

CHAPTER III

THE name "Livia" is connected with the Latin word which means Malignity. My grandmother was a consummate actress, and the outward purity of her conduct, the sharpness of her wit and the graciousness of her manners deceived nearly everybody. But nobody really liked her: malignity commands respect, not liking. She had a faculty for making ordinary easy-going people feel acutely conscious in her presence of their intellectual and moral shortcomings. I must apologize for continuing to write about Livia, but it is unavoidable: like all honest Roman histories this is written from "egg to apple": I prefer the thorough Roman method, which misses nothing, to that of Homer and the Greeks generally, who love to jump into the middle of things and then work backwards or forwards as they feel inclined. Yes, I have often had the notion of re-writing the story of Troy in Latin prose for the benefit of our poorer citizens who cannot read Greek; beginning with the egg from which Helen was hatched and continuing, chapter by chapter, to the apples eaten for dessert at the great feast in celebration of Ulysses's home-coming and victory over his wife's suitors. Where Homer is obscure or silent on any point I would naturally draw from later poets, or from the earlier Dares whose account, though full of poetical vagaries, seems to me more reliable than Homer's, because he actually took part in the war, first with the Trojans, then with the Greeks.

I once saw a strange painting on the inside of an old cedar chest which came, I believe, from somewhere in Northern Syria. The inscription, in Greek, was "Poison is Queen",

and the face of Poison, though executed over a hundred years before Livia's birth, was unmistakably the face of Livia. And in this context I must write about Marcellus, the son of Octavia by a former husband. Augustus, who was devoted to Marcellus, had adopted him as his son, giving him administrative duties greatly in advance of his years; and had married him to Julia. The common opinion at Rome was that he intended to make Marcellus his heir. Livia did not oppose the adoption, and indeed seemed genuinely to welcome it as giving her greater facility for winning Marcellus's affection and confidence. Her devotion to him seemed beyond question. It was by her advice that Augustus advanced him so rapidly in rank; and Marcellus, who knew of this, was duly grateful to her.

Livia's motive in favouring Marcellus was thought by a few shrewd observers to be that of making Agrippa jealous. Agrippa was the most important man at Rome after Augustus: a man of low birth, but Augustus's oldest friend and most successful general and admiral. Livia had always hitherto done her best to keep Agrippa's friendship for Augustus. He was ambitious, but only to a degree; he would never have presumed to contend for sovereignty with Augustus, whom he admired exceedingly, and wanted no greater glory than that of being his most trusted minister. He was, moreover, over-conscious of his humble origin, and Livia, by playing the grand patrician lady, always had the whip-hand of him. His importance to Livia and Augustus did not, however, lie only in his services, his loyalty and his popularity with the commons and the Senate. It was this: by a fiction which Livia herself had originally created, he was supposed to hold a watching brief for the nation on Augustus's political conduct. At the famous sham-debate staged in the Senate, after the overthrow of Antony between Augustus and his two friends, Agrippa and Mæcnas, Agrippa's part had been that of counselling him against assuming sovereign power; only to let his objections be overruled by the arguments of Mæcnas and the enthusiastic

demands of the Senate. Agrippa had then declared that he would faithfully serve Augustus so long as the sovereignty was wholesome and no arbitrary tyranny. He was thenceforth popularly looked to and trusted as a buttress against possible encroachments of tyranny; and what Agrippa let pass, the nation let pass. It was now thought by these same shrewd observers that Livia was playing a very dangerous game in making Agrippa jealous of Marcellus, and events were watched with great interest. Perhaps her devotion to Marcellus was a sham and her real intention was that Agrippa should be goaded into putting him out of the way. It was rumoured that a devoted member of Agrippa's family had offered to pick a quarrel with Marcellus and kill him: but that Agrippa, though he was no less jealous than Livia had intended him to be, was too honourable to accept such a base suggestion.

It was generally assumed that Augustus had made Marcellus his chief heir and that Marcellus would not only inherit his immense wealth but the monarchy—for how else can I write of it but as that?—into the bargain. Agrippa therefore let it be known that while he was devoted to Augustus and had never regretted his decision to support his authority, there was one thing that he would not permit, as a patriotic citizen, and that was that the monarchy should become hereditary. But Marcellus was now almost as popular as Agrippa, and many young men of rank and family to whom the question "Monarchy or Republic?" seemed already an academic one tried to ingratiate themselves with him, hoping for important honours from him when he succeeded Augustus. This general readiness to welcome a continuance of the monarchy seemed to please Livia, but she privately announced that, in the lamentable case of the death or incapacity of Augustus, the immediate conduct of State affairs, until such time as further arrangements should be made by decrees of the Senate, must be entrusted to hands more experienced than those of Marcellus. Yet Marcellus was such a favourite of Augustus that, though Livia's private

announcements usually ended as public edicts, nobody paid much attention to her on this occasion; and more and more people courted Marcellus.

The shrewd observers wondered how Livia would meet this new situation; but luck seemed to be with her. Augustus caught a slight chill which took an unexpected turn, with fevers and vomiting: Livia prepared his food with a.c. 23 her own hands during this illness, but his stomach was so delicate that he could keep nothing down. He was growing weaker and weaker and felt at last that he was on the point of death. He had often been asked to name his successor, but had not done so for fear of the political consequences, and also because the thought of his own death was extremely distasteful to him. Now he felt that it was his duty to name someone, and asked Livia to advise him. He said that sickness had robbed him of all power of judgment; he would choose whatever successor, within reason, she suggested. So she made the decision for him, and he agreed to it. She then summoned to his bedside his fellow-Consul, the City magistrates and certain representative senators and knights. He was too weak to say anything but handed the Consul a register of the naval and military forces and a statement of the public revenues, and then beckoned to Agrippa and gave him his signet ring; which was as much as to say that Agrippa was to succeed him, though with the close cooperation of the Consuls. This came as a great surprise. Everyone had expected that Marcellus would be chosen.

And from this moment Augustus began mysteriously to recover: the fever abated and his stomach accepted food. The credit for his cure went, however, not to Livia who continued attending to him personally, but to a certain doctor called Musa who had a harmless fad about cold lotions and cold potions. Augustus was so grateful to Musa for his supposed services that he gave him his own weight in gold pieces, which the Senate doubled. Musa was also, though a freedman, advanced to the rank of knight, which gave him the right to wear a gold ring and become a candi-

date for public office; and a still more extravagant decree was passed by the Senate, granting exemption from taxes to the whole medical profession.

Marcellus was plainly mortified at not being declared Augustus's heir. He was very young, only in his twentieth year. Augustus's previous favours had given him an exaggerated sense both of his talents and of his political importance. He tried to carry the matter off by being pointedly rude to Agrippa at a public banquet. Agrippa with difficulty kept his temper; but that there was no sequel to the incident encouraged Marcellus's supporters to believe that Agrippa was afraid of him. They even told each other that if Augustus did not change his mind within a year or two Marcellus would usurp the Imperial power. They grew so rowdy and boastful, Marcellus doing little to check them, that frequent clashes occurred between them and the party of Agrippa. Agrippa was most vexed by the insolence of this young puppy, as he called him—he who had borne most of the chief offices of state and fought a number of successful campaigns. But his vexation was mixed with alarm. The impression created by these incidents was that Marcellus and he were indecently wrangling as to who should wear Augustus's signet ring after he was dead.

He was ready to make almost any sacrifice to avoid seeming to play such a part. Marcellus was the offender and Agrippa wished to put the whole burden on him. He decided to withdraw from Rome. He went to Augustus and asked to be appointed Governor of Syria. When Augustus asked him the reason for his unexpected request he explained that he thought he could, in that capacity, drive a valuable bargain with the King of Parthia. He could persuade the King to return the regimental Eagles and the prisoners captured from the Romans thirty years before, in exchange for the King's son whom Augustus was holding captive at Rome. He said nothing about his quarrel with Marcellus. Augustus, who had himself been greatly disturbed by it, torn between old friendship for Agrippa and indulgent paternal love for

Marcellus, did not allow himself to consider how generously Agrippa was behaving, for that would have been a confession of his own weakness, and so made no reference to the matter either. He granted Agrippa's request with alacrity, saying how important it was to get the Eagles back, and the captives—if any of them were still alive after so long—and asked how soon he would be ready to start. Agrippa was hurt, misunderstanding his manner. He thought that Augustus wanted to get rid of him, really believing that he was quarrelling with Marcellus about the succession. He thanked him for granting his request, coldly protested his loyalty and friendship, and said that he was ready to sail the following day.

He did not go to Syria. He went no farther than the island of Lesbos, sending his lieutenants ahead to administer the province for him. He knew that his stay at Lesbos would be read as a sort of banishment incurred because of Marcellus. He did not visit the province, because if he had done so it would have given the Marcellans a handle against him: they would have said that he had gone to the East in order to gather an army together to march against Rome. But he flattered himself that Augustus would need his services before long; and fully believed that Marcellus was planning to usurp the monarchy. Lesbos was conveniently near Rome. He did not forget his commission: he opened negotiations, through intermediaries, with the King of Parthia but did not expect to conclude them for a while. It takes a deal of time and patience to drive a good bargain with an Eastern monarch.

Marcellus was elected to a City magistracy, his first official appointment, and made this the occasion for a magnificent display of public Games. He not only tented in the theatres themselves, against sun and rain, and hung them with splendid tapestries but made a gigantic multi-coloured marquee of the whole Market Place. The effect was very gorgeous, particularly from the inside when the sun shone through. In this tent-making he used a fabulous amount of

red, yellow and green cloth, which when the Games were over was cut up and distributed to the citizens for clothes and bed-linen. Huge numbers of wild beasts were imported from Africa for the combats in the amphitheatre, including many lions, and there was a fight between fifty German captives and an equal number of black warriors from Morocco. Augustus himself contributed lavishly towards the expenses; and so did Octavia, as Marcellus's mother. When Octavia appeared in the ceremonial procession she was greeted with such resounding applause that Livia could hardly restrain tears of anger and jealousy. Two days later Marcellus fell sick. His symptoms were precisely the same as those of Augustus in his recent illness, so naturally Musa was sent for again. He had become excessively rich and famous, charging as much as a thousand gold pieces for a single professional visit, and making a favour of it at that. In all cases where sickness had not taken too strong a hold on his patients his mere name was enough to bring about an immediate cure. The credit went to the cold lotions and cold potions, the secret prescriptions for which he refused to communicate to anyone. Augustus's confidence in Musa's powers was so great that he made light of Marcellus's sickness and the Games continued. But somehow, in spite of the unremitting attention of Livia and the very coldest lotions and potions that Musa could prescribe, Marcellus died. The grief of both Octavia and Augustus was unbounded and the death was mourned as a public calamity. There were, however, a good many level-headed people who did not regret Marcellus's disappearance. There would certainly have been civil war again between him and Agrippa if Augustus had died and he had attempted to step into his place: now Agrippa was the only possible successor. But this was reckoning without Livia, whose fixed intention it was, in the event of Augustus's death—Claudius, Claudius, you said that you would not mention Livia's motives but only record her acts—whose fixed intention it was, in the event of Augustus's death, to continue ruling the Empire through

my uncle Tiberius, with my father in support. She would arrange for them to be adopted as Augustus's heirs.

Marcellus's death left Julia free for Tiberius to marry, and all would have gone well with Livia's plans had there not been a dangerous outbreak of political unrest at Rome, the mob clamouring for a restoration of the Republic. When Livia tried to address them from the Palace steps they pelted her with rotten eggs and filth. Augustus happened to be away on a tour of the Eastern provinces, in company with Mæcenas, and had reached Athens when the news arrived. Livia wrote shortly and in haste that the situation in the City could not be worse and that Agrippa's help must be secured at any price. Augustus at once summoned Agrippa from Lesbos and begged him, for friendship's sake, to return with him to Rome and restore public confidence. But Agrippa had been nursing his grudge too long to be grateful for this summons. He stood on his dignity. In three years Augustus had written him only three letters and those in a hard official tone; and after Marcellus's death should certainly have recalled him. Why should he help Augustus now? It was Livia, as a matter of fact, who had been responsible for this estrangement; she had miscalculated the political situation by dropping Agrippa too soon. She had even hinted to Augustus that Agrippa, though absent in Lesbos, knew more than most people about Marcellus's mysterious and fatal illness; someone, she said, had told her that Agrippa, when he heard the news, had shown no surprise and considerable complacency. Agrippa told Augustus that he had been so long away from Rome that he was out of touch with City politics and did not feel capable of undertaking what was asked of him. Augustus, fearing that Agrippa, if he went to Rome in his present mood, would be more inclined to put himself forward as a champion of popular liberties than to support the Imperial government, dismissed him with words of gracious regret and hurriedly summoned Mæcenas to ask his advice. Mæcenas wanted permission to talk to Agrippa freely on Augustus's behalf and undertook to find out from

him exactly on what terms he would do what was wanted of him. Augustus begged Mæcenas for God's sake to do so, "as quick as boiled asparagus" (a favourite expression of his). So Mæcenas took Agrippa aside and said: "Now, old friend, what is it that you want? I realize that you think you have been badly treated, but I assure you that Augustus has a right to think himself equally injured by you. Can't you see how badly you behaved towards him, by not being frank? It was an insult both to his justice and to his friendship for you. If you had explained that Marcellus's faction put you in a very uncomfortable position and that Marcellus himself had insulted you—I swear to you that Augustus never knew about this until just the other day—he would have done all in his power to right matters. My frank opinion is that you have behaved like a sulky child—and he has treated you like a father who won't be bullied by that sort of behaviour. You say that he wrote you very cold letters. Were your own, then, written in such affectionate language? And what sort of a good-bye had you given him? I want to mediate between the two of you now, because if this breach continues it will be the ruin of us all. You both love each other dearly, as it is only right that the two greatest living Romans should. Augustus has told me that he is ready, as soon as you show your old openness to him, to renew the friendship on the same terms as before, *or even more intimate ones.*"

"He said that?"

"His very words. May I tell him how grieved you are that you offended him, and may I explain that it was a misunderstanding—that you left Rome, thinking that he was aware of Marcellus's insult to you at the banquet? And that now you are anxious, on your side, to make up for past failures in friendship and that you rely on him to meet you half-way?"

Agrippa said: "Mæcenas, you are a fine fellow and a true friend. Tell Augustus I am his to command as always."

Mæcenas said: "I shall tell him that with the greatest pleasure. And I shall add, as my own opinion, that it would

not be safe to send you back to the City now, to restore order without some outstanding mark of personal confidence."

Then Mæcenas went to Augustus. "I smoothed him down nicely. He'll do anything you want. But he wants to believe that you really love him, like a child jealous of his father's love for another child. I think that the only thing that would really satisfy him would be for you to let him marry Julia."

Augustus had to think quickly. He remembered that Agrippa and his wife, who was Marcellus's sister, had been on bad terms ever since the quarrel with Marcellus, and that Agrippa was supposed to be in love with Julia. He wished Livia were present to advise him, but there was no escape from an instant decision: if he offended Agrippa now he would never recover his support. Livia had written "at any price": so he was free to make what arrangements he pleased. He sent for Agrippa again, and Mæcenas staged a dignified scene of reconciliation. Augustus said that if Agrippa would consent to marry his daughter, it would be proof to him that the friendship which he valued before any other in the world was established on a secure foundation. Agrippa wept tears of joy and asked pardon for his shortcomings. He would try to be worthy of Augustus's loving generosity.

Agrippa returned to Rome with Augustus, and immediately divorced his wife and married Julia. The marriage was so popular and its celebration so magnificently lavish that the political disturbances immediately subsided. Agrippa won great credit for Augustus, too, by carrying through the negotiations for the return of the Eagle standards, which were formally handed over to Tiberius as Augustus's personal representative. The Eagles were sacred objects, more truly sacred to Roman hearts than any marble statues of Gods. A few captives returned, too, but after thirty-two years of absence they were hardly worth welcoming back; most of them preferred to remain in Parthia, where they had settled down and married native women.

My grandmother Livia was far from pleased with the

bargain made with Agrippa—the only cheerful side of which was the dishonour done to Octavia by the divorce of her daughter. But she concealed her feelings. It was nine years before Agrippa's services could be spared. Then he died suddenly at his country house. Augustus was away in Greece at the time, so there was no inquest on the body. Agrippa left a large number of children behind him, three boys and two girls, as Augustus's heirs-at-law; it would be difficult for Livia to set their claims aside in favour of her own sons. B.C. 12

However, Tiberius married Julia, who had made things easy for Livia by falling in love with him and begging Augustus to use his influence with Tiberius on her behalf. Augustus consented only because Julia threatened suicide if he refused to help her. Tiberius himself hated having to marry Julia, but did not dare refuse. He was obliged to divorce his own wife, Vipsania, Agrippa's daughter by a former marriage, whom he passionately loved. Once when he met her accidentally afterwards in the street he followed her with his eyes in such a hopeless longing way that Augustus, when he heard of it, gave orders that, for decency's sake, this must not happen again. Special look-outs must be kept by the officers of both households to avoid an encounter. Vipsania married, not long afterwards, an ambitious young noble called Gallus. And before I forget it, I must mention my father's marriage to my mother, Antonia, the younger daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia. It had taken place in the year of Augustus's illness and Marcellus's death.

My uncle Tiberius was one of the bad Claudians. He was morose, reserved and cruel, but there had been three people whose influence had checked these elements in his nature. First there was my father, one of the best Claudians, cheerful, open and generous; next there was Augustus, a very honest, merry, kindly man who disliked Tiberius but treated him generously for his mother's sake; and lastly there was Vipsania. My father's influence was removed, or lessened, when they were both of an age to do their military service

and were sent on campaign to different parts of the Empire. Then came the separation from Vipsania, and this was followed by a coolness with Augustus, who was offended by my uncle's ill-concealed distaste for Julia. With these three influences removed he gradually went altogether to the bad.

I should at this point, I think, describe his personal appearance. He was a tall, dark-haired, fair-skinned, heavily-built man with a magnificent pair of shoulders, and hands so strong that he could crack a walnut, or bore a tough-skinned green apple through, with thumb and forefinger. If he had not been so slow in his movements he would have made a champion boxer: he once killed a comrade in a friendly bout—bare-fisted, not with the usual metal boxing-gloves—with a blow on the side of the head that cracked his skull. He walked with his neck thrust slightly forward and his eyes on the ground. His face would have been handsome if it had not been disfigured by so many pimples, and if his eyes had not been so prominent, and if he had not worn an almost perpetual frown. His statues make him extremely handsome, because they leave out these defects. He spoke little, and that very slowly, so that in conversation with him one always felt tempted to finish his sentences for him and answer them in the same breath. But, when he pleased, he was an impressive public speaker. He went bald early in life except at the back of his head, where he grew his hair long, a fashion of the ancient nobility. He was never ill.

Tiberius, unpopular as he was in Roman society, was nevertheless an extremely successful general. He revived various ancient disciplinary severities, but since he did not spare himself when on campaign, seldom sleeping in a tent, eating and drinking no better than the men and always charging at their head in battle, they preferred to serve under him than under some good-humoured, easy-going commander in whose leadership they did not have the same confidence. Tiberius never gave his men a smile or a word of praise and often overmarched and overworked them.

"Let them hate me," he once said, "so long as they obey me." He kept the colonels and regimental officers in as strict order as the men, so there were no complaints of his partiality. Service under Tiberius was not unprofitable: he usually contrived to capture and sack the enemy's camps and cities. He fought successful wars in Armenia, Parthia, Germany, Spain, Dalmatia, the Alps, and France.

My father was, as I say, one of the best Claudians. He was as strong as his brother, far better looking, quicker of speech and movement and by no means less successful as a general. He treated all soldiers as Roman citizens and therefore as his equals, except in rank and education. He hated having to inflict punishment on them: he gave orders that as far as possible all offences against discipline should be dealt with by the offender's own comrades, whom he assumed to be jealous for the good name of their section or company. He gave it out that if they found that any offence was beyond their corrective powers, for he did not allow them to kill a culprit or incapacitate him for his daily military duties, it should be referred to the regimental colonel; but so far as possible he wished his men to be their own judges. The captains might flog, by permission of their regimental colonels, but only in cases where the offence, such as cowardice in battle or theft from a comrade, showed a baseness of character that made flogging appropriate; but he ordered that a man once flogged must never afterwards serve as a combatant, he must be degraded to the transport or clerical staff. Any soldier who considered that he had been unjustly sentenced by his comrades or his captain might appeal to him; but he thought it unlikely that such sentences would need to be revised. This system worked admirably, because my father was such a fine soldier that he inspired the troops to a virtue of which other commanders did not believe them capable. But it can be understood how dangerous it was for troops who had been handled in this way to be commanded afterwards by any ordinary general. The gift of independence once granted cannot be lightly

taken away again. There was always trouble when troops who had served under my father happened to be drafted for service under my uncle. It happened the other way about too: troops who had served under my uncle reacted with scorn and suspicion to my father's disciplinary system. Their custom had been to shield each other's crimes and to pride themselves on their cunning in avoiding detection; and since under my uncle a man could be flogged, for example, for addressing an officer without being first addressed, or for speaking with too great frankness, or for behaving independently in any way, it was an honour rather than a disgrace for a soldier to be able to show the marks of the lash on his back.

My father's greatest victories were in the Alps, France, the Low Countries, but especially in Germany, where his name will, I think, never be forgotten. He was always in the thick of the fighting. His ambition was to perform a feat which had only been performed twice in Roman history, namely, as general to kill the opposing general with his own hands and strip him of his arms. He was many times very close to success but his prey always escaped him. Either the fellow galloped off the field or surrendered instead of fighting, or some officious private soldier got the blow in first. Veterans telling me stories of my father have often chuckled admiringly: "Oh, Sir, it used to do our hearts good to see your father on his black horse playing hide-and-seek in the battle with one of those German chieftains. He'd be forced to cut down nine or ten of the bodyguard sometimes, tough men too, before he got near the standard, and by then the wily bird would be flown." The proudest boast of men who had served under my father was that he was the first Roman general who had marched the full length of the Rhine from Switzerland to the North Sea.