of her parents. The story was so ridiculous that, furious as I was, I could not help laughing; but this increased Augustus's rage. He was about to rise from his ivory chair and strike me."

I said: "I don't understand? Was there really an alarm of thieves?"

"Yes, and Æmilia and I were left alone for a few minutes, but the conversation was most blameless and her governess was there! We were discussing fruit-trees and garden-pests until Julilla and Æmilius came back and said that it was a false alarm. Julilla and Æmilius aren't in Livia's pay, you may be sure—they hate her—so Æmilia must have arranged it. I began to think quickly what spite she held against me, but I could remember nothing. Suddenly the explanation occurred to me. Julilla had told me as a secret that Æmilia was at last getting what she wanted: she was to marry Appius Silanus. You know that young dandy, don't you?"

"Yes. But I don't follow."

"It's quite simple. I said to Livia: 'Æmilia's reward for this lie is to be marriage to Silanus, isn't it? And what does Livilla get? Did you promise to poison her present husband and provide her with a handsomer one?' Once I had mentioned poison I knew that I was doomed. So I decided to say as much as I could while I had the opportunity. I asked Livia just how she had arranged the poisoning of my father and brothers and whether she favoured slow poisons

or quick ones. Claudius, do you think that she killed them? I'm sure of it."

"You dared ask her that? It's very probable. I think she poisoned my father and my grandfather, too," I said, "and I don't suppose they were her only victims. But I have no proof."

"Neither have I, but I enjoyed accusing her of it. I shouted at the top of my voice so that half the Palace must have heard. Livia hurried from the room and called the guard. I saw Livilla smiling. I made a grab at her throat but Castor got between us and she escaped. Then I grappled with Castor and broke his arm and knocked out two of his front teeth on the marble floor. But I did not struggle with the soldiers. It would have been undignified. Besides, they were armed. Two of them held each of my arms as Augustus thundered abuse and threats at me. He said that I am to be banished for life to the most desolate island in his dominions and that only his unnatural daughter could have borne him so unnatural a grandson. I told him that in name he was Emperor of the Romans but that in fact he was less free than the girl slave of a drunken bawdmaster, and that one day his eyes would be opened to the unnatural crimes and deceptions of his abominable wife. But meanwhile, I said, my love and loyalty to him remained unchanged."

The hue and cry was now sounding through the lower story of our house. Postumus said: "I don't want to compromise you, dear Claudius. I must not be found in your room. If I had a sword now I'd use it. Better to die fighting than to rot away on an island."

"Patience, Postumus. Yield now and your chance will come later. I promise you it will come. When Germanicus knows the truth he'll not rest until you're free again, and neither will I. If you get yourself killed it will only be a cheap triumph for Livia."

"You and Germanicus can't explain away all that evidence against me. You'd only get yourself into trouble if you tried."

"The opportunity will come, I say. Livia has had things her own way too long and she'll grow careless. She's bound to make a slip soon. She wouldn't be human if she didn't."

"I don't think she *is* human," Postumus said.

"And when Augustus suddenly realizes how he has been deceived, don't you think he'll be as merciless towards her as he was towards your mother?"

"She'll poison him first."

"Germanicus and I will see that she doesn't. We'll warn him. Don't despair, Postumus. Everything will be all right in the end. I'll write you letters as often as I can, and send you books to read. I'm not afraid of Livia. If you don't get my letters you'll know that they are being held back. Look carefully at the seventh page of any sewn-sheet book that reaches you from me. If I have a private message for you I'll write it in milk there. It's a trick that the Egyptians use. The writing is invisible until you warm it in front of a fire. Oh, listen to those doors banging. You must go now. They're at the end of the next corridor."

Tears were in his eyes. He embraced me tenderly without another word and walked quickly to the balcony. He climbed over the edge, waved his hand in farewell and slid down the old vine up which he had climbed. I heard him running away through the garden and a moment later cries and shouts from the guard.

I have no recollection at all of anything that happened for the next month or more. I was ill again: so ill that they talked of me as already dead. By the time that I began to recover, Germanicus was already at the wars and

A.D. 7 Postumus had been disinherited and banished for life. The island chosen for him was Planasia. It lay about twelve miles from Elba in the direction of Corsica and had not been inhabited within human memory. But there were some prehistoric stone huts on it which were converted into living quarters for Postumus and a barracks for the guard. Planasia was roughly triangular in shape, the longest side

being about five miles long. It was treeless and rocky and only visited by the Elba boatmen in the summer when they came to bait lobster-pots. By Augustus's orders this practice was discontinued, for fear Postumus might bribe someone and escape.

Tiberius was now Augustus's sole heir, with Germanicus and Castor to carry on the line after him—Livia's line.