

## CHAPTER XXVI

SEJANUS composed a memorial to Tiberius, begging to be remembered if a husband for Livilla was being looked for; saying that he was only a knight, he was aware, but Augustus had once spoken of marrying his only daughter to a knight, and Tiberius at least had no more loyal subordinate than himself. He did not aim at senatorial rank but was content to continue in his present station as sleepless sentinel for his noble Emperor's safety. He added that such a marriage would be a serious blow to Agrippina's party, who recognized him as their most active opponent. They would be afraid to offer violence to Castor's surviving son by Livilla—young Tiberius Gemellus. The recent death of the other twin must be laid at Agrippina's door.

Tiberius answered graciously that he could not yet give a favourable answer to the request, in spite of his great sense of obligation to Sejanus. He thought it unlikely that Livilla, both of whose previous husbands had been men of the highest birth, would be content for him to remain a knight; but if he were advanced in rank as well as being married into the Imperial family this would cause a great deal of jealousy, and so strengthen the party of Agrippina. He said that it was precisely to avoid such jealousies that Augustus had thought of marrying his daughter to a knight, a retired man who was not mixed up with politics in any way.

But he ended on a hopeful note: "I shall forbear to tell you yet precisely what plans I have for binding you closer to me in affinity. But I shall say this much, that no recompense that I could pay you for your devotion would be too high,

and that when the opportunity presents itself I shall have great pleasure in doing what I propose to do."

Sejanus knew Tiberius too well not to realize that he had made the request prematurely—he had only written at all because Livilla had pressed him—and had given considerable offence. He decided that Tiberius must be persuaded to leave Rome at once, and must appoint him permanent City Warden—a magistrate from whose decisions the only appeal was to the Emperor. As Commander of the Guards he was also in charge of the Corps of Orderlies, the Imperial couriers, so he would have the handling of all Tiberius's correspondence. Tiberius would depend on him, too, for deciding what people to admit to his presence; and the fewer people he had to see the better he would be pleased. Little by little the City Warden would have all the real power, and could act as he pleased without danger of interference by the Emperor.

At last Tiberius left Rome. His pretext was the dedication of a temple at Capua to Jove, and one at Nola to Augustus. But he did not intend ever to return. It was known that he had taken this decision because of Thrasyllus's warning; and what Thrasyllus prophesied was accepted without question as bound to come to pass. It was assumed that Tiberius, now sixty-seven years of age—and an ugly sight he was, thin, stooping, bald, stiff-jointed, with an ulcered face patched with plasters—was to die within a very short time. Nobody could possibly have guessed that he was fated to live eleven years longer. This may have been because he never came nearer the City again than the suburbs. Well, anyway it was how it turned out.

Tiberius took with him to Capri a number of learned Greek professors, and a picked force of soldiers, including his German bodyguard, and Thrasyllus, and a number of painted strange-looking creatures of doubtful sex and, the most curious choice of all, Cocceius Nerva. Capri is an island in the Bay of Naples about three miles from the coast. Its climate is mild in winter and cool in summer. There is

only one possible landing place, the rest of the island being protected by steep cliffs and impassable thickets. How Tiberius spent his leisure time here—when he was not discussing poetry and mythology with the Greeks, or law and politics with Nerva—is too revolting a story even for history. I shall say no more than that he had brought with him a complete set of the famous books of Elephantis, the most copious encyclopædia of pornography ever gathered together. In Capri he could do what he was unable to do at Rome—practise obscenities in the open air among the trees and flowers or down at the water's edge, and make as much noise as he liked. As some of his field-sports were extremely cruel, the sufferings of his playmates being a great part of his pleasure, he considered that the advantage of Capri's remoteness greatly outweighed the disadvantages. He did not live wholly there: he used to go for visits to Capua, Baia and Antium. But Capri was his headquarters.

After a while he gave Sejanus authority to remove the leaders of Agrippina's party by whatever means seemed most convenient. He was in daily touch with Sejanus and approved all his acts in letters to the Senate. One New Year's Festival he celebrated at Capua by A.D. 28 speaking the customary prayer of blessing, as High Pontiff, and then suddenly turning on a knight called Sabinus, who was standing near, and accusing him of trying to seduce the loyalty of his freedmen. One of Sejanus's men at once pulled Sabinus's gown up, muffled his head with it, and then threw a noose round his neck and dragged him away. Sabinus called out in a choking voice: "Help, friends, help!" But nobody stirred, and Sabinus, whose only crime was that he had been Germanicus's friend and had been tricked by a tool of Sejanus's into privately expressing sympathy for Agrippina, was summarily executed. A letter from Tiberius was read the next day in the Senate, reporting the death of Sabinus and mentioning Sejanus's discovery of a dangerous conspiracy. "My Lords, pity an unhappy old man, living a life of constant

apprehension, with members of his own family plotting wickedly against his life." It was clear that Agrippina and Nero were meant by this. Gallus rose and moved that the Emperor should be desired to explain his fears to the Senate, and to allow them to be set at rest; as no doubt they could easily be. But Tiberius did not yet feel himself strong enough to revenge himself on Gallus.

In the summer of this year there was an accidental meeting between Livia in a sedan-chair and Tiberius on a cob in the main street of Naples. Tiberius had just landed from Capri and Livia was returning from a visit to Herculaneum. Tiberius wanted to ride past without a greeting but force of habit made him rein up and salute her with formal enquiries after her health. She said: "I'm all the better for your kind enquiries, my boy. And as a mother my advice to you is: *be very careful of the barbel you eat on your island.* Some of the ones they catch there are highly poisonous."

"Thank you, Mother," he said. "As the warning comes from you I shall in future stick religiously to tunny and mullet."

Livia snorted and turning to Caligula, who was with her, said in a loud voice: "Well, as I was saying, my husband (your great-grandfather, my dear) and I came hurrying along this street one dark night sixty-five years ago, wasn't it, on our way to the docks where our ship was secretly waiting. We were expecting any moment to be arrested and killed by Augustus's men—how strange it seems! My elder boy—we had had only one child so far—was riding on his father's back. Then what should that little beast do but set up a terrific yowl: 'Oh, father, I want to go back to Peru-u-u-sia.' That gave the show away. Two soldiers came out of a tavern and called after us. We dodged into a dark doorway to let them pass. But Tiberius went on yowling, 'I want to go back to Peru-u-u-sia.' I said 'Kill him! Kill the brat! It's our only hope.' But my husband was a tender-hearted fool and refused. It was only by the merest chance we escaped."

Tiberius, who had stopped to hear the end of the story, dug his spurs into his cob and clattered off in a fury. They never saw each other again.

Livia's warning about fish was only intended to make him uncomfortable, to make him think that she had his fishermen or his cooks in her pay. She knew Tiberius's fondness for barbel, and that he would now have a constant conflict between his appetite and his fear of assassination. There was a painful sequel. One day Tiberius was sitting under a tree on a western slope of the island, enjoying the breeze and planning a verse-dialogue in Greek between the hare and the pheasant, in which each in turn claimed gastronomic pre-eminence. It was not an original idea: he had recently rewarded one of his court-poets with two thousand gold pieces for a similar poem, in which the rivals were a mushroom, a titlark, an oyster and a thrush. In his introduction to the present piece he brushed all these claims aside as trifling, saying that the hare and pheasant alone had the right to dispute the parsley-crown—their flesh alone had dignity without heaviness, delicacy without paltriness.

He was just searching for a discourteous adjective with which to qualify the oyster when he heard a sudden rustling from the thorn-bushes below him and a tousle-headed wild-looking man appeared. His clothes were wet and torn to rags, his face bleeding and an open knife was in his hand. He burst through the thicket shouting: "Here you are, Cæsar, isn't it a beauty?" From the sack he was carrying over his shoulder he pulled out a monstrous barbel and threw it, still kicking, on the turf at Tiberius's feet. He was only a simple fisherman who had just made this remarkable catch and, seeing Tiberius at the cliff top, had decided to present it to him. He had moored his boat to a rock, swum to the cliff, struggled up a precipice path to the belt of thorn bushes, and hacked himself a path through them with his clasp-knife.

But Tiberius had been startled nearly out of his senses. He blew a whistle and shouted out in German: "Help, help!

Come at once! Wolfgang! Siegfried! Adelstan! An assassin! *Schnell!*"

"Coming, all-highest, noblest-born, gift-bestowing Chief," the Germans instantly replied. They had been on sentry-duty to his left and right and behind him, but there was nobody posted in front, naturally. They came bounding along, brandishing their assegais.

The man did not understand German, and shutting his clasp-knife said cheerfully: "I caught him by the grotto yonder. What do you guess he weighs? A regular whale, eh? Nearly pulled me out of the boat."

Tiberius, somewhat reassured, but with his imagination now running on poisoned fish, shouted to the Germans: "No, don't spear him. Cut that thing in two and rub the pieces in his face."

Burly Wolfgang from behind clasped the fisherman around the middle so that he could not move his arms, while the other two scrubbed his face with raw fish. The unfortunate fellow called out: "Hey, stop it! That's no jokel! What luck that I didn't first offer the Emperor the other thing in my sack."

"See what it is," Tiberius ordered.

Edelstein opened the sack and found in it an enormous lobster. "Rub his face with that," said Tiberius. "Rub it well in!"

The wretched man lost both his eyes. Then Tiberius said: "That's enough, men. You may let him go!" The fisherman stumbled about screaming and raving with pain, and there was nothing to be done but toss him into the sea from the nearest crag.

I am glad to say that I was never invited to visit Tiberius on his island and have carefully avoided going there since, though all evidences of his vile practices have long ago been removed and his twelve villas are said to be very beautiful.

I had asked Livia's permission to marry Ælia and she had given it with malicious good wishes. She even attended the

wedding. It was a very splendid wedding—Sejanus saw to that—and one effect of it was to alienate me from Agrippina and Nero and their friends. It was thought that I would not be able to keep any secrets from Ælia and that Ælia would tell Sejanus all that she found out. This saddened me a great deal, but I saw that it was useless trying to reassure Agrippina (who was now in mourning for her sister Julilla, who had just died after a twenty-years exile in that wretched little island of Tremerus). So gradually I stopped visiting her house, to avoid embarrassment. I and Ælia were man and wife only in name. The first thing she said to me when we went into our bridal-chamber was: "Now understand, Claudius, that I don't want you to touch me and that if we ever have to sleep together again in one bed, like to-night, there'll be a coverlet between us, and the least movement you make—out you go. And another thing: you mind your own business, and I'll mind mine . . ."

I said: "Thank you: you have taken a great load off my mind."

She was a dreadful woman. She had the loud persistent eloquence of an auctioneer in the slave-market. I soon gave up trying to answer her back. Of course I still lived at Capua, and Ælia never came to see me there, but Sejanus insisted that whenever I visited Rome I should be seen in her company as much as possible.

Nero had no chance against Sejanus and Livilla. Though Agrippina constantly warned him to weigh every word he spoke, he was of far too open a nature to conceal his thoughts. Among the young noblemen whom he trusted as his friends there were several secret agents of Sejanus, and these kept a register of the opinions he expressed on all public events. Worse still, his wife, whom we called Helen, or Heluo, was Livilla's daughter and reported all his confidences to her. But the worst of all was his own brother, Drusus, to whom he confided even more than to his wife, and who was jealous because Nero was the elder son, and Agrippina's favourite. Drusus went to Sejanus and said that Nero had

asked him to sail secretly to Germany with him on the next dark night, where they would throw themselves on the protection of the regiments, as Germanicus's sons, and call for a march on Rome; that he had of course indignantly refused. Sejanus told him to wait a little longer and he would then be called on to tell the story to Tiberius: but the right moment had not yet come.

Meanwhile, Sejanus sent the rumour flying around that Tiberius was about to charge Nero with treason. Nero's friends began to desert him. As soon as two or three of them began excusing themselves from attending his dinners, and returning his greeting coldly when they met him in public, the rest followed their example. After a few months only his real friends remained. Among them was Gallus, who now that Tiberius himself did not visit the Senate any more concentrated on teasing Sejanus. His method with Sejanus was constantly to propose votes of thanks for his services, and the granting of exceptional honours—statues and arches and titles and prayers and the public celebration of his birthday. The Senate did not dare to oppose these motions, and Sejanus, not being a senator, had no say in the matter; and Tiberius did not wish to go against the Senate by vetoing their vote for fear of antagonizing Sejanus or seeming to have lost confidence in him. Whenever the Senate now wanted anything done they would first send representatives to Sejanus asking for permission to apply to Tiberius about it: and if Sejanus discouraged them the matter would be dropped. Gallus one day proposed that, as the descendants of Torquatus had a golden torque and those of Cincinnatus a curled lock of hair, granted by the Senate as family badges in commemoration of their ancestors' services to the State, so Sejanus and his descendants should be awarded as their badge a golden key, in token of his faithful services as the Emperor's door-keeper. The Senate unanimously voted this motion and Sejanus, growing alarmed, wrote to Tiberius and complained that Gallus had maliciously proposed all the previous honours in the hope of making the Senate jealous



of him, and even perhaps of making the Emperor suspect him of insolent ambitions. The present motion had been still more malicious—a suggestion to the Emperor that access to the Imperial presence was in the hands of someone who made use of it for his own private enrichment. He begged that the Emperor would find a technical reason for vetoing the decree, and a way to silence Gallus. Tiberius answered that he could not veto the decree without damaging Sejanus's credit, but that he would very soon take steps to silence Gallus: Sejanus need not be anxious about the matter and his letter had shown true loyalty and a fine delicacy of judgment. But Gallus's hint had struck home. Tiberius suddenly realized that while all the goings and comings at Capri were known to Sejanus and could to a great extent be controlled by him, he himself only knew as much as Sejanus cared to tell him about the comings and goings by Sejanus's front door.

And now I have come to a turning point in my story—the death of my grandmother Livia at the age of eighty-six. She might well have lived many years longer, for she had kept her eyesight and hearing and the use of her limbs—not to mention her mind and memory—A.D. 29 unimpaired. But recently she had suffered from repeated colds owing to some infection of the nose, and at last one of these settled on her lungs. She summoned me to her bedside at the Palace. I happened to be in Rome and came immediately. I could see that she was dying. She reminded me of my oath again.

"I'll not rest until it's fulfilled, Grandmother," I said. When a very old woman lies dying, one's grandmother too, one says whatever one can to please her. "But I thought Caligula was going to arrange it for you?"

She did not answer for a time. Then she said, raging weakly: "He was here ten minutes ago! He stood and laughed at me. He said that I could go to Hell and stew there for ever and ever for all he cared. He said that now I was dying he had no need to keep in with me any longer,

and that he did not consider himself bound by the oath, because it was forced on him. He said that *he* was going to be the Almighty God that has been prophesied, not I. He said . . .”

“That’s all right, Grandmother. You’ll have the laugh of him in the end. When you’re the Queen of Heaven and he’s being slowly broken on an eternal wheel by Minos’s men in Hell . . .”

“And to think that I ever called you a fool,” she said. “I’m going now, Claudius. Close my eyes and put the coin in my mouth that you’ll find under the pillow. The Ferryman will recognize it. He’ll pay proper respect. . . .”

Then she died and I closed her eyes and put the coin in her mouth. It was a gold coin of a type I had never seen before, with Augustus’s head and her own facing each other, on the obverse, and a triumphant chariot on the reverse.

Nothing had been said between us about Tiberius. I soon heard that he had been warned about her condition in plenty of time to pay her the last offices. He now wrote to the Senate excusing himself for not having visited her but saying that he had been exceedingly busy and would at all events come to Rome for the funeral. Meanwhile the Senate had decreed various extraordinary honours in her memory, including the title Mother of the Country, and had even proposed to make her a demi-goddess. But Tiberius reversed nearly all these decrees, explaining in a letter that Livia was a singularly modest woman, averse to all public recognition of her services, and with a peculiar sentiment against having any religious worship paid to her after death. The letter ended with reflections on the unsuitability of women’s meddling in politics “for which they are not fitted, and which rouse in them all those worst feelings of arrogance and petulance to which the female sex is naturally prone”.

He did not of course come to the City for the funeral though, solely with the object of limiting its magnificence, he made all arrangements for it. And he took so long over them that the corpse, old and withered as it was, had reached

an advanced stage of putrefaction before it was put on the pyre. To the general surprise, Caligula spoke the funeral oration, which Tiberius himself should have done, and if not Tiberius, then Nero, as his heir. The Senate had decreed an arch in Livia's memory—the first time in the history of Rome that a woman had been so honoured. Tiberius allowed this decree to stand but promised to build the arch at his own expense: and then neglected to build it. As for Livia's will, he inherited the greater part of her fortune as her natural heir, but she had left as much of it as she was legally permitted to members of her own household and other trusted dependents. He did not pay anybody a single one of her bequests. I was to have benefited to the extent of twenty thousand gold pieces.