

School #5
Alex M.
Age: 15

Livia Drusilla, aged 86,
Born of the Claudian Family in Fondi, 695 years after the founding of the city Rome

Hades is such a desolate place... the crying never seems to cease and it rings in your head like some sort of odd memory that you can't forget. These plains, in between the good and the bad, are a hell unto themselves. I am neither tortured, nor favored. This in-between ground will drive me insane – I feel it. I must forgive myself for my transgressions before that happens, or else the only sanity left me will be my own guilt.

I had divorced, and I married Octavian for power. Who wouldn't, really? It was after all, every young woman's dream. And he loved me, that stupid fool. Of course, I led him on. It was a nice fantasy... he even fabricated some cock-and-bull story about allowing me to weave his tunics for him. As if I knew how to weave! What nonsense! But it was good publicity; it gave us the image of being a loving couple, and I suppose, for a little while, we were.

I had had two sons from a previous marriage. Tiberius and Drusus were handsome boys, and I knew one of them would make the best successor to my husband. Since I had failed Octavian in the production of new heirs, I supplied my own children in suggestion. Tiberius, the elder of the two, was my favorite. He was already a general at such a young age, but he was quiet. Not shy, but turned in on himself, always observing and calculating, much like a stork preparing to strike. His brother, Drusus, was favored by Octavian. Passionate and kindly, but with none of the strength Tiberius had, he was much more appealing to the emperor's heart. At the time, Marcellus was favored as heir by my husband. Marcellus' advantage didn't last long, however. He already had a weak stomach, and it took very little poison to subdue him...permanently.

Oh, Drusus... why had you to be so frank with your views? Had you been slightly less conservative, I may have been able to spare your life, my son. But no. Hadn't you learned by then? You were the General of the Army on the Rhine. Did you not know what was safe to write in your letters? Did you not know that everyone could potentially read them? Your letter to Tiberius slipped into my hands, filled with blasphemy against the imperial rule and even against me! So you had to be killed. The least I could allow was an honorable death. You "died of a wound in a battle for the homeland"... at least, that's what the officials told the family.

That whore Julia...she *deserved* what she got. After being married to Tiberius for 7 years she still betrayed him. Her exile was the least Octavian could have done. If it had been up to me, a public execution would have been more appropriate – but it was not. She had been cheating on my poor Tiberius! I had to expose her. It was perfectly justified in every way. The exposé was carried out beautifully as well, I must say. I can't imagine how horrifying that betrayal was for her. And her expression as the many lovers confessed their involvement with her! However long I stay in Hades I shall never forget it, with or without my senility.

Of course, I had to destroy the evidence of all involvement with Julia's demise. The only real source of evidence was Lucius, the adopted son of Octavian, and son of Marcus Agrippa. Lucius was another favorite of my husband, which was a surprising coincidence. He was easily manipulated, and I enjoyed his naivety. He was a master sailor, and loved his crafts more than

his own life. Only fitting, then, that he should die in his own ship. Sabotaging such a complex craft is no difficult task, and making it seem like an accident is even less so.

Although I am responsible for much of my family's "misfortune," Gaius, another of Julia's sons from Agrippa, was not among them. His habits of self-respect and respect for me made him the least likely target of my plans. In fact, I almost wouldn't mind if he had become emperor instead of Tiberius. But it was not to be. He died of natural causes, a disease, I think, that infected his liver.

As for Posthumus Agrippa... there isn't much to tell. He was becoming too powerful, too quickly. Postumus was a big man and I doubted if much I could do would bring him down, physically at least. So, naturally, I used mental torture. I staged a rape scene between him and Livilla, his married mistress. In the end, he was banished and died not too long thereafter by rather mysterious means, but I had no hand in it.

My greatest work was the death of my own husband, Octavian. You see, my dear husband already had a stomach problem. He was a very weak man in his older days, and he felt a few natural remedies, such as eating figs from his fig tree, would cure him. So one day I coated them with a substance the women of this country use as makeup. It is clear and tasteless and gives things a special luster. He naturally selected the best looking figs, and these shiny ones were ingested first. He did not die immediately... it took him days before his heart finally gave way, days of hand-feeding him the poison laden figs. He knew, in the end, what I had done. All his other heirs were gone, so he chose with his last breath Tiberius to take the throne.

Tiberius is despicable. My dream for him shattered with his ascent to the throne. After all I had done for him, how could he have betrayed me in such away? Once Tiberius was emperor, he began to resent my involvement. He shunned me, and as my health diminished, so did many others. All but Claudius... I believe he defied me, but by then I was long gone. What a sweet, stupid boy. Germanicus' son, Caligula, stepped in my own foot steps. He must be quite the clever man now.

Now, in Hades, I realize the wrong I have done, but also I know my cause was good – to a point. I did everything to further my son's standing, not my own. Perhaps that is why I am here, in this middle ground, instead of suffering in Tartarus, racked with eternal punishments. The gods have spared me from my final torments.

This coin that they placed in my mouth...it must have belonged to Octavian. He was so fond of these mystical stories of monsters and heroes; this coin perfectly reflects this obsession. It is the only possession that came with me to the Underworld. It must have been slipped under my tongue as a gift to Charon, but why I still have it I do not know.

It is old even now, over 300 years old, and seems in the Sicilian style. The griffin on the obverse leaps over the ground like a hunting hound springing after its kill and the horse on the front charges in battle, its mane flying. Horses are beautiful creatures... I once had a black mare, purely for casual riding of course, but it loved to be stroked. It used to have tufts of fur on the very top of its ears, and a brown splotch between its eyes, as though anointed with dirt. Horses are such powerful creatures...I aspired to be like them. Their beauty, majesty, and dignity the commands respect from all others. They are my true role models. I long to say that I lived my life like my beautiful black mare did, with power and beauty and grace.

But my surviving relatives wouldn't know that. Why did they place this particular coin in my mouth? Was it random, a coincidence? Or perhaps the last joke of my family? If my guess of its age is correct, that would make its minting immediately after the death of Dionysius of Syracuse. It was a time of civil war in Sicily allowing the Carthaginians time to increase their

power. Perhaps it is Claudius' last joke – he was always obsessed with history. Perhaps this coin was meant to signify my place in our family, and the civil war I caused within it.

The griffin, though, has particular significance, I think, more so than the minting age of this coin. A griffin's special ability is to lord it over both the air and the earth, much like me, a deified empress. This idea could be linked with this coin's placement under my tongue. Or perhaps thoughts of the griffin's intelligence, strength, and beauty placed it here. Perhaps even the beast's role as a guardian of the dead!

Or perhaps, the reason is more subtle. The chariot of Apollo is pulled by these beautiful creatures, and Apollo was Octavian's special god. Maybe it represents me as the driving force of his rule.

But more likely than all of these possibilities, the coin was given to me because of its connection to the Nemesis, goddess of vengeance and retribution. The griffin was not only her special symbol, but pulled her chariot. This coin may be the last comment on my life by my son, Tiberius, for whom I suffered so much.

And it is my last tie to the world of the living.

The coin described was found on vcoins.com with a “griffin” search.

Atlantis

Sicily.Kainon.Ca.365-360 B.C. AE 20 mm.VF, dark brown patina