**The Reign of Servius Tullius (Livy, *ab urbe condita*, I.XLVI-XLVIII)**

*According to tradition, Servius gained his name due to being born a slave into Tarquinius Priscus’ (the fifth king of Rome’s) household. Livy strongly doubts this tradition because Servius went on to be given the king’s daughter, Tarquinia, in marriage. Surely a king of Rome would never allow his daughter to marry a slave or a descendant of a slave.*

*Legend has it that when Servius was sleeping as a boy, a flame was seen above his head, which indicated divine favour. The king’s wife, Tanaquil, seem to favour him in particular, and above her own sons. Thus, when the sons of Ancus Marcius (the fourth king of Rome) tried to have Tarquinius Priscus assassinated, she shut up her wounded husband and kept his condition secret, whilst announcing that Servius had been appointed regent by her husband. Priscus died and the senate elected Servius as his successor. Meanwhile, the sons of Ancus fled to the Volscian town of Suessa Pometia*. *But the sons of Tarquinius Priscus remained in Rome, although overlooked in the succession…*

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Servius had by this time a definite prescriptive right to the supreme power. Still, hearing that the young Tarquinius now and then threw out hint that he was reigning without the consent of the people, he proceeded to gain the goodwill of the commons by dividing among all the citizens the land obtained by conquest from the enemy; after which he made bold to call upon the people to vote whether he should be their ruler, and was declared king with such unanimity as none of his predecessors had experienced. Yet the circumstance did not lessen Tarquinius’s hopes of obtaining the kingship. On the contrary, perceiving that the bestowal of land on the plebeians was in opposition to the wishes of the senate, he felt that he had got an opportunity of vilifying Servius to the Fathers and of increasing his own influence in the senate-house. He was a hot-headed youth himself, and he had at hand, in the person of Tullia his wife, one who goaded on his restless spirit. For the royal house of Rome produced an example of tragic guilt, as others had done, in order that loathing of kings might hasten the coming of liberty, and that the end of reigning might come in that reign which was the fruit of crime. This Lucius Tarquinius—whether he was the son or the grandson of King Tarquinius Priscus is uncertain; but, following the majority of historians, I would designate him son—had a brother, Arruns Tarquinius, a youth of a gentle disposition. These two, as has been said before, had married the two Tullias, daughters of the king, themselves of widely different characters. Chance had so ordered matters that the two violent natures should not be united in wedlock, thanks doubtless to the good fortune of the Roman People, that the reign of Servius might be prolonged and the traditions of the state become established. It was distressing to the headstrong Tullia that her husband should be destitute of ambition and enterprise. With her whole soul she turned from him to his brother; him she admired, him she called a man and a prince: she despised her sister because, having got a man for a mate, she lacked a woman’s daring. Their similarity soon brought these two together, as is generally the case, for evil is strongly drawn to evil; but it was the woman who took the lead in all the mischief. Having become addicted to clandestine meetings with another’s husband, she spared no terms of insult when speaking of her own husband to his brother, or of her sister to that sister’s husband. She urged that it would have been juster for her to be unmarried and for him to lack a wife than for them to be united to their inferiors and be compelled to languish through the cowardice of others. If the gods had given her the man she deserved she would soon have seen in her own house the royal power which she now saw in her father’s. It was not long before she had inspired the young man with her own temerity, and, having made room in their respective houses for a new marriage, by deaths which followed closely upon one another, they were joined together in nuptials which Servius rather tolerated than approved.

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From that moment the insecurity of the aged Tullius and the menace to his authority increased with each succeeding day. For the woman was already looking forward from one crime to another, nor would she allow her husband any rest by night or day, lest the murders they had done before should be without effect. She had not wanted a man just to be called a wife, just to endure servitude with him in silence; she had wanted one who should deem himself worthy of the sovereignty, who bethought him that he was the son of Tarquinius Priscus, who preferred the possession of the kingship to the hope of it. “If you are he,” she cried, “whom I thought I was marrying, I call you both man and king; if not, then I have so far changed for the worse, in that crime is added, in your case, to cowardice. Come, rouse yourself! You are not come, like your father, from Corinth or Tarquinii, that you must make yourself king in a strange land; the gods of your family and your ancestors, your father’s image, the royal palace, with its throne, and the name of Tarquinius create and proclaim you king. Else, if you have no courage for this, why do you cheat the citizens? why do you suffer yourself to be looked on as a prince? Away with you to Tarquinii or Corinth! Sink back into the rank of your family, more like your brother than your father!” With these and other taunts she excited the young man’s ambition. Nor could she herself submit with patience to the thought that Tanaquil, a foreign woman, had exerted her spirit to such purpose as twice in succession to confer the royal power—upon her husband first, and again upon her son-in-law—if Tullia, the daughter of a king, were to count for nothing in bestowing and withdrawing a throne. Inspired by this woman’s frenzy Tarquinius began to go about and solicit support, especially among the heads of the lesser families, whom he reminded of his father’s kindness to them, and desired their favour in return; the young men he attracted by gifts; both by the great things he promised to do himself, and by slandering the king as well, he everywhere strengthened his interest. At length, when it seemed that the time for action was now come, he surrounded himself with a body of armed men and burst into the Forum. Then, amidst the general consternation which ensued, he seated himself on the throne in front of the Curia, and commanded, by the mouth of a herald, that the senators should come to King Tarquinius at the senate-house. They at once assembled: some of them already prepared beforehand, others afraid that they might be made to suffer for it if they did not come; for they were astounded at this strange and wonderful sight, and supposed that Servius was utterly undone. Tarquinius then went back to the very beginning of Servius’s family and abused the king for a slave and a slave-woman’s son who, after the shameful death of his own father, Tarquinius Priscus, had seized the power; there had been no observance of the interregnum, as on former occasions; there had been no election held; not by the votes of the people had sovereignty come to him, not with the confirmation of the Fathers, but by a woman’s gift. Such having been his birth, and such his appointment to the kingship, he had been an abettor of the lowest class of society, to which he himself belonged, and his hatred of the nobility possessed by others had led him to plunder the leading citizens of their land and divide it amongst the dregs of the populace. All the burdens which had before been borne in common he had laid upon the nation’s foremost men. He had instituted the census that he might hold up to envy the fortunes of the wealthy, and make them available, when he chose to draw upon them, for largesses to the destitute.

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In the midst of this harangue Servius, who had been aroused by the alarming news, came up and immediately called out in a loud voice from the vestibule of the Curia: “What means this, Tarquinius? With what assurance have you dared, while I live, to convene the Fathers or to sit in my chair?” Tarquinius answered truculently that it was his own father’s seat he occupied; that the king’s son was a fitter successor to his kingdom than a slave was; that Tullius had long enough been suffered to mock his masters and insult them. Shouts arose from the partisans of each, and the people began to rush into the senate-house; it was clear that he would be king who won the day. Tarquinius was now compelled by sheer necessity to go on boldly to the end. Being much superior to Servius in youth and strength, he seized him by the middle, and bearing him out of the senate-house, flung him down the steps. He then went back into the Curia to hold the senate together. The king’s servitors and companions fled. The king himself, half fainting, was making his way home without the royal attendants, when the men whom Tarquinius had sent in pursuit of the fugitive came up with him and killed him. It is believed, inasmuch as it is not inconsistent with the rest of her wickedness, that this deed was suggested by Tullia. It is agreed, at all events, that she was driven in her carriage into the Forum, and nothing abashed at the crowd of men, summoned her husband from the Curia and was the first to hail him king. Tarquinius bade her withdraw from so turbulent a scene. On her way home she had got to the top of the Vicus Cyprius, where the shrine of Diana recently stood, and was bidding her driver turn to the right into the Clivus Urbius, to take her to the Esquiline Hill, when the man gave a start of terror, and pulling up the reins pointed out to his mistress the prostrate form of the murdered Servius. Horrible and inhuman was the crime that is said to have ensued, which the place commemorates—men call it the Street of Crime—for there, crazed by the avenging spirits of her sister and her sister’s husband, they say that Tullia drove her carriage over her father’s corpse, and, herself contaminated and defiled, carried away on her vehicle some of her murdered father’s blood to her own and her husband’s penates, whose anger was the cause that the evil beginning of this reign was, at no long date, followed by a similar end.

Servius Tullius had ruled forty-four years, so well that even a good and moderate successor would have found it hard to emulate him. But there was this to enhance his renown, that just and lawful kingship perished with him. Yet, mild and moderate though his sway was, some writers state that he had intended to resign it, as being a government by one man, had not the crime of one of his family interrupted his plans for the liberation of his country.

