**Livy: The Rape of Lucretia, from the History of Rome**

**Introduction:** Titus Livius (c. 59 BCE – 17 CE) was a Roman historian who wrote the foundational history of Rome, *Ad Urbe Condita* (From the Founding of the City). This monumental work traces the history of the Roman Republic from its foundations through to the present moments of his own lifetime. One thing to keep in mind while reading Livy’s history is the historical context of its writing—meaning the period in which it was being written and read and the influence the events of that period may have had on his writing—as well as his own personal relationships to those in power and his own personal views of the successes and strengths of Rome and his viewpoint of its failings. In other words, you will want to consider his bias while reading this.

Questions to consider: How did the events, especially Augustan reforms on social and moral values, taking place during the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire shape Livy’s perspective of the past? How does Livy portray the family relationships? Who are portrayed as ideal good characters? Who are portrayed as villains?

**Book 57** [According to Livy the King of the Romans and his army were currently attacking the neighboring Ardea in search of riches] …

As it commonly happens in standing camps, the war being rather tedious than violent, furloughs were easily obtained, more so by the officers, however, than the common soldiers. The young princes sometimes spent their leisure hours in feasting and entertainments. One day as they were drinking in the tent of Sextus Tarquin, where Collatinus Tarquinius, the son of Egerius, was also at supper, mention was made of wives. Every one commended his own in an extravagant manner, till a dispute arising about it, Collatinus said, "There was no occasion for words, that it might be known in a few hours how far his Lucretia excelled all the rest. If then, added he, we have any share of the vigour of youth, let us mount our horses and examine the behaviour of our wives; that must be most satisfactory to every one, which shall meet his eyes on the unexpected arrival of[Pg 75] the husband." They were heated with wine; "Come on, then," say all. They immediately galloped to Rome, where they arrived in the dusk of the evening. From thence they went to Collatia, where they find Lucretia, not like the king's daughters-in-law, whom they had seen spending their time in luxurious entertainments with their equals, but though at an advanced time of night, employed at her wool, sitting in the middle of the house amid her maids working around her. The merit of the contest regarding the ladies was assigned to Lucretia. Her husband on his arrival, and the Tarquinii, were kindly received; the husband, proud of his victory, gives the young princes a polite invitation. There the villanous passion for violating Lucretia by force seizes Sextus Tarquin; both her beauty, and her approved purity, act as incentives. And then, after this youthful frolic of the night, they return to the camp.

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A few days after, without the knowledge of Collatinus, Sextus came to Collatia with one attendant only; where, being kindly received by them, as not being aware of his intention, after he had been conducted after supper into the guests' chamber, burning with passion, when every thing around seemed sufficiently secure, and all fast asleep, he comes to Lucretia, as she lay asleep, with a naked sword, and with his left hand pressing down the woman's breast, he says, "Be silent, Lucretia; I am Sextus Tarquin; I have a sword in my hand; you shall die, if you utter a word." When awaking terrified from sleep, the woman beheld no aid, impending death nigh at hand; then Tarquin acknowledged his passion, entreated, mixed threats with entreaties, tried the female's mind in every possible way. When he saw her inflexible, and that she was not moved even by the terror of death, he added to terror the threat of dishonour; he says that he will lay a murdered slave naked by her side when dead, so that she may be said to have been slain in infamous adultery. When by the terror of this disgrace his lust, as it were victorious, had overcome her inflexible chastity, and Tarquin had departed, exulting in having triumphed over a lady's honour, Lucretia, in melancholy distress at so dreadful a misfortune, despatches the same messenger to Rome to her father, and to Ardea to her husband, that they would come each with one trusty friend; that it was necessary to do so, and that[Pg 76] quickly.[64] Sp. Lucretius comes with P. Valerius, the son of Volesus, Collatinus with L. Junius Brutus, with whom, as he was returning to Rome, he happened to be met by his wife's messenger. They find Lucretia sitting in her chamber in sorrowful dejection. On the arrival of her friends the tears burst from her eyes; and to her husband, on his inquiry "whether all was right," she says, "By no means, for what can be right with a woman who has lost her honour? The traces of another man are on your bed, Collatinus. But the body only has been violated, the mind is guiltless; death shall be my witness. But give me your right hands, and your honour, that the adulterer shall not come off unpunished. It is Sextus Tarquin, who, an enemy in the guise of a guest, has borne away hence a triumph fatal to me, and to himself, if you are men." They all pledge their honour; they attempt to console her, distracted as she was in mind, by turning away the guilt from her, constrained by force, on the perpetrator of the crime; that it is the mind sins, not the body; and that where intention was wanting guilt could not be. "It is for you to see," says she, "what is due to him. As for me, though I acquit myself of guilt, from punishment I do not discharge myself; nor shall any woman survive her dishonour pleading the example of Lucretia." The knife, which she kept concealed beneath her garment, she plunges into her heart, and falling forward on the wound, she dropped down expiring. The husband and father shriek aloud.

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Brutus, while they were overpowered with grief, having drawn the knife out of the wound, and holding it up before him reeking with blood, said, "By this blood, most pure before the pollution of royal villany, I swear, and I call you, O gods, to witness my oath, that I shall pursue Lucius Tarquin the Proud, his wicked wife, and all their race, with fire, sword, and all other means in my power; nor shall I ever suffer them or any other to reign at Rome." Then he gave the knife to Collatinus, and after him to Lucretius and Valerius, who were surprised at such extraordinary mind in the breast of Brutus. However, they all take the oath as they were directed, and converting their sorrow into rage, follow Brutus as their leader, who from that time ceased not to so[Pg 77]licit them to abolish the regal power. They carry Lucretia's body from her own house, and convey it into the forum; and assemble a number of persons by the strangeness and atrocity of the extraordinary occurrence, as usually happens. They complain, each for himself, of the royal villany and violence. Both the grief of the father moves them, as also Brutus, the reprover of their tears and unavailing complaints, and their adviser to take up arms against those who dared to treat them as enemies, as would become men and Romans. Each most spirited of the youth voluntarily presents himself in arms; the rest of the youth follow also. From thence, after leaving an adequate garrison at the gates at Collatia, and having appointed sentinels, so that no one might give intelligence of the disturbance to the king's party, the rest set out for Rome in arms under the conduct of Brutus. When they arrived there, the armed multitude cause panic and confusion wherever they go. Again, when they see the principal men of the state placing themselves at their head, they think that, whatever it may be, it was not without good reason. Nor does the heinousness of the circumstance excite less violent emotions at Rome than it had done at Collatia; accordingly they run from all parts of the city into the forum, whither, when they came, the public crier summoned them to attend the tribune of the celeres, with which office Brutus happened to be at that time vested. There an harangue was delivered by him, by no means of that feeling and capacity which had been counterfeited up to that day, concerning the violence and lust of Sextus Tarquin, the horrid violation of Lucretia and her lamentable death, the bereavement of Tricipitinus, to whom the cause of his daughter's death was more exasperating and deplorable than the death itself. To this was added the haughty insolence of the king himself, and the sufferings and toils of the people, buried in the earth in cleansing sinks and sewers; that the Romans, the conquerors of all the surrounding states, instead of warriors had become labourers and stone-cutters. The unnatural murder of king Servius Tullius was dwelt on, and his daughter's driving over the body of her father in her impious chariot, and the gods who avenge parents were invoked by him. By stating these and other, I suppose, more exasperating circumstances, which though by no means easily detailed by writers, the heinousness of the case suggested at[Pg 78] the time, he persuaded the multitude, already incensed, to deprive the king of his authority, and to order the banishment of L. Tarquin with his wife and children. He himself, having selected and armed some of the young men, who readily gave in their names, set out for Ardea to the camp to excite the army against the king: the command in the city he leaves to Lucretius, who had been already appointed prefect of the city by the king. During this tumult Tullia fled from her house, both men and women cursing her wherever she went, and invoking on her the furies the avengers of parents.

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News of these transactions having reached the camp, when the king, alarmed at this sudden revolution, was going to Rome to quell the commotions, Brutus, for he had notice of his approach, turned out of the way, that he might not meet him; and much about the same time Brutus and Tarquin arrived by different routes, the one at Ardea, the other at Rome. The gates were shut against Tarquin, and an act of banishment passed against him; the deliverer of the state the camp received with great joy, and the king's sons were expelled. Two of them followed their father, and went into banishment to Cære, a city of Etruria. Sextus Tarquin, having gone to Gabii, as to his own kingdom, was slain by the avengers of the old feuds, which he had raised against himself by his rapines and murders. Lucius Tarquin the Proud reigned twenty-five years: the regal form of government continued from the building of the city to this period of its deliverance, two hundred and forty-four years. Two consuls, viz. Lucius Junius Brutus and Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, were elected by the prefect of the city at the comitia by centuries, according to the commentaries of Servius Tullius.

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