

CHAPTER IV

MY father had never forgotten my grandfather's teaching about liberty. As quite a small boy he had fallen foul of Marcellus, five years his senior, to whom Augustus had given the title "Leader of Cadets". He had told Marcellus that the title had been awarded to him only for a specific occasion (a sham-fight called "Greeks and Trojans" fought on Mars Field between two forces of mounted cadets, the sons of knights and senators) and that it did not carry with it any of the general judicial powers which Marcellus had since assumed; and that, for himself, as a free-born Roman, he would not submit to such tyranny. He reminded Marcellus that the opposing side in the sham-fight had been led by Tiberius, and that Tiberius had won the honours of the engagement. He challenged Marcellus to a duel. Augustus was very much amused when he heard the story and for a long time never referred to my father except playfully as "the free-born Roman".

Whenever he was in Rome now my father chafed at the growing spirit of subservience to Augustus that he everywhere encountered, and always longed to be back in arms. While acting as one of the chief City magistrates during an absence of Augustus and Tiberius in France he was disgusted by the prevalence of place-hunting and political jobbery. He privately told a friend, from whom I heard it years later, that there was more of the old Roman spirit of liberty to be found in a single company of his soldiers than in the whole senatorial order. Shortly before his death he wrote Tiberius a bitter letter to this effect from a camp in the interior of Germany. He said that he wished to Heaven that Augustus

would follow the glorious example of the Dictator Sulla, who, when sole master of Rome after the first Civil Wars, all his enemies being either subjugated or pacified, had only paused until he had settled a few State matters to his liking before laying down his rods of office and becoming once more a private citizen. If Augustus did not do the same pretty soon—and he had always given out that this was his ultimate intention—it would be too late. The ranks of the old nobility were sadly thinned: the proscriptions and the Civil Wars had carried away the boldest and best, and the survivors, lost among the new nobility—nobility indeed!—tended more and more to behave like family slaves to Augustus and Livia. Soon Rome would have forgotten what freedom meant and would fall at last under a tyranny as barbarous and arbitrary as those of the East. It was not to forward such a calamity that he had fought so many wearisome campaigns under Augustus's supreme command. Even his love and deep personal admiration for Augustus, who had been a second father to him, did not prevent him from expressing these feelings. He asked Tiberius's opinion: could not the two of them together persuade, even compel, Augustus to retire? "If he consents I shall hold him in a thousand times greater love and admiration than formerly; but I am sorry to say that the secret and illegitimate pride that our mother Livia has always derived from her exercise of supreme power through Augustus will be the greatest hindrance that we are likely to encounter in this matter."

By ill-luck the letter was delivered to Tiberius while he was in the presence of Augustus and Livia. "A dispatch from your noble brother!" the Imperial courier called out, handing it to him. Tiberius, not suspecting that there was anything in the letter that should not be communicated to Livia and Augustus, asked permission to open and read it at once. Augustus said: "By all means, Tiberius, but on condition that you read it aloud to us." He motioned the servants out of the room. "Come, let us lose no time, what are his latest victories? I am impatient to hear. His letters

are always well written and interesting, much more so than yours, my dear fellow, if you'll pardon me for making the comparison."

Tiberius read out the first few words and then grew very red. He tried to skip over the dangerous part, but found that there was little but danger throughout the letter, except just at the end where my father complained of giddiness from a head-wound and told of his difficult march to the Elbe. Curious portents had occurred lately, he wrote. A most extraordinary display of shooting stars, night after night; sounds like the lamenting of women from the forest; and two divine youths on white horses in Greek, not German, dress, had suddenly ridden through the middle of the camp at dawn. Finally, a German woman of more than mortal size had appeared at his tent door and spoken to him in Greek, telling him to advance no further because fate ruled against it. So Tiberius read a word here and there, stumbled, said that the writing was illegible, started again, stumbled again and finally excused himself.

"What's this?" said Augustus, "Surely you can make out more than that."

Tiberius pulled himself together. "To be honest, Sir, I can, but the letter does not deserve reading. Evidently my brother was not well at the time of writing it."

Augustus was alarmed. "He is not seriously ill, I hope?" But my grandmother Livia, as if her mother's anxiety for once over-rode good manners—though of course she guessed at once that there was something in the letter that Tiberius was afraid to read because it reflected either on Augustus or herself—snatched it from him. She read it through, frowned grimly and handed it to Augustus, saying: "This is a matter which only concerns you. It is not my business to punish a son, however unnatural, but yours as his guardian and as the head of the State."

Augustus was alarmed, wondering what in the world could be amiss. He read the letter, but it seemed to call for disapproval rather as something which had outraged my

grandmother than as something written against himself. Indeed, except for the ugly word "compel", he secretly approved of the sentiments expressed in the letter, even though the insult to my grandmother reflected on himself, as having been persuaded by her against his better judgment. The Senate were certainly becoming shamefully obsequious in their manners towards him and his family and staff. He disliked the situation as much as my father, and it was true that as long ago as before the defeat and death of Antony he had publicly promised to retire when no public enemy remained in the field against him; and he had several times since referred in his speeches to the happy day when his task would be done. He was weary now of perpetual State business and perpetual honours: he wanted a rest and anonymity. But my grandmother would never allow him to give up: she would always say that his task was not half accomplished yet, that nothing but civil disorder could be expected if he retired now. Yes, he worked hard, she owned, but she worked still harder and with no direct public reward. And he must not be simple-minded: once out of office and a mere private citizen he was liable to impeachment and banishment, or worse; and what of the secret grudges that the relations of men whom he had killed or dishonoured bore against him? As a private citizen he would have to give up his bodyguard as well as his armies. Let him accept another ten years of office and at the end of them, perhaps, things might have changed for the better. So he always gave in and continued ruling. He accepted his monarchical privileges in instalments. He was voted them for five or ten years at a stretch, usually ten.

My grandmother looked hard at Augustus when he had finished reading the unlucky letter: "Well?" she asked.

"I agree with Tiberius," he said mildly. "The young man must be ill. This is the derangement of overstrain. You notice the final paragraph where he mentions the results of his head-wound and seeing those visions—well, that proves it. He needs a rest. The natural generosity of

his soul has been perverted by the anxieties of campaign. Those German forests are no place for a man sick in mind, are they, Tiberius? The howling of wolves gets on one's nerves the worst, I believe: the lamenting of women he talks about was surely wolves. What about recalling him, now that he has given these Germans such a shaking as they'll never forget? It would do me good to see him back here at Rome again. Yes, we must certainly have him back. You'll be glad, dearest Livia, to have your boy again, won't you?"

My grandmother did not answer directly. She said, still frowning: "And you, Tiberius?"

My uncle was more politic than Augustus. He knew his mother's nature better. He answered: "My brother certainly seems ill, but even illness cannot excuse such unfilial behaviour and such gross folly. I agree that he should be recalled to be reminded of the heinousness of having entertained such base thoughts about his modest, devoted and indefatigable mother, and of the further enormity of committing them to paper and sending them by courier through unfriendly country. Besides, the argument from the case of Sulla is childish. As soon as Sulla was out of power the Civil Wars began again and his new constitution was overturned." So Tiberius came quite well out of the affair, but much of his severity against my father was genuine, for landing him in so embarrassing a position.

Livia was choking with rage against Augustus for allowing insults to her to go by so easily, and in her son's presence too. Her rage against my father was equally violent. She knew that when he returned he was likely to carry into execution his plan for forcing Augustus to retire. She also saw that she would never now be able to rule through Tiberius—even if she could assure the succession for him—so long as my father, a man of enormous popularity at Rome and with all the Western regiments at his back, stood waiting to force the restoration of popular liberties. And supreme power for her had come to be more important than

life or honour; she had sacrificed so much for it. Yet she was able to disguise her feelings. She pretended to take Augustus's view that my father was merely sick, and told Tiberius that she thought his censure too severe. She agreed, however, that my father should be recalled at once. She even thanked Augustus for his generous extenuation of her poor son's fault and said that she would send him out her own confidential physician with a parcel of hellebore, from Anticyra in Thessaly, which was a famous specific for cases of mental weakness.

The physician set out the next day in company with the courier who took Augustus's letter. The letter was one of friendly congratulation on his victories and sympathy for his head-wound; it permitted him to return to Rome, but in language which meant that he must return whether he wished to come or not.

My father replied a few days later with thanks for Augustus's generosity. He said that he would return as soon as his health permitted, but that the letter had reached him the day after a slight accident: his horse had fallen under him at full gallop, rolled on his leg and crushed it against a sharp stone. He thanked his mother for her solicitude, for the gift of the hellebore and for sending her physician, of whose services he had immediately availed himself. But he feared that even his well-known skill had not kept the wound from taking a serious turn. He said finally that he would have preferred to stay at his post but that Augustus's wishes were his commands; and repeated that as soon as he was well again he would return to the City. He was at present encamped near the Thuringian Saal.

On hearing this news, Tiberius, who was with Augustus and Livia at Pavia, instantly asked leave to attend his brother's sick-bed. Augustus granted it and he mounted his cob and galloped off north, with a small escort, making for the quickest pass across the Alps. A five hundred mile journey lay before him but he could count on frequent relays of horses at the posting-houses and when he was too weary for the

saddle he could commandeer a gig and snatch a few hours' sleep in it without delaying his progress. The weather favoured him. He went over the Alps and descended into Switzerland, then followed the main Rhine road, not having yet stopped for as much as a hot meal, until he reached a place called Mannheim. Here he crossed the river and struck north-east by rough roads through unfriendly country. He was alone when he reached his destination on the evening of the third day, his original escort having long fallen out, and the new escort which he had picked up at Mannheim not having been able to keep up with him either. It is claimed that on the second day and night he travelled just under two hundred miles between noon and noon. He was in time to greet my father but not in time to save his life; for the leg by now was gangrened up to the thigh. My father, though on the point of death, had just sufficient presence of mind to order the camp to pay my uncle Tiberius the honours due to him as an army commander. The brothers embraced and my father whispered, "She read my letter?" "Before I did myself," groaned my uncle Tiberius. Nothing more was B.C. 9 said except by my father, who sighed "Rome has a severe mother: Lucius and Gaius have a dangerous stepmother." Those were his last words, and presently my uncle Tiberius closed his eyes.

I heard this account from Xenophon, a Greek from the island of Cos, who was quite a young man at this time. He was my father's staff-surgeon and had been much disgusted that my grandmother's physician had taken the case out of his hands. Gaius and Lucius, I should explain, were Augustus's grandchildren by Julia and Agrippa. He had adopted them as his own sons while they were still infants. There was a third boy, Postumus, so called because he was born posthumously; Augustus did not adopt him too, but left him to carry on Agrippa's name.

The camp where my father died was named "The Accursed" and his body was carried in a marching military

procession to the army's winter quarters at Mainz on the Rhine, my uncle Tiberius walking all the way as chief mourner. The army wished to bury the body there, but he brought it back for a funeral at Rome where it was burnt on a monstrous pyre in Mars Field. Augustus himself pronounced the funeral oration, in the course of which he said, "I pray the gods to make my sons Gaius and Lucius as noble and virtuous men as this Drusus and to vouchsafe to me as honourable a death as his."

Livia was not sure how far she could trust Tiberius. On his return with my father's body his sympathy with her had seemed forced and insincere, and when Augustus wished himself as honourable a death as my father's she saw a brief half-smile cross his face. Tiberius who, it appears, had long suspected that my grandfather had not died a natural death, was resolved now not to cross his mother's will in anything. Dining so often at her table he felt himself completely at her mercy. He worked hard to win her favour. Livia understood what was in his mind, and was not dissatisfied. He was the only one who suspected her of being a poisoner, and would obviously keep his suspicions to himself. She had lived down the scandal of her marriage with Augustus and was now quoted in the City as an example of virtue in its strictest and most disagreeable form. The Senate voted that four statues of her should be set up in various public places; this was by way of consoling her for her loss. They also enrolled her by a legal fiction among the "Mothers of Three Children". Mothers of three or more children had special privileges under Augustus's legislation, particularly as legatees—spinsters and barren women were not allowed to benefit under wills at all and their loss was the gain of their fruitful sisters.

Claudius, you tedious old fellow, here you have come to within an inch or two of the end of the fourth roll of your autobiography and you haven't even reached your birthplace. Put it down at once or you'll never reach even the middle of your story. Write, "My birth occurred at Lyons in France,

on the first of August, a year before my father's death." So. My parents had had six children before me but as my mother always accompanied my father on his campaigns a child had to be very hardy to survive. Only my brother Germanicus, five years older than myself, and my sister Livilla, a year older than myself, were living: both inherited my father's magnificent constitution. I did not. I nearly died on three occasions before my second year and, had not my father's death brought the family back to Rome, it is most unlikely that this story would have been written.