



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

STORIES FROM  
THE HISTORY OF ROME

Emily Beesly

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# STORIES FROM THE HISTORY OF ROME

*by*

Emily Beesly





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## PREFACE

**T**HE writer of this little book was not satisfied that her children should hear nothing but fairy tales and the stories of nursery life, now so popular. But she could find nothing else fit to read to them. There are, indeed, plenty of story-books drawing their materials from history, and professing to be intended for children. But they are not suited to very young children. They abound in words and ideas which a child of four or six years old not only does not understand, but cannot be made to understand. The writer, however, believed that it was quite possible to put portions of Livy and Plutarch into language which should need little or no explanation even to children of that age. She accordingly made the experiment. One story after another was written and read to her little boys. Whenever she discovered that a word or idea was unintelligible to them, she took pains to simplify it. She found that they thoroughly enjoyed these old tales from Roman history, and liked to hear them repeated again and again. She has thought, there-

fore, that if published they might perhaps supply a want that may have been felt by other parents.

It was necessary that the stories should be such as would interest little children. But the writer has also selected them with a view to illustrate the two sentiments most characteristic of Roman manners—duty to parents and duty to country. She has, moreover, tried to indicate that the latter of these sentiments took precedence of the former. A healthy moral lesson is thus conveyed, while at the same time the most essential feature of the Roman civilization is impressed on the memory.

Probably no one will be found to raise the dull objection that many of these tales are not strictly true. Being typical of Roman manners, they are true in a more real sense than many a well attested but less, characteristic fact. They undoubtedly helped to create in Romans those virtues which they professed to record. To the young, aye, and to older persons, it is more important to have heard that Brutus beheaded his sons and that Mucius thrust his hand into the flame, than to be acquainted with the most approved theories as to the origin of the Plebs or the functions of the three Comitia. May it be long before these old legends are banished from Roman history in the name of a pedantic and unprofitable accuracy!

## THE BUILDING OF ROME

**T**HERE once reigned in a town called Alba in Italy a king whose name was Numitor. He had a brother called Amulius, who was a proud and wicked man, and could not bear that his elder brother should be king over him. So Amulius plotted against his brother. He got together a number of men who were as bad and cruel as himself, and they attacked Numitor and drove him from his throne, and made Amulius king in his stead. They took the sons of Numitor, and his daughter Rhea Silvia, and killed them. Then Amulius seized the two little sons of Rhea Silvia, who were still only babies; he gave them to his soldiers, and told them to throw the poor little boys into the River Tiber.

“Then,” thought he, “they will be drowned. There will be none of my brother’s children left to trouble me, and I shall be king all my life.”

The soldiers took the two babies in their cradle, lying side by side fast asleep, and carried them to the river.

Now, there had been a great deal of rain, and the

Tiber had overflowed its banks, so that the men could not put the children in the deep part of the river, but only at the edge, where the water was shallow. However, they thought that they would have obeyed the orders of Amulius if they left the little boys there. So they put the cradle down in the water, and went away.

But the sun was shining, and the waters were sinking fast; soon the dry land began to show itself; the cradle stood still, and the waters left it on the bank and ran back into their bed.

There lived not far from the Tiber a shepherd whose name was Faustulus. He was walking by the side of the river, when he saw a cradle lying under a fig-tree, and beside the cradle stood a great she-wolf. Faustulus was very much astonished, and ran quickly to see what this might mean. When he got near, he saw that in the cradle were two beautiful little baby boys, and the wolf was feeding them with her milk, just as if they had been her own little ones. But when she saw Faustulus, she fled away into the woods; and he took the children and carried them home to his wife. So these two kind people loved the boys and brought them up like their own sons.

Romulus and Remus, so the boys were called, grew up strong and bold and active. They did not care to till the ground and herd the cattle, but loved to hunt in the woods and mountains. Sometimes, too, they would attack the robbers whom they met in that wild land,

and take their plunder from them. So, it happened that many young men from the country round came to them and joined their expeditions, and of these Romulus and Remus were always the chiefs and leaders.

Faustulus had heard that two grandsons of the king had been thrown into the Tiber, and he guessed that these must be the boys he had found. When Numitor, their old grandfather, heard of these two young men, he too thought they must be his daughter's sons. Then Romulus and Remus took their friends and companions with them, and went to Alba. They attacked King Amulius and killed him. When Numitor heard of what had happened, he called the Alban nobles together, and told them of all the wrongs he had borne from his brother, and all the story of his grandsons. While he was still speaking, the two brothers marched with their followers into the midst of the assembly, and they hailed their grandfather as King of Alba, to the great joy of all the Alban people.

Now Romulus and Remus were not content to stay at Alba with their old grandfather; but they determined to build a new city for themselves. They made up their minds that this new city should be near the River Tiber, on the spot where they were found by Faustulus when they were little babies. So they took their companions with them, and went to that place. There was still growing the fig-tree under which their cradle had lain, and they resolved that they would build their walls there, and

leave the fig-tree standing in the midst. For hundreds of years afterwards the fig-tree was to be seen standing in one of the chief streets of Rome.

The walls were soon begun, but while they were building, the two young men began to quarrel. Remus spoke scornfully to his brother and laughed at him, and jumped over the wall that Romulus had just begun to raise. Romulus was very angry, and in his rage he struck his brother and killed him.

Thus he became the only leader and king. He finished building the city, which he called Rome after his own name. He ruled it for many years, and after his death the Romans worshipped him as a god.

## THE HORATII AND THE CURIATII

**I**N the reign of King Tullus Hostilius there was a quarrel between the people of Rome and the people of Alba. The Romans and the Albans were generally very friendly to each other. They were of the same race; their way of living was the same, and they spoke the same language. Some of the Romans had married Alban women, and some of the Albans had married Roman women, so that each people had friends and relations in the other town.

But now there was a quarrel between them, and the Roman army with King Tullus at its head marched out to meet the Albans, who were commanded by their Dictator, Mettius Fufetius.

When the armies came near together, the Alban Dictator sent a messenger to King Tullus. The messenger came to the Roman army, and was led before the king, who was preparing himself for the battle.

Now, Tullus was a brave warrior; he was young and strong, and eager to win glory in war; but still he was wise, and he did not refuse to listen to the message of Mettius. "O Tullus," said the messenger, "I am sent to you by the Dictator of the Albans. He bids me tell you, that it will be much for the good of Rome as well as for the good of Alba if you will come out in front of your army, and speak with him before the fight begins."

Tullus agreed to do as Mettius asked. The two armies took their places, and all was made ready for battle; and then Mettius and Tullus, followed by some of their nobles, advanced midway between the armies, and Mettius spoke these words,—

"Hear me, King Tullus, and you nobles of Rome. It seems to me that the only cause of our quarrel is that we know not whether Rome or Alba is the stronger, and which town shall be the master of the other. Can we not decide this in some other way than by the death of all the brave men who must be slain if we begin to fight?"

The thought pleased King Tullus, and after consulting together, they fixed upon a plan. It was agreed that three Romans should fight against three Albans, and that if the Romans conquered, Rome should govern Alba; but if the Albans were victorious, then Alba should govern Rome.

It happened that in the Roman army there were three brothers called Horatius, all strong men and brave soldiers. They were the sons of an old Roman named Publius

Horatius, who had taught them, as Roman fathers in those days taught their sons, that they ought to be ready to die for the good of their people and their dear city of Rome. That was the first duty of every Roman, and you shall hear how the Horatii kept their father's sayings.

The Roman army felt that they could choose no better champions than these three brothers. And the Horatii proudly and gladly agreed to fight, and each in his heart resolved to do his very best to save his country from being subject to Alba.

Now in the Alban army there were also three brothers, whose name was Curiatius. They too were good soldiers, and their countrymen chose them to fight for Alba. These three brothers were friends of the Horatii, such dear friends that one of them had promised to marry the sister of Horatius. But they loved their town of Alba, and like the Romans they felt that they must lose their own lives, or take those of their friends, for the sake of their country.

When the Roman King and the Alban Dictator had promised solemnly that Rome and Alba should keep the agreement, the three brothers on each side took their weapons and marched out between the two armies. The soldiers of both towns sat down on each side, to watch the fight, with anxious hearts, knowing that the fate of their country depended on the courage and skill of those few men.

At first the battle seemed very equal, for the six were

all good soldiers and full of bravery; their hearts were set on winning the victory, and they were not thinking of the wounds or death that they might suffer in the struggle. But soon it seemed that the Albans were getting the better, for two of the Romans were killed, but the Albans were all wounded. The Alban army shouted for joy; they thought their victory was won, as they saw the three Curiatii surround the one Horatius who was still alive and unhurt. But cries of anger broke from the Romans when they saw their last champion turn and fly from his enemies.

“Shame on the coward!” they cried; “the name of Horatius is disgraced for ever. Better he had died gloriously doing his duty like his brothers.”

But they soon saw that Horatius was no coward, and that his flight was only a way to separate the three Albans, who all together would have been more than a match for him. Horatius knew that all the Curiatii were wounded. As he fled they followed him, and soon the one who was least wounded came up to him. Horatius turned instantly to attack him. The combat was fierce, and lasted for some time; the Roman and Alban armies eagerly watched the two champions, and the two other Curiatii tried hard to reach their brother to help him. But they were wounded and could not move fast, and before they could come up they saw their brother fall. Still they came forward; the one who was least wounded hastened on, and Horatius,

joyful with his victory, stepped out to meet him. The Alban, bleeding and out of breath with the haste he had made, had no chance with the conqueror; and the third brother, dragging himself on with difficulty, yet with no thought of yielding, saw him die, and knew that he was left alone.

Then Horatius sprang forward to meet him, crying out,—

“Two of these brothers have died by my hand. Now the third shall follow them, that Rome may rule over Alba!”

Having said this he stabbed Curiatius, and so died the last of the Alban brothers.

When the Romans saw that their enemies were slain they shouted for joy, and Mettius the Alban Dictator came to King Tullus, and asked him if he had any commands for him; for he remembered the agreement that had been made between them before the fight began. Tullus told him to take his army safely back to Alba, but he said that the Albans must keep themselves ready to help him in war, if he should want them.

So the armies departed to their homes, after having buried the five brothers who had fallen. The graves of the two Romans were together; those of the Albans were separate, in the places where they died. Hundreds of years afterwards their tombs were still to be seen.

Great was the joy in Rome when news came from the camp that Horatius was victorious; the people decked

their houses with garlands and hung them with bright-coloured cloths, and came in crowds flocking to see the brave man who had saved Rome. The army marched in at the gate of the city, and in the front came Horatius, carrying in his hands the swords of the three Curiatii, and wearing on his shoulders the mantle that one of them had worn. And the people cried to the gods to bless their champion, and the women threw flowers and laurel boughs on his helmet and under his feet as he went along.

But there was one person in Rome whose heart was sad that day, and that was the sister of Horatius, when she heard that her brother had killed the man who was in a little while to have been her husband. In her grief and despair she ran out to meet Horatius, with her head uncovered and her hair loose on her shoulders; and when she met him she saw that he was wearing the mantle that she herself had embroidered and given to Curiatius. Then, in a voice of sorrow, she called out the name of Curiatius, and told Horatius that he was a cruel brother to her, because he had killed the man she loved so well.

The words she said made Horatius very angry.

“What,” cried he, “do you forget your two brothers who are dead, and your brother who is still alive, and your country, which I have this day saved!”

Then in his rage he drew his sword, and stabbed his sister to the heart, so that she died, saying,—

“So may it be done to every maid who is a Roman, and weeps for the death of an enemy!”

The people of Rome were very much shocked at what Horatius had done, and they took him and led him before the king, who then spoke to the people, and said,—

“I will choose two judges to judge this man, and to say what shall be done to him.”

And so he did. Then the judges said that Horatius must be slain. But he cried out, and said,—

“Let me be tried by the whole people, and let them say if I deserve to be punished.”

So the king called the people to meet together to try Horatius for having killed his sister. And when the people were assembled Horatius came before them, and with him was his old father, Publius Horatius.

In Rome a father was able to do as he pleased with his son, even after the son had grown up to be a man—he could sell him as a slave, or put him to death, or punish him in any way he chose; but Publius Horatius did not wish to give his son a severe punishment, for he thought that his daughter deserved to die. The father and the son were of the same temper—they loved their country better than they loved their family.

The old man stood up before the people and spoke to them.

“My daughter,” said he, “has been rightly punished, for she forgot her duty, and loved a stranger better than she

loved Rome. Do not take away from me my last child, but remember that I have already lost two brave sons, who died in battle for their country.”

Then he threw one arm round his son, and pointing with the other hand to the armour and weapons of the Curiatii, which had been hung up on a pillar in the open square where the people were met,—

“O Romans,” he cried, “could you bear to see this young man die shamefully, whom you saw a little while ago marching as a victor through the streets of Rome? Would you chain these hands which have just won freedom and empire for the Roman people? Where would you kill him? Inside the walls where you see the spoils and weapons which he won from your enemies, or outside the city in sight of the graves where the Curiatii lie buried?”

The people were sorry to see his father’s tears, and were surprised that Horatius himself showed no fear of death; they wondered at his courage, and remembered that he had saved them from being subjects of Alba, and they said,—

“We will pardon Horatius, because he has done such great things for the good town of Rome.”

## BRUTUS AND HIS SONS

THE last king who reigned in Rome was called Tarquin the Proud. The Romans hated him because of his pride and cruelty; and at last his wickedness and the wickedness of his sons enraged the people so much, that they rose against him, and drove him and all his family away from Rome. The people resolved that they would never more have a king to govern them, but that they would choose two of the best and bravest nobles of Rome to be their rulers. These two chiefs were called consuls, and they were to govern the city for one year only, after which new consuls were to be chosen.

The two first consuls were Collatinus Tarquinius and Lucius Junius Brutus. Both of these men had been leaders of the people in driving out the king. Both were relations to Tarquin, and both had suffered great wrongs from him. Lucius feared that Tarquin would kill him, as he had killed others of the chief men of Rome, and for years he pretended to be so stupid and foolish that the people gave him the surname of Brutus, which means foolish.

But when the people of Rome at last rose up against the wicked Tarquin, Brutus put himself at their head, and soon showed by his wise and brave conduct that he had been only acting or pretending to be stupid, that he might live unharmed by the cruel king.

Tarquin for a long time tried hard to get back to Rome. Among the young Roman nobles were several who had been friends of the young princes, and who would have been glad to bring the Tarquins back, for they cared more for their own amusements than that the people should be free. Two of these young nobles were Titus and Tiberius, the sons of Brutus.

These young men met together one night to talk over their plans, and they wrote letters to Tarquin telling him they were ready to help him, and sent messengers to him with the letters. But it happened that a slave named Vindicius was in the room where they met. He did not mean to watch what they were doing, but he saw them come hastily into the room with anxious faces, and feeling afraid, he hid himself behind a large chest, and so heard all that was said.

When they had gone away Vindicius came out of his hiding place, and was at first greatly puzzled what to do. He was afraid to go to the Consul Brutus, and to tell him that his two sons were plotting to bring King Tarquin back. At last he determined that he would go to Valerius, a noble Roman who from his great love for

the people was afterwards called Poplicola, which means the people's friend.

So Vindicius went to Valerius, and told him all his story. Valerius was very much astonished, and ordered that Vindicius should be kept safely in his house, while he himself went, with as many armed friends and slaves as he could get together in a hurry, to the house of one of the plotters. They broke open the doors, and found the letters to King Tarquin in the room of the messengers, who had not yet started on their journey.

The consuls sat to judge the people in the Forum, or market place, with their lictors beside them. The lictors were the consuls' guards, and were armed with a bundle of sticks or rods in which an axe was tied up; and they punished any one who was condemned by the consuls, either by beating him or by cutting off his head.

The young men were brought before the consuls. When they were accused of plotting to bring back the king, and the letters found by Valerius were read aloud, and the story of the slave Vindicius had been heard, they did not dare to say that they were not guilty.

The people were sorry for Brutus when they saw his sons led before him to be judged, and some said,—

“Would it not be punishment enough if the young men were banished for all their lives from Rome?”

Collatinus, the second consul, shed tears, and Valerius

did not speak a word. But Brutus looked sternly on his sons.

“Titus and Tiberius,” he said, “why do you not answer to the accusation these men bring against you?”

Three times he asked them this question, but still they did not dare to answer a word, for they knew they were guilty and deserved to be punished. Then Brutus turned to the lictors.

“You,” said he, “must do all the rest that has to be done.”

So the lictors seized the young men, tied their hands behind them, beat them with their rods, and afterwards cut off their heads. Then Brutus left his seat and went home to his own house.

## HOW LARS PORSENNA BESIEGED ROME

**W**HEN King Tarquin was driven out of Rome he went to Clusium in Etruria, where reigned a great and powerful king called Lars Porsenna. Tarquin hoped that by the help of Porsenna and his Etruscan allies he might be able to conquer the people of Rome and so make himself king again. So he came before Porsenna and begged for his help.

“Do not,” he said, “allow these Romans to banish us from their city. Remember that kings should be always ready to help each other; for if the peoples of Italy see that the Romans can drive out their king without being punished for it, they too will try to get rid of their kings, for all men love freedom.”

Porsenna listened to all that Tarquin said. He was sorry for the old man, who had been obliged to fly from his kingdom, and he promised to help him. He collected a great army, and accompanied by Tarquin and his sons,